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Learning together: Integrating worship, education, and personal devotion at Oakhurst Baptist Church of Asheboro, North Carolina

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LEARNING TOGETHER:

INTEGRATING WORSHIP, EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DEVOTION

AT OAKHURST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ASHEBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

A PROJECT

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BY

HUNTER DUNCAN

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APPROVAL FORM

LEARNING TOGETHER:

INTEGRATING WORSHIP, EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DEVOTION

AT OAKHURST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ASHEBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The hypothesis of this project is that an integrated worship experience that engages church members with one biblical concept each week through various interactions will strengthen the community of faith. The ministry experiment sought to accomplish this goal by integrating weekly worship, Sunday School, daily devotions, and an internet-based discussion forum. Data was collected from project participants before the project began, weekly to measure the ongoing impact, and again at the project's conclusion. The results of the project revealed that integrating worship elements does improve engagement with the community of faith and the overall satisfaction with the weekly worship experience.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

God called his people to be a church, a community of believers who strengthen

and support one another as we seek to grow closer to God. Oakhurst Baptist Church has

demonstrated that with proper focus, we can be a growing and active community of faith.

Steven Turner writes that, "Participation in social experiences is a fundamental form of

learning."[1] If we are to grow and learn as individuals and as a community, it is crucial

that we do it together.

Ministry Setting

The setting for this project was Oakhurst Baptist Church of Asheboro, North

Carolina. Asheboro is a city of 25,000 people located in Randolph County.[2] Asheboro

is the largest city in Randolph County and part of the Piedmont Triad, which also

includes the cities of Greensboro and Winston-Salem. Asheboro is home to the North

Carolina State Zoo.

Oakhurst was first formed in 1941 by three Methodist ministers who saw a need

for the church in a growing community on the south side of Asheboro. In 1943 the

church voted to become a Baptist Church. The name Oakhurst originates from a

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[1] Stephen L. Turner, "Using the Learning Sciences And Knowledge About How People Learn to Support Reluctant and Disengaged Secondary School Learners," American Secondary Education 37, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 6.

[2] B. Morton, "City of Asheboro Homepage," http://www.ci.asheboro.nc.us/index.html (accessed May 24, 2013).

neighboring subdivision. Oakhurst is a member of the Randolph Baptist Association and contributes to both the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

Oakhurst is pastored by Dr. Richard Crider. Dr. Crider has served as the Senior Pastor at Oakhurst for 27 years. Oakhurst currently has two morning worship services. A contemporary service is held at 8:45, followed by Sunday School at 9:45, and a traditional service at 11:00. A Children's Church is offered for elementary school-aged children. The average total Sunday morning attendance is approximately 120 people. Attendance is recorded for Sunday School, but not for the worship services. Worship is an integral part of Oakhurst Baptist Church. Jay Williams has led the music in worship while serving as Music Minister at Oakhurst for 22 years.

I began my ministry at Oakhurst in November of 2010. I was called to serve as Associate Pastor of Youth and Education. My primary responsibility is to the youth ministry of Oakhurst, with secondary emphasis on educational programs within the church. In January 2013, I was tasked by the Deacons of Oakhurst to oversee the contemporary service and to lead a committee whose purpose was to plan that service. In April 2013 I became the primary preacher for the contemporary service, preaching three Sundays each month.

Oakhurst has eight adult Sunday School classes and four classes for youth and children. Most of the Sunday School classes use the *Bible Studies for Life* from Lifeway, with a few using various other materials. The church Sunday School director selects the Sunday School curriculum. In practice, each class selects the material they wish to use and the church office orders it. Evening Bible studies for adults are conducted on

Wednesday and Sunday evenings by Dr. Crider. The church has mission groups for children and youth on Wednesdays and a Bible study time for youth on Sunday nights.

Personal Rationale

One Sunday approximately two years ago, I had a conversation with my family that impacted me greatly. On our way home from church my family and I began discussing our experience at church that day. During the contemporary service I preached a message based on the death of Lazarus. My wife shared that her Sunday School lesson covered the topic of angels. When we asked our two children the topics of their Sunday School lessons they were unsure, but thought it had something to do with faith. The message of the traditional service brought by our Senior Pastor was on the prophet Amos. We all attended the same church, but had four different experiences. Through many years of personal experience, this is too often the theme of our family conversations about our church experience.   This particular conversation sparked a concern that I could not rationalize.   Why did church feel compartmentalized? How was it possible that there was no fluidity or consistency with the message of our worship and educational time? I felt no real connection to any faith-based discussion going on within the church. We often talk of church business, schedules, and prayer concerns. But we rarely have discussions on the meanings of scripture or its application for our lives. Those things are talked about by the preacher or Sunday School teacher, and sometimes in the church newsletter, but there is rarely a true discussion of ideas that engages the whole church. Sunday School classes and other small group Bible study groups have this type of discussion, but the discussion and questions are isolated from the whole body of

the church. The opportunity for personal and corporate spiritual growth is limited

because we compartmentalize the things we do. Therefore, I began to consider what

steps could be taken to remedy this issue. For the sake of my family, other church

members, and Oakhurst Baptist as a whole, comprehensive thematic education is the

direction I chose in pursuit of this goal.

As a minister, this project offered me the opportunity to encourage my church to

worship and learn together, not merely at the same time and location. Some

congregations focus on a series of sermons. Others purchase all Sunday School

curriculum from one publisher. Neither of these scenarios is present at my church, nor

does it suffice to accomplish this goal. I preach from the lectionary.   The Senior Pastor

chooses his preaching topics based on his perceived needs of the church. Sunday School

classes choose from various curriculum publishers, while some rely on the weekly

discretion of the teacher. It is clear to me that this freedom of choice has led to a

fragmentation of the various groups within the church. Organizing the educational and

spiritual direction of the congregation is a difficult task. The alternative is the chaos in

which I now find my church mired. Through the implementation of this project I hope to

show the people of Oakhurst that an organized and coordinated educational plan is

beneficial to the overall spiritual health of the church.

Why This Project Was Needed At Oakhurst Baptist Church

In 2012 Oakhurst Baptist Church conducted a survey asking members of the

church to provide feedback on the worship practices of our church. We received 83

responses, which is approximately 70% percent of the average attendance of 120. Of the respondents, 67% indicated that they felt disconnected from others in the church.

The Sunday School classes are disconnected from one another and from the sermons. The worship services are disconnected from one another. Our rotational preaching schedule causes our two worship services to hear different sermons twice each month. The various Sunday School material used insures that few classes are focused on the same topic each week. As church members we are largely disconnected from one another. Even the floor plan of the church lends itself to disconnectedness. It is entirely feasible for two members of the church to attend every Sunday for a year and never pass one another in the hallway. One of the reasons for this apparent isolation from others in the church is that we do not have a shared experience. Thomas Hawkins writes, "there is no such thing as a solitary Christian," and so, "there is no such thing as a solitary learner."[3] Hawkins goes on to describe learning as, "a cumulative experience derived and informed by our social interactions."[4] Learning requires that we share our experience with others. Richard Osmer states that we are to learn together, not in solitude, and that such an education is, "a special kind of conversation within a community in which the participants search together for truth."[5] Our church, however, in seeking to provide for the various needs of the social groups that make up our church, has also fragmented the social structure that is key to our ability to learn. A young family with three children

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[3] Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: a New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 101.

[4] Hawkins, 101.

[5] Richard Robert Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 5.

attending the contemporary worship service would seldom cross paths with a senior adult

couple who may have life changing insight into the problems troubling the younger

family. The fragmentation of our educational and worship environment has created a

congregation that feels equally fragmented. We cannot be a church of 120 solitary

individuals who happen to come to the same place for church on Sunday mornings.   We

must be a community of 120 individuals who are sharing our experiences with each

other.

In her book, *Quitting Church*, Julia Duin writes that, "one of the top reasons

people give for leaving church is loneliness: the feeling…that no one knows or cares

whether they are there."[6] When our interaction with others in the church is limited to

pleasantries expressed during two minutes of greetings after the announcements, it is easy

to understand why people feel alone in a room full of people. When do we get to ask

questions? When do we get to share our own experiences? When do we start acting like

a community of believers? Asking questions and sharing our experiences connect us to

other people.

This project sought to bridge the connections to the various groups within the

church. It focused on a common educational theme that gave the opportunity to voice

shared experience. It also sought to stimulate a sense of community among the whole

church.

A 2012 survey conducted by the Barna Group found that 61% of church attenders

"could not remember a significant or important new insight or understanding related to

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[6] Julia Duin, *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2008), 50.

faith."[7] Half of the respondents to the same survey who had attended church within the previous week also confessed that, "they could not recall a significant insight they had gained" at church.[8]

Every week pastors around the world spend countless hours preparing for a few hours of interaction with their congregations. Every week Christians around the world set aside a few hours to receive whatever religious instruction and motivation those pastors have prepared. Often that is where it stops. Sometimes there is additional instruction in smaller groups and at other times.

On Monday morning people go back to their lives, back to jobs, school, and the distractions of everyday life. From my own experience as a preacher and a congregant, I know that it is easy to leave the message at church and to move on. The time we devote to church each week is supposed to be an important time of spiritual growth and encouragement. Yet, for many, church is nothing more than an interruption to the weekend. The sermon was not connected to the Sunday School lesson and neither of those were connected to any ongoing personal or group study. There is rarely any chance for those involved to continue to engage with the concepts or ideas discussed. The matter is dropped. The pastor moves on to next week's message. The teacher prepares for the next lesson. If daily devotions are completed at all, they are probably not related to the theme of the preacher's message or Bible lesson. The congregants move on. The cycle repeats, week after week and year after year. And yet, we wonder why people do not

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[7] "What People Experience in Churches," Barna Group, January 9, 2012, accessed June 19, 2013, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/congregations/556-what-people-experience-in-churches.

[8] "What People Experience in Churches".

make any progress in their walk with Christ. We wonder why words do not become actions. We wonder if anyone was listening at all.

In contrast to this fragmentation, my congregation spends thousands of dollars each year to provide a focused week for our children and youth. For Vacation Bible School we prepare, we pray, we enlist volunteers, and we invite every child we can find. We have a combined focus every day. Each day builds on the previous day and at the end of the week we see children who have heard our message and many respond.

Each summer we spend a week with our teenagers at summer camp. We all attend worship two times each day. We have Bible studies that are related to worship. We have private devotional times that are related to the overall message. At the end of the day we have a chance to interact and discuss what we have heard. The results are astounding. Lives change. People grow.

A recent study of 8,000 Christian families discovered that only 10% of the families regularly discussed matters of faith and 43% never discussed faith at all.[9] The 2012 survey conducted at Oakhurst shows that we are a church that is disconnected. The small size of our congregation makes the disconnection more pronounced. The vast majority of our young families with children do not attend the traditional service. Therefore the members of the congregation who attend the traditional service feel disconnected from the families who attend the contemporary service.

It is clear that a multifaceted, integrated approach works with our children and youth. Recreating similar experiences for our entire church each week would be nearly

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[9] Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel, *Passing On the Faith: a Radical Model for Youth and Family Ministry*, rev. ed. (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2008), 14.

impossible. We can, however, find ways to integrate and focus the things we already do. It was the goal of this project to determine if an integrated and focused worship and education plan would be more effective in communicating ideas to church members. It sought to determine if implementing an integrated approach to worship and Sunday School would improve the sense of community within the church and foster discussion of experiences within families.

CHAPTER TWO

PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Goals

The objective of this project was to create an integrated church experience that focused the attention of Oakhurst Baptist Church on the same biblical concept each week. This integrated approach was designed to create an environment that promotes personal and corporate engagement with a biblical theme and encourages the active participation of the congregation in theological thought and discussion. The goal was for each member of a given family to encounter the biblical concept twice on Sunday and then again each day while using a family devotional that focused on the theme for the week.

The second goal was to create a setting that encourages families to engage in theological discussion. Parents are the single largest influence on their children. Marcia Bunge writes about the disconnect that occurs between our personal lives and our church lives. She says, "Religious education programs often operate in isolation from home, not as an extension of home. Many parents do not know what their children are learning in Sunday School or confirmation, let alone participate in intergenerational or family religious education programs."[10] My goal was to set the stage for the participants to discuss biblical ideas within the family unit. Discussion of theological and life

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[10] Marcia J. Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives On Children, Parents, and 'Best Practices' for Faith Formation: Resources for Child, Youth, and Family Ministry Today," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 349.

application principles within the family unit serves to strengthen the connections that the members of the family feel toward each other and toward God.

Related to the goal of individual family growth was the third goal: growth of the church family as a community of faith. Shared weekly experiences build connections between all of the participants, regardless of their personal family status. Bunge writes, "faith formation is a cooperative effort between home and congregation."[11] If we are to grow in faith as a church we must be willing to do it together, not in isolation. During the project, individuals were given the opportunity to make stronger connections with each other through shared experiences in worship, Sunday School, daily devotions, and the project interactive weblog.

Project Strategy

To achieve the goal of creating an integrated church experience I selected *The Gospel Project* to be used by the Sunday School classes participating in the experiment. *The Gospel Project* is an educational curriculum developed by Lifeway Christian Resources. It was designed as an age-graded resource that conveys the same biblical theme to all ages each week. It has supplemental resources available as well, such as a daily devotional, which was used in the project. The theme and biblical passages used in the Sunday School lessons were used as the biblical text and theme of the worship services planned by the church staff. The project blog also integrated themes and ideas from the Sunday School lessons and the sermons preached.

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[11] Bunge, 350.

The main tool used to achieve the goal of motivating families toward theological discussion was the daily devotional. Its purpose was to keep the concepts taught in Sunday School and worship fresh in the minds of the participants daily. My expectation was that the repetition of concepts taught on Sunday throughout the week would promote discussion within the families. From my own experience, the diversity of topics taught in Sunday School and worship created no common ground for my family's theological discussions to grow. Integrating the church experience and then building upon it with daily devotions sought to overcome this obstacle to family discussions.

The final goal of nurturing the community of faith was attempted primarily through Sunday School and secondarily through the project blog. Sunday School at Oakhurst is one of the focal points of interaction between church members. It is a place where ideas can be shared and questions can be asked. Unlike most worship services, everyone has the opportunity to be directly involved in shaping the direction of conversation. The project blog was created as an extension of this time, allowing church members to continue interacting with each other throughout the week.

Questionnaires were chosen to be the primary tools used to evaluate the success of the project. The first type of questionnaire used was a pre- and post-project survey. The surveys contained identical questions, allowing for analysis to be made of the answers given before the project and at the project's completion. The surveys contained a mix of question types, including Likert style ten-point continuum and forced-option questions.

The effectiveness of the project was measured in several ways. The pre- and post-project questionnaires were used to determine if changes had occurred as a result of

the project. The weekly surveys were used to track changes and satisfaction throughout the project. One of the main formulas used to determine the effectiveness of the project was the percentage of change. The percentage of change was calculated using the following formula:

*% Change = (Post-Project Response – Pre-Project Response)/Pre-Project Response * 100*

An example of this method is a pre-project score of 7 and a post project score of 10. The resulting equation to determine percentage change would be: $((10-7)/7) * 100$. The resulting percentage of change is 42.85%. A high percentage of change indicates a large change in response from before the project to after the project.

Weekly surveys were used to track changes from week to week. The data from the weekly surveys was analyzed using tables and line graphs. The first two weeks of the project create a baseline score for each measurement, with results during the following four weeks representing the positive, negative, or neutral effects of the project on the participants. Line graphs were created using the average scores of all participants and charted for six weeks. The line graphs visually relate the change that occurred as the project progressed.

Daily journals were provided along with the weekly questionnaires. Participants were instructed to use the journals to record any of the thoughts or feelings related to the daily devotion. The journal also allowed the participants to indicate if they completed a daily devotion each day.

Project Description

Jesus commanded his followers in Matthew 28:19 to, "go and make disciples." A disciple of Christ is someone who is devoted to the cause of Christ, learning about his ways, experiencing his love, and sharing this knowledge with others. This project sought to create an environment within the church that would strengthen the community of believers, individually and corporately. This was attempted through an emphasis on a single biblical theme brought to the church through various means over an extended period of time.

This project was based on the creation of a four-week unit that engaged the church, individuals, families, and classes with a coordinated theological focus through a variety of delivery methods. Those methods included Sunday School, corporate worship, daily devotions, and interactive discussions on a dedicated internet-based discussion board, also called a weblog, or more simply, a blog.

The first two weeks of the project, beginning Sunday, January 5, 2014 and ending Saturday, January 18, 2014, served as a control for research feedback, setting the baseline for responses so that changes could be observed. No changes were made to any elements of worship, Sunday School, or daily devotionals, if one was used. Worship was conducted and planned using regular procedures. Sunday School teachers used their existing material. Participants used their normal personal or family devotions. Focus group members were instructed to make as few changes as possible during the first two weeks, while being diligent to record their observations in their survey instruments.

The educational resource chosen to be used by the Sunday School classes was *The Gospel Project. The Gospel Project* is a discipleship resource that is designed to be used by churches over a three year period. The participating Sunday School Classes used the first four weeks of material from the first year cycle. Each week of the project the children's, youth, and selected adult Sunday School classes used this material. A total of six classes used this material during the project period; three children's classes, one youth class, and two adult classes. Each teacher was given the material at the beginning of January.

The theme from each week's lesson in *The Gospel Project* was used as the overall theme for all elements of the project. The principal part of the worship experience relating to this project was the weekly sermon. A second component was music selection. I worked in conjunction with the Music Director to coordinate the hymns, praise choruses, and special music used in worship during the project period with the weekly project theme. Videos were sometimes used as a part of worship to highlight the weekly theme.

Dr. Richard Crider, the Senior Pastor at Oakhurst, and I shared the preaching responsibilities for our two worship services. Our schedule was set up so that I would preach three weeks in a row for our contemporary service and he would preach three weeks in a row for the traditional service. Once in each four week cycle we would each preach for both services meant each of us had one Sunday where we preached for neither service. During the four weeks of the project Dr. Crider agreed to use the weekly project theme as the theme for his messages and to aid me in planning worship services that reflected the weekly biblical theme.

A devotional resource was made available to the entire church. The devotional resource was a component of *The Gospel Project* literature and was developed to coordinate with the theme being taught each week in Sunday School. The devotional was available in print form as well as electronically on the church website.

The final element of the project was an internet based blog. The blog was setup using a free blogging resource: www.blogspot.com. A link was placed on the front page of the church's website to provide easy access to all church members. The blog was updated several times each week with questions and thoughts related to the weekly theme and the daily devotional readings. All church members were invited to access the blog and share their own thoughts and questions. Focus group members were encouraged to visit the blog at least once each week.

The entire congregation encountered this project at some level, but not all engaged it at every level. The daily devotions and internet blog were made available to the entire church. All church members were encouraged to participate to their level of interest, thus enabling the focus group to respond to the survey questions based on their interaction with the entire church.

A group of 15 people agreed to be a part of a focus group. Oakhurst has an average weekly attendance of 120 people. Eleven of the focus group members returned completed surveys. The participants who responded represent approximately 10% of the average church attendance. The focus group members were chosen from the members of the two adult Sunday School classes that agreed to use *The Gospel Project* Sunday School literature during the project timeframe. Eleven of the 15 volunteers had children who attended one of the children's Sunday School classes using the themed material. Six

of the participants had youth-aged children who participated in the youth Sunday School class. Four of the participants had no children currently attending our church. The focus group participants were invited to a meeting on Sunday, December 29, 2013, where they received instructions and materials, including the pre-project surveys, weekly project surveys, and post-project surveys.

