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Enhancing the Koinonia at Camp Creek Baptist Church in Union Mills, North Carolina, by expanding "sacred space"

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ENHANCING THE *KOINŌNIA* AT CAMP CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH IN
UNION MILLS, NORTH CAROLINA, BY EXPANDING “SACRED SPACE”

A PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

TONY DWAYNE MCCRAW

MAY 13, 2013

APPROVAL FORM

ENHANCING THE *KOINŌNIA* AT CAMP CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH IN
UNION MILLS, NORTH CAROLINA, BY EXPANDING “SACRED SPACE”

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ABSTRACT

Since the day of Pentecost, the defining characteristic of the church has been the extraordinary bond of unity and fellowship amongst Christians. Scripture refers to this intense sharing of life as *koinōnia*. Fellowship, however, is often neglected in deference to earthly priorities.

This project aimed to inspire and enable the members of Camp Creek Baptist Church to practice the type of fellowship descriptive of first-century Christianity. Through studying Scripture, analyzing social demographics, and conducting statistical analyses, a solution for enhancing the *koinōnia* at CCBC emerged—namely, the regular gathering of its members into one another’s homes, thereby expanding “sacred space.”

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Every church has its own unique setting and mission in the world, as well as its own strengths and weaknesses. Based on this proposition, I theorized at the beginning of this project that size was a major strength at Camp Creek Baptist Church. In fact, because CCBC was small, I knew it had the potential to accomplish something that a church with thirty thousand members and a multimillion dollar budget could not accomplish—namely, gather as a “whole church” (1 Cor. 14:23) in one another’s homes to experience *koinōnia*.¹ Consequently, I decided that CCBC’s members served in a congregation that was ideally suited for knowing others “intimately enough to be able to bear one another’s burdens, confess faults one to another, rebuke, exhort, and admonish one another....”² Undoubtedly, a small congregation provides the perfect environment for such interaction.

Although I believed my supposition was correct—that small congregations were ideal for fellowship and life sharing—that was not the reality at CCBC. While fellowship existed, it did not rise to the level of biblical *koinōnia*. In short, my congregants were not taking advantage of their unique opportunity for fellowship. My project aimed to remedy this problem by enhancing the *koinōnia* at CCBC through home-fellowship gatherings.

Project Setting

My ministry setting provided the perfect atmosphere for an experiment regarding the communal nature of the church. Simply put, Christians are called to be intimately involved in one another’s lives. Such interaction requires a manageable number of

¹ All biblical references are taken from *The New Revised Standard Version*.

² Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972), 107.

congregants. Scriptural evidence attests to the fact that early Christians met daily in the homes of fellow church members (Acts 1:13; 2:46; Rom. 16:5). The house, presumably belonging to a wealthier church member, probably held no more than 50 people for a gathering or maybe 120 people if it contained a peristyle or courtyard.³ According to Robert J. Banks, the average membership of the “whole church” (1 Cor. 14:23) assembly in a first-century city was around 30 to 35 people, sometimes reaching 40 to 45 (and possibly double that number if the churchgoers assembled in the atrium); therefore, even the larger Christian community within a given city was still small enough for intimate relationships to form between its members.⁴ Individual house churches, however, were smaller—perhaps less than ten members⁵—making the formation of intimate relationships even more likely.

Based on Scripture, therefore, small churches are ideal for fellowship. Practically speaking, the members of a small church can be closer to one another than members of churches where voices, thoughts, personalities, and even names fail to get connected with the faces in a crowd. Because the current number of “core” members at CCBC is twenty-eight, I knew that experiencing the type of *koinōnia* practiced in the first-century house church was an attainable goal.

This project idea occurred to me while doing visitation with one of my deacons. I asked him about a particular house that we had never visited—his neighbor’s house, no less. He explained to me that “those people” were former members who had left the church and were better “left alone.” Facetiously, I asked if he ever allowed them to cross

³ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 211.

⁴ Robert J. Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

the street. “Nope!” he shot back, “And we feed ‘em with a long-handled spoon, brother!”

The exchange was funny, but indicative of what I see as a major problem in our church: Christians who refuse to be reconciled, revealing their lack of brotherly love and fellowship in the Spirit. I began to wonder if the problem might be due, in part, to a lack of true communal living. If the members of CCBC truly viewed their lives as being dependent upon one another’s, perhaps such church schisms would occur less frequently.

Not only did CCBC contain the perfect sample-size of congregants, but it also provided a well-rounded demographic mixture for conducting an experiment on this subject. For example, our oldest member is eighty-six. We have another who is eighty-five and several others who are in their mid- to late-seventies. We have several couples, “baby boomers,” who have either retired or are about to retire. We have three couples whose ages range from thirty-five to forty-five. Recently, we have added a couple to our congregation who are in their mid-twenties. We have eight children, the youngest of whom is five, the oldest eleven.

Camp Creek Baptist Church is also religiously diverse. We have members who come from several different faith traditions: A Methodist, a Lutheran, a Pentecostal, two Presbyterians, and a Roman Catholic have each joined our ranks in the past three years. There is even a good mixture of northerners and southerners in our congregation. The major weakness of my ministry setting, however, is that it lacks racial diversity; in fact, my congregation consists solely of white people. In short, the Christian community at CCBC is located in a rural, North Carolinian, Anglo-American cultural setting.

Most of our members work modest jobs, such as heating and air-conditioning installation, auto-paint and bodywork, furniture delivery, doctor’s office personnel, and

factory workers. We have a beautiful building and grounds: Recently we installed an upstairs restroom, bricked our church sign, landscaped our lawn and cemetery, poured a concrete sidewalk, and purchased a new canopy for our church van. Moreover, our fellowship hall is exquisite. Exposed rafters of hand-hewn lumber—constructed by saints who have since passed away—adorn its ceiling, complementing a huge stone fireplace.

Statement of the Problem

The infusion of American secular values—especially the notions of rugged individualism and excessive consumerism—into the Christian culture had obscured the biblical concept of fellowship and community at CCBC. Also, many of my members considered their faith to be a “private” matter, which had disproportionately skewed their practice of Christianity towards individual acts of piety, as opposed to engaging in *both* individual works *and* in acts of communal sharing. Furthermore, the institutionalization of the church had become a problem at CCBC because it had led to the impression that *koinōnia* was something that happened *away* from their homes at scheduled times. The “mega-church” phenomenon had also created an obstacle to fellowship at CCBC because it had fostered the notion that fellowship was about quantity, rather than quality. Finally, as it related to CCBC’s disregard for regular home gatherings, the problem was due, in part, to centuries of historical conditioning—specifically, Westerners’ familiarity with church buildings. The following excerpt explains the difficulty for modern Christians to envision early Christianity within a “house church” setting:

In the case of positioning earliest Christianity within the religious makeup of different Mediterranean societies, this becomes especially difficult after the larger part of two millennia of the church’s religious dominance in most Western societies. No matter what our country of origin or residence, we are likely familiar with the idea of a church building....This, however, was not the case in the

earliest days of the church....We would perhaps do better to construe earliest Christianity as primarily a domestic religion....⁶

Consequently, this inability to accurately place the early church in a domestic religious setting had negatively affected my church members' desire to fellowship in their homes.

Finally, the privilege to fellowship was taken for granted at CCBC, which had led the members to devalue it. Because the privilege to fellowship is a work of God's grace, my congregants needed to make an intentional effort to gather. Writing at a time when the freedoms in Germany were under assault, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated, "It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians...It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share Gods' Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing."⁷

Project Goal

Because my congregants rarely assembled in domestic settings or otherwise made intimate contact with one another during the week, they were failing to share their lives at a level necessary for experiencing biblical *koinōnia*. My project aimed to remedy this problem by moving the participants' embedded theology regarding fellowship to a more deliberative theology. Specifically, my goal was to lead the participants to rediscover the biblical concept of community and to incorporate the ancient practices of *koinōnia* into their lifestyles, thereby enabling them to develop more intimate relationships with one another and experience a deeper sense of Christian community. Christian fellowship, after all, is not "an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in

⁶ Brook W. R. Pearson, "Domestic Religion and Practices," **Dictionary of New Testament Background**. Ed. by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, 300.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954), 17–18.

Christ in which we may participate.”⁸ Such participation, I knew, required willingness on the part my congregants to overcome their complacency regarding fellowship. My hope was that this project—which was both aggressive and intentional about fellowship—would serve as a catalyst, inspiring within them a desire to gather more regularly.

Generally speaking, my goal was neither for my congregation to join the current house-church movement, which advocates that churches gather solely in houses, nor was I attempting to recreate the first-century church. My goal was to recapture the spirit of *koinōnia* that characterized the early church in a way that was genuine, yet compatible, with the rural culture of Union Mills. My idea for achieving this was to incorporate regular home-fellowship gatherings into CCBC’s current program, thereby emulating the early church, which, according to Acts 2:42–47, gathered at the temple *and* in homes. Robert W. Wall writes, “The traditional Jewish routines of temple observance are paired with meetings in believers’ homes.”⁹ My overall goal, then, was to determine if my congregants’ sense of “sacred space” had been expanded, along with their appreciation and desire for fellowship, specifically as a result of the home-fellowship gatherings.

My theory was that CCBC could experience the *koinōnia* that characterized first-century Christianity, not by abandoning the church building, but by incorporating regular home meetings into its program. In fact, Scripture, along with sixteen centuries of church history, attests to Christians’ use of both. The fact that early Christians fellowshiped in one another’s homes, in synagogues, and in the temple provides overwhelming support for the use of both domestic and “corporate” settings. Because fellowship at CCBC already occurred regularly in a specialized building, my project focused primarily on the

⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁹ Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” **The New Interpreter’s Bible**. Vol. X. Ed. by Leander E. Keck et al. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002, 71.

home, or “domestic,” setting for Christian assembly. In order to compare and contrast the two venues, however, meetings were held at both locations. My hope was that the home meetings would not only help my congregants to acknowledge the value of gathering in one another’s houses, but that they would inspire them to do so. My ultimate goal was for members to begin viewing home gatherings as an indispensable part of the total church program at CCBC, thereby expanding our “sacred space.”

Finally, my goal was for the members of CCBC to gain more biblical knowledge about fellowship, as well as personal knowledge about one another. My hope was that such knowledge would lead them to a greater love for one another, as well as to a stronger sense of community. Commenting on the early church’s practice of *koinōnia*, Clinton E. Arnold writes, “It was important to these early believers to spend much time together...encouraging one another in the family bond that the Spirit created.”¹⁰ He clarifies, however, that early Christians did not enter entirely into a communal living arrangement—that is, they did not all live under the same roof. Rather, they developed a sense of community by spending time together, by sharing with one another, and by participating in a common goal.¹¹ This was my objective for the members of CCBC.

Means of Evaluation

I administered various diagnostic tools in order to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the participant’s level and depth of knowledge regarding first-century *koinōnia*, as well as his or her knowledge of other members. Specifically, through the use of surveys, field-reports, written statements, and self-reporting, I collected data

¹⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, “Acts,” **Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary**. Vol. 2. Ed. by Clinton E. Arnold. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002, 237.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

regarding each church member's understanding of and disposition towards fellowship in general, as well as his or her knowledge of fellow members. These tools helped me to determine the participants' dispositions towards CCBC's current fellowship practices, as well as the various changes that occurred in their theology as a result of this project.

The primary tool for collecting statistical data was a pre- and post-survey (Appendix A), which provided me with relevant information by revealing changes in the participants' responses to questions about fellowship. Because the surveys were taken anonymously (and because, theoretically, there were no "wrong" answers), participants were able to reveal their true feelings about fellowship, as well as their opinions of the project. Moreover, open-ended questions on the post-survey allowed the congregants to tell me in their own words how they had or had not changed as a result of this project. Furthermore, it provided them with an opportunity to voice their opinion about whether or not CCBC should include home meetings in the church's future ecclesiology.

Because the survey targeted specific areas—such as the congregant's biblical knowledge of, practice of, and attitude towards fellowship—changes in the responses from pre- to post-survey were both informative and measurable. For example, I was able to determine if participants' knowledge of the early church's practice of *koinōnia* had improved, thereby establishing a biblical foundation for the future fellowship at CCBC. Likewise, I was able to determine how much personal knowledge the members had gained of one another as a result of this project. By comparing the results of this section of the survey to other parts of the survey, I was given some indication as to whether or not the acquisition of more knowledge about one another had led to a deeper appreciation and love for one another, as well as to a stronger sense of community.

CHAPTER TWO

DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This ministry project rigorously tested my congregants' knowledge of biblical *koinōnia*, their depth of knowledge concerning one another, their current disposition towards fellowship in general, and their inclination to fellowship in the future. For a period of six weeks, the members of CCBC were immersed in one another's lives, gathering regularly in members' homes, as well as in the church sanctuary. At these meetings, the congregants shared a meal together (which included the Lord's Supper), engaged in Bible study, prayed, and sang hymns. The meetings were held in accordance with my understanding of the early Christians' practice of meeting regularly both in the temple and in one another's homes (Acts 2:46), as well as their practice of having "all things in common" (Acts 2:44b). Each week a different family hosted the meeting.

Project *Koinōnia* Kickoff

Although my congregants had already taken the pre-survey on August 29, 2012, my project officially began on September 5, 2012, in CCBC's sanctuary. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the participants in both groups were excited about the project and eager to begin the process. My goals for the evening were as follows: to distribute project folders; to administer a quiz on first-century *koinōnia* (Appendix C); to provide an overview of the project in all its facets; to discuss some practical, yet biblical, reasons why this project is needed in our church setting; to discuss the Trinity as a model for Christian community; to discuss my expectations for the home-fellowship gatherings (and theirs); and to provide a schedule. These goals were achieved in a timely and efficient manner.

In order to foster a more casual atmosphere for the night's meeting and to set the tone for future home gatherings, I sat on a stool as I explained the project. By way of introduction, I explained to them that my intention for the project was simply to enhance CCBC's current practice of fellowship, not to completely overhaul it. This seemed to relieve some of the anxiety that I sensed in them. I also explained to them my concept of enhancing CCBC's fellowship by expanding "sacred space" to include members' homes. They agreed that the project was worthwhile and biblically sound. In fact, they reminded me that church members in the past had gathered in homes for prayer meetings. The realization that I was not introducing anything new further comforted them.

After the introduction, which highlighted the value of small congregations, we discussed what I believed to be the problem at CCBC, namely that members do not spend enough time getting to know one another more thoroughly and intimately through home gatherings. Next, we discussed why I believed this project was needed at CCBC, whereby I provided three practical reasons why home-fellowship gatherings are important: First, the "family" imagery of Scripture necessitates it. For example, Jesus used the term *Abba*, "Father," and referred to his disciples as "kin" (Mark 3:31–34.) Also, Jesus considered his spiritual family his true "kin" (Matt. 12:16–50). Likewise, Paul used family imagery to describe church membership. In fact, for him, the image of the church as a "family" is the most significant metaphor of all.¹² Moreover, he used the term *oikeioi*, which means "household," to describe the church.¹³ Elsewhere, Paul referred to Christians as "children of God" (Rom. 8:16). Regarding the significance of using family terminology to describe the church, Michael J. Wilkins writes, "The family was established by God, it was

¹² Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 49.

¹³ Ibid.

protected by the Law, and it was an illustration of God's relationship with people. God's people were called to be his family."¹⁴

Secondly, I pointed out to them that such household language goes along with the household context of the church. In other words, church members' homes provide the perfect setting for expressing such family imagery. Again, my congregants agreed with this supposition, commenting on their uses of the terms "brother" and "sister" to refer to fellow church members. One of my congregants remarked that he had once used the term "brother" in addressing a friend and immediately felt awkward because he was not sure of this person's spiritual standing. Simply put, he did not know if he was, in fact, talking to a "brother." We concluded that, aside from one's biological family, such language only feels natural when addressing spiritual kin, an act innately proper in a house setting.

Thirdly, I presented to them my supposition that home-fellowship gatherings are more conducive for personal sharing, which helps church members to fulfill the "one another" commands of Scripture. I provided biblical support for this statement from the theological rationale section of my project proposal. I then concluded this portion of the meeting with a discussion of the Trinity, demonstrating how the Triune God provides us with a perfect model for community. Again, I used some of the arguments put forth in my project proposal to elaborate on this idea.

After a brief discussion of my goals for the project, I distributed project folders containing an outline of the project, the biographical survey to be used in meetings between covenant partners (Appendix B), and a quiz that consisted of twenty-five true/false questions (Appendix C). Before explaining the project any further, I decided to

¹⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 139.

administer the quiz. In order to minimize any fears, I allowed them to take it as a group. We made a game of it, forming two groups, males versus females. I kept score on a dry-erase board. Although the females won, I was impressed by the whole congregation's depth of knowledge. A combined total of only four questions were missed.

During the final twenty minutes of the meeting, my congregants and I discussed expectations for the home meetings and went over the schedule. We discussed and settled issues such as transportation, music, food, and the Lord's Supper. We decided that the hosts would take church hymnals to their homes each Sunday to accommodate the worshippers. For music, I and a fellow member would bring guitars. We also settled the issue of food, deciding to have complete meals set up "buffet style." I assured them that I would be cooking most of the food each week in order to minimize the burden on the hosts. However, they wanted to provide food as well. Finally, we discussed the issue of the elements to be used in the Lord's Supper. I told them that I would bring the "wine" each week, while one of the deacons would be responsible for bringing unleavened bread.

The Home-Fellowship Gatherings

The first home-fellowship gathering took place on September 12, 2012, at a member's house. This nice lady, who is a widow in her mid-seventies, is a longstanding member of CCBC, as well as the minister of music. Our first act together was to share a meal—an "*agápē* feast"—which consisted of lasagna, bread, salad, and chocolate cake that I had brought, along with pineapple sandwiches and a pecan cake that the host had prepared. Initially, I was disappointed at the host's dinner arrangements. While there was plenty of space in the home for everyone to eat together, she had prepared a table outside for the "men folk." My initial reaction was that I had failed as a leader to explain the

importance of enjoying one another's presence in fellowship around the table. However, based on an overheard conversation, I determined that the host's arrangements were, in part, motivated by her desire to prevent any stains on her light beige carpet that might incur from spilt lasagna. That being the case, I found her arrangements appropriate and made a note to myself to keep this issue in mind for the next home meeting. Moreover, I remembered from my research that early Christians gathered in the central courtyards (the atriums) of the Roman-style homes.¹⁵ While this practice was subject to abuse—poor Christians often being left outside and unfed (1 Cor. 11:21–22)¹⁶—it was, nevertheless, a common practice. Her arrangements, then, allowed me to comment on the typical layout of the early house church and how women, with or without a husband, were responsible for managing the Christian assembly within the household.¹⁷

As my congregants filled their plates at the buffet table, they laughed, joked, and discussed the week's events, which helped to foster a warm, cheerful atmosphere that continued throughout the meal. As we ate, I was encouraged to see members serving one another by refilling tea glasses, carrying one another's empty plates to the trash, and bringing desserts to other members' tables. Typically, when eating in the social hall, the same Christians take responsibility for serving the other members. The house setting, however, seemed to foster a servant's heart within each of CCBC's members.