Project Calendar Outline

- December 2013

    o December 8, 2013 – Introduced the project to the Deacon Board of Oakhurst

      Baptist Church and received approval to proceed with the project beginning

      January 5.

    o December 11, 2013 – Met with church staff to discuss implementation of

      project. Dr. Crider and Jay Williams, the Music Minister, agreed use the

      integrated theme during four weeks of the project, beginning January 19,

      2014.

    o December 12, 2013 – Sent letter of invitation to potential focus group

      members.

    o December 29, 2013 – Introduced project to congregation during morning

      worship services. Focus group members were given a survey booklet which

      included the pre-project survey, the six weekly surveys, six weeks of daily

      journal pages, and the post-project survey. The focus group members were

      reminded to complete the pre-project survey before January 5, 2014. The

      project blog was activated and a link to the blog was placed on the church

      website. A basic introduction of purpose of the blog and project was posted

      on the blog and church website.

- January 2014

    o January 5, 2013 – The first Sunday of the project and the first of two weeks of no changes to the worship services or Sunday School. Dr. Crider preached for both of our worship services this week. Sunday School literature was distributed to the Sunday School teachers.

    o January 12, 2013 – The second week of the project and the second baseline week with no changes made to either the worship service or Sunday School. I preached for both services this week. Before each message I gave a brief review of the project and the changes that would be beginning the next week. I also announced that devotional guides would be made available next week to the entire congregation. The title of my message was, "Lift Up Your Face." The message was based on the text of Acts 10:34-43.

    o January 19, 2014 – The third week of the project and the first week of the integrated format. This week I preached for our contemporary service and Dr. Crider preached for the traditional service. The theme for the week was, "The God Who Speaks." The Scripture focus of Sunday School literature was Genesis 1:1-3, Exodus 3:2-6, and Genesis 1:27-30. During the contemporary service I showed a video made from the audio recording of the Apollo 8 astronauts reading Genesis 1:1-10 while on the moon on December 24, 1968.

    o January 26, 2014 – The fourth week of the project and the second week of the integrated format. Dr. Crider and I once again split the responsibility of preaching. The theme for the week was, "God is Not Hiding." The scripture used was Psalms 19:1-6, Romans 1:20, and Acts 14:15-17.

- February 2014
  - February 2, 2014 – The fifth week of the project and the third week of the integrated format. Dr. Crider preached for both services this week. The theme for the week was, "God is Not Mute." The scripture used was 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalms 19:7-11, and Luke 24:25-27.
  - February 9, 2014 – The sixth and final week of the project and the fourth week of the integrated format. I preached for both services this week. The theme for the week was, "In God We Trust." The scripture used was Genesis 3:1-6. During the message I showed a video that depicted a lady doing a trust-fall activity with a man portraying Jesus. The woman, while skeptical at first, was willing to trust Jesus to catch her, as long as she could see Jesus and understand how he could catch her. When Jesus stood in front of her and asked her to fall backwards she walked away and would not trust Jesus anymore. Focus group members were reminded to complete the post-project survey on Saturday, February 15, before turning the completed survey packet in on February 16.
  - February 16, 2014 – Completed survey books were returned by the project participants.

CHAPTER THREE

RATIONALE AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

"Why do we live the way we live and do what we do?"[12] Walter Brueggemann

raises this question in an article entitled, *"Passion and Perspective: Two Dimensions of*

Education in the Bible." Brueggemann states this question as a "foundational" question

to the "community of faith."[13] The answer for the people of God is to tell the story of our

community.[14] The stories of our Christian community are the roots of our faith. Old

Testament stories of God's faithfulness to an adulterous people, the message of love,

divinity, and sacrifice of Jesus, and the promise of eternity through him, are immovable

elements of our faith. Just as these lessons were shared throughout history, they must be

shared today. They were shared to ancient Israel at family tables. They were taught in

synagogues and the early churches established through the leadership of the Apostle Paul.

They were taught through communities, families, and churches. Community is the key

component of sharing our faith, and sharing the experiences of our faith is the key to

community. Faith and community are bound together as we see continually throughout

the history of God's people.

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[12] Walter Brueggemann, "Passion and Perspective: Two Dimensions of Education in the Bible," *Theology Today* 42, no. 2 (July 1, 1985): 173.

[13] Brueggemann, "Passion and Perspective," 172.

[14] Brueggemann, "Passion and Perspective," 173.

Community in the Old Testament

The faith community is at the core of the Old Testament. In Genesis 12, God begins the establishment of a covenant community. God communicates with Abram and directs him to, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis12:1).[15] Brueggemann explains that, "the purpose of the call is to fashion an alternative community in creation gone awry."[16] This is the beginning of the community of faith. It is through this community that God chose to act in the world. It is also within this community that God's people found direction and comfort. Prior to Abram's covenant with God, Genesis 11 shares that the people of earth made up one common community, sharing the same language and ambition. Brueggemann calls this a "self-made unity,"[17] as their purpose in constructing the tower of Babel was exposed as self-glorification. God's judgment of the people was to scatter them, thereby disrupting community. The covenant with Abraham and his descendants re-established the community of faith.

God later clarifies the covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants, promising them land (Genesis 17:8), prosperity (Genesis 15:1), and fruitfulness (Genesis 17:6). In return, God uses this new community to bless the world (Genesis 28:14). The story of the establishment of the faith community is passed on through generations. The writer of Hebrews reinforces the story of God's faithfulness as seen through Abraham's

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[15] All biblical quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

[16] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 105.

[17] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 100.

story: the promise of land, the promise of future generations, and God's deliverance in the testing of Abraham to further build the community of faith in the time of the early church.[18]

The community of faith that began with the covenant with Abraham continued to grow, prosper, and face adversity in its relationships with God. The stories and wisdom gained from this relationship and experience with God began to take on a formal pattern. Any community, large or small, is defined by the common beliefs that bind the individuals together to form that community. Those beliefs must be communicated to new members as the community continues to grow.

One of the most defining experiences of God's new covenant community was the Exodus from Egypt. The Passover is perhaps the most significant experience of the Exodus event, as evidenced by its yearly remembrance celebrations conducted by the Jewish community. On three occasions, Exodus 12:26, 13:8, and 13:14, Exodus instructs the reader to pass along explanation and instruction when children ask about the Passover celebration. Craig Dykstra notes that of particular importance to the formation of community convictions, "are the key images, metaphors, and symbolic actions that give a community's language and ritual life its particular distinctiveness."[19] No event, save for the crucifixion of Christ, provides a more defining image, metaphor, and symbolic action, than the Passover event through which God delivered the people of Israel from captivity

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[18] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 110-111.

[19] Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 133.

in Egypt. The people of Israel made this pivotal event the defining experience of their community of faith and made it a central part of their corporate and individual identity.

Brueggemann further states that, "The biblical community of faith is a community of memory, working at its precious identity in a culture devoted to amnesia. The market forces that encourage a consumer consciousness are largely controlled by ideology that wants to abandon the past and forsake the future in order to live in an absolute 'now'."[20] The same forces that sought to push the people of Israel away from God are the same that seek to push our church members away from God today. Our culture tells us to live for today; to seek the things that others tell us are valuable. God's message to the Hebrews and to us is to stay focused on the redeeming actions of God. We do this, as Exodus tells us, by talking about it with our children, passing down the stories and traditions, and celebrating God's action in our lives. Terrence Fretheim writes that, "The saving power of the original event is made available ever anew to the community by God's redeeming activity within the context of worship."[21]

As a community of faith, Oakhurst Baptist Church must join together as a people. We must tell our stories of God's involvement in the life of individuals and our church. We must celebrate together the redeeming action of God in our lives.   Brueggemann writes that as a community of faith, our identity, "must be kept present-tense in each new generation and in each new circumstance."[22] When our children ask why we worship,

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[20] Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus*, (NIB 1; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 786-7.

[21] Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus, (IBC; Louisville: John Know Press, 2010), 139.

[22] Brueggemann, *NIB* 1: 776.

baptize, and partake of the Lord's Supper, we ought to rejoice in the opportunity to keep our faith new and share our faith experiences.

The covenant community of faith that began with Abraham was freed and renewed by Moses. God worked through Moses to create a community that would be sustained by uniting with one another, remembering the past, and passing on their faith and understanding to future generations. The perpetuation of faith was based entirely on a community demonstrating faith's importance in everyday life. If God had not been an active and essential element to the life of the Hebrew people, God's existence, and upholding the abundance of laws put into place by God, would have been irrelevant and unnecessary. The writers of the Old Testament understood the significance of learning in community. The book of Deuteronomy offers heady instruction regarding the importance of teaching and learning within the family and community.

Robert Clement wrote that the writers of Deuteronomy, "very evidently set out to compose a comprehensive guidebook for Israel to live as the people of the LORD God."[23] Deuteronomy was designed as a tool for building the community of believers that would make up God's chosen people. Walter Brueggemann states that the "theological accent point" of the book of Deuteronomy is "ecclesiology."[24] Brueggemann goes on to define "ecclesiology" as, "a sense of the community that must always be redefined in terms of its origin, purpose, and destiny."[25] The origin, purpose, and destiny of a community serves as its identity. The identity for the Israelites came

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[23] Robert E. Clements, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, (NIB 2; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 272.

[24] Walter Brueggemann. *Deuteronomy* (The Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Ed. By Patrick D. Miller. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001) MinistryMatters.com (Accessed September 3, 2013).

[25] Ibid.

from their covenant with God, the Exodus from Egypt, and the promise of a homeland. God entered into a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, creating a community of faith.

One purpose of Deuteronomy was to give the people of Israel guidelines for establishing and maintaining their identity as a community of faith. Many of the laws and statutes contained in Deuteronomy give specific direction about how people should interact with other members of the community. Brueggemann writes that the laws and commandments established by God for the people of Israel, "assume a community of neighborly economic and political practices."[26] God was trying to create within this nomadic people a sense of community and togetherness. The life lived by the Israelites within their community of faith would be their witness to the other nations. They were to trust and obey God and do it together.

God spoke to Moses and commanded Moses to gather the people together and to share the messages God spoke to him. Deuteronomy 4:10 says, "How on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so'." (RSV) Brueggemann writes, "It is by utterance that later generations of Israel are always again brought to Sinai and the drama of covenant making. By utterance, this generation is invited to the awesome assembly, whereby Israel is entrusted its peculiar identity in the world."[27]

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[26] Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*.

[27] Ibid.

They received the teaching and commands of the Lord as a group so that they might support each other, so that each might grow individually in the faith, and so that the entire body would grow together. Thomas Hawkins writes, "Moses organized Israel into a learning community centered around the revelation of God's Torah."[28] Learning the law of God together built the community of faith and strengthened individuals and groups. God's words were meant to be learned and applied to their lives. To fear God was to know God, and to know God was to make his commandments part of every element of their lives.

God also commanded the people to teach what they had learned to their children. The job of teaching the children in their family was not given just to the Levite priests, but to each person. Brueggemann states, "Moses proposes 'saturation education' so that a child's imaginative horizon is completely pervaded by signs and reminders of this imperative."[29] Each person was to be totally immersed in the laws and commands of God. Knowledge and experience was passed from generation to generation through the saturation of religious concepts in each part of everyday life because there were laws and commands about every part of life. The responsibility for teaching God's commandments was within the family and the local community. This project echoes the sentiment of God's command to the Israelites to encourage and provide a means for this teaching environment to take place within the family and the local church.

Deuteronomy 6: 6-7 says, "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and

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[28] Hawkins, 6.

[29] Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*.

when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise." If Moses sought to shape the Israelites into a learning community as Hawkins stated,[30] then verses 6 and 7 describe a primary means of making this happen. Learning is described by Peter Jarvis as, "the process of transforming… everyday experience into knowledge, skills, attitude, and belief."[31] God wanted the people of Israel to make his words a part of each facet of their everyday experience. It was to be a part of their work, their rest, and their family. God commanded the people to make his word central in their lives. Through their everyday experiences they would learn what it meant to be in community with one another and with God. This constant focus on God's word kept his people connected. It also keeps the commandments and relationship with God fresh in our minds and in our hearts. This project sought to strengthen the sense of community felt by the members of Oakhurst Baptist Church by helping us to learn together as a community. The project aimed to build connections within families, Sunday School classes, and throughout the entire church community. The community created by God, the people of Israel, was intended to be one of mutual support. Throughout this project, my hope was to help Oakhurst move toward the community of faith that God desires for all believers.

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[30] Hawkins, 6.

[31] Peter Jarvis, *Paradoxes of Learning: On Becoming an Individual in Society* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 11.

Community in the New Testament

The New Testament contains the story of God's ultimate effort to restore the relationship between God and mankind. Jesus, the son and emissary of God, entered our world to bridge the gap between God and man and to teach us how to live in community with one another. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in the book *Life Together* that, "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him."[32] Jesus sought to free us from the bonds of sin and to bring people into a community of faith that would strengthen and support each other. "When we live in community with other believers, we reflect the gospel because Christ has made us one."[33]

Community in the New Testament: The Gospels

The gospels provide us with a clear picture of Jesus interacting with and participating in a community of faith. As Hawkins points out, "The gospels...usually describe Jesus amid a crowd of people, sitting at table fellowship with others, preaching and teaching the multitude, gathered with disciples."[34] Through the example of his life, Jesus taught us the value of community in spiritual formation. Thomas Wieser writes,

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[32] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (Minneapolis: HarperOne, 1954), 112.

[33] Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Louisville, KY: B&H Books, 2012), 172.

[34] Hawkins, 123.

"The formation of this community is reported in the Gospels in a series of stories about the 'calling' of the disciples."[35] In Mark 1:17 Jesus says to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." In Mark 2:14 Jesus approaches the tax collector Levi and says, "Follow me." Levi, Simon, Andrew, and all of the other disciples leave behind their old lives, joining with Jesus in the formation of this new faith community. Hawkins notes, "Jesus gathered around himself a community of disciples. Discipleship happened in a community of learners."[36]

Before Jesus miraculously fed 5000 people gathered on a hillside, he gathered his disciples and they discussed the work they had been doing. Mark 6:30 says, "The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all they had done and taught." They discussed within their small group their experiences in teaching and serving the larger community. Discussion was a prominent part of Jesus's relationship with the disciples. The teachings of Jesus were often different and hard for the disciples to understand. Matthew 15:15 captures a request that was probably a common reaction of the disciples to Jesus. Peter asked Jesus to, "Explain the parable to us." Mark 4:34 tells us, "When he [Jesus] was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything to them." These three passages highlight encounters that happened throughout the gospels. Teaching, conversation, questions, and answers all came within the context of the community of disciples that Jesus had brought together. Jesus forced the disciples and other new believers, as well as believers today, to thoughtfully engage with ideas that did not have straightforward understandings. They had to be applied within the context of their time

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[35] Thomas Wieser, "Community: Its Unity, Diversity and Universality," *Semeia* 33 (1985): 86.

[36] Hawkins, 123.

and culture. The best way for them to understand these ideas was to immerse themselves in the teaching and life of Jesus and to discuss these new ideas within the context of their community. This project sought to imitate this pattern, creating discussion in Sunday School classes, among families at home, and among the entire church through shared experiences and interactive social media.

The importance of community in the gospels is also highlighted by Jesus ongoing efforts to return people to fellowship within the community. The Jewish purity laws were often used to exclude people from the community of faith. Chilton writes, "Purity is best understood as the condition which God demands of his people for contact with him."[37] A person who was considered unclean according to Jewish laws and customs was cut off from the community of faith until their impurity was corrected. This could last from a period of days up to a person's entire life. In Mark 7:20-23, Jesus clarifies the truth of what separates us from the fellowship of the community. Jesus said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Throughout Jesus's ministry he healed many people whose afflictions caused them to be considered unclean. This created a perceived exclusion from the presence of God. In the fifth chapter of Mark's gospel Jesus encounters a woman who has a bleeding problem. Leviticus 15 describes the ritual status of a woman bleeding who would be considered unclean for a period of 7 days after her bleeding

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[37] Bruce D. Chilton, "Purity and Impurity," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove (Illinois: Intervaristy Press, 1997), 988.

stopped. The woman who Jesus encounters in Mark 5 would have remained unclean indefinitely, as her bleeding had continued for 12 years. For this entire time anyone who touched her or sat where she sat would also become unclean. Her touching Jesus's garment would have brought ritual impurity upon Jesus as well. Being healed by Jesus not only ended her suffering but also restored her ability to function in her community. In the first chapter of Mark Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit (Mark 1:23), a man with leprosy (Mark 1:40-41), and people with various other diseases and demons (Mark 1:34). Jesus's purpose was twofold, to heal their afflictions, and to restore their ability to be in community with God and with others.

Jesus also sought to open the community to those who had been excluded. In the tenth chapter of Luke, Jesus is asked, "Who is my neighbor?" This is a question of community. Fred Craddock describes a Samaritan as, "Ceremonially unclean, socially outcast, and religiously a heretic, the Samaritan is the very opposite of the lawyer as well as the priest and the Levite."[38] A person could not stray much further from the accepted community of faith than a Samaritan. Jesus shatters the walls surrounding the exclusive community and opens it to those on the outside. Richard Averbeck wrote, "God sent Christ to love people and he sends Christians to do the same."[39] The example of Christ shows us that God intended for the community of faith to be one that is open to all people, Samaritans, tax-collectors, lepers, outcasts, sinners, women, and men.

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[38] Fred Craddock, *Luke*, (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 2009), 150.

[39] Averbeck Richard E., "Spirit, Community, and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation," *Journal Of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 44.

The 28th chapter of Matthew's gospel records what is often referred to as the Great Commission. The writer of Matthew records this final instruction to Jesus's followers: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Eugene Boring writes, "After the resurrection, the invitation to discipleship is open to all people of all nations. That is, people are not called to become individual believers but are to be enlisted as disciples within the Christian Community, whose reception of the Christian message in faith must be actualized in their lives."[40] The community, which is now open to all, has been given a purpose, which that community must now work to achieve. The goal is to bring others into the community and to teach them how this community works. The community that started with Abraham has been reformed and can now begin to accomplish the work God intended. Douglas Hare writes in his commentary on Matthew, "Nothing is explicitly said in the commission about building the church, but its emphasis on Jesus's teachings clearly points in the direction of a nurturing community."[41] Churches should be nurturing communities that seek to build one another up, creating disciples of Christ. Boring writes, "The call [to the disciples], is now extended to all, as an extension of the call to Abraham and in accord with the promise that all nations would finally be blessed through him (Gen 12:1-3)."[42] God will

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[40] Eugene Boring, *Matthew*, (NIB 8; Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994), 503.

[41] Douglas R. Hare, *Matthew*, (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 2009), 334.

[42] Boring, *NIB* 8: 503-4.

now use the new community of faith, the followers of Jesus, the church, to fulfill the promise to bless all nations.

Eric Geiger writes, "The triune God is a community of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God who exists in community designed his followers to live in community for their maturity and to reflect his character."[43] The community of faith should reflect the character of God. In chapter 17 of John's gospel, Jesus prays to God for his followers. Jesus prays that they would have unity, that they would be one (John 17:11, 21). Thomas Wieser writes, "The unity – in the place of the enmity – of the human community with the Father is the fundamental good news that Jesus has come to bring to the world."[44] The main goal of Jesus coming into our human world is bring unity to our relationship with God, to restore us to the community of faith. If that was Jesus's purpose, then we should also work as members of that community to strengthen and build that community through whatever means God has placed before us. As a church, we can be a part of this effort by seeking to strengthen the communities of faith we encounter: the church congregation, families, and the community that exists between individuals and God. This project sought to follow the example of Christ by strengthening and building our local community of faith.

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[43] Geiger, 162.

[44] Wieser, 93.

Community in the New Testament: The Early Church

The story of church begins in Acts and is continued through the remainder of the New Testament writings. The struggles and triumphs of this newly reimagined community of faith are recorded so that the community of faith might be strengthened, encouraged, and taught. Eric Geiger states, "Throughout the biblical narrative, community is emphasized and commanded; it is never presented as optional."[45] The letters of the New Testament were written to communities of believers, giving them both commands and encouragement for each person and community to live according to God's desire for unity among his people.

Genesis 11 tells of the disruption of community by the scrambling of languages. In the Acts 2, the Holy Spirit empowers the people to overcome the language barrier and to share with people of all tongues the gospel of Jesus Christ in their own language. Wieser writes, "The story of Pentecost shows the Apostles able to communicate to everybody in their language. In an obvious allusion to the story of the Tower of Babel that shows the destruction of the community, community here is being re-established."[46] As the new community of followers of Jesus began to spread around the world, God sent the Holy Spirit to bridge the divide between God and man and between man and man. Robert Wall writes, "The restoration of Israel is the work of this Spirit sent by God as promised (Acts 1:6)."[47] The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was an act of God to

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[45] Geiger, 160.

[46] Wieser, 89.

[47] Robert W Wall, NIB 10: 57.

restore the faith community.   The people each heard the same gospel message. The

message was stronger because each heard the same message. My project sought to

strengthen the message of my church and to strengthen the community by focusing on a

common message and theme each week, so that my community might also be

strengthened by the message of the gospel.

After Pentecost, the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ began to spread and the

community of faith began to grow. New communities, called churches, were established

by the Apostles in many places throughout the Mediterranean world. Acts 22:21 tells of

Paul's call to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul is called to spread the community of

faith beyond the ethnic and social borders of Judaism. Hare writes, "The Gentiles are not

to be converted to a philosophy but to a unique way of living together in the Messiah's

community."[48] The letters of Paul to the various faith communities are written with the

purpose of building up and strengthening these new communities. Much of Paul's

instruction to the various communities is focused on how members of the community

should interact with one another.

In the 1 Corinthians 12, Paul's introduces a metaphor to help the people of

Corinth understand how they each fit into the community of faith. Paul writes, "For just

as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though

many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). Wieser writes, "Paul

evokes the image of the body as a means to help the Corinthians to understand the nature

of a non-competitive community."[49] The believers in Corinth had begun to fight and

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[48] Hare, 334.

[49] Wieser, 91.

argue over which gifts of the Spirit were the greatest. Paul used the metaphor of the body

to show how each part of the body is equal though each also has a unique function.

Wieser adds, "Paul reminds the Corinthians that the work of the Spirit is to maintain

unity in the midst of diversity and thus to make diversity an instrument for the

'manifestation of the common good' (12:7)."[50] The diversity of the community of faith is

a strength that needs to be fostered and provided with a means to be expressed. In order

for the diversity of the community to be expressed, opportunities must be created for

interaction of the diverse parts. This project sought to increase interaction of all of the

parts of the church body through the discussion of a common biblical focus each week.

In Romans 14, Paul encourages the members of the community of faith in Rome

not to judge the actions of others or to allow their own actions to cause others to stumble.

Paul Achtemeier writes in his commentary on the book of Romans, "Christians are

representatives of God's plan of the redemptive unity of all peoples and are to act

accordingly, both individually and as members of the community of the faithful."[51]

God's plan was for the community of faith to serve one another. Romans 15:7 instructs

believers to, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the

glory of God." Achtemeier notes that this welcoming of "one another," both Jew and

Gentile, "makes possible the unity of all people."[52] Christ has become our intermediary

with God, allowing us to be in community with God, and also with one another. To be in

community with God is to be in community with others. Paul urges the people,

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[50] Wieser, 91.

[51] Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1985), 226.

[52] Achtemeier, 225.

regardless of background, whether Jew or Greek, to find common ground. Bob Adams

writes that this common ground is found in the fact that, "they all have actively placed

their loyalty in Jesus as Lord and Christ."[53] It is Christ that unites us. Christ brings the

parts of the body together to form one community of faith, united for the purposes of

God. Averbeck writes, "Christianity is not just an individual pursuit. In fact, God never

intended that the Christian live isolated or alienated from other Christians."[54] God

intended community, not isolated individuals exploring and practicing faith on their own.

It is clear throughout the Bible that God intended for people to live in a

community of faith. In order to be a community, there must be interaction between the

members of the community. The community must gather with a purpose. P.T. Obrien

states that Paul regularly uses the Greek word "*oikodomē,*" meaning edification, "to

indicate the purpose and function of Christian gatherings."[55] Paul regularly references

"edification" sometimes translated "upbuilding," as a primary purpose of the church.

Paul wrote, "On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their

upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. Those who speak in a tongue build up

themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church" (1 Corinthians 4:3-4). Paul

echoes this idea to the church in Thessalonica, saying, "Therefore encourage one another

and build up each other, as indeed you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). To the church

in Ephesus, Paul notes that pastors and teachers have been called, "to equip the saints for

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[53] Bob E. Adams, "Responsible Living in Community Setting (Romans 12-16)," *Southwestern Journal Of Theology* 19, no. 1 (1976): 65.

[54] Averbeck, 43.

[55] P.T. O'Brien, "Church," **Dictionary of Paul and His Letters.** Ed. by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid. Grand Rapids, Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1993, 129.

the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 5:12). Further

referencing the metaphorical body of believers, Paul writes that the community of faith in

Christ is, "joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each

part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love"

(Ephesians 5:16). Obrien notes that to Paul, "of primary importance in the process of

building up God's people is the regular and systematic exposition of Scripture, together

with the teaching of 'sound doctrine' by those equipped and appointed for the task."[56]

The process of building up the believers and strengthening the church was designed to

happen within the community of faith. Millard Erickson reminds us that, "edification is

mutual upbuilding by all members of the body, not merely the minister or pastor."[57]

Osmer writes about the early church and the importance that each person was expected to

give to theological study. He says, "In the first centuries of the church's life, theology

was viewed as something each member of the church was called to do. All persons were

seen as called to reflect on the entirety of their lives in light of their relationship with

God."[58] In order to achieve this critical task two things are vital, the study of the word

and the community of faith. This project sought to reinforce these practices within the

congregation at Oakhurst through the exposition of scripture, the teaching of sound

doctrine, and the edification of the people. Each element of the project was used for

edification of the individuals and the community of faith. Hawkins explains that, "the

need for learning is not limited to individuals. Learning occurs at three levels: the

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[56] Obrien, 129.

[57] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 1064.

[58] Richard Robert Osmer, *Teaching for Faith: a Guide for Teachers of Adult Classes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 21.

individual, team, and congregational levels."[59] Through the shared strength of ideas we can all grow stronger in our faith and closer to God as individuals, as small groups, and as the community of faith called Oakhurst Baptist Church.

The Christian Church

Throughout the history of the Christian church, many resources have been developed and used to bring strength and unity to the community of faith.

The *Didache* is one such resource. It was developed around 100 CE. Robert Weber describes the *Didache* as, "an early church manual."[60] It contained prayers and other instructions that guided the worship of the early church.   One of the primary features of the *Didache* was a common prayer to be used during the celebration of the Eucharist.[61] This resource of the early church served to bring uniformity to worship, connecting the community of faith in common practices.

During the second century Justin Martyr's *First Apology* gave instruction regarding the structure and practice of worship. His instructions were related to the Lord's Supper, the reading of Scripture, and the discourse of leaders to the church regarding how we could live in accordance with the words of the apostles and prophets. [62]

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[59] Hawkins, 9.

[60] Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 52.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Weber 54.

These two early Christian writings demonstrate understanding from the earliest days of the church that there is a need for common experiences. The formulation of these standard practices provided a template for the community of faith. Christians were beginning to have common experiences, uniting the Christians of different regions into a community of believers.

In addition to many writings, religious leaders have often gathered to address issues within the Christian community. The Council of Nicea in 325 CE produced the Nicene Creed, which sought to normalize some Christian beliefs and end controversies arising from differing schools of thought.[63] The purpose was to present a common set of beliefs, agreed upon by the leaders of the church. The purpose was to bring unity to the community of faith.

The *Book of Common Prayer* was developed by the Anglican Church in the 16th Century to establish standard practices that would be used in all Anglican churches.[64] The *Book of Common Prayer* was used to create a foundation for worship practices within the church. Priests and church members in all Anglican churches shared common experiences in worship every week.

Lectionaries have been another source used to create common experiences with the community of faith. Lectionaries dated in the 8th Century provided scripture readings to be used in worship services.[65] Today some churches use the Revised Common Lectionary, which was developed by the Consultation On Common Texts: an ecumenical

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[63] Justo L. González, *Church History: An Essential Guide*, Abingdon Essential Guides (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 38.

[64] Weber, 112.

[65] Cheslyn Jones, ed., *The Study of Liturgy*, rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 1992), 97.

group of liturgical scholars from the United States and Canada.[66] The Revised Common Lectionary was first published in 1992.

Contemporary Voices

Henri Nouwen defines Christianity through community. He states, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ."[67] The Christian community in today's church is composed mostly of local church congregations that participate in Sunday School and worship services.

Robert Raikes, and English Anglican, is credited as one of the primary supporters of the implementation of Sunday School. According to Timothy Larsen, Sunday School began in the late 1700s in Britain, where it served as a literal school for the purpose of educating children within the working class during the Industrial Revolution.[68] The movement sought to combat illiteracy, and the primary textbook for instruction was the Bible. Robert Raikes promoted this Sunday School movement which spread across denominations and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Sunday School became a, "near universal aspect of childhood."[69]

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[66] "History," Consultation on Common Texts, http://www.commontexts.org/history/index.html (accessed March 20, 2014).

[67] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, 21.

[68] Thomas Larsen, "When Did Sunday School Start?" Christianity Today, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/asktheexpert/whendidsundayschoolstart.html (accessed April 18, 2014).

[69] Ibid.

The universality of faith-based education is not limited to our history. It is a primary element of our continued faith practices. Being educated together bonds us to one another, making us mutually accountable to one another and connected together through common goals and experiences. Henri Nouwen states, "Our society is so fragmented, our family lives so sundered by physical and emotional distance, our friendships so sporadic, our intimacies so 'in-between' things and often so utilitarian, that there are few places where we can feel truly safe."[70] The ability to bond ourselves through community offers the intimacy, safety, and closeness that is missing in our society. The intimacy created through this type of community causes us to want to share with others. Nouwen says, "When we claim and constantly reclaim the truth of being the chosen ones, we soon discover within ourselves a deep desire to reveal to others their own chosenness."[71]

Connectedness meets a fundamental Christian need. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, "Among earnest Christians in the church today there is a growing desire to meet together with other Christians in the rest periods of their work for common life under the Word. Communal life is again being recognized by Christians today as the grace that it is..."[72] Community is essential to Christianity and is a gift from God. Bonhoeffer states, "It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and sacrament."[73] It strengthens the individual believer as well. Bonhoeffer

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[70] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 90.

[71] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World,* 63.

[72] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community,* 21.

[73] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: the Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, 18.

also writes, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer…[who] years for the physical presence of other Christians."[74]

In light of contemporary Christian education practices, it is important to understand how and why integrated education is relevant to our church community experience. According to David Francis, in his article entitled "Sunday School and Discipleship," all church ministries seek to accomplish common purposes. The five common purposes he shares are worship, biblical discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, and ministry. Worship is accomplished primarily through worship services, while evangelism, fellowship, and ministry are accomplished through Sunday School.[75] Discipleship is accomplished only partially through Sunday School and necessitates an additional educational opportunity such as discipleship training classes.[76] It is only through the integration of both worship and Sunday School that the entire purpose of the church is met. Therefore, finding a way to integrate the message of Sunday School and worship serves to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the message and the community. Nouwen states, "We are called to proclaim the Gospel together, in community. There is a divine wisdom here….I need my brothers or sisters to pray with me, to speak with me about the spiritual task at hand, and to challenge me to stay pure…"[77]

Throughout the ages of Christian history there has been an abundance of writings regarding the practices and functions of the church. From the earliest examples of

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[74] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: the Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, 19.

[75] David Francis, "Sunday School and Discipleship," Lifeway.com, http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/files/lwcf_sunday_school_and_discipleship.pdf (accessed April 18, 2014).

[76] Francis, "Sunday School and Discipleship.

[77] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989) 58.

Christian instruction, the *Didache* and Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, to the more recent

writing of *The United Methodist Worship Book* and the *Revised Common Lectionary*,

church leaders have been trying to bring the community of faith to a common

understanding of the practices of the church. The modern voices of our religious

pioneers, such as Henri Nouwen and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, echo the call to community

that began with Abraham. All of these works and many others seek to accomplish the

same goal: strengthening the community of faith. This project sought to build upon the

solid foundation built by centuries of experience and expertise and provide a common

experience to the people of Oakhurst Baptist Church in the sincere hope that our

community might grow closer to God and to one another.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Two methods of evaluation were used to evaluate the success of the project. The first method was a combination of pre-project and post-project surveys. The congregation members serving in the focus group were asked to complete the pre-project survey (Appendix D) prior to the beginning of the project and prior to exposure to any other project materials. At the conclusion of the project the focus group members were asked to complete the post-project survey (Appendix E). The post-project survey contained the same questions as the pre-project survey.

The second means of evaluation was a weekly survey (Appendix F). It included a daily journal for the participants to record their feedback or responses to the daily devotionals that were part of the project. A weekly survey was provided for each of the six weeks of the project. Each weekly survey contained questions similar to the pre-project and post-project survey so that changes could be tracked throughout the entire course of the project.

The project surveys were designed to gather information about each of the three goals of the project. The first project goal was to create an integrated church experience that focused the attention of Oakhurst Baptist Church on the same biblical concept each week. A part of this goal is the overall evaluation of the execution of the project itself. The second goal of the project was to create a setting that encourages families to engage in theological discussion. The final goal was the growth of the church body as a community of faith. The survey results were evaluated with regard to each of these goals.

There were fifteen church members who participated in the focus group. Of that group, 40% were male and 60% female. Of those who returned survey results, 27% were male and 73% female. There was no significant statistical difference in the survey results based on gender differentiation. The surveys also indicated that 45% of the participants were college graduates with only one person indicating post-graduate education. This difference also failed to produce any significant statistical variations.

Evaluation of Results

Goal #1 – Integration and Execution

The first goal was to create an integrated church experience that focused the attention of Oakhurst Baptist Church on the same biblical concept each week. Within this goal is also the overall execution of the project. Various data elements from all of the project surveys were used to determine if this goal was met.

Integration of the main biblical concept into various aspects of the weekly church experience was the primary goal of the project. Each week the participants were asked to indicate if they noticed a connection between the theme of the music, worship, and Sunday School. The results located below in Table 4.1 show that the project was successful in communicating a common theme. The results were recorded by the participants in Part 1 of the weekly survey (Appendix F). Participants were asked to complete this portion of the survey on Sunday, after morning services were completed.

TABLE 4.1

SERMON THEME CONNECTION WITH MUSIC AND SUNDAY SCHOOL

	Participants who noticed a connection between the sermon theme and music during worship.	Participants who noticed a connection between the sermon theme and theme of Sunday School.
Week 1	40.0%	25.0%
Week 2	57.1%	20.0%
Week 3	80.0%	100.0%
Week 4	75.0%	100.0%
Week 5	70.0%	80.0%
Week 6	90.0%	100.0%

The first two weeks of the project were conducted according to normal church procedures. The worship services were planned by the church staff and the Sunday School teachers used their normal literature. The connection of the music to the sermon theme during the first two weeks was higher than the connection of the Sunday School theme to the sermon theme during the same period. This was expected, since the music minister is often aware of the sermon topics chosen by the speaker. The attempt at integrating the music and sermon theme was very evident during the four weeks of the project. During week 5 of the project 70% of the participants recognized a connection between the music and the sermon. This was the lowest percentage of any of the weeks of increased integration, yet was significantly greater than the two baseline weeks. During week 6 of the project 90% of the participants recognized a connection, giving clear evidence that the project succeeded in integrating music and worship themes.

The recognition of Sunday School integration with the sermon theme offered a more stark contrast between the first two baseline weeks and the four weeks of integration. During the two baseline weeks only 25% and 20% of the participants who

attended both Sunday School and either of the worship services noticed a connection between the two events. A drastic increase in these percentages occurred during the four weeks of targeted integration. During three of the four weeks of integration 100% of the participants who attended both Sunday School and a worship service noticed a connection between the theme of the sermon and the theme of the Sunday School lesson. During week 5, 80% of the participants responded that they noticed the connection.

To further verify the extent to which efforts to integrate Sunday School and the theme of the sermon were effective, I gave each participant the opportunity to record in their own words both the theme of the worship service they attended and Sunday School. The responses I received are located below in Tables 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7. The responses are recorded verbatim from the responses of the survey participants.

TABLE 4.2

WEEK 1 THEME RESPONSES (CONTROL WEEK 1)

Sermon Theme	Sunday School Theme
Seeking the Lord	Getting caught up in projects and not coming to church
Come and seek the Lord	Our lesson was about God's eternality and how his love & power have and will always be there.
Seeking a deeper relationship with God	New Year's resolutions

TABLE 4.3

WEEK 2 THEME RESPONSES (CONTROL WEEK 2)

Sermon Theme	Sunday School Theme
God loves all people the same	Revelation with God
Keeping your course toward heaven, not doing what the world wants	Biblical resolutions. Keeping your eyes on the cross, not the world
God loves all people the same and treats all people the same	Top Christian resolutions - Top spiritual resolutions
Trust God	Spiritual New Year's Resolutions
Value of life	

During the first two weeks it was easy to notice the lack of connection between the theme of the sermon and the theme of Sunday School. During the first week all of the respondents were in close agreement as to the theme of the sermon. During the second week the interpretations of the theme were varied. It should be noted that the speaker for the first two weeks conducted both services and attempted to bring the same message to each service. The comments from the first two baseline weeks clearly show that there was little connection between the theme of the sermon and the theme of Sunday School.

TABLE 4.4

WEEK 3 THEME RESPONSES (WEEK 1 OF INTEGRATION)

WEEKLY PROJECT THEME: "THE GOD WHO SPEAKS"

Sermon Theme	Sunday School Theme
God is a God who speaks	God desires communication with us
God having authority when speaking	How the Bible show God speaking into existence
God speaking	God Speaking
God tells us, God Blesses us, God expects us to do	Communication and how important it is to listen when God speaks
Importance of Communication - God Speaks - He spoke all into existence	God Speaks
God Speaks	We serve a God who speaks to us and desires to have a relationship with us.
How God can and does speak to us	God speaks to us with authority out of love with mercy and we should respond with obedience
God is trying to speak to us every day, but we are often too busy to listen	
God reaches out to us	

TABLE 4.5

WEEK 4 THEME RESPONSES (WEEK 2 OF INTEGRATION)

WEEKLY PROJECT THEME: "GOD IS NOT HIDING"

Sermon Theme	Sunday School Theme
God makes himself known to us every day	God gives us the ability to experience his creation
You can see God in everything you do on a daily basis	The beauty in nature
God gave us a beautiful creation and we should take every opportunity to notice it	God's creation, looking for specific ways God takes care of us in His way
God is not hiding. God is in control. God is not through with us.	God is not hiding (but I may be)
God is not hiding.	God is not Hiding.