After the meal, the host and I gathered the church into her living room in order to partake of the Lord's Supper. While the atmosphere was still casual and warm, it was also solemn, as we began passing out the bread and the wine. Before my congregants and

¹⁵ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Church: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 248.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁷ Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 162–63.

I partook of the elements, I expounded on other texts, such as Luke 24:30, Acts 2:42, and Mark 14:22, which describe the sharing of the common meal within the intimate confines of a house church. I focused particularly on the words “blessed,” “break,” and “gave,” reflecting theologically on the many ways that observing the Lord’s Supper represents church unity as indicated in the story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus.¹⁸ I made the point that fellowship is recognized in the life of the church through the Lord’s Supper.

Next, I expounded on Acts 2:42, which states that the early church broke bread from house to house “daily” (v.46). My teaching goal was threefold: First, I wanted my congregants to see that the Lord’s Supper was initially a complete meal that took place in the Christians’ homes. Secondly, I wanted them to see how that the church’s move from houses to special buildings had a transformative effect on the Lord’s Supper, a practice that expressed Christian solidarity, unity, and fellowship more than any other. In short, it went from being a family function to a priestly one.

Thirdly, I wanted my congregants to understand that the Lord’s Supper was probably observed more frequently than it is at CCBC; in fact, it was possibly observed each time the church gathered. The implication is that—contrary to the Baptist fear that “overly” observing the Lord’s Supper leads the worshippers to devalue it—the partaking of the Lord’s Supper can be a vital, spiritually invigorating, and renewing experience no matter how frequently it is practiced. Based on my congregants’ facial expressions and body language, they agreed with this point.

¹⁸ Darrell L. Bock, **Luke**. The NIV Application Commentary. Ed. By Terry Muck et al. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996, 616.

Next, the congregation sang a hymn. My original plan was to sing several songs; however, I discovered that time was quickly waning, so we stopped after singing “Sweet By-and-By.” For music, I simply strummed guitar chords. Everyone sang loudly, filling her home with a beautiful sound. Sitting in a circle, we were able to make eye-contact with one another, which added to the warmth and intimacy of the fellowship experience.

After praising God through song, we engaged in more Scripture studies. For example, we discussed the OT practice of fellowship as predicated by God’s desire for community. My goal was to demonstrate how church fellowship is undergirded by God’s desire to commune with his creation. Our study of the creation stories not only underscored God’s desire to communicate with human beings, but it also highlighted his desire to live in community with them. We concluded the teaching session of our home meeting with a study on the biblical command to “have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7). My goal was to express how small groups are not only biblical, but, in fact, necessary for cultivating intimate relationships.

We closed the meeting with a time for personal sharing led by the host. Although little personal information was shared, we generally agreed that the home setting had been conducive for intimate fellowship. However, one member said, “This doesn’t feel like church to me.” In response, I reiterated the proposition that “church” happens whenever and wherever the people of God are gathered for worship and fellowship. My words did little to change her perception. Another member complained about eating “so late.” However, it was pointed out to her that some of our church members do not get to eat on Wednesdays until after the meetings because they work so late. So, for them, the meal was actually early. After this time of sharing, we prayed and disassembled.

The second home-fellowship gathering was held on September 19, 2012, at a sweet married couple's home. The two of them, both of whom are in their sixties, are very active in the church, as well as in the community. They had prepared a pot of chili beans and an assortment of potato chips, crackers, nuts, and cookies. I brought a pan of chicken pie and a St. Louis Gooey Butter Cake. Once all of the members arrived, we greeted one another with handshakes, filled our plates, and sat down in the living room to enjoy our meal together. Unlike the first home meeting, we were all able to sit in the same room together, talk, and fellowship while we ate. Most of the conversation centered on how delicious the food tasted, who had made each dish, and the sharing of recipes.

Judging by the positive conversations and warm smiles, my congregants were more comfortable at this meeting than at the previous one. Even the church members who had previously complained about home gatherings seemed to enjoy themselves and truly grasp the significance of home meetings. Also, a member who had refused to come to the first meeting because of a grudge held against another member was present this week and actually spoke to this other member. Knowing what to expect this time around seemed to have contributed to their good moods and generous spirits, so I made a note to myself regarding the importance of order and structure for my church members.

After the meal, we observed the Lord's Supper. The atmosphere was hushed and reverent as the deacons distributed the elements. Before partaking of them, I summarized last week's teaching, reminding them that Lord's Supper was a time for examining not only one's own spiritual condition, but the spiritual condition of the church (i.e., the unity of its members). Unlike our observance of the Lord's Supper in the church building, we filled Dixie cups a quarter-full with grape juice. I wanted the members to experience a

full, refreshing drink. This added depth and texture to the ceremony as I discussed the regenerative power of Christ's precious blood. I wanted the Dixie cups to remind the participants of the simplicity of the Gospel, as well as its efficacy for the common person.

Next, we sang a hymn. This week's choice was "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." A fellow brother and I strummed guitar chords while the other members sang. My congregants loved it and asked us to continue playing. The experience alerted me to the possibility of using guitars in our Sunday morning worship services.

After the singing, we petitioned God on behalf of our sick members, shared praise reports, and began the teaching segment of the meeting. The lesson centered on the NT concept of community and *koinōnia*. Specifically, we discussed the importance of these terms for understanding Acts 2:42–47. I made the point that, unlike the OT community of God's people—which excluded the "unclean"—the Christian community is predicated on faith in Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. The NT community is, therefore, a "new and true Israel," the kingdom of God that includes both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁹

Moreover, it is a community that expresses *koinōnia*, a term that describes early Christians' willingness to participate in ministry with one another, as well as share their possessions. For the Apostle Paul, however, the term was used with different meanings. For example, sometimes it refers to fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16; Phil. 3:10), or fellowship with the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13; Phil. 2:1), or the Gospel (Phil. 1:5; Philem. 6). Paul also used the term *koinōnia* to describe the generous sharing of material resources to help the community's poor (Rom. 15:16).²⁰

¹⁹ David Watson, *I Believe in the Church*, ed. Michael Green (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1978), 78.

²⁰ Mark Finney, "Koinōnia," **The New Interpreter's Dictionary**. Vol. III. Ed. by Katherine Doob Sakenfeld et al. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008, 546–547.

Next, we discussed the NT command to “love one another” (John 13:34). In addition to Richard Myer’s study on the subject, we discussed the following quote from David Yonggi Cho:

When we love each other with *agápē* love, God’s love comes and shines forth among us, which shows us God is in us and we are in him....To know this means we will practice his great love in all the events of our daily lives.”²¹

Cho’s words inspired a thoughtful discussion about how church members can show love daily. We agreed that the best way to show love daily is by praying for one another, visiting one another, and calling one another regularly throughout the week.

We ended the meeting by sharing testimonies of small-group experiences. One of our members testified that as a former member of a five-thousand member church in Florida, she participated in many small groups. According to her, the bond she shared with other group members made them feel “like a church within a church.” Other church members shared similar experiences from having spent time in larger churches.

The third home-fellowship gathering took place on September 26, 2012, at a deacon’s residence. Although this man is a widower in his late-eighties, he still lives in his own home, manages livestock, bales hay, and works a sizable garden. However, he is most noted and respected for his wisdom, gentle spirit, and steadfast demeanor. He had prepared two pans of barbeque, along with baked beans and potato chips. In addition, I brought a bowl of barbeque slaw and a pan of baked beans. Once all the church members arrived, we wasted no time in asking God’s blessing on the food and gathering our plates.

As with the previous week, my congregants were able to sit together and talk while we ate our meal. Most of the discussion centered on the member’s lovely home. He

²¹ David Yonggi Cho, *The Home-Cell Study Guide* (Seoul: Seoul Logos Co., 1997), 1:102.

purchased his property in the late 1940s when he and his wife moved to North Carolina from Florida. He told the story of how he drove a Model-T Ford from Florida, yet his wife took a train because her father did not want her to ride in that “old jalopy.” He went on to share his childhood memories of weeklong revivals and of riding to church in a wagon with his family and neighbors. We were not only mesmerized at hearing his story, but some other members were inspired to discuss their own childhood experiences at CCBC. For example, one lady told of how the men and women were separated for Sunday morning worship. When asked why this was the case, she simply replied, “That’s just the way we did things back then.” Another member spoke of being disciplined at CCBC as a young boy. According to him, disrupting the worship service resulted in being taken outside and spanked with a hickory limb. He spoke fondly of the memory, not bitterly. Everyone laughed with him. At this point, it occurred to me that my congregants were becoming more comfortable with sharing personal information.

After dinner, we partook of the Lord’s Supper and sang two hymns. This week’s choices of songs were “Lily of the Valley” and “Have a Little Talk with Jesus.” My partner and I strummed guitar chords while the other church members sang. The timing of the singing and music was off at first, so we tried again. This time, however, we (i.e., the guitarists) went to the center of the room and played only the music in order to give the others an idea of the right speed. The second time went better. Everyone sang loudly and rejoiced; in fact, the singing continued as we put our instruments away.

Next, we focused our efforts on the teaching segment of the meeting. This week’s topic was the NT house church. We began with the following quote from John Havlik:

The church is never a place, but always a people; never a fold, but always a flock; never a sacred building, but always a believing assembly. The church is

you who pray, not where you pray. A structure of brick or marble can no more be a church than your clothes of serge or satin can be you.²²

My congregants and I discussed this quote thoroughly, concluding that most of CCBC's members do not apply this truth in practice. One of my congregants pointed out that some of our church members have the misconception that fellowship (as a gathered church) can only take place on church property. Another member countered that "church" takes place wherever the congregation is gathered.