	Creation alone provides evidence enough of God that we are accountable for not blessing in him.
God's abilities and plans	
God is visible everywhere, "if" we are looking for him.	God is not Hiding.
God is not hiding.	

TABLE 4.6

WEEK 5 THEME RESPONSES (WEEK 3 OF INTEGRATION)

WEEKLY PROJECT THEME: "GOD IS NOT MUTE"

Sermon Theme	Sunday School Theme
God is speaking to us constantly, we just have to be listening	God uses many ways to communicate to us
God always speaks to us. He does not sit quietly by.	We must listen closely to hear God speak to us.
God is not mute	We are mute, not God
What God says or has said is true and the only true way. It is all in His word.	God Speaks to us through His word, The Bible - All in his timing and manner - we have to go tell others what he has done
God speaks to us all the time, we just need to listen, god is not mute	God is always there to help us and guide us if we listen to him. He is not silent, we just need to be still and hear him.
God is not mute.	God is not Mute.
God isn't mute	God is the hero of the Bible
God revealing himself	

TABLE 4.7

WEEK 6 THEME RESPONSES (WEEK 4 OF INTEGRATION)

WEEKLY PROJECT THEME: "IN GOD WE TRUST"

Sermon Theme	Sunday School Theme
We need to trust god in all things	We don't have to understand, just trust.
In God we trust. We can Trust God. He has given us everything we need to serve him.	We can trust God to give us what we need.

Remembering what this nation was founded on	Praying the country turns back to what were founded on
Trusting and obeying God	The Bible is our Guide - We have the choice to use it or not, even though we don't always understand why he does/has done some things
We need to trust God even when we don't understand His reasoning	Trusting in God
Trusting in God - Putting all our trust in him even when we are unsure or afraid	Trusting God is a choice. We choose many things daily, and our service to Him is also a choice
Faith and Trust	
Serving and obeying God are a matter of choice and when we fail at it, we are questioning God's authority	

The themes recorded by the participants during the four weeks of integration showed clear evidence that theme was being understood in both Sunday School and worship services. Not only is the theme of each individual component being recognized by the participants, but most responses also show that they understood the connection between worship and Sunday School. An example of this can be found in Table 4.5. During the fourth week of the project, the theme for the week was "God is Not Hiding." The emphasis for both Sunday School and the sermon was that God can be seen in creation. One participant recorded the sermon theme as, "God makes himself known to us every day." For the Sunday School theme the same participant recorded, "God gives us the ability to experience his creation." The responses were not just restating the sermon and Sunday School lesson titles, but the essence of the message. The responses were different, but echoed the overall theme.

During the four weeks of integration more of the participants responded to this question on the survey than did during the first two baseline weeks. The implementation

of the project caused people to pay more attention to both the worship and Sunday School content. This is similar to the "observer effect," when the observation of a task causes those performing the task to be affected by the fact that they are being observed. That cannot be discounted for these responses, or any responses on the surveys, but is also one of the strengths of an integrated theme across several elements of church. The integration is different from normal and it draws people's attention, making them more aware of each of the elements and the other people who are also involved. Knowing that everyone is having a common experience encourages participation and engagement with the ideas presented and with the others who are participating, as we will see through other results from the project.

The survey results clearly show that an integrated system was created and that the participants were able to understand the theme being presented each week. Achieving that is admirable only if it also has a positive impact on the participant's experience within the faith community.

TABLE 4.8

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT WORSHIP SERVICE RATING

Pre-Project Average	8.55
Post-Project Average	9.44
Percent Change	10.52%

GRAPH 4.1

WEEKLY WORSHIP SERVICE RATINGS (10 POINT SCALE)
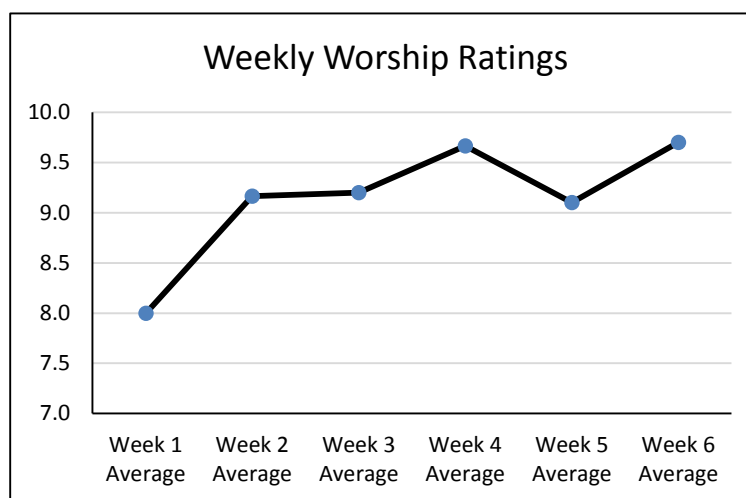
The worship service average rating increased from 8.55 to 9.44 on the pre- and post-project surveys. The weekly surveys confirm this data, Table 4.8 and Graph 4.1, as it shows an overall increase in the satisfaction with the worship service. Week 5 took a small dip, but it was still well above the pre-project average. The average ratings for the music, sermon content, and sermon delivery also showed improvements from pre-project to post-project scores, as seen in Table 4.9 below. Graph 4.2 below provides a visual analysis of the ratings received for the content of the sermon and its delivery. There was definite upward trend each week of the project, with only week 5 again taking a minor dip in rating. From an evaluative standpoint, the weeks with an integrated theme received higher satisfaction in almost every assessment. While individual data points may show occasional drops during the integration period, as a whole it was successful in providing an integrated theme and superior experience for worship and Sunday School.

TABLE 4.9

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT MUSIC AND SERMON RATINGS

Music Rating	
Pre-Project Average	8.18
Post-Project Average	9.33
Percent Change	14.07%
Sermon Content	
Pre-Project Average	8.64
Post-Project Average	9.44
Percent Change	9.36%
Sermon Delivery	
Pre-Project Average	8.64
Post-Project Average	9.44
Percent Change	9.36%

GRAPH 4.2

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT MUSIC AND SERMON RATINGS

(10 POINT SCALE)
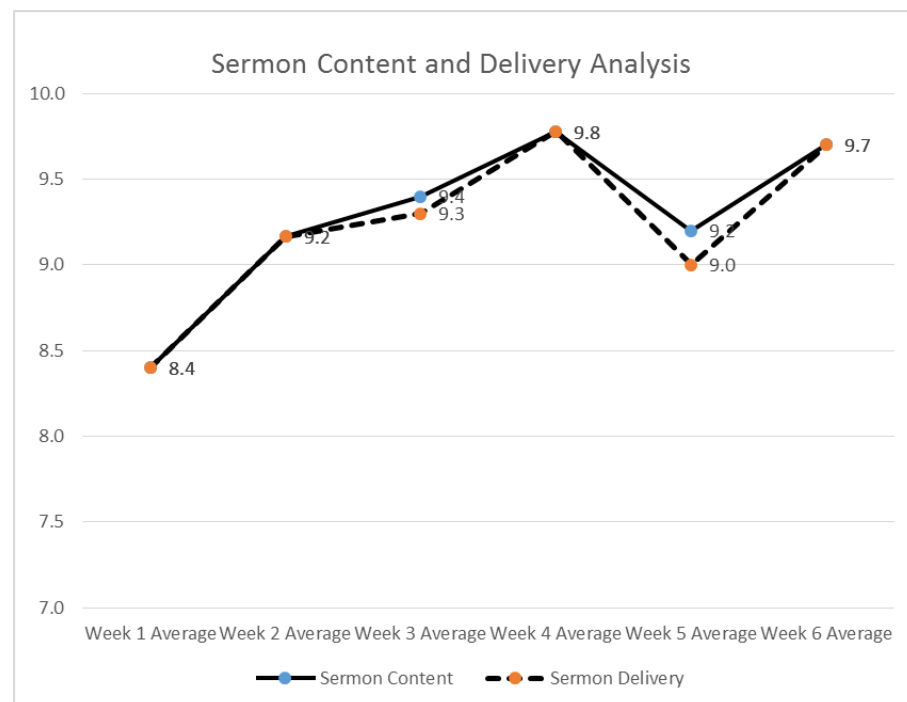
In summary, the data collected shows a positive response to the integration of worship, Sunday School, and daily devotions. From a personal perspective I learned a great deal about the implementation of an integrated strategy. Organizing a church to focus corporately on a single theme requires precise coordination and communication, but can be accomplished successfully using time and resources already available to the church. I chose to introduce a new curriculum for the project, but I believe similar results could be achieved using material already in use by the church. This specific level of integration and coordination may not be practical for some churches on a weekly basis, but I do believe it could be useful on a limited basis, being used two to three times each year to provide special emphasis. I personally plan to integrate the methods learned from this project into my future ministry plans.

Goal # 2 – Family Engagement

The second goal of the project was to create a setting that encourages families to engage in theological discussion. It was my hypothesis that an integrated system that engages both children, teenagers, and adults would help foster an environment that encourages families to discuss at home the concepts of faith taught and discussed at church.

The survey analysis, presented below in Table 4.10, shows the effect the project had on the individual participation in a daily devotional time. During the first two baseline weeks with no integration and no specific devotional provided less than 30% of the focus group participants had a personal or family devotional time. During the third week of the project, when integration began, there was a doubling of the participation.

Participation rose to a high point during the fifth week, with an average of 76.6% of the group members participating every day. The sixth week saw a drastic drop, close to pre-integration numbers. One possible explanation for such a severe drop could have been the structure of the project. The devotions were designed to be completed as a follow up to the Sunday church events. The last Sunday of the project was February 9, 2014. It is possible that some of the participants used the final Sunday of the project as a reason to stop the daily devotions. Examination of the survey results (Appendix G) reveals that the participants who did have a daily devotional time during the first two baseline weeks of the project were also the ones who continued to do their devotions during the final week. Only one participant who did not do any devotions during the first two weeks continued the devotions into the sixth week. This may indicate that a permanent behavioral change did not occur for most participants in the focus group, while the project did cause a temporary change to a positive personal spiritual habit for most participants. This temporary change in behavior demonstrates the value of creating an integrated system. The project has shown that individuals are willing to make significant changes to behavior when the community has supported the implementation of this change. Integrating new elements, such as the daily devotions, with activities that are already a part of the community experience increases the likelihood of community members integrating the new experience into their current faith practices.

TABLE 4.10

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO COMPLETED A DEVOTION EACH DAY

	Average	Percentage of Focus Group
Week 1	3.29	29.87%
Week 2	2.71	24.68%
Week 3	7.00	63.64%
Week 4	7.29	66.23%
Week 5	8.43	76.62%
Week 6	5.29	48.05%

At the end of each week the focus group members were asked to record how often they had a daily devotion, either alone or as a family. Table 4.11 below contains their answers. The first two weeks reflect their usual behavior as no changes were made and no special devotions were provided. During the first two weeks 57% and 44% indicated they did not have a devotional time at all. This figure dropped throughout the project, with 70% of the focus group members indicating that they had a devotion at least three times a week.

TABLE 4.11

SURVEY QUESTION: HOW OFTEN DID YOU AND/OR YOUR FAMILY

COMPLETE THE DAILY DEVOTION?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Three or Four Times	Everyday
Week 1	57.14%	14.29%	0.00%	28.57%
Week 2	44.44%	11.11%	11.11%	33.33%
Week 3	22.22%	11.11%	22.22%	44.44%
Week 4	22.22%	11.11%	22.22%	44.44%
Week 5	9.09%	18.18%	9.09%	63.64%
Week 6	10.00%	20.00%	30.00%	40.00%

All of the data collected shows that the project had a positive effect on the number of individuals having a devotional time throughout the week. While this is positive, it is not conclusive in achieving the goal of engaging families in theological studies. A flaw in the survey instruments was that there was no place to indicate specifically if the devotion was done with other family members or by individuals alone.

Table 4.12 looks at the religious discussions by the family outside of a daily devotional time. The results show little significant change and some decrease in the frequency of discussions. Beginning in week 3, the first week of project related changes, the percentage of participants who discussed their faith everyday dropped to only 11% for the remainder of the project. The fluctuations in responses indicates that the project either had little effect on religious discussion or that the survey instrument was not understood. Table 4.13 supports my conclusions in regards to the data presented in Table 4.12. Table 4.13 also shows that the project had marginal effect on the quality of the religious discussions in the families of the focus group members. The only major shifts are within the two affirmative responses.

TABLE 4.12

SURVEY QUESTION: NOT INCLUDING THE DEVOTION TIME, HOW OFTEN

DID YOUR FAMILY ENGAGE IN RELIGIOUS DISCUSSIONS?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Three or Four Times	Everyday
Week 1	14.29%	28.57%	28.57%	28.57%
Week 2	12.50%	25.00%	37.50%	25.00%
Week 3	11.11%	33.33%	44.44%	11.11%
Week 4	0.00%	22.22%	66.67%	11.11%
Week 5	11.11%	44.44%	33.33%	11.11%
Week 6	22.22%	33.33%	33.33%	11.11%

TABLE 4.13

SURVEY STATEMENT: I HAD MEANINGFUL RELIGIOUS DISCUSSIONS WITH

MY FAMILY THIS WEEK

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	12.5%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%
Week 2	22.2%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%
Week 3	33.3%	55.6%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
Week 4	40.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Week 5	22.2%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%
Week 6	33.3%	44.4%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%

Graphs 4.3 and 4.4 paint a slightly different picture. When asked to rate the family

devotion content and interaction on a 10 point scale, both graphs show close to a 2 point

increase during the four weeks of integrated content. Graphs 4.5 and 4.6 also show a

definite increase in rating related to the family religious discussions and family

connectedness.

GRAPH 4.3

FAMILY DEVOTION CONTENT RATING (10 POINT SCALE)
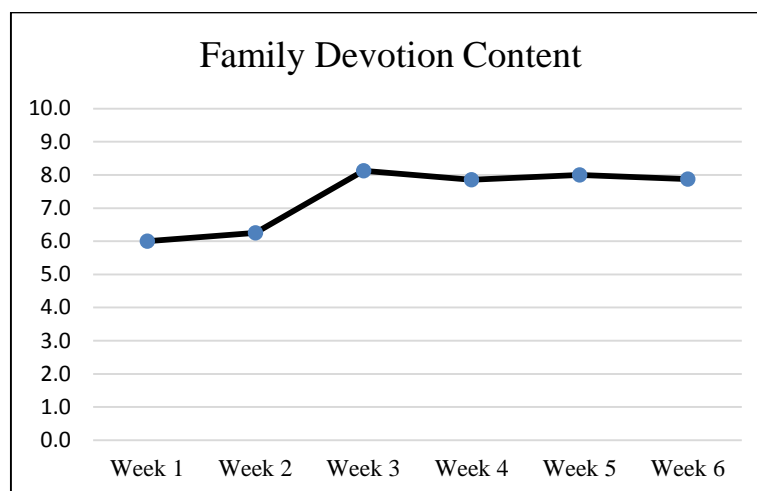
GRAPH 4.4

FAMILY DEVOTION INTERACTION RATING (10 POINT SCALE)
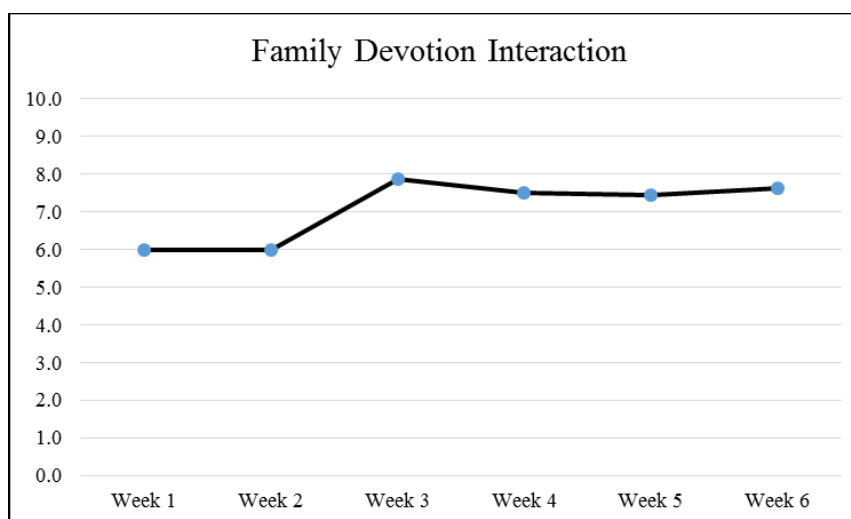
GRAPH 4.5

FAMILY RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION RATING (10 POINT SCALE)
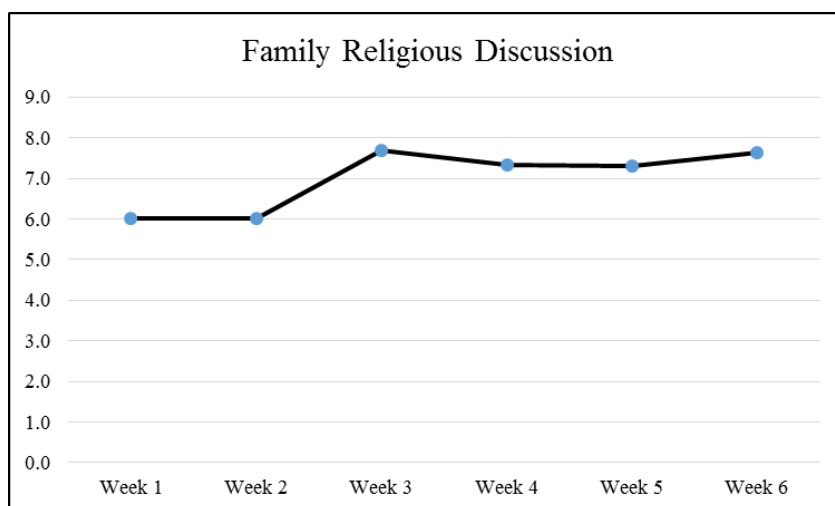
GRAPH 4.6

FAMILY CONNECTEDNESS RATING (10 POINT SCALE)
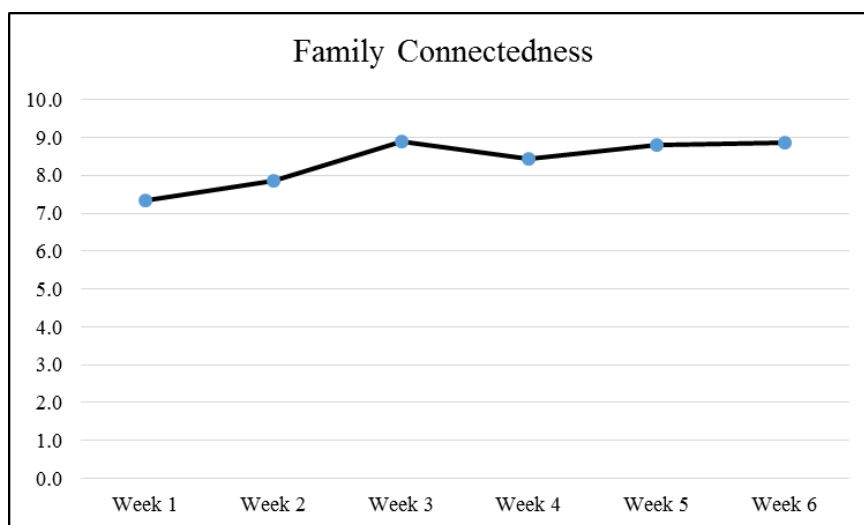
When compared to the data collected in Tables 4.12 and 4.13, graphs 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 show a more consistent and expected level of improved satisfaction.