Next, we discussed information found David Watson's book entitled *I Believe in the Church* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1978). We agreed that, if left unchecked, our focus on church buildings could give people the wrong idea about the nature of the church. For example, buildings could send the message to the world that the church is immoveable, inflexible, formal (and unfriendly), prideful, and even segregated.²³ To elaborate on the discussion, we debated the following quote by Howard Snyder:

It seems to me that any church which spends more on buildings than on outreach, holds all its gatherings only in "the church," puts construction before missions and evangelism, refuses to use its building for anything other than 'sacred' functions, and measures spirituality by the number of human bodies present within the four walls, has an edifice complex and is almost totally ignorant of what the Bible means by the church.²⁴

As my congregants affirmed the truth of this statement, I assured them that the early Christians did likewise. In fact, even when the early church could have gathered in lecture halls or market places that could have accommodated large numbers of people, the church chose to meet in small groups in one another's homes. The lack of buildings

²² John Havlik, *People-Centered Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), 47, quoted in David Watson, *I Believe in the Church*, ed. Michael Green (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1978), 119.

²³ Watson, 119–20.

²⁴ Howard Snyder, *New Wineskins* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978), 69, quoted in David Watson, *I Believe in the Church*, ed. Michael Green (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1978), 120–21.

was no hindrance to the expansion of the church; in fact, the first two centuries of Christian history was marked by a rapid advancement and power unequalled in history.²⁵ We decided that, theoretically, such kingdom advancement should be possible in our day with or without the use of church buildings.

Next, we discussed the biblical record concerning the use of homes for Christian assembly. The term “house church,” I pointed out, describes the early Christians’ practice of meeting in the homes of wealthier members.²⁶ I also informed my congregants that—unlike the Greco-Roman model of home patronage—the NT “establishes no connection between financial patronage and congregational authority.”²⁷

Next, we discussed the book of Acts, specifically how it highlights the importance and frequency of home meetings (1:13–14; 2:46). Furthermore, I pointed out that Paul uses the phrase “the church in their house” (ἡ κατ’ οἰκὴ αὐτῶν ἐκκλησία) in various ways throughout his letters (1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Rom 16:5). Moreover, the use of the “household codes” found in the NT (1 Tim. 3:4–5; Col. 3:18–4:1; Eph. 5:2–6:9) is an expression of the fact that Christians at the turn of the second century contextualized their church structure to model that of the Greco-Roman household.²⁸

Finally, we discussed ways to prevent the use of church buildings from being a hindrance to our faith. We decided that the members of CCBC must always remember that we ourselves are God’s “building.” Anytime and anywhere that CCBC’s members are gathered, therefore, we are having “church.” We also agreed that the members of

²⁵ Watson, 121.

²⁶ Phillip A. Harland, “House Church,” **The New Interpreter’s Dictionary**. Vol. II. Ed. by Katherine Doob Sakenfeld et al. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007, 903.

²⁷ James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Academic, 1999), 83–84.

²⁸ Harland, 903.

CCBC must remember the following truths: Christ is the center of the church (1 Cor. 3:11; Col. 1:18); the church is a creation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:24); church members are “living stones” (1 Pet. 2:4–5); and the church is still being constructed (Phil. 1:12–14).²⁹

The final home-fellowship gathering took place on October 3, 2012, at a young married couple’s residence. When everyone arrived, we exchanged handshakes and hugs and began to engage in polite conversation. I soon realized, however, that one of our members was absent. Because this member is an extrovert, who loves to gather with her church family and share her life with others, her absence was conspicuous and troubling. I later discovered that her reason for not coming was that she was too afraid to drive such a long distance at night. I was disappointed that after all of our discussion about church unity and obeying the “one another” commands of Scripture that no one seemed to notice her absence. Because the teaching focus for this particular meeting was “caring for one another,” I knew that overlooking her absence would be detrimental to our discussion. So, as members prepared for dinner (spaghetti and salad), I decided to go and get her.

We got back just in time to eat and observe the Lord’s Supper. As with the previous two meetings, we all sat together and engaged in table talk while we ate our meal. During the observance of the Lord’s Supper, I discussed its relationship to the Last Supper. Just as the Passover commemorated the Israelites’ deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the Lord’s Supper reminds Christians that Jesus—our “paschal lamb”—has been sacrificed for us in order to deliver us from sin.³⁰

As the bread and “wine” were served, I observed my congregants’ attitudes as expressed through their facial expressions and body language. It became apparent to me

²⁹ Watson, 121–128.

³⁰ Ibid., 237.

that there had been an increase in the solemnity and reverence of our observance of the Lord's Supper at this home meeting; in fact, I had noticed a steady increase in these attributes since the first home gathering. Typically, the more formal atmosphere of the church sanctuary inspires a "conditioned" response of solemnity; however, in the case of the home meetings, the intimacy of the gathering itself seemed to have led to an even greater reverence and respect for Christ's atoning work. Contributing to this newfound reverential tone was our sitting arrangement within the confined spaces of the host's living room. Not only were we, the worshippers, closer to one another in proximity, but we sat face-to-face, forcing us to make eye contact with one another as we spoke.

After the Lord's Supper, we sang hymns. This week's choices were "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" and "Have a Little Talk with Jesus." Again, my partner and I strummed guitar chords while the other church members sang. At this meeting, I noticed an increase in the joyous praise that accompanied the singing. I noted that my congregants were becoming more comfortable with the use of guitars in worship, as well as singing within the confines of a house. Their voices rang out loud and clear. Smiles were prevalent and genuine. Although we played and sang through the songs twice before our timing was settled, my congregants did not get frustrated. In fact, they seemed to enjoy the process.

The singing of hymns of praise fostered the perfect atmosphere to begin the lesson. However, having learned from prior meetings that time passes quickly in a home setting, I decided to keep the teaching segment short in order to allow more time for personal sharing. As stated previously, the lesson was about caring for each other (1 Cor. 12:24–26). Because of the lesson's narrowed focus, we were able to thoroughly discuss this text, giving past examples of how this command has been fulfilled at CCBC.

The meeting ended with a time of personal sharing. One of my members began this segment with an honest appraisal of how his feelings had changed since the start of this project. In a moment of brutal honesty, he told me that, at first, he “hated” the ideas that I had put forth regarding both the home-fellowship gatherings and the assigning of “covenant partners.” He went on to say, however, that the meeting with his covenant partner and the sharing of personal information with her (Appendix B) had “changed all that.” His covenant partner was a woman who had recently lost her daughter to cancer. Because he could relate to her pain (having lost his wife to cancer several years prior), they were able to have honest, productive discussions about the challenges that death brings to one’s faith, as well as how to move beyond their experience (in faith).

Another member learned that her covenant partner had been involved in a life-changing automobile accident with her sister that had not only brought the two sisters close to death, but closer to one another in the ensuing years. Yet another member was amazed that her covenant partner’s mother had flown airplanes. Another member discovered that her covenant partner enjoyed writing song lyrics.

On a more somber note, however, one of our members shared with us that one of her biggest regrets was that she did not spend more time with her father before he died. Words of comfort and support were then given to her from the other members, thereby fulfilling the command to “suffer together” (1 Cor. 12:26). Likewise, other members shared burdens of various sorts, as well as the many joys and blessings in their lives. Based on the level and depth of the personal sharing (and caring) at this meeting, I concluded that we had truly experienced the type of biblical *koinōnia* practiced in the first-century house church.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Although some biblical support for home-fellowship gatherings has been given in previous sections, this chapter will provide a more comprehensive rationale for including home-meetings in CCBC's future ecclesiology. It will address the need for home fellowships, the biblical witness of the use of domestic residences in religion, the contemporary practice of Christian fellowship, my personal and professional rationale for this project, the Trinity as a model for Christian community, and the history of house churches.

The Need for this Project in My Ministry Setting

What was missing at CCBC was the commitment among its members to share all of life with one another, which, of necessity, would have included spending time in one another's homes. The issue was not that the practice of *koinōnia* was lacking entirely at CCBC, but rather that it was inadequate. The members shared spiritual activities together and provided for one another's material needs whenever they arose; however, my theory was that by gathering regularly in one another's homes, the church would enhance the existing *koinōnia*, thus, making its practice of it more biblical.

Fellowship in the Old Testament

Although no exact counterpart exists in the Old Testament for the type of fellowship, or "*koinōnia*," experienced in the early church, the people of ancient Israel are consistently depicted as sharing all of life, both at specialized structures of worship and in their houses. For example, to the extent that the whole congregation could assemble out-

side the tabernacle, the Israelites gathered at the entrance of the tent of meeting to witness the consecration of the priests and other priestly procedures (Lev. 8:3–36). Although the synonymy of the terms “tabernacle” and “tent of meeting”—as well as the continuity of the structures themselves—is debatable, the relevance of this structure (or structures) is that it provided a space where God would meet not only with Moses (or the priests), but with all of the Israelites.³¹ Moreover, the centrality of the tabernacle in respect to its location amongst the twelve tribes was such that, technically speaking, the Israelite community was always gathered around it (Numbers 2). Less ambiguous, however, is Israel’s later use of the temple, which provided the OT community of God’s people a worship space in which to gather. The point is that there seems to have existed none of the artificial divisions between the secular and the sacred so prevalent at CCBC. Simply put, households *and* specialized structures of worship were treated as “sacred space.”