In summary, the project was successful in creating a setting that encourages theological discussion within families. While some of the numerical data showed less distinction in pre- and post-project responses, it is clear that the project did have a positive effect on families engaging each other in discussions of their faith. The most encouraging data for me was the increase in the participation with the daily devotions. This is a critical step in making discussions of faith a part of our daily lives. People who do not engage with God and their Bible daily will also struggle to engage their families and peers in discussions of faith. Churches often encourage people to have a daily devotion. Sometimes we even provide resources. This project has shown me that churches can and should do more to make the devotional life of individuals a priority to the church. The project had a positive impact on my own family during the period of integration. The daily devotions brought my family together every day as we shared the devotion time each night after dinner. Our discussions of church on the way home on Sunday afternoons showed the positive impact of the integrated theme. We also continued to discuss the ideas first introduced on Sunday throughout the week.

The impact of the project on my family and the families participating in the project was encouraging. The challenge for the future is how to make these practices a part of the church experience and culture moving forward. As a minister, preacher, and educator, this project has taught me the value of the community experience.

Goal # 3 – Community Growth

The final goal was the growth of the church body as a community of faith. The growth desired refers not to numerical growth in the number of people in community, but

growing closer to one another, becoming a community who share their faith experiences.

Sunday School and the project blog were the two main elements of the project where

participants encountered one another in a community setting. Participants were asked in

the pre- and post-project surveys if they desired to have a place to express their views on

faith issues. The results are recorded in Table 4.14 below. Seventy-two percent of the

participants indicated before the project that they did desire such a place. The post-

project results showed that 64% continued to desire a place to discuss their faith. While

the number dropped slightly, the data still suggests that having a place to discuss issues of

faith was of high importance to members of the church. In Table 4.15 focus group

members indicated how often they had faith based discussions with people who are not in

their family. Fifty-five percent of the group members indicated an affirmative answer

before the project, and that number rose to 72.7% after the project. Both of these data

items clearly show that the focus group members valued sharing their faith experiences in

a broader community. What must be determined is whether or not the project experiment

helped create a better place for this sharing of faith experiences to occur.

TABLE 4.14

SURVEY STATEMENT: I WOULD LIKE A PLACE TO EXPRESS

MY VIEWS ON FAITH ISSUES.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	18.2%	54.5%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	27.3%	36.4%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	50.0%	-33.2%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%

TABLE 4.15

SURVEY STATEMENT: I REGULARLY HAVE MEANINGFUL FAITH-BASED

DISCUSSIONS WITH NON-FAMILY MEMBERS.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	18.2%	36.4%	27.3%	18.2%	0.0%
Post-Project	18.2%	54.5%	9.1%	18.2%	0.0%
% Change	0.0%	49.7%	-66.7%	0.0%	0.0%

In the pre- and post-project surveys (Appendix D and E) the participants were asked to respond to questions that described their experience in Sunday School. Tables 4.16 and 4.17 below show that Sunday School is a generally positive experience for the focus group members. Both tables show a moderate increase in satisfaction with Sunday School at the conclusion of the project. Table 4.18 indicates that 88.2% of the focus group participants are comfortable sharing their personal stories during Sunday School. Before and after the project, Sunday School is viewed as a positive experience that is also a comfortable place to have faith-based discussions with others in the community of faith. The project itself appears to have had a small positive impact on the participant's satisfaction with the Sunday School experience.

TABLE 4.16

SURVEY STATEMENT: I ENJOY MY SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	72.7%	18.2%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	81.8%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	12.5%	-50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

TABLE 4.17

SUNDAY SCHOOL (OVERALL) RATING – 10 POINT SCALE

Pre-Project Average	8.40
Post-Project Average	9.25
Percent Change	10.12%

TABLE 4.18

SURVEY STATEMENT: I FEEL COMFORTABLE SHARING PERSONAL STORIES

DURING SUNDAY SCHOOL

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	36.4%	45.5%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	25.0%	-20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

The introduction of the projects internet based discussion blog was a new

experience for me and for many of the focus group members. Of all the elements of the

project it was the element that I was most unsure of how it would be received. The

church has maintained a website for many years, but it is not used as a tool for

interaction, just information. The church attempted to have a Facebook page three years

ago, but it met with some controversy because it was not regulated by the church staff or

leaders. Blog posts and responses can be found in Appendix C.

Table 4.19 shows that the project blog received the most attention during the first

week of implementation of the integrated theme, with 77% of participants visiting the site

at least once. The number of visitors to the project blog dwindled each week until only

50% of the group members indicated that they visited. No one indicated at any point that

they visited the blog more than once each day. Weeks 3 and 4 showed 11% and 10%

respectively of participants visiting the blog every day. 45% of the focus group

acknowledged before and after the project that they visited social media websites at least

once each day (Appendix D and E). Approximately 50% indicated that did not talk to

other church members or discuss their faith at all on social media (Appendix D and E).

Focus group members frequent social media sites similar to the blog setup for the project,

but they are not a popular place for faith-community interaction and discussion.

TABLE 4.19

SURVEY QUESTION: HOW OFTEN DID YOU VISIT THE PROJECT BLOG THIS
WEEK?

	Not at all	Once or twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Week 1	87.50%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Week 2	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Week 3	33.33%	33.33%	22.22%	11.11%	0.00%
Week 4	40.00%	50.00%	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Week 5	45.45%	36.36%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%
Week 6	50.00%	40.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%

In summary, the responses given by the focus group members demonstrate a

strong desire for a community of faith where ideas and experiences can be shared with

other Christians. The data also shows that the project had a minor effect on this

community at Oakhurst Baptist Church. I believe this lack of significant change speaks

more to the strength of the community that already existed than it does to flaws within the

premise of the project. The adult Sunday School classes used as a part of this study are

vibrant communities of faith that already provide many of the experiences this project

sought to improve upon. It was this strength that made these classes the logical place to

conduct this experiment, yet also the reason its impact was not as significant as expected. I also believe that a similar model, including integrated themes and social media based discussions would become more effective over time as the members become more comfortable with both.

Strengths

One of the greatest strengths of this project is that it can be easily adapted to many church settings. The integrated elements, worship, Sunday School, daily devotions, and social media are present in most churches. The project, with the exception of filling out surveys, does not ask church members to do much more than they are already doing. The average church member would be able to participate with little change to their normal church routines. The church staff and other leaders are already involved in most of the preparation elements for the project. The only pieces that might require significant additional effort would be the creation and/or distribution of the daily devotionals and interaction on the chosen form of social media.

The format of the project provided an excellent model for churches to use when a special emphasis is desired by the church leadership. The theme of the integrated emphasis could be adapted to any area where the church may need a special focus, such as stewardship or missions.

Weaknesses

The choice to implement the project in only two adult classes may have reduced the effectiveness of creating a sense of community within the entire church. Many church members who were not in the selected church members noted to me their enjoyment of the daily devotions that were provided to the whole church. Expanding the experiment to the whole church would have taken considerable more resources and cooperation from the church, but likely would have yielded more accurate results.

The choice of using only two adult classes for project implementation also limited the candidate pool. Only two individuals do not attend that class, as they teach the youth class, which was also using the integrated material. The two adult Sunday School classes chosen were selected because of the high percentage of class members who also had either youth or children who would be attending Sunday School also using the integrated material. This was necessary so that the integration would be presented to the whole family.

The candidates chosen from the selected adult classes were chosen because of their involvement in the church and the likelihood that they would engage with a majority of the project elements. They were successful candidates for the project because they were more actively involved. They were more active because they frequently had more positive church experiences and which was demonstrated by their greater involvement in the community of faith. This likely skewed their answers toward more positive ratings and answers while limiting the effect that the positive changes of the project would have on their responses.

The choice to use only participants who attended Sunday School classes using the integrated material prevented any comparison of the effectiveness of the project on those who do not attend Sunday School, or who attend a Sunday School class not using the integrated material. Creating a more diverse group to study would have provided results that could be used to determine which specific elements of the project were most effective in achieving the project goals.

The choice to use a blog as the source for social media may have limited its effectiveness. After the project began I discovered that several members were unfamiliar with this specific resources and had trouble interacting on the blog. Personally, I was unfamiliar with blogging before the project began and I was unsure of how often to add new posts or how long to wait so that people would have enough time to engage with each other on a topic before a new topic was introduced. Perhaps a more familiar resource, such as Facebook, would have provided a better forum for the desired interaction. A pre-project assessment of social media use by the church could would have been helpful in determining the best format for this type of interaction.

After spending much time studying the data collected from the surveys, I now see that some of the survey methods were less effective for collecting informative data. The forced-option questions asking focus group members to "agree" or "disagree" with a statement strongly favor the respondent choosing what they deem to be a positive answer. Throughout the entire project, few individuals ever indicated that they disagreed with a statement.

In addition to the less effective questions, there was a significant amount of data collected that yielded unrelated or extraneous information. One example of this was the

question asking the participant if they regularly shared their faith with others (Appendix D and E). This question was unrelated to any of the goals of the project and yielded data that was useless. There was also one question asked twice on the pre- and post-project surveys. The questions asking the participants to rate a portion of the project on a scale of 1 to 10 produced data that was easier to interpret. I believe this style of question also allowed the responder more flexibility in their response, creating more accurate data. The daily journals were seldom used and provided no data that was relevant to the project goals. All they showed was if the person engaged with the devotion. The check boxes indicating completion of the devotion would have been sufficient to generate useful data.

The survey instruments also failed to capture some vital personal information that could have provided valuable data as to the effectiveness of the integration of the project into families. Many questions in the survey asked questions about interactions with family members. Nowhere on the survey was there a place for the focus group members to give information about their own family make-up. Knowing which participants had children or teenagers at home would have provided important data on the effectiveness of the age-graded Sunday School and family devotions. This information would have also shed light on responses given in regards to interaction and discussion with family members. This weakness restricted the ability to compare the data of participants without children to the data of those who have children. It also prevented any comparison of the effectiveness of integration for families with children only to families with youth only. This oversight did not invalidate the data gathered about families because a 74% of the participants did have children or youth at home, but does reduces the overall effectiveness of the data collected.

The survey instruments also lacked the ability to collect data that was not specifically asked for. Interviews with the participants would have brought a level of depth and meaning to the questionnaires. The survey instruments also lacked any open-ended questions that would have allowed for free-flowing feedback from the focus group members. The weekly journal pages allowed for the participants to share their thoughts, but few did and most of the information shared was simple restating of that days devotional reading. Either of these two options, open-ended questions or in-person interviews, could have added additional data that might have improved the evaluation of the project. I initially refrained from including any type of interview style questions because I believed that the participants would want to give answers that reflected positively on the church, their own families, and the project. I had hoped that an anonymous survey would encourage more honesty and deliver more accurate and useful information. Upon reflection of the data collection process, it is clear that interviews with the participants could have produced different data which could have provided a more accurate analysis of the success of the project.

Personal Reflection

This project has significantly influenced my ministry and will continue to shape me as a minister. The process of developing, conducting, and evaluating this project has been educational in both the practice and purpose of serving as a minister to the community of faith.

I began this project with a sincere desire to bring the community of faith that calls itself Oakhurst Baptist Church closer to God and closer to each other. I had hoped to

prove to myself that the disconnect of church and individuals felt within my own family could be overcome with a focused and integrated approach adopted within the existing church functions of worship, Sunday School, and daily time spent with God. I wanted to show myself that church could be a community of believers who were strongly connected to one another and with God, and that as a minister I had the ability to bring about this improvement.   I believe that this project has shown me that this can be accomplished with intentional direction from the church's ministerial staff.

This project has improved my understanding of the critical role the pastor of the church plays in shaping and supporting the community of faith. A minister wears many hats in church. As the leader of this project I took on some of those roles; planner, preacher, teacher, writer, publisher. Maintaining a common idea or theme throughout the many interactions that a minister has with the congregation in a given week takes an intentional effort. It is easier not to integrate elements of the church's worship and educational environment. It is easier not to provide additional resources and opportunities for community interaction. The easier way is also less effective at building and strengthening the bonds of the community of faith. As a minister serving a community of faith, I must be deliberate in all areas of my service to God and the church. This project lasted only four weeks, yet had positive effects on the community of faith, families, and individuals. As a minister, this same effort and expectation should be present every week of every year. This can be accomplished by working with church leaders to find and use resources that allow for integration into the various elements of the church experience. The alternative is to continue with disconnectedness and the discouragement which led me to this project in the beginning.

This project has also taught me more about the need for evaluation in every component of ministry. The evaluation tools used for this project assessed some of the components, but also failed to evaluate others. Some of the weaknesses of the surveys and data collection have been detailed above. There was also little evaluation of the educational curriculum used by the Sunday School classes. The material was selected primarily because it met the need of all age groups focusing on the same idea and was easily available from a publisher currently used by our Sunday School classes. The subject of the material was not designed to enhance or even highlight community connectedness or growth. The material chosen didn't harm the project, but it didn't help it either. As a minister, such decisions should be made in a way that maximizes the impact of the church experience for those participating in it.

Evaluation is critical to ministry, yet must be conducted in a manner that yields useful information. As I look back on the project, having reviewed and analyzed the data collected, and evaluated the success of the project, it is possible to see survey questions that had little relevance to the goals of the project. I can also see questions that were not asked that might have given more insight into the effects and success of the project. In developing the questions, I focused on evaluating the processes involved in the project, and not the overall goals. The survey instruments should have been developed with more focus given to the goals the project sought to achieve. This consideration would have allowed me to receive feedback that would be more effective in evaluating the success of the project.

As a participant in carrying out the project I was excited to take part in the various elements with which I was involved each week. I truly felt as though I was a part of

something bigger than just my piece of the experience. Knowing that the message of my sermon would be used as a stepping stone toward the larger discussion within the community caused me to be excited to preach. Being a part of the process brought me greater joy and satisfaction in knowing that my efforts and work would not be soon forgotten, but would continue to impact the lives of everyone involved. Participating in the project helped me to experience a church in a way that felt connected with a common purpose. It gives me hope for the future to know that with intentional focus on a common church experience, the community of faith can draw closer to one another and closer to God each week.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

When I evaluate my success in ministry, I often ask the question, "Did the lesson, sermon, or activity I just completed have a positive effect on the lives of those involved?" The response I usually give is, "I don't know." On Monday mornings I put Sunday behind me and begin preparing for the coming week. This pattern repeats week after week and year after year. One problem with determining success in church is that each week is disconnected from the next. Our Sunday morning experiences are just one day, among 365, with nothing binding them into our lives. This project grew from my desire for a more complete church experience for myself, my family, and my community of faith.

Rationale

Romans 10:14 says, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? (NIV)" In a world where there are so many voices competing for our attention and so many ideas competing for our minds, the church must continue to grow as a community of faith and strive toward better ways of communicating the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Bible consistently tells the story of the community of faith. The book of Genesis describes how God called Abraham and his descendants to be the people of God, learning and growing in faith together. Exodus tells of the people of God fleeing from

the captivity of the Egyptians and how God gave them laws to follow that would strengthen the community. The book of Deuteronomy details the establishment of the guidelines designed to instruct the people of God on living in community.

In the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus and Paul expand the community to include all people. Jesus, through his life, provided an example of community. That example includes how we interact with God and how we interact with other people. The life of Paul and his letters to early Christian communities demonstrate the importance of unity within the community of faith.

Throughout the history of the church, theologians and church leaders have sought to strengthen the community of faith by encouraging a common experience, bridging the gap between individuals and binding them into a community. The earliest church documents, such as the *Didache* or the Nicene Creed, sought to bring unity to the beliefs and practices of the church. This work continued to evolve over time and brought us such resources as Sunday School, hymnals, and prayer guides.

Community, like all things, began with God. Bonhoeffer writes, "The community of Christians springs solely from the Biblical and Reformation message of the justification of man through grace alone; this alone is the basis of the longing of Christians for one another."[78] It is by God's grace that we have a community of which to belong. It is a work that began with creation and has been changed and shaped throughout the history of mankind. This project sought to continue this work by creating a common experience for the community of faith at Oakhurst Baptist Church.

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[78] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, 23.

Project Strategy

This project was brought about due to my concerns about the interconnectedness of the church experience within my family and the church body as a whole. Through the integration of the church experience, including the worship services, Bible study, daily devotions, and an interactive blog , I sought to create a system that would bind each week to the next, creating an environment where the community of faith could flow from day to day together.

The integration of the church experience began with a common educational curriculum in Sunday School classes for adults and students. The curriculum selected was *The Gospel Project*, an educational resource developed by Lifeway Christian Resources. The Sunday School material was used in six classes, two adult classes and four student classes. The worship services were developed in consultation with the entire church staff to build upon the theme of each week's Sunday School lesson. The daily devotions, which were provided to the entire church, carried the common theme out of the church and into the daily lives of the church. The interactive discussion questions found on the blog reflected the content of the daily devotionals and the biblical concept highlighted on Sunday.   Members of the focus group recorded their experiences in pre- and post-project surveys, weekly surveys, and daily devotional journals.

Project Results

Success was not measured by the number of people who attended, the offering collected, or comments at the door as people left the church, but by how they interacted

with the integrated elements of the church experience and with each other. This was demonstrated by improved participation with daily devotionals and increased satisfaction with the various elements of the weekly church experience. The results of the project clearly showed that being part of a community of faith was important to the focus group members.

While the project brought both success and disappointment, it has shown me that it is possible for our weekly church experiences to be the bridge that brings the community of faith together. The daily devotions and the integration of Sunday School and worship had the biggest impact on the focus group members. The integrated theme was well understood by the participants.

Notably, the project caused a significant increase in daily devotion participation. Individual participation in a daily devotional doubled during the project with project high of 76% participation during the fifth week. The integration of the daily devotionals with the other elements of the individual's church experience had a clear impact on participation. I was personally very encouraged by this result. It shows that connecting devotional content to the church experience is an effective way to encourage individuals to have a daily quiet time with God. This is valuable information that I plan to make use of in my future ministry.

Evaluations during the integrated portion of the project demonstrated an increase in the overall satisfaction with the various elements incorporated into the project. This includes increased satisfaction with worship and Sunday School. This may be attributed to the fact that the participants were paying closer attention due to their participation in the project. This is also a strength that is found in this approach. The increased attention

brought to the elements of the church experience caused the focus group members to be more observant, causing them to value their whole experience more.

The inclusion of a social media forum for discussion among church members was not as successful as anticipated. But, even from this disappointing result, knowledge can be gleaned that will benefit the future of my ministry. Integrating new experiences, such as the project blog, requires informed analysis of the preferences of those who will be asked to participate in this new experience.

<div align="center">

Project Missteps

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This project contained a number of missteps, as is detailed above in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter 4. One of the major areas overlooked by this project was conveyed to me by Dr. Guy Sayles. He noted that the project lacked a missional component. Being a part of the community of faith is more than just attending worship and Sunday School. It is more than having a daily quite time and interacting with others on social media. Being part of the community of faith involves participating in the mission of God, serving others, and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Acts 2 tells the events of Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit to those gathered. The purpose of Pentecost was not simply for common purpose and understanding, but so that the mission of God in the world could be accomplished. David Bosch writes, "For it is the community that is the primary bearer of mission."[79] If the community is the primary

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[79] Bosch, 472.

bearer, then the primary purpose of the community is the mission of God. This mission includes some of the elements found in the project, worship, teaching, and connecting with the community of faith, but also lacks connection to other elements, such as service, prayer, and evangelism.

The lack of a missional component to the project limits the participants from experiencing the fullness of God's purpose for the community of faith. Inclusion of opportunities of service for the church would be an excellent means to expand the impact of the project. Our church regularly participates in several community service and outreach projects. Incorporating one of these activities into the framework of the project would have provided an opportunity for the community to experience this together. This additional experience could have enhanced the community experience and made the project more effective in achieving its goals.

Future

The project has taught me that community does not happen by accident or by chance, but with deliberate effort and persistence. The project demonstrated that an integrated approach to church, one that focused the attention of the church members on one key concept in worship, Sunday School, daily devotions, and through social media, can be successfully used to connect one Sunday to the next Sunday, and one person to another. This was successfully achieved at Oakhurst Baptist Church, and I plan to retain this educational model for use in future ministry settings.

I believe that one of the greatest strengths of this project is its adaptability to future needs within the context of ministry. I believe that the model of a four week integrated focus on a single concept within the church provides an excellent means for churches to seek personal and corporate growth with the community. An example of this would be a focus on stewardship, with Sunday School lessons, small group studies, sermons, and daily devotions focused on the common theme.

Integrating the various elements of the church experience was a new concept for the people of Oakhurst Baptist Church. It was well received by the entire church and I believe that it would continue to be successful in the future. The project results show that the integration had a positive effect on the perceptions of the church members who participated in the study. The positive results demonstrate that change can happen at church for the good of the Kingdom of God. Integrating the various elements of the church experience takes more time, more effort, more money, and more patience. Yet, it is the community of faith that benefits, and ultimately the Kingdom of God that is made stronger.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this conclusion I discussed the question I often ask myself, "Did the lesson, sermon, or activity I just completed have a positive effect on the lives of those involved?" When asked of this project, I believe that the answer is "yes." Our first attempts at many things in life are less successful than our later attempts, with experience and the lessons of failures teaching us through every attempt. This project did achieve the goals described in detail in Chapter 2, and demonstrated the potential that integration of church activities can have in developing the bonds of community within the

congregation of a church. Evaluating this project has also revealed the need for

improvement in the project strategy and the evaluation of success. I look forward to

future opportunities to implement this ministry model with continuing improvements and

evaluation. I also look forward to the ever changing community of faith and my

opportunity to participate in its growth and development. As a final thought and prayer

for myself and all who read this project I would like to share a statement from Dietrich

Bonhoeffer. He writes, "Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living

a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his

heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we

are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren."[80]

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[80] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, 20.

FOCUS GROUP PRE-PROJECT VS POST-PROJECT COMPARISON

SECTION 1

Check all activities that you regularly participate in:

☐ 8:45 Worship Service   ☐ 11:00 Worship Service

☐ Sunday School   ☐ Sunday Night Bible Study

☐ Sunday Night Youth   ☐ Wednesday Night Bible Study

☐ Wednesday Mission Groups (Children or Youth)

☐ Wednesday Night Adult Small Groups   ☐ Choir Practice

☐ Wednesday Prayer Ministry Meeting   ☐ Wednesday Night Fellowship Meal

Pre-Project Responses	8:45 Service	11:00 Service	SS	Sun. Bible Study	Sun. Youth	Wed. Bible Study	Wed. Mission Groups
YES	9	5	10	4	5	5	2
NO	2	6	1	7	6	6	9
Total	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Post-Project Responses	8:45 Service	11:00 Service	SS	Sun. Bible Study	Sun. Youth	Wed. Bible Study	Wed. Mission Groups
YES	9	6	10	4	4	5	5
NO	2	5	1	7	7	6	6
Total	11	11	11	11	11	11	11

SECTION 2

How often did you visit social media sites (i.e. Facebook, twitter, Pintrest) in a one week period?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	27.3%	27.3%	0.0%	27.3%	18.2%
Post-Project	9.1%	45.5%	0.0%	27.3%	18.2%
% Change	-66.7%	66.7%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

How often did you talk to other church members on social media sites?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	45.5%	0.0%	27.3%	18.2%	9.1%
Post-Project	54.5%	9.1%	9.1%	18.2%	9.1%
% Change	19.8%		-66.7%	0.00%	0.00%

How often did you discuss your faith on social media sites?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	45.5%	27.3%	18.2%	0.0%	9.1%
Post-Project	45.5%	36.4%	9.1%	0.0%	9.1%
% Change	0.0%	33.3%	-50.0%	0.0%	0.0%

How often did your family engage in religious/faith based discussions?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	0.0%	9.1%	45.5%	36.4%	9.1%
Post-Project	0.0%	9.1%	63.6%	18.2%	9.1%
% Change	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-50.0%	0.0%

How often did your family study the Bible as a family (example: daily family devotion)?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	45.5%	18.2%	18.2%	9.1%	9.1%
Post-Project	45.5%	0.0%	27.3%	18.2%	9.1%
% Change	0.0%	-100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

How often did your family engage in religious/faith based discussions?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	0.0%	10.0%	50.0%	30.0%	10.0%
Post-Project	10.0%	0.0%	60.0%	20.0%	10.0%
% Change		-100.0%	20.0%	-33.3%	0.0%

How often did you have a personal devotional time?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	9.1%	0.0%	18.2%	63.6%	9.1%
Post-Project	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	81.8%	9.1%
% Change	0.0%	0.0%	-100.0%	28.6%	0.0%

How often did you read your Bible?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	0.0%	9.1%	36.4%	45.5%	9.1%
Post-Project	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	63.6%	9.1%
% Change	0.0%	0.0%	-50.0%	39.8%	0.0%

How often did you set aside time for personal prayer?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Pre-Project	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%	45.5%	45.5%
Post-Project	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	45.5%	54.5%
% Change	0.0%	-100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.8%

SECTION 3

For the following questions, write the number in the blank which best expresses your agreement with the following statements:

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

___ I feel a positive connection to my church family.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	45.5%	54.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	36.4%	63.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	-20.0%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

___ I feel a positive connection to my family.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	81.8%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	-18.2%		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

___ I feel like I have personal connection with God.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	81.8%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	72.7%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	-11.1%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

___ I enjoy my Sunday School Class.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	72.7%	18.2%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	81.8%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	12.5%	-50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

___ I feel comfortable sharing personal stories during Sunday School.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	36.4%	45.5%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	25.0%	-20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

___ I feel comfortable asking questions during Sunday School.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	36.4%	27.3%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	45.5%	27.3%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	25.0%	0.0%	-25.0%	0.0%	0.0%

___ I would like to have a place to express my views on faith issues.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	18.2%	54.5%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	27.3%	36.4%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	50.0%	-33.2%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%

I regularly have meaningful faith based discussions with my family.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	18.2%	54.5%	18.2%	9.1%	0.0%
Post-Project	36.4%	45.5%	9.1%	0.0%	9.1%
% Change	100.0%	-16.5%	-50.0%	-100.0%	

I regularly have meaningful faith based discussions with non-family members.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	18.2%	36.4%	27.3%	18.2%	0.0%
Post-Project	18.2%	54.5%	9.1%	18.2%	0.0%
% Change	0.0%	49.7%	-66.7%	0.0%	0.0%

I regularly share my faith with others.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	18.2%	45.5%	18.2%	18.2%	0.0%
Post-Project	18.2%	54.5%	9.1%	18.2%	0.0%
% Change	0.0%	19.8%	-50.0%	0.0%	0.0%

My worship experience regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	36.4%	27.3%	27.3%	9.1%	0.0%
Post-Project	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	0.0%	99.6%	-66.7%	-100.0%	0.0%

My personal Bible study regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	45.5%	45.5%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	25.0%	-16.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

___ My Sunday School class regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	27.3%	54.5%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%
Post-Project	45.5%	45.5%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	66.7%	-16.5%	0.0%	-100.0%	0.0%

___ My behavior/actions are modified by my faith.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pre-Project	45.5%	54.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Post-Project	45.5%	54.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
% Change	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

SECTION 4

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one (1) being the worst and ten (10) being the best, please rate the following aspects of your church experience over the past month: (Please circle your answer)

1. Worship Service (overall) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pre-Project Average	8.55
Post-Project Average	9.44
Percent Change	10.52%

2. Music 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pre-Project Average	8.18
Post-Project Average	9.33
Percent Change	14.07%

3. Sermon Content 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pre-Project Average	8.64
Post-Project Average	9.44
Percent Change	9.36%

4. Sermon Delivery 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pre-Project Average	8.64
Post-Project Average	9.44
Percent Change	9.36%

5. Sunday School (overall) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pre-Project Average	8.40
Post-Project Average	9.25
Percent Change	10.12%

6. Sunday School Content 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pre-Project Average	8.10
Post-Project Average	9.25
Percent Change	14.20%

FOCUS GROUP MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS

Group Member #: _____

PART 1: Please complete on Sunday, after the morning worship service
              and Sunday School have been completed.

Check all activities that you participated in this Sunday:

☐ 8:45 Worship Service   ☐ 11:00 Worship Service   ☐ Sunday School

1. Did you notice a connection between the music and the sermon during worship?
    YES   NO

2. Did you notice a connection between the worship service and Sunday School?
    YES   NO

	Participants who noticed a connection between the sermon theme and music during worship.	Participants who noticed a connection between the sermon theme and theme of Sunday School.
Week 1	40.0%	25.0%
Week 2	57.1%	20.0%
Week 3	80.0%	100.0%
Week 4	75.0%	100.0%
Week 5	70.0%	80.0%
Week 6	90.0%	100.0%

3. In your own words, what was the overall theme of the worship service:_____

    _____

    _____

4. In your own words, what was the overall theme of Sunday School: _____

    _____

    _____

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one (1) being the worst and ten (10) being the best, please rate the following aspects of your church experience from this week (Sunday, January 5, 2014):

(Please circle your answer)

1. Worship Service (overall)

	Worship
Week 1 Average	8.0
Week 2 Average	9.2
Week 3 Average	9.2
Week 4 Average	9.7
Week 5 Average	9.1
Week 6 Average	9.7

Weekly Worship Ratings
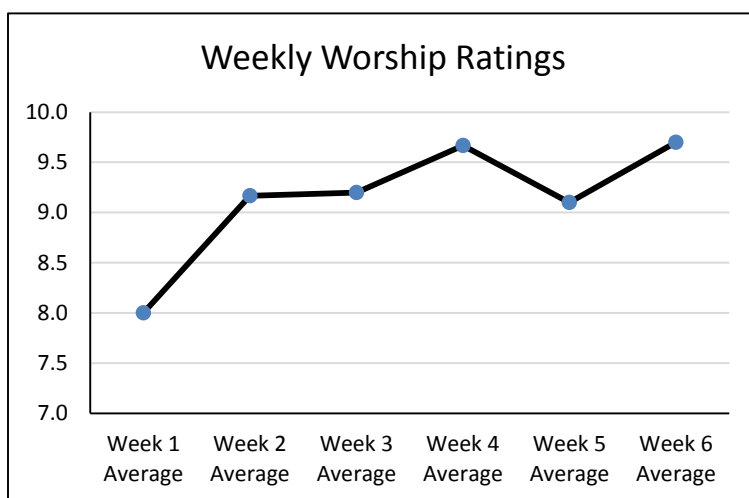
2. Music

	Music
Week 1 Average	8.6
Week 2 Average	9.3
Week 3 Average	8.9
Week 4 Average	9.1
Week 5 Average	9.2
Week 6 Average	9.6

Weekly Music Ratings
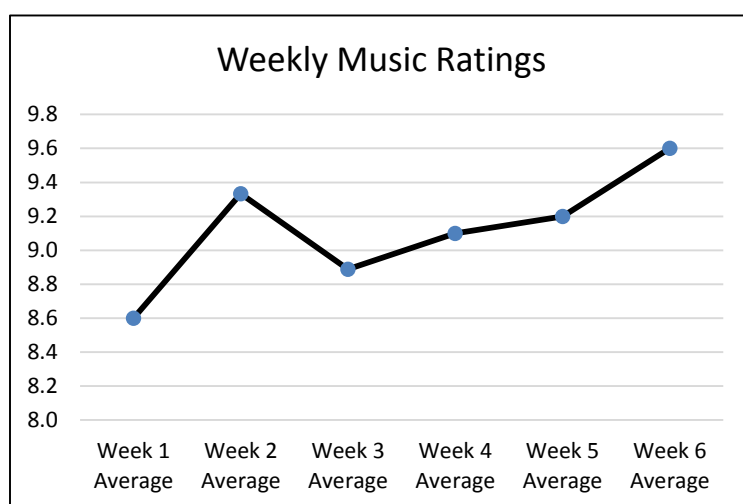
3. Sermon content

	Sermon Content
Week 1 Average	8.4
Week 2 Average	9.2
Week 3 Average	9.4
Week 4 Average	9.8
Week 5 Average	9.2
Week 6 Average	9.7

Weekly Sermon Content Ratings
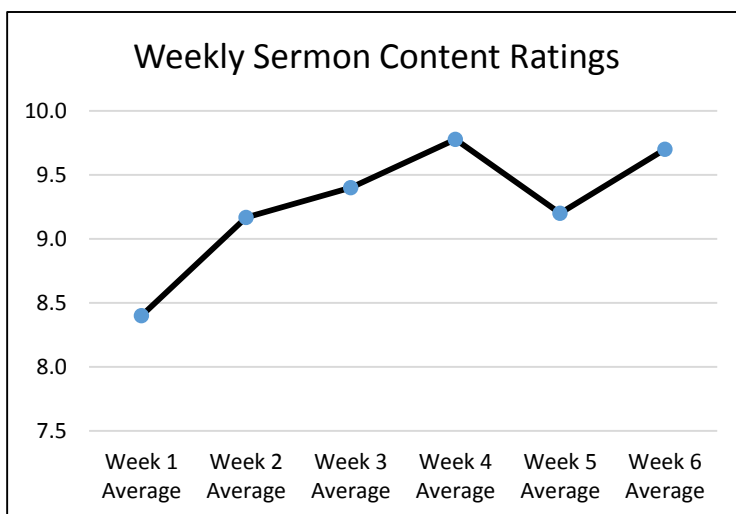
4. Sermon delivery

	Sermon Delivery
Week 1 Average	8.4
Week 2 Average	9.2
Week 3 Average	9.3
Week 4 Average	9.8
Week 5 Average	9.0
Week 6 Average	9.7

Weekly Sermon Delivery Ratings
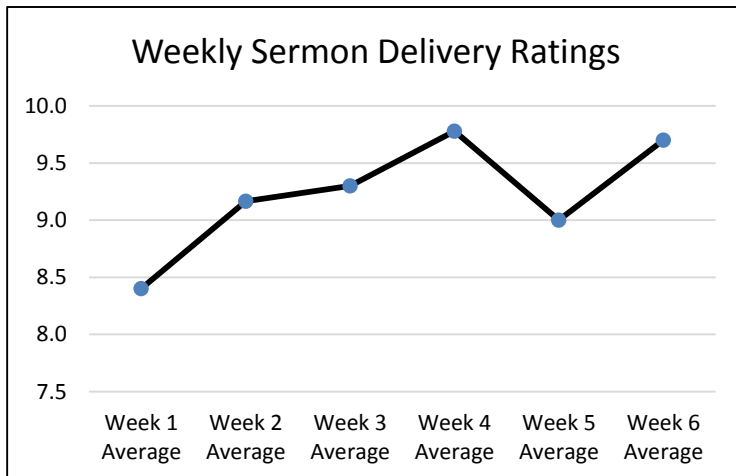
5. Sermon connection to theme

	Sermon Theme
Week 1 Average	6.0
Week 2 Average	8.0
Week 3 Average	9.8
Week 4 Average	9.5
Week 5 Average	9.0
Week 6 Average	9.8

Weekly Sermon Theme Ratings
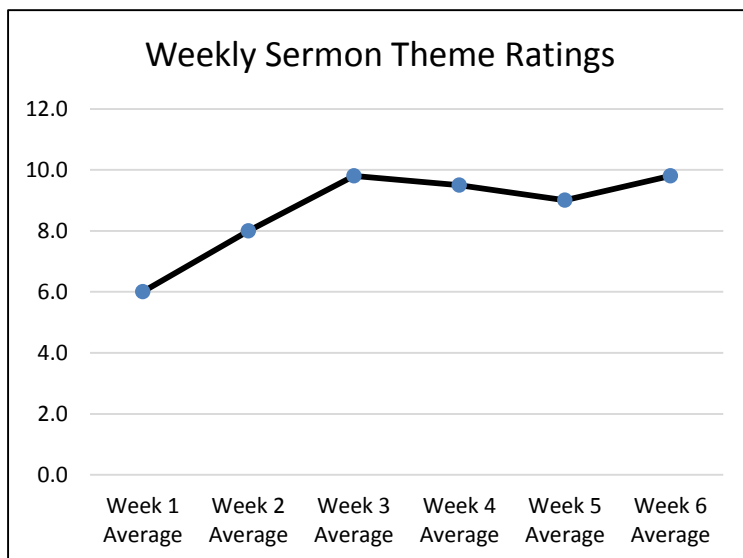
6. Sunday School content

	SS Content
Week 1 Average	8.2
Week 2 Average	8.2
Week 3 Average	9.3
Week 4 Average	8.6
Week 5 Average	9.2
Week 6 Average	9.0

Weekly Sunday School Content Ratings
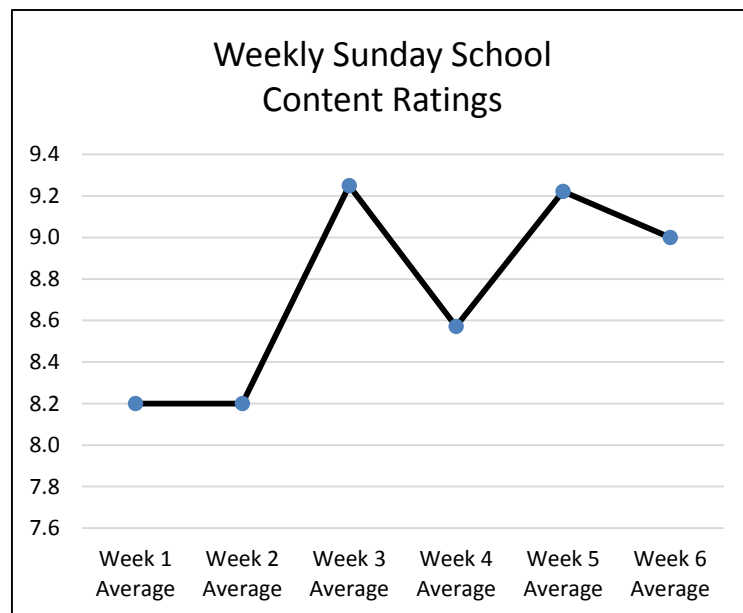
7. Sunday School connection to theme

	SS Theme
Week 1 Average	5.2
Week 2 Average	6.3
Week 3 Average	9.5
Week 4 Average	8.9
Week 5 Average	9.3
Week 6 Average	9.3

SS Theme
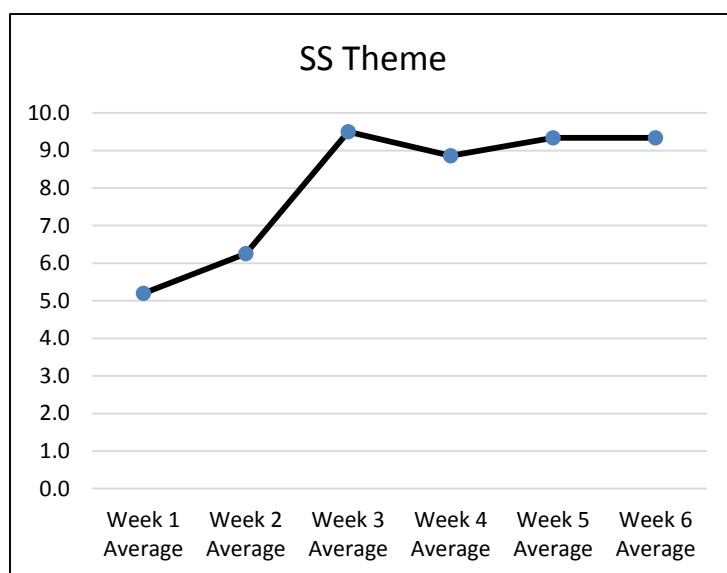
8. Sunday School lesson delivery

	SS Delivery
Week 1 Average	8.5
Week 2 Average	8.0
Week 3 Average	8.6
Week 4 Average	8.1
Week 5 Average	9.2
Week 6 Average	9.1

SS Delivery

Focus Group Member Survey – Week 1 January 5th, 2014

Group Member #: _____

PART 2: Please complete the following questions on Saturday.