The Language of Fellowship in the Old Testament

As with the *type* of fellowship expressed in the NT, there is no exact counterpart in terms of language for fellowship in the OT either. Specifically, there is no equivalent for the Greek word *koinōnia*. The Hebrew word *chābhar* (חָבַר), however, serves a similar function, describing something shared or held in common (Prov. 1:14; 21:9; 25:24). For example, in Prov. 21:9, the term describes a “shared house.”³² Moreover, in Arabic one of three possible meanings of the root *hbr* is “unite” or “be united.”³³ This seems to be

³¹ Richard E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” **Dictionary of Old Testament Pentateuch**. Ed. by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 811.

³² Roland E. Murphy, **Proverbs**. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 22. Ed. by Bruce M. Metzger et al. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998, 157.

³³ H. Cazelles, “חָבַר” **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament**. Vol. IV. Ed. By Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Trans. by David E. Green. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965, 193.

the idea of its use in Ps. 122:3, where Israel's unity is symbolized by the firmness with which the houses of Jerusalem are bound together. Other uses of the term *chābhar* in the Old Testament include “binding” (Exod. 26:6), “joining” (Eccles. 9:4), and “companion” (Mal. 2:14). Taken together, then, the usage of *chābhar* depicts close relationships, unity, and the communal sharing of possessions among the people of ancient Israel.

Fellowship Predicated on God's Desire for Community

The fellowship motif is pervasive throughout the OT. In fact, the creation of human beings itself suggests that God “desired relationship with beings that, as his image, could communicate with him.”³⁴ The first example of God's desire for fellowship is found in the first creation narrative (Gen. 1:1–2:4a), particularly in the conversation recorded in Gen. 1:28–30. Although the speech is one-sided, it evinces both God's ability and desire to communicate with Adam and Eve, as well as reveals his expectations for them in relation to other aspects of creation. Indeed, human beings are presented in the early chapters of Genesis not only as good, trustworthy creatures made in God's own image (1:27), but as “co-creators with God.”³⁵ This fact is seen in humanity's obligation to procreate (1:28), the work given them to do in God's world (2:15), and in Adam's naming of the animals (2:20). The opening chapters of Genesis then—especially Genesis 3 where Adam responds verbally to God's inquiry—portray God as being a relational Deity. In other words, “God is present and active in the world, enters into a relationship of integrity with the world, and does so in such a way that both world and God are

³⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2006), 149.

³⁵ Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 43–44.

affected by that interaction.”³⁶ In later texts, as God provides even more self-disclosure through special revelation, the conversation becomes more two-sided, and humanity begins responding to God through praises, petitions, and laments (e.g., such as those found in the Prophets and in the Psalter). Regarding the theological significance of humanity’s part in the divine dialogue, Eugene H. Merrill writes, “The response of God’s people to him is also an act of *fellowship* [emphasis added], one in which he greatly delights.”³⁷ Walter Brueggemann also recognizes God’s desire for community, stating the following regarding the human creature’s unique relationship to God:

It is important that of all the creatures of God’s eight creative acts, God speaks directly only to human creatures. The others have no speech directed toward them at all. By contrast, in Gen. 1:28, God speaks *to the human creatures*, and in v. 29, he twice addresses them directly, “you.” This creature has a different intimate relation with the creator. This is the speech-creature *par excellence*. This is the one to whom God has made a peculiarly intense commitment (by speaking) and to whom marvelous freedom has been granted (in responding).³⁸

Likewise, the second creation narrative (Gen. 2:4b–25) testifies to God’s desire for community and fellowship. In this text, God provides the life (v. 7) and locality for community to unfold (v. 8), as well as a partner for Adam with whom he could relate and communicate (v. 18). As Victor P. Hamilton points out concerning this text, it is “God who makes the judgment about the unsuitability of man’s aloneness. Man is not consulted for his thoughts on the matter. At no point does the man offer to God any grievance about his current circumstances.”³⁹ It is God, then, who initiates fellowship and community. This more intimate account of creation not only underscores God’s immanence, but also

³⁶ Ibid., 42.

³⁷ Merrill, 149.

³⁸ Walter Brueggemann, **Genesis**. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Ed. by James L. Mays et al. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982, 31.

³⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, **The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17**. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Ed. by R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990, 175.

testifies to a God who desires to know and fellowship with the men and women that he created. Consequently, God's people should also desire fellowship and community.

Although Adam and Eve's sin changed the manner in which God fellowshiped both with them and their posterity—evinced in their attempt to hide from God (Gen. 3:8), as well as in their subsequent expulsion from the garden (Gen. 3:24–25)—fellowship, nevertheless, continued to be sought after by God. For example, the patriarchal narratives portray God as actively calling out Abraham (then Abram), through whom he created a new community unto himself (Gen. 12:2; 17:4–5; 18:18). According to Brueggemann, the reason for God's calling-out of Abraham is “to fashion an alternative community in creation gone awry, to embody in human history the power of the blessing. It is the hope of God that in this new family all human history can be brought to the unity and harmony intended by the one who calls.”⁴⁰ God's promise to Abraham culminated in the creation of the nation of Israel, a covenant people who ultimately provided the fullest expression of fellowship with God and fellow community members since before the fall.

The Practice of Fellowship in the Old Testament

As stated above, fellowship in the OT is predicated on God's desire to live in community with his people. While God's desire for community is evinced in the creation stories (Gen. 1:1–2:25) and in the calling-out of Abraham and his family (Gen. 12:1), the Exodus-event marked the start of the OT community of God in earnest (Exod. 19:4–6). Upon the Hebrews' acceptance of the covenant stipulations (Exod. 19:8), Yahweh's covenant community was established. Moreover, they had become a nation, a “*gōy*.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Brueggemann, 105.

⁴¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 71.

Simply put, it is in the Exodus that “Israel is born.”⁴² God also refers to this newly-established nation as “my people” (Lev. 26:12). Wilkins writes, “The nation was called to a relationship in which God was with his people.”⁴³ Even Israel’s call to be a worshipping community evinces God’s desire for fellowship. In fact, Israel’s creation—especially post-Sinai, with the establishment of its priesthood, sacrificial laws, and tabernacle—was, in part, God’s prescription for restoring lost fellowship. God’s initiative in creating a community with himself at the center is recorded in Exod. 25:8, which states, “And have them make me a sanctuary, *so that I may dwell among them* [emphasis added].” Commenting on the nation of Israel, post-Sinai, Merrill writes, “Moses would no longer go up a mountain to encounter the Lord in a realm of holiness too glorious to describe; rather, the Lord would come down and dwell among his people, the nation of Israel that he had graciously deigned to bring into special *fellowship* [emphasis added] with himself.”⁴⁴

The theme of fellowship extended to the community members’ relationships as well. Psalm 133:1–3 states, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” Clearly, God desired for community members to fellowship with one another. The following section describes the type of community that God expected Israel to be:

A Community that Gathered Regularly

As the community of God’s people on earth, Israel was called to physically gather, or “assemble,” on a regular basis. Two Hebrew terms describe the assembled OT community: The first term is קהל (*qāhāl*), which is translated “assembly.” Religious significance is given to this term in Deut. 9:10, 10:4, and 23:1–3, where it refers to the

⁴² John Durham, **Exodus**. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 3. Ed. by Bruce M. Metzger et al. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987, xix.

⁴³ Wilkins, 57.

⁴⁴ Merrill, 352.

community assembled at Sinai.⁴⁵ In short, the term serves as the “ceremonial expression for the assembly that results from the covenant.”⁴⁶ The second term is עדָה (*ēdāh*). It refers to the congregation of God’s people, particularly when they are gathered at the entrance of the “tent of meeting” (e.g., Lev. 8:3–4).⁴⁷ In this cultic context, it served to designate “the ceremonial community as a whole.”⁴⁸ As Walter C. Kaiser Jr. points out, this word functions as a “technical term for the ‘people’ of God gathered together to worship God or to be instructed in spiritual things.”⁴⁹

A Community that Shared

If the roots and etymologies of specific Hebrew terms fail to accurately describe the concept of NT *koinōnia*, the passages dealing with Israel’s corporate worship and her care for the community’s poor do not. Examples of the communal sharing of spiritual activities, as well as of material possessions are clearly present in the OT. For instance, Deut. 15:4–11 commands the wealthy Israelites to lend money and cancel debts every seven years—the “year of remission,” שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה (v. 9)—regardless of its proximity. This law of “release (שְׁמִטָּה)” —which literally means “a letting drop, remitting”⁵⁰—was aimed at fulfilling Yahweh’s promise to the OT community that there would be “no one in need” (v. 4). The spirit of unity and solidarity expressed in this command is indicative of a bond that, although not a direct parallel, is at least akin to the *koinōnia* expressed in

⁴⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 1042.

⁴⁶ Lothar Coenen, “Church,” **The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology**. Vol. 1. Ed. by Colin Brown. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975, 295.

⁴⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1042.

⁴⁸ Coenen, 295.

⁴⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., **Exodus**. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Vol. 2. Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelien et al. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990, 372.

⁵⁰ Duane L. Christensen, **Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9**. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 6A. Rev. ed. Ed. by Bruce M. Metzger et al. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001, 312.

early Christian communities. Commenting on the morality of this OT practice, Merrill writes, “There was, of course, the sense of moral obligation toward a fellow Israelite that might have encouraged risk taking and a willingness to forgive indebtedness that would not ordinarily prevail in the secular world. This seems to be the sentiment behind vv. 4–5.”⁵¹ Although the spirit of this OT command falls short of the Spirit-filled giving recorded in the NT, it, nevertheless, exemplifies God’s desire that the members of his community strive to meet one another’s needs.

Finally, not only did Israel’s community members share their possessions, but they also shared in spiritual activities. As a worshipping community, Israel was called to “serve” Yahweh (Exod. 8:1; 9:1; 10:3). Among other things, this meant being obedient to the covenant by offering God the best of their flocks through an elaborate sacrificial system mediated by priests, as well as by praying, singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments in praise to God.

A Community that Enlarged Its Sacred Space

Robert E. Webber writes, “In addition to the times appointed for worship, God also established a special place for worship—first the mobile tabernacle and then the temple. While the Israelites could worship God in their hearts anywhere and anytime, specific gatherings for public worship occurred at a specific place and time.”⁵² Elsewhere, he elaborates on Israel’s sacred space, writing, “This worship included a sacred structure enclosure (the tabernacle, and later temple) with its sacrifices and ritual and

⁵¹ Eugene H. Merrill, **Deuteronomy**. The New American Commentary. Vol. 4. Ed. by E. Ray Clendenen et al. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994, 242.

⁵² Robert E. Webber, *Worship: Old and New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 26.

sacred priesthood.”⁵³ Here God’s people fellowshiped while celebrating festivals (Exod. 23:14–19; Leviticus 23), presented sin and guilt offerings (Lev. 1–7), made sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), and witnessed purification rituals (Lev. 12–13).

While Israel’s life as a community—that is, its practice of fellowship—is often expressed by the nation’s sharing of spiritual activities centered in the tabernacle and temple, it also found expression in the household; in fact, worship initially took place within the family unit. As D. E. Fleming points out, “Israel’s ancestors display a religion of the extended family rather than that of a nation or state...and there are no temples.”⁵⁴ A domestic setting for worship, therefore, was characteristic of the patriarchal society. Religious practices prior to Moses and the Exodus-event sought to influence “the widest possible range of social settings, including even the private affairs of individuals and households.”⁵⁵ For example, all male children were circumcised in the household (Gen. 17:10; Deut. 8:10–18). Also, children were taught religion in the home (Deut. 4:5–14). In this context, therefore, parents acting as de facto “priests” were responsible for ensuring that all those inside the house honored and obeyed God.⁵⁶

The most meaningful OT example of fellowship in the home was the celebration of the Passover. However, like the church’s status as both a local and universal entity, there is an integrative duality in the Hebrew celebration of the Passover. It is at once both intimately private—in that it takes place in the private confines of the home—and communal. As Peter Enns points out, “Although the meal is to be celebrated inside the

⁵³ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁴ D. E. Fleming, “Religion,” **Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch**. Ed. by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 682.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 671–72.

⁵⁶ Robert Banks and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 25.

home, it is more properly considered a community affair. This is not private worship.”⁵⁷

My hope for this project was that it might instill within my congregants this same integrative outlook towards fellowship—namely, that it is both private and public. It is both corporate and domestic. I wanted them to understand the all-encompassing nature of fellowship, that it is something we as Christians “live in” at all times and in all locations, as opposed to something we practice at scheduled times at specified locations. In short, I wanted them to expand their “sacred space.”

Finally, during the Babylonian exile and afterwards (during the Second Temple period), the Jews living outside of Jerusalem met in synagogues, which were originally in homes.⁵⁸ Not until the third century in Palestine “do typical patterns of construction for synagogues become wide-spread, and at the same time stunning artistic embellishments are widely represented.”⁵⁹ The practice of meeting in synagogues, a term that means “gathering place” or “place of assembly,” likely originated as a result of the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. and the subsequent Babylonian captivity.⁶⁰ While the original motivation for establishing the synagogue was to provide the Jewish community with a gathering place for reading and preserving Scripture, praying, and singing hymns, its development would later serve as a model for the church, which later added Communion and baptism to its list of spiritual practices.⁶¹ In fact, because the first converts were Jewish Christians or Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism, the influence of the

⁵⁷ Peter Enns, **Deuteronomy**. The NIV Application Commentary. Ed. by Terry Muck et al. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000, 251.

⁵⁸ Jeffers, 216.

⁵⁹ Bruce Chilton and Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Synagogues,” **Dictionary of New Testament Background**. Ed. by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, 1149.

⁶⁰ Webber, 36.

⁶¹ Jeffers, 72.

synagogue was a practical necessity. More germane to my topic, however, is the fact that it was synagogues that provided the Jewish community members with places of acceptance and belonging.⁶² Until synagogues became a place of Christian persecution (Matt. 10:17; Mark 13:9; Luke 12:11), and before there existed any rivalry between the church and synagogue (as alluded to in James 2 and Rev. 1:10; 2:9; 3:9), synagogues provided safe places for Christian fellowship. Only later did Christians form their own “separate worshipping communities.”⁶³ Such communities were founded in homes.

Fellowship in the New Testament

Although there is continuity between the practice of fellowship within the OT community and its expression within the NT community, there is also discontinuity. For example, whereas OT fellowship is predicated on Israel’s obligation to obey the covenant stipulations, NT fellowship is portrayed as being the natural and spontaneous reaction of men and women whose hearts have been changed by God’s indwelling Spirit. Moreover, whereas fellowship within the OT community occurred primarily between those who shared a common ancestry—that is, had certain “kinship or ethnic ties”⁶⁴—the Christian community is based on faith alone in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Fellowship as “Life in the Spirit”

While Christian fellowship is predicated on faith in Christ, it is characterized by life in the Spirit. Christians, post-Pentecost, are men and women who have been regenerated and, thus, have been joined together in a new life—a life lived in the “unity

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Webber, 38.

⁶⁴ Mark Finney, “Koinōnia,” **New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible**. Vol. 3. Ed. by Katherine Doob Sakenfeld et al. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008, 712.

of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3). No text more clearly—and idealistically—depicts Spirit-filled Christians living in *koinōnia* than does Acts 2:42–47. However, the book of Acts in general is indispensable for understanding the scriptural concept of community. In fact, Luke’s most fundamental purpose for writing Acts may be “to help Christians answer the question ‘who are we?’”⁶⁵ For this reason, the rationale undergirding my project relied, in part, on an exposition of Luke’s summary of the early church.

The necessity for studying the book of Acts (esp., 2:42–47) in order to understand early church fellowship is partly due to Luke’s emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in forming the new community of God’s people. In Acts, Luke chronicles the period of transition from the Gospels to the church age, a time characterized by the actualization of “the unity of community brought by the Spirit.”⁶⁶ Also, the absence of the term *koinōnia* prior to Pentecost implies that true fellowship was impossible until the coming of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, it implies that genuine fellowship with other Christians requires fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit first.⁶⁷ With the coming of the Holy Spirit, such fellowship was made possible. Luke describes this new close-knit community as having “all things in common” (Acts 2:44b). He further explains that the members of the Jerusalem church “were together” (ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό). This phrase is not to be taken as a reference to geographical locality, but rather should be interpreted as a reference to congregational unity.⁶⁸ In support of this view, John B. Polhill contends that this phrase

⁶⁵ D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 325.

⁶⁶ Wilkins, 265.

⁶⁷ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2005), 233.

⁶⁸ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:412.

“seems to depict the gathered community, with a strong emphasis on their unity.”⁶⁹

Polhill’s interpretation is validated in Acts 4:32a, which states that believers were of “one heart and soul” (ἡ καρδία καὶ ἡ ψυχή μία), a statement that provides a rationale as to why early Christians were so willing to share their possessions (Acts 4:32b).

Other NT texts affirm the Spirit’s role in forming community also. In fact, numerous texts in the NT suggest that fellowship and a Spirit-filled church go together. For example, Paul desired for the believers at Corinth to experience the “communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:13). Also, Peter encouraged spiritual unity among believers, using the image of a “spiritual house” into which Christians are to “be built” (1 Pet. 2:5). Elsewhere, Paul calls for Christians to “maintain the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3). Other Pauline texts describe Christians as consisting of “one body and one Spirit” (Eph. 4:4) and as living “by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25) and “in Christ” (Eph. 2:6). Concerning this latter description, Bonhoeffer writes, “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this.”⁷⁰ Millard J. Erickson also comments on the unity of life brought about by the Spirit, writing, “The Spirit, being one, also produces a unity within the body.”⁷¹ Regular *koinōnia*, then, is the natural outgrowth of a Spirit-filled, unified church.

The Language of Sharing in the New Testament

As stated above, the church is characterized by new life in the Spirit. The spontaneous and natural outgrowth of God’s work through the Holy Spirit is the

⁶⁹ John B. Pohill, *Acts*. The New American Commentary. Vol. 26. Ed. by E. Ray Clendenen et al. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992, 120.

⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, 21.

⁷¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1050.

establishment of a community of faith defined by a “communal form of life” that involves radical unity, generosity and sharing.⁷² The Greek term used to describe this sharing community is *koinōnia*.

The NT term *koinōnia* (κοινωνία) is generally defined as “association, communion, fellowship, or close relation.”⁷³ Specifically, however, the term means “to share with someone in something.”⁷⁴ Wilkins defines *koinōnia* similarly as “sharing or partaking in something or someone.”⁷⁵ Underscoring the emphasis on sharing as an expression of *koinōnia*, Ben Witherington III defines it as “participation or sharing in common of something with someone else.”⁷⁶ Finally, Ajith Fernando acknowledges the use of the term *koinōnia* to describe sharing within Christian communities. He writes, “The nineteen occurrences of *koinōnia* in the New Testament suggest that the church used this word for the unique sharing that Christians have with God and with other Christians.”⁷⁷ As implied in all of these definitions, the Christian community expresses *koinōnia* most distinctly through sharing.