Check all activities that you and/or your family participated in this Week:

☐ Sunday Night Bible Study   ☐ Sunday Night Youth

☐ Wednesday Night Bible Study   ☐ Wednesday Mission Groups (Children or Youth)

☐ Wednesday Night Adult Small Groups   ☐ Choir Practice

☐ Wednesday Prayer Ministry Meeting   ☐ Wednesday Night Fellowship Meal

How often did you visit the project blog this week?

	Not at all	Once or twice	Several Times	Everyday	More than once a day
Week 1	87.50%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Week 2	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Week 3	33.33%	33.33%	22.22%	11.11%	0.00%
Week 4	40.00%	50.00%	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Week 5	45.45%	36.36%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%
Week 6	50.00%	40.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%

How often did you and/or your family complete the daily devotion?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Three or Four Times	Everyday
Week 1	57.14%	14.29%	0.00%	28.57%
Week 2	44.44%	11.11%	11.11%	33.33%
Week 3	22.22%	11.11%	22.22%	44.44%
Week 4	22.22%	11.11%	22.22%	44.44%
Week 5	9.09%	18.18%	9.09%	63.64%
Week 6	10.00%	20.00%	30.00%	40.00%

Not including the devotion time, how often did your family engage in religious discussions?

	Not at all	Once or Twice	Three or Four Times	Everyday
Week 1	14.29%	28.57%	28.57%	28.57%
Week 2	12.50%	25.00%	37.50%	25.00%
Week 3	11.11%	33.33%	44.44%	11.11%
Week 4	0.00%	22.22%	66.67%	11.11%
Week 5	11.11%	44.44%	33.33%	11.11%
Week 6	22.22%	33.33%	33.33%	11.11%

For the following questions, write the number in the blank which best expresses your agreement with the following statements:

I felt a positive connection to my church family this week.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	37.5%	37.5%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 2	40.0%	40.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 3	44.4%	44.4%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 4	60.0%	30.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	30.0%	50.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%

I felt a positive connection to my family this week.

11	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 2	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 3	77.8%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 4	70.0%	30.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	54.5%	45.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	63.6%	27.3%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%

I felt a connection to God this week.

12	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	37.5%	62.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 2	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 3	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 4	80.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	72.7%	18.2%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	72.7%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

I enjoyed the visiting the project blog this week.

13	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	14.3%	0.0%	85.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 2	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 3	12.5%	37.5%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 4	22.2%	22.2%	55.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%

I felt comfortable sharing comments on the project blog this week.

14	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	14.3%	0.0%	85.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 2	12.5%	0.0%	87.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 3	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 4	11.1%	33.3%	55.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Visiting the project blog this week helped me stay connected to my church family.

15	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	12.5%	0.0%	87.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 2	11.1%	0.0%	88.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 3	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 4	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	11.1%	11.1%	77.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%

I had meaningful religious discussions with my family this week.

16	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	12.5%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%
Week 2	22.2%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%
Week 3	33.3%	55.6%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
Week 4	40.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Week 5	22.2%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%
Week 6	33.3%	44.4%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%

I had meaningful religious discussions with non-family members this week.

17	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	0.0%	12.5%
Week 2	11.1%	44.4%	22.2%	11.1%	11.1%
Week 3	11.1%	33.3%	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%
Week 4	20.0%	40.0%	30.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Week 5	18.2%	36.4%	36.4%	0.0%	9.1%
Week 6	27.3%	27.3%	36.4%	0.0%	9.1%

I was motivated to modify my behavior/actions this week because of my church experience.

18	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	37.5%	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Week 2	11.1%	44.4%	33.3%	11.1%	0.0%
Week 3	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 4	30.0%	50.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	27.3%	45.5%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	18.2%	45.5%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%

I was motivated to modify my behavior/actions this week because of my devotional time.

19	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Week 1	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 2	11.1%	55.6%	22.2%	11.1%	0.0%
Week 3	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%	11.1%	0.0%
Week 4	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 5	36.4%	45.5%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Week 6	27.3%	45.5%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one (1) being the worst and ten (10) being the best, please rate the following aspects of your project experience from this week: (Please circle your answer)

1. Family Devotion Content

Weekly Average	
Week 1	6.0
Week 2	6.3
Week 3	8.1
Week 4	7.9
Week 5	8.0
Week 6	7.9
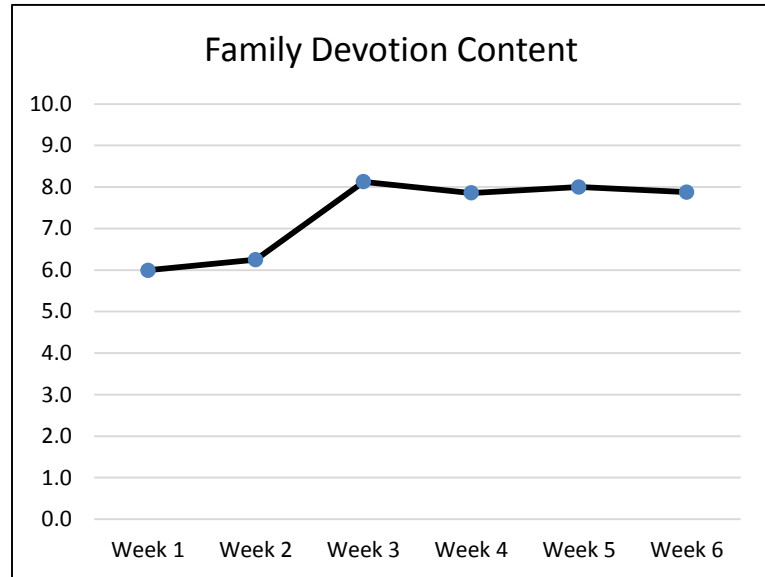
2. Family Devotion Interaction

Weekly Average	
Week 1	6.0
Week 2	6.0
Week 3	7.9
Week 4	7.5
Week 5	7.4
Week 6	7.6
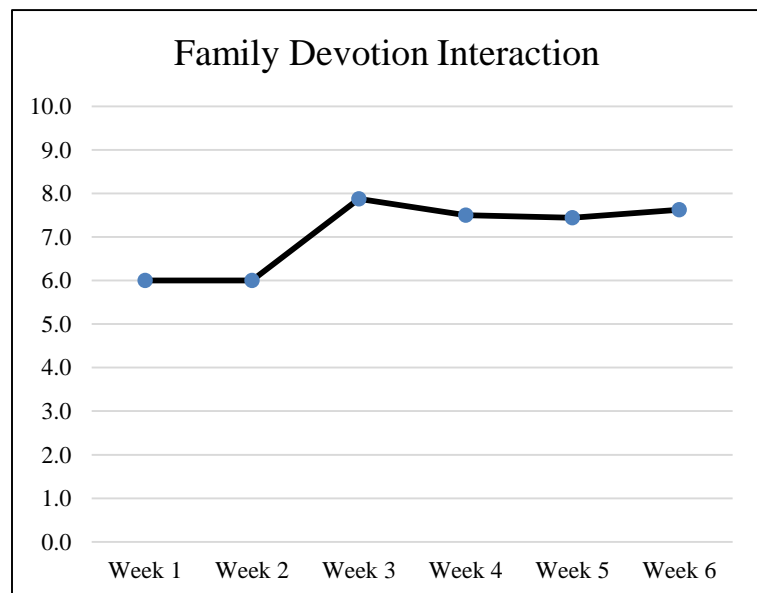
3. Online Discussion Content

Weekly Average	
Week 1	5.5
Week 2	6.7
Week 3	6.5
Week 4	7.0
Week 5	7.0
Week 6	6.5

Online Discussion Content
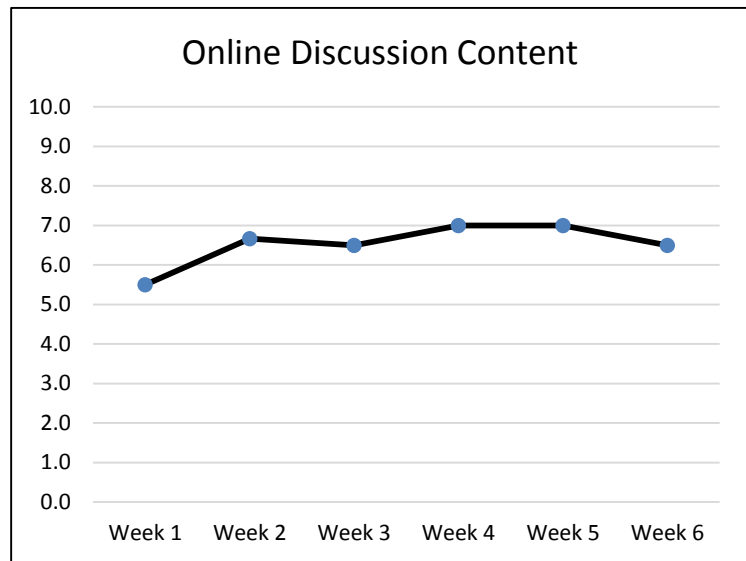
4. Online Discussion Interaction

Weekly Average	
Week 1	5.5
Week 2	5.0
Week 3	6.0
Week 4	6.5
Week 5	6.0
Week 6	5.3

Online Discussion Interaction
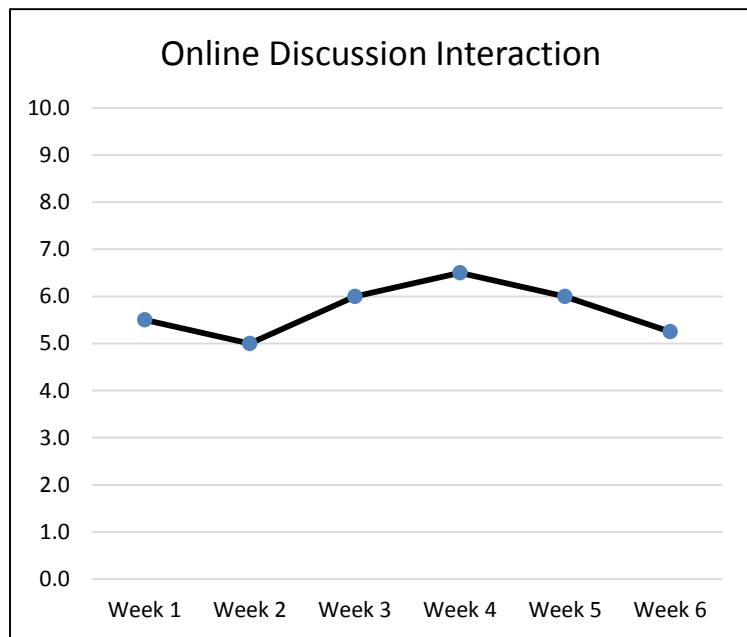
5. Family Religious Discussion

Weekly Average	
Week 1	6.0
Week 2	6.0
Week 3	7.7
Week 4	7.3
Week 5	7.3
Week 6	7.6

Family Religious Discussion
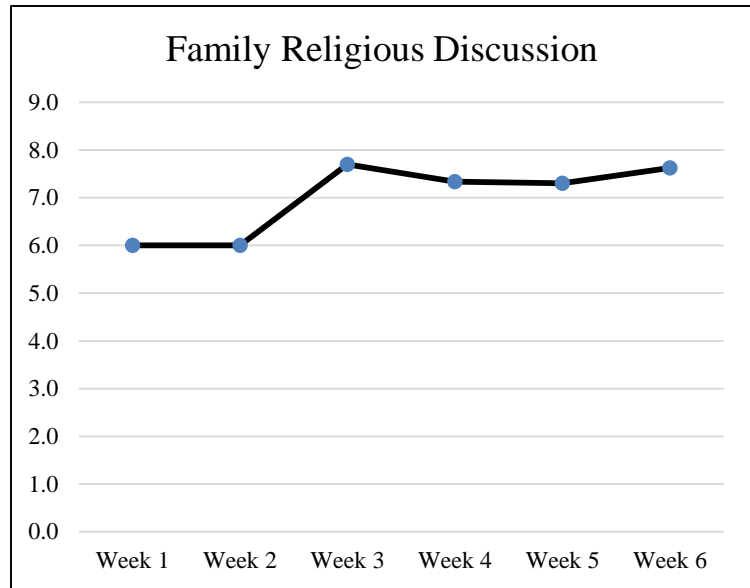
6. Family Connectedness

Weekly Average	
Week 1	7.3
Week 2	7.9
Week 3	8.9
Week 4	8.4
Week 5	8.8
Week 6	8.9

Family Connectedness
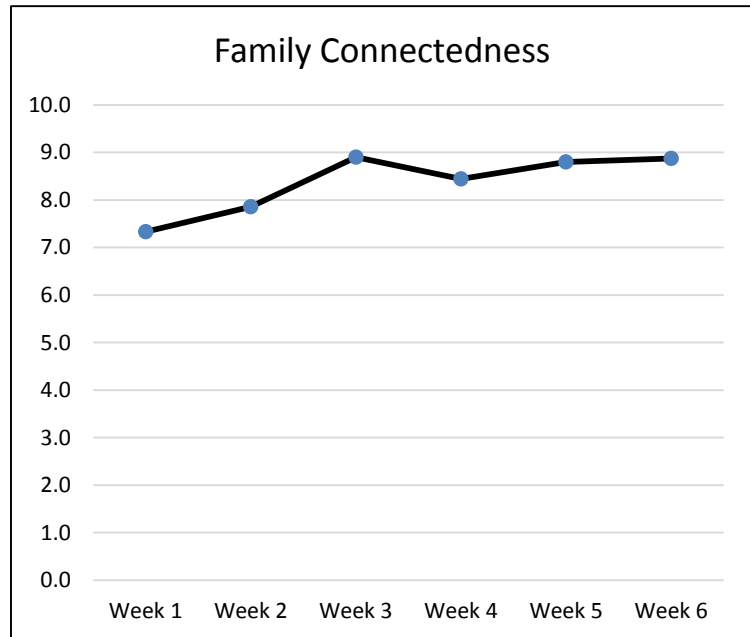
7. Church Family Connectedness

Weekly Average	
Week 1	7.3
Week 2	7.1
Week 3	8.7
Week 4	8.0
Week 5	8.6
Week 6	8.5

Church Family Connectedness
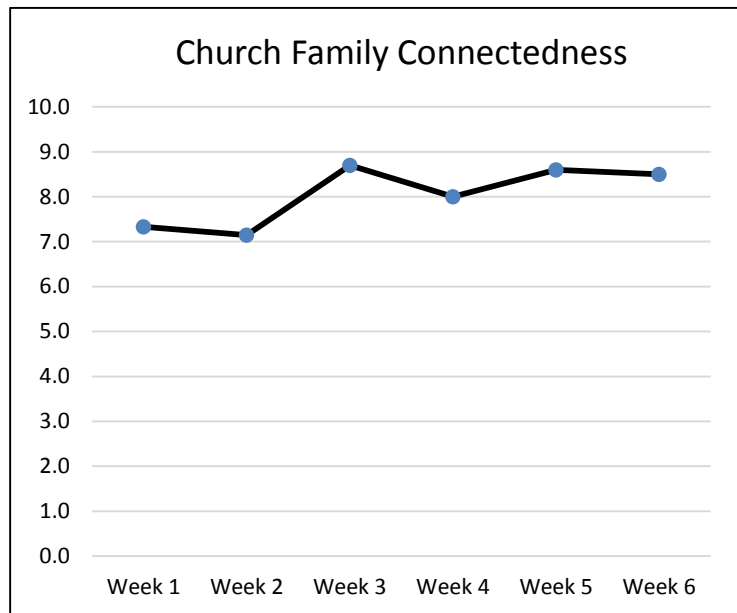
8. Connection to God

Weekly Average	
Week 1	8.3
Week 2	8.4
Week 3	8.9
Week 4	9.1
Week 5	9.5
Week 6	8.1

Connection to God
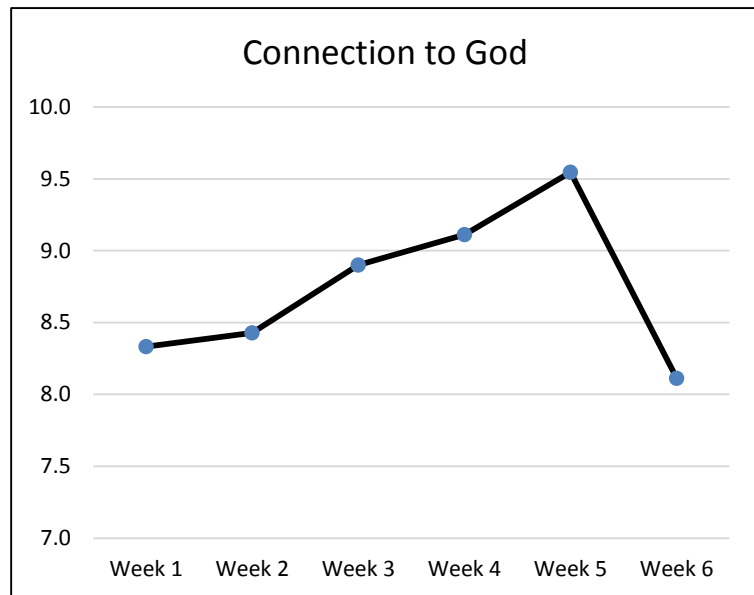
PROJECT BLOG POSTS

<u>Blog Post #1:</u>

Saturday - January 4th, 2014

Welcome to the OBC blog. This blog will be used during Rev. Hunter Duncan's doctoral project. The blog will be active from January 19th to February 15th. Everyone is welcome to contribute your thoughts and questions to the blog. Please be respectful of others.