Sharing in the New Testament: A Summary of Acts 2:42–47

Elaborating on his initial summary statement, Luke records that food, possessions and prayers were shared in the early church. Luke also notes the early church’s devotion to apostolic teaching, which reflects the Greco-Roman banquet. At the conclusion of this

⁷² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, **The Acts of the Apostles**. The Anchor Bible. Vol. 31. Ed. by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1998, 269.

⁷³ Polhill, 119.

⁷⁴ Friedrich Hauck, “κοινωνία” **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**. Vol. III. Ed. By Gerhard Kittel. Trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965, 804.

⁷⁵ Wilkins, 275.

⁷⁶ Witherington, 160.

⁷⁷ Ajith Fernando, **Acts**. The NIV Application Commentary. Ed. by Terry Muck et al. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998, 120.

banquet, a time for teaching and discussion would have been held.⁷⁸ However, *koinōnia* was a much broader category of communal life within the church directed towards acts of kindness. In other words, the sharing of food, possessions, and prayers were the primary expressions of *koinōnia* in the early church. The following is a brief exposition of the components of house fellowship:

First, meals were shared in homes. Interpreting the phrase “breaking of bread” (κλάσις του ἄρτου) in v. 42, Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes, “It does not refer here only to the opening rite of a meal, as usually in Jewish meals, but to a whole meal.”⁷⁹ Not only does this phrase refer to the early Christians’ practice of eating regular meals together in one another’s homes, but it possibly refers to their observance of the Lord’s Supper.⁸⁰ While the precise meaning behind this phrase is debatable, the sharing of meals was indicative of the unity and solidarity among church members that the Lord’s Supper symbolized.

Possessions were also shared with a generosity that exceeded typical human behavior (v. 45). Wall writes, “The most distinctive practice of the community’s common life is the sharing of goods.”⁸¹ Luke’s portrayal of early Christians as having “all things in common” (v. 46) is possibly an allusion to the Hellenistic notion of friendship, whereby, goods were shared equally; however, while the Greek idea of sharing is derived from a secular vision for social equality, Luke depicts the sharing of goods among Christians as the spontaneous actions of Spirit-filled people living in *koinōnia*.⁸² In this way, therefore, the Christian ideal of sharing goods is different from the Greco-Roman world’s utopian

⁷⁸ Witherington, 161.

⁷⁹ Fitzmyer, 270.

⁸⁰ F. F. Bruce, **The Book of Acts**. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Rev. ed. Ed. by Gordon D. Fee. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988, 73.

⁸¹ Wall, 73.

⁸² Timothy Luke Johnson, **The Acts of the Apostles**. Sacra Pagina Series. Vol. 5. Ed. by Daniel J. Herrington. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992, 59.

vision of community ownership. Luke's point is that in a community characterized by *koinōnia*, people are more important than possessions. As J. Bradley Chance points out, "A community of sharing where people give to others 'as any had need' is a goal, idealized or not, to which the covenant community of God's people should strive."⁸³

Finally, the early Christians shared in "prayers (προσευχαί)." Because the definite article and the plural form is used in Acts 2:42, prayers were apparently a regular practice in the early church, likely referring to Jewish payers and prayer times at the temple, as well as to Christian prayers at both the temple and within Christian homes.⁸⁴ However, while the Christian community's prayer life may or may not have been modeled after Jewish prayer services in the temple (Acts 3:1), the primary reference in v. 42 is to the church's "own appointed season for united prayer."⁸⁵ In support of this, Polhill contends that the reference to prayer in v. 42 is "probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private house worship."⁸⁶

The Practice of Fellowshiping in Homes in the New Testament

Like the citizens of ancient Israel, members of the NT church were also called to gather. In fact, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word *qāhāl* (קהל) with the Greek term *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), which is used in the NT to designate the "church."⁸⁷ It was primarily in Christians' private homes, as opposed to the temple precincts—although they met there regularly as well (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12)—that the early church gathered. For

⁸³ J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Ed. by Mark K. McElroy et al. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007, 59.

⁸⁴ Schnabel, 415.

⁸⁵ Bruce, 72–73.

⁸⁶ Polhill, 120.

⁸⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1042.

this reason, early Christianity can be characterized as “domestic religion.”⁸⁸ However, because early Christians also gathered at the temple, their sacred space consisted of “dual locales,” the temple being primarily a place for witnessing, the home being primarily a place for fellowship.⁸⁹

Biblical support for the use of domestic residences for Christian fellowship in the first century is extensive. For example, as Polhill points out, the Greek phrase κατ’ οἶκον found in Acts 2:46 can be translated “at home” or “from house to house.”⁹⁰ Witherington supports this view, writing, “Christians were meeting daily together, sharing food ‘from house to house,’ which suggests that they rotated where they ate, or more likely that since there were a goodly number they did this sharing in various homes.”⁹¹ Acts 2:46, then, indicates that Christians met in homes on a daily basis.

Addressing the importance—even the necessity—of homes for fostering intimate relationships, Eckhard J. Schnabel writes, “Luke reports that the Jerusalem church numbered several thousand believers, and so *koinōnia* was possible only in meetings that took place in private houses.”⁹² Moreover, it was only in homes that church members could “know everybody. Only here everybody could have contact with everyone. Only here...could they take care of each others’ material needs.”⁹³ Clearly, the most significant benefit for gathering in the homes of individual members was that it helped to foster intimate relations and fellowship.

⁸⁸ Pearson, 300.

⁸⁹ Polhill, 121.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Witherington, 163.

⁹² Schnabel, 414.

⁹³ Ibid.

The History of Christian Fellowship in House Churches

For more than three hundred years, Christians gathered in house churches; in fact, the Christianity that extended to the Roman Empire was essentially a “home-centered movement.”⁹⁴ Such house churches were in their purest form during the period of 50–150 C.E., remaining architecturally unmodified, meaning they were still used for domestic purposes. Afterwards—from 150–250 C.E.—archeological evidence suggests that houses were renovated and used exclusively for Christian assemblies.⁹⁵ Such changes in the meeting places were necessitated by changes in the social makeup of the church and by the sheer number of Christian communities. Eventually, poorer Christians continued meeting in private homes that were renovated for worship, while wealthy Christians began to own property.⁹⁶ Finally, before Constantine’s introduction of the basilica (250–313 C.E.), larger buildings were used to assemble Christian communities.⁹⁷ Archeological findings from this period reveal that basilicas were built on these sites.⁹⁸ Not only did house churches give way to specialized buildings, just a few centuries after Christ, but the highly participatory form of house meetings soon gave way to clergy-led worship. The church’s drift from a communal form of existence to being a corporate, collective body of formal worshippers was greatly accelerated by the so-called conversion of Constantine.

The alleged conversion of Constantine to Christianity in 312 C.E. (and the subsequent Edict of Milan in 313 C.E., legalizing Christianity) led to changes in ecclesiology that not only altered the nature of church governance, but also had a detrimental affect on

⁹⁴ Banks, *The Church Comes Home*, 49–50.

⁹⁵ Blue, Bradley, “Architecture, Early Church,” **Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments**. Ed. by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1997, 92.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

the nature of church fellowship. The loss of organic, dynamic, and intimate expressions of *koinōnia* practiced in house churches resulted when the church became an institution licensed with a priesthood of “professional” clergy. Sparkling Cathedrals, rather than modest houses, became the places to meet and “experience” worship mediated through an ordained priesthood, as opposed to the priesthood of all believers.⁹⁹ The following excerpt highlights the evolution of a distinction between clergy and laity.

Worship in the house-church had been of an intimate kind in which all present had taken an active part. But by the beginning of the fourth century the distinction between clergy and lay people was becoming more prominent.... This may have influenced the choice of the basilica plan for the new churches.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, prior to Constantine’s legalization of Christianity, houses were still the primary locations for Christian assemblies; in fact, until the rule of Severus around 222–35 C.E., church buildings were not even allowed by the government. However, after 380 C.E., once the Catholic Church became the only religion recognized by the state, house churches were considered to be not only illegitimate, but illegal. Those attempting to start house churches were considered criminals. The Inquisition, which was an attempt to uphold one rule of faith, followed, resulting in the death of millions of Christians.¹⁰¹

No longer having to meet in secrecy, which had long been the main impetus for using houses for church fellowship, Christianity soon began building more “stately and elaborate” structures for worship that were patterned after the Roman basilica.¹⁰² More relevant to the subject of fellowship is the fact that it is at this time in church history that

⁹⁹ Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book: Rediscover the Dynamic, Organic, Relational, Viral Community Jesus Started* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 19.

¹⁰⁰ Tim Dowley, ed., *Introduction to the History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 160.

¹⁰¹ Simson, 19–20.

¹⁰² Dowley, 44.

worship “space” was first divided into a part for the clergy and a part for the laity, greatly affecting Christians’ ability to participate in worship, as well as their sense of unity. This division was partly due to the design of the basilicas themselves. A throne was set up for the bishop, at the sides of which were benches for the presbyters. Ordinary worshippers gathered in the main section of the building on the opposite side of the communion table, which served as a permanent altar.¹⁰³ Also, because Christianity became an acceptable, even favored, religion—indeed, a religion that was forced upon Roman citizens¹⁰⁴—the number of worshippers grew, requiring larger structures. Because basilicas were designed to accommodate crowds gathered for court, or market goers, or other large assemblies, they could provide enough worship space for large numbers of worshippers.¹⁰⁵ However, while basilicas met the need for larger space, it did so at the cost of losing the intimacy of smaller house-church fellowships.