<u>Blog Post # 2:</u>

Sunday - January 19th, 2014

Today in church we talked about "The God who Speaks." I would love to hear how God speaks to you. First, I thought I would share how God often speaks to me. I love listening to praise and worship music while I am working and driving. Lately I have been listening a lot to Hillsong United's Zion Acoustic Sessions. Click the following link to check it out on YouTube. Hunter's YouTube Hillsong Playlist.

Anyway, at various times as I am going through my day one of these songs just pops into my head. I can't get it out. Often, one particular line repeats over and over. When I begin to pay attention, I realize that the lyrics that come to mind often speak to the challenge I am facing that day. I don't know if God puts the song in my head, but I do know that God's message of love and hope is coming through. God is speaking to me through the songs.

So now for you: How does God speak to you?

Comment #1:

I would agree with you Hunter sometimes a relevant song comes to your mind when you need it most. Sometimes I have noticed that verses will enter my mind at the time that I am dealing certain situations that will speak to the situation directly giving strength, peace, hope, rebuke or answer at the exact time it is needed. Sometimes even Scripture from before I was saved and never knew was even in my brain still.

Comment #2:

Sometimes I feel like God speaks the loudest when I am the quietest. When I'm alone and praying I think it opens the door for God to communicate with me without the distraction of other things.

Comment #3:

Most often God speaks to me through scripture. whether it be in a daily devotional reading of when studying a Sunday school lesson. He uses music as well to gain my attention. I love a song that comes direct from scripture. If we listen close to the lyrics a song can really speak to us. Sometimes it's just the encouragement we need or the reminder to strive to do God's will and not ours.

Comment #4:

Most often God speaks to me through scripture. whether it be in a daily devotional reading of when studying a Sunday school lesson. He uses music as well to gain my attention. I love a song that comes direct from scripture. If we listen close to the lyrics a song can really speak to us. Sometimes it's just the encouragement we need or the reminder to strive to do God's will and not ours.

Blog Post # 3:

Monday, January 20, 2014

In Genesis 1:1, God spoke and created the Earth. In Genesis 1:28 God spoke to Adam and Eve and blessed them. The God who spoke and created the world also speaks to us today. Do you believe that? If so, Why? Many people don't want to believe that God still speaks today. Why do you think some people don't want to hear from God?

Comment #1:

We did our devotion as a family at the dinner table. Some of the comments the kids made were profound. They said that they believe God does speak, but that people believe he doesn't either because they don't like what he said, feel like he hasn't spoken to them personally by answering their prayers, or because their life is difficult and it feels like he isn't speaking.

Blog Post # 4:

Wednesday, January 22, 2014

In the devotional reading for today it read: "It's been said that 'the only Scripture we believe is the scripture we obey.' We demonstrate our belief by our actions; we demonstrate our unbelief by our actions too."

In our post-modern world many people believe that whatever you believe is true, for you. We see that played out in our own lives and the lives of those around us when we pick and choose the things that are acceptable and the things that are unacceptable. We see it in many political debates over moral issues, such as abortion, gay-marriage, and poverty. We even see it in our churches.

We all must make choices of who we believe. We all must choose what will have authority over us. And we all must choose a source for ultimate truth. As Christians, we say that we believe in Jesus, the Christ, the Redeemer, the Son of God. As Christians, we say that God has authority over all things, even us. And, as Christians, we say that God, and the word of God revealed in the Bible, is our ultimate source of truth?

When you look at your life, who or what really holds authority over you? How do you know?

What should our lives look like if we truly submit to the authority of God?

Blog Post # 5:

Friday, January 24th 2014

God speaks. That statement is so powerful. The God of the universe has decided to communicate with us. Unfortunately our world is filled with many voices, and we often allow other voices, influences, to give us direction. If you are anything like me, there are often too many voices competing for my attention.

What are some things in your life that keep you from hearing God's voice?

Are there things you need to remove from your life so that you can hear God more clearly?

Blog Post # 6:

Monday, January 27, 2014

Romans 1:20: "For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made."

In today's devotional we talked about finding God in the world around us. For me, the clouds in the sky have always brought my thoughts to God. Whenever I see a beautiful sunset with amazing colors in the clouds I can't help but believe that God created it so that we might be reminded that he is an incredible artist who has created a beautiful world.

What do you see in our world that reveals God's glory?

Comment #1:

I see God's glory in the ocean. In the beauty of the rolling waves and the relaxing sounds of the crash against the shore. Yet it also shows how awesome He is in the control of the water to stay in place yet still have such magical timing of high tide and low tide.

Comment #2:

Ok, so I know this is kind of off topic, but I had to share. This really hit me. It is from K-love's artist page for the band United (Hillsong United):

"I remembered this conversation I had with this guy who was kind of a disgruntled believer, about God. We were talking about how some things don't make sense, and he said to me, 'it's the scandal of grace,'" explains Joel. "We think of scandal as something negative, but the grace of God through Jesus is completely scandalous! That's why He was crucified. It's much easier to live by a set of rules that we think can take us up to God, when He made his way to us and there is no good enough thing that we can do to get to God."

Blog Post # 7:

Thursday, January 30 2014

Over the past couple of days we have all been aware of the power of weather. It has caused us to miss school, work, and church. We have heard stories of people being stranded in their cars and in schools. I heard a story on the news of a man who walked 6 miles in the snow to spend the night with his daughter at her school.

Whenever we have severe weather, we often hear someone refer to it as an Act of God. Some Insurance policies even have exemptions for acts of God.

I do not believe that God sends bad weather as a result of our behavior, but I do believe that weather, as a part of our creation, is an act of our God. We should give God glory for both the beautiful summer days and cold winter days filled with snow.

How have you seen God at work in the world around us? When have you seen incredible acts of God in the weather of our world?

Blog Post # 8:

Monday, February 3rd, 2014

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Nobody likes to be told that they are wrong. Sometimes we will argue a point to extremes to prevent someone else from having the upper hand. When we look at the world of politics we see intelligent and passionate people fighting for what they believe to be right.

When we find out we are wrong, we feel often feel embarrassed and ashamed. Sometimes we keep on fighting even when we know we are wrong just so that we can avoid these feelings.

Paul, in writing to Timothy, knows that Christians face this same challenge when presented with the truth of God. Our inadequacies are staring us in the face. Unfortunately, we sometimes would rather ignore the truth of the Bible then have to admit we were wrong.

Our problem is pride. And stupidity. The Bible corrects and rebukes not for our degradation, but for our profit, so that we might be more complete, so that we might look more like Jesus!

What areas of correction do you find the most challenging?

Comment #1:

Today is Thursday, read my devotion this morning. It brought me back to the other Sunday when the lesson was about letting God instruct us, then bless us, then we are to go do the tasks He has given us. I had never heard reading the scriptures put quite that way. It really stuck with me, the order we should study in..........

Blog Post # 9:

Thursday, February 6th, 2014

I thought the devotional for today was right on target, so I included it all just in case you missed it. It can be found at www.oakhurstbaptist.com in case you don't have a hard copy.

Luke 24:27: "Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures."

Bible study won't change your life*. Perhaps a bit of overstatement to get your attention, but just because you know the Bible doesn't mean the Word will bear fruit in your life. It is possible to know, read, and study Scriptures and miss the point entirely.*

Way too often Bible study is more about us than Christ. We commonly begin with us at the center and bring God into out world to address our already-defined needs and problems. We look at the Bible as a book of divine instruction, a manual for succeeding in life, or a map for making sure we get to heaven when we die. Studying the Scriptures like this will not result in life transformation. Why? Because it is missing some-thing. Better put, it is missing Someone.

Bible study alone is not what transforms your life. Jesus transforms your life. It's possible to amass great amounts of biblical knowledge, to impress people with our mastery of Bible trivia, to creatively apply the Bible in ways that seem so down to earth and practical, to dot your theological I's and cross your exegetical T's—and still miss Jesus. Scary, isn't it?

The purpose of our Bible study is to know God and make Him known. The Bible unveils Jesus Christ as the focal point of human history. All creation exists by Him, through Him,

to Him, and for Him. Our Bible study should exist for Him too. That's the only kind of Bible study that will change your life.

Why do you read and study your Bible? Is God at the center of your Bible study, or are you? So you often find yourself saying things like, "How does this help me?"

What is the difference in knowing Jesus and knowing about Jesus? Which one best describes you?

Comment #1:

This reminds me of the story where a man asked God to reveal something to him in scripture. The man didn't have time to study the Bible, so he opened it to a random spot and pointed his finger on the page. He was mortified when he read, "and Judas went and hanged himself." (Matt. 27:5). The man decided to once again point his finger on some text to receive God's word. He landed on Luke 10:37 which says, "Go and do likewise." God's word is deep and alive, not a "drive-thru" theology. :)

Comment #2:

Wow! How many times in my life have i read scripture just looking to see if and how it affected me. I don't spend near enough time in scripture just seeking God and figuring out more about who he is. Our Creator. Our True love. Our Redeemer. Our Friend.

Blog Post # 10:

Tuesday, February 11th, 2014

Today's devotional topic was promises. Click here to get today's devotional online.

Sin promises that we will be happier without God. God promises a life of peace, joy, and love. On Sunday we talked about the trustworthiness of God. We all must choose the things we trust based on what we know to be true.

How have you seen God demonstrating trustworthiness in your life? How have you seen God keeping promises in your life?

Comment #1:

Today's devotional helped me realized just how little time i spend in God's word. I should spend more time memorizing scripture so i can cling to God's promises all the time.

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP MEMBER PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

Group Member #: _____

Please complete the following questions before Sunday, September 8ᵗʰ, 2013.

Age: _____   Age of salvation: _____   Gender: M/F

Highest Education level achieved: High School   College   Masters   Doctorate

Who would you say is the spiritual leader of your family: You   Spouse   Child
                                                                                    Other: _____

Check all activities that you regularly participate in:
☐ 8:45 Worship Service   ☐ 11:00 Worship Service   ☐ Sunday School

☐ Sunday Night Bible Study   ☐ Sunday Night Youth

☐ Wednesday Night Bible Study   ☐ Wednesday Mission Groups (Children or Youth)

☐ Wednesday Night Adult Small Groups   ☐ Choir Practice

☐ Wednesday Prayer Ministry Meeting   ☐ Wednesday Night Fellowship Meal

Check the box that most closely matches your answer:
How often do you visit social media sites (i.e. Facebook, twitter, Pintrest) in a one week period?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once or twice   ☐ Several times   ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often do you talk to other church members on social media sites?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often do you discuss your faith on social media sites?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often does your family engage in religious/faith based discussions?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often does your family study the Bible as a family (example: daily family devotion)?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often does your family engage in religious/faith based discussions?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month ☐ Once a week ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often do you have a personal devotional time?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month ☐ Once a week ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often do you read your Bible?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month ☐ Once a week ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

How often do you set aside time for personal prayer?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month ☐ Once a week ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

For the following questions, write the number in the blank which best expresses your agreement with the following statements:

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

___ I feel a positive connection to my church family.

___ I feel a positive connection to my family.

___ I feel like I have personal connection with God.

___ I enjoy my Sunday School class.

___ I feel comfortable sharing personal stories during Sunday School.

___ I feel comfortable asking questions during Sunday School.

___ I would like to have a place to express my views on faith issues.

___ I regularly have meaningful faith based discussions with my family.

___ I regularly have meaningful faith based discussions with non-family members.

___ I regularly share my faith with others.

___ My worship experience regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

___ My personal Bible study regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

___ My Sunday School class regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

___ My behavior/actions are modified by my faith.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one (1) being the worst and ten (10) being the best, please rate the following aspects of your church experience over the past year: (Please circle your answer)

1. Worship Service (overall)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. Music   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. Sermon Content   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

4. Sermon Delivery   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

5. Sunday School (overall)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6. Sunday School Content   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

FOCUS GROUP MEMBER POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Group Member #: _____

Please complete the following questions on February 16th. Please do not refer to your previous answers. Please answer based on your experiences and habits during the four week period beginning December 5th and ending February 16th.

Check all activities that you regularly participate in:
☐ 8:45 Worship Service   ☐ 11:00 Worship Service   ☐ Sunday School

☐ Sunday Night Bible Study   ☐ Sunday Night Youth

☐ Wednesday Night Bible Study   ☐ Wednesday Mission Groups (Children or Youth)

☐ Wednesday Night Adult Small Groups   ☐ Choir Practice

☐ Wednesday Prayer Ministry Meeting   ☐ Wednesday Night Fellowship Meal

How often did you visit social media sites (i.e. Facebook, twitter, Pintrest) in a one week period?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once or twice   ☐ Several times   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did you talk to other church members on social media sites?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did you discuss your faith on social media sites?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did your family engage in religious/faith based discussions?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did your family study the Bible as a family (example: daily family devotion)?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did your family engage in religious/faith based discussions?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did you have a personal devotional time?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did you read your Bible?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once a month   ☐ Once a week   ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did you set aside time for personal prayer?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once a month ☐ Once a week ☐ Everyday ☐ More than once a day

For the following questions, write the number in the blank which best expresses your agreement with the following statements:

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

____ I feel a positive connection to my church family.

____ I feel a positive connection to my family.

____ I feel like I have personal connection with God.

____ I enjoy my Sunday School Class.

____ I feel comfortable sharing personal stories during Sunday School.

____ I feel comfortable asking questions during Sunday School.

____ I would like to have a place to express my views on faith issues.

____ I regularly have meaningful faith based discussions with my family.

____ I regularly have meaningful faith based discussions with non-family members.

____ I regularly share my faith with others.

____ My worship experience regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

____ My personal Bible study regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

____ My Sunday School class regularly challenges me to modify my behavior/actions.

____ My behavior/actions are modified by my faith.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one (1) being the worst and ten (10) being the best, please rate the following aspects of your church experience over the past month: (Please circle your answer)

1. Worship Service (overall)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. Music   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. Sermon Content   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

4. Sermon Delivery   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

5. Sunday School (overall)   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6.   Sunday School Content   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

APPENDIX F

WEEKLY SURVEY (SAMPLE)

Focus Group Member Survey – Week 1 – January 5th, 2014

Group Member #: _____

PART 1: Please complete on Sunday, after the morning worship service and Sunday School have been completed.

Check all activities that you participated in this Sunday:

☐ 8:45 Worship Service   ☐ 11:00 Worship Service   ☐ Sunday School

5. Did you notice a connection between the music and the sermon during worship?
    YES   NO

6. Did you notice a connection between the worship service and Sunday School?
    YES   NO

7. In your own words, what was the overall theme of the worship service: _____

    _____

    _____

8. In your own words, what was the overall theme of Sunday School: _____

    _____

    _____

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one (1) being the worst and ten (10) being the best, please rate the following aspects of your church experience from this week
(Sunday, January 5, 2014):

Please circle your answer)

9. Worship Service (overall)   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Music   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. Sermon content   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Sermon delivery   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

13. Sermon connection to theme 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

14. Sunday School content   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

15. Sunday School connection to theme 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

16. Sunday School lesson delivery 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Focus Group Member Survey – Week 1 January 5th, 2014

Group Member #: _____

PART 2: Please complete the following questions on Saturday.

Check all activities that you and/or your family participated in this Week:

☐ Sunday Night Bible Study   ☐ Sunday Night Youth

☐ Wednesday Night Bible Study   ☐ Wednesday Mission Groups (Children or Youth)

☐ Wednesday Night Adult Small Groups   ☐ Choir Practice

☐ Wednesday Prayer Ministry Meeting   ☐ Wednesday Night Fellowship Meal

How often did you visit the project blog this week?
☐ Not at all ☐ Once or twice ☐ Several times ☐ Everyday   ☐ More than once a day

How often did you and/or your family complete the daily devotion?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once or twice   ☐ Three or Four times   ☐ Everyday

Not including the devotion time, how often did your family engage in religious discussions?
☐ Not at all   ☐ Once or twice   ☐ Three or Four times   ☐ Everyday

For the following questions, write the number in the blank which best expresses your agreement with the following statements:

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

___ I felt a positive connection to my church family this week.

___ I felt a positive connection to my family this week.

___ I felt a connection to God this week.

___ I enjoyed the visiting the project blog this week.

___ I felt comfortable sharing comments on the project blog this week.

___ Visiting the project blog this week helped me stay connected to my church family.

___ I had meaningful religious discussions with my family this week.

___ I had meaningful religious discussions with non-family members this week.

___ I was motivated to modify my behavior/actions this week because of my church experience.

___ I was motivated to modify my behavior/actions this week because of my devotional time.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one (1) being the worst and ten (10) being the best, please rate the following aspects of your project experience from this week:
(Please circle your answer)

9. Family Devotion Content	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Family Devotion Interaction	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. Online Discussion Content	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. Online Discussion Interaction	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. Family Religious Discussion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14. Family Connectedness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15. Church Family Connectedness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16. Connection to God	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Please list/describe any personal, family, or church events that may have influenced your ability to participate in the focus group study this week:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Daily Journal

This Journal is provided to allow you to share your thoughts and feedback about any portion of project. Please use this to share insights, interactions with others, and your general thoughts in regards to the project. Positive and negative feedback are both welcome.

Sunday, January 5th   Daily Devotional Completed ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Monday, January 6th   Daily Devotional Completed ☐

_____

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_____

Tuesday, January 7th   Daily Devotional Completed ☐

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<u>Wednesday, January 8th</u>   Daily Devotional Completed ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

<u>Thursday, January 9th</u>   Daily Devotional Completed ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

<u>Friday, January 10th</u>   Daily Devotional Completed ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

<u>Saturday, January 11th</u>   Daily Devotional Completed ☐

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX G

DAILY DEVOTINOAL SURVEY RESULTS

WEEK 1 & 2

	Devotions - Week 1							**Devotions - Week 2**						
	M	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**Sa**	**Su**	**M**	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**Sa**	**Su**
1	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
3	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
5	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
6	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
8	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
9	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
10	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
11	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Yes	2	4	4	4	4	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	1
No	9	7	7	7	7	8	9	9	8	8	8	8	7	10

WEEK 3 & 4

	Devotions - Week 3							**Devotions - Week 4**						
	M	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**Sa**	**Su**	**M**	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**Sa**	**Su**
1	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
2	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
3	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
5	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
8	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
9	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
10	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
11	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Yes	6	7	8	8	7	7	6	7	8	8	8	7	7	6
No	5	4	3	3	4	4	5	4	3	3	3	4	4	5

WEEK 5 & 6

	Devotions -Week 5							Devotions - Week 6						
	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
1	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
3	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
8	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
9	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
10	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
11	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Yes	8	9	9	9	8	8	8	5	6	5	5	6	6	4
No	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	6	5	6	6	5	5	7

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