This change from house church to church house also had a devastating affect on the Lord’s Supper, a practice that expressed Christian solidarity, unity, and fellowship more than any other. As William Barclay points out, the Lord’s Supper began as a family meal or a meal of friends in a private house... Worship was therefore a thing of the house church and the small group and the home... The Lord’s Supper began in the house and moved to the church.”¹⁰⁶ The transformation of the Lord’s Supper, then, was from an actual “family” meal shared in a house to a symbolic meal dispensed by a bishop as congregants watched. Simply put, it went from a family function to a priestly one.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁴ Simson, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Dowley, 158–59.

¹⁰⁶ William Barclay, *The Lord’s Supper* (London: SCM, 1967), 50–51.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

While these changes have diminished the church's experience of *koinōnia*, Christians and movements over the centuries have fought to regain it. For example, the monastic movement, in protest of the Catholic Church's formalizing of Christianity, developed fraternities that practiced intimate communal living. These fraternities, which functioned as extended families, valued the gifts and participation of all its members. Likewise, the Franciscans and Dominicans practiced communal living based on "regular worship and genuine fellowship."¹⁰⁸

The Reformers also addressed the topic of fellowship. Although Luther failed to introduce home fellowships in the larger parish church, he too recognized the importance of gathering in homes. Inspired by the Anabaptists, he identified the assembling of Christians in homes as one of the three major kinds of worship.¹⁰⁹ Although he does not refer specifically to house churches, Calvin also addressed communal living:

All the elect of God are so joined together in Christ, that as they depend on one head, so they are, as it were, compacted into one body, being knit together like its different members; made truly one by living together under the same Spirit....¹¹⁰

Finally, renewal movements from groups such as the Quakers in England, Pietists within German Lutheranism, the Moravians, and Methodists all expressed commitments to small church communities and communal living in houses or on farms.¹¹¹ In fact, according to John Wesley, *koinōnia* is the defining mark of Christianity. He writes, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Banks, *The Church Comes Home*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 53–54.

¹¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 673.

¹¹¹ Banks, *The Church Comes Home*, 56–58.

¹¹² John Wesley, preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), quoted in Ajith Fernando, *Acts*. The NIV Application Commentary. Ed. by Terry Muck et al. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998, 126.

Renewal movements abound today as well. According to George Barna's research, almost 10 percent of Christians currently attend house churches.¹¹³ However, while the church is changing in North America, it is in non-Western countries that house fellowships are most prevalent. For example, the need for Christians to meet in secrecy in countries like China still provides the impetus for establishing house churches. Moreover, in Latin America (e.g., in Brazil), Christians meet in small groups, often in shantytowns, along the edges of major cities (an estimated 200,000 such groups). This same dynamic is at work in the Philippines and in other parts of Southeast Asia and Africa.¹¹⁴

Contemporary Christian Experience Concerning Fellowship

While the contemporary "house church" movement tends to view a return to home fellowships as the only viable means of expressing genuine *koinōnia*, the larger Christian community recognizes the value of sharing sacred space both in houses and in buildings. However, the contemporary impetus for home meetings is discipleship.

Such reasoning is not without biblical precedent. In fact, in the early church, after having successful evangelism, "follow-through care was done within the context of 'the fellowship.'" ¹¹⁵ In short, the early church recognized the need for discipleship to take place in community. Likewise, contemporary churches are beginning to grasp the fact that, although the Christian faith is predicated on a personal relationship with Christ, it is not an individualistic religion, but a communal one (Eph. 4:1–16). In other words, "Faith and the life of faith are communal before they are individual."¹¹⁶

¹¹³ George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, Ill: Tyndale, 2005), 48–49.

¹¹⁴ Banks, *The Church Comes Home*, 60–65.

¹¹⁵ Fernando, 124.

¹¹⁶ Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 39.

Finally, contemporary Christian leaders are beginning to emphasize the fact that community is indispensable to discipleship. As Craig Dykstra points out, “Spirituality deepens in community, rather than in individualistic isolation.”¹¹⁷ Simply put, Christians need fellowship with one another to grow. Although we have an individual relationship with Jesus Christ, we are also part of a fellowship of believers.

In many parts of the world today (including North America), houses are providing effective settings for cultivating intimate relationships (e.g., Mainland China, Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia). The success of house churches around the world is due, in part, to the informal and participatory nature of home fellowships.¹¹⁸ This casual setting, in turn, fosters an environment where sharing can take place. Daniel L. Migliore writes, “With its emphasis on prayer, meditation, spiritual exercises, and exchange of personal experiences, the church as intimate community cultivates a more personal and egalitarian experience of life in community than does the institutional model of the church.”¹¹⁹ Finally, homes offer a place where Christians other than the church’s “staff members” can participate and lead in the worship service. Addressing the topic of home fellowship, Fernando writes, “Informal fellowship like this takes away pretense and helps people to be themselves. This in turn opens the door to deep sharing.”¹²⁰

The Trinity as a Contemporary Model for Christian Community

The concept of the Trinity has become a contemporary way of understanding and describing fellowship. For example, when speaking of church unity, theologians and

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 83.

¹¹⁸ Simson, 11.

¹¹⁹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 194.

¹²⁰ Fernando, 134.

church leaders are beginning to evoke images of the Triune God, describing him as a “*koinōnia* of persons in love.”¹²¹ The implication is that God exists in community. The social relevance for this way of thinking about God for the Christian community is that Christians (especially Western Christians) should begin viewing their identities in communal terms as opposed to individualistic ones.

Though a Trinitarian understanding of God has many implications for understanding Christian community, the most primary is that a person created in God’s image is a social being and, therefore, needs social interaction within a community of others. Christians were not meant to live in solitude and independence, but in relationships of interdependence, mutual concern, and sharing. Resembling the Trinity, therefore, means that the church will be a place of equality, sharing, and fellowship. Simply put, because we are made in the image of a triune God, “human beings are created for community.”¹²²

Personal and Professional Reflection on the Project

On a personal level, my goal was to become a more socially-interactive Christian, as well as to gain more knowledge about my congregants. My assumption, professionally speaking, was that such intimacy would allow me to minister to CCBC’s members more effectively. Moreover, I desired to pastor a close-knit congregation, one that reflected the biblical concept of community. Based on my understanding of *koinōnia*, I believed that this could be achieved only if my congregants learned how to fulfill the “one another” commands of Scripture, which are indispensable for cultivating Christian relationships.¹²³ Subsequently, I theorized that if my congregants were to fulfill these commands—that is,

¹²¹ Migliore, 68.

¹²² Hammett, 233.

¹²³ Richard C. Meyer, *One Anothering* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 1990), 1:124.

if they were to love one another, share one another's burdens, rejoice and suffer with one another, and so forth—then intimate knowledge of one another's circumstances was necessary. This, in turn, required regular, intimate fellowship in all of life's settings, including the household. In other words, it meant that CCBC's members had to expand their sense of "sacred space" and stop dividing life between the secular and the sacred.

Despite the focus of my project on home-fellowship gatherings as an important venue for practicing *koinōnia*, the understanding of biblical fellowship that I wished to convey to my church members was more comprehensive. My desire for them was that they begin to think of *koinōnia* not only in a practical sense, but also in a more mystical way in terms of its non-spatial expression. In other words, I did not want them to confuse the physical expressions of *koinōnia*, such as the gathering and sharing of Christians in a house setting, with the spirit of *koinōnia*, which is more mystical and all-encompassing. In fact, *koinōnia* cannot be identified with any particular model. It is not a static principle, but a dynamic, functional, and contextual movement of the Spirit that transcends various locations and practices. For example, *koinōnia* cannot be defined as "gathering in homes" any more than it can be defined as "gathering in church buildings." The early church met in both places and, theoretically, could have gathered anywhere to experience *koinōnia*. Moreover, the early church shared whenever needs arose, indicating the functional and contextual nature of *koinōnia*. However, two constants can be found in the practice of *koinōnia* no matter the context—namely, the *gathering* and *sharing* amongst a local body of Christians. My hope for this project was that the members of CCBC would come to understand the necessity of these two components for practicing and, thus, experiencing biblical fellowship.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL EVALUATION

In order to evaluate the success of the project, I utilized both quantitative and qualitative diagnostic instruments. Specifically, through the use of field reports, written statements, self-reporting, and surveys (pre- and post-), I collected data regarding the congregant's understanding of, practice of, and disposition towards fellowship in general, as well as his or her knowledge of one another. These tools also helped me to ascertain the participant's disposition towards CCBC's current fellowship practices, as well as the various changes that occurred as a result of this project. Once collected, the data was then analyzed using SPSS with the aid of Dr. David Carscaddon.

A Report and Analysis of the Quantitative Data

The primary survey instrument for collecting quantitative data was a pre-project and post-project congregational survey (Appendix A), which I administered to all who participated in the project. The data obtained from both independent means *t*-tests and dependent means *t*-tests conducted on all pre- and post-surveys using SPSS showed an overall increase in positive, correct, or “favorable,” answers to survey questions for both groups (i.e., the experimental and the control group).¹²⁴ Because the survey addressed the facets, or “categories,” of fellowship necessary for enhancing biblical *koinōnia*—such as understanding how to achieve spiritual community, knowing the practices of fellowship within the NT house church, cultivating a biblical attitude and desire for spiritual unity, and practicing *koinōnia*—the increase in favorable results in these areas indicates that the

¹²⁴ In this survey, the higher number indicates the most favorable response. To accurately assess the data using SPSS, Dr. Carscaddon “reversed” those questions in which the lower number was most favorable.

koinōnia at CCBC has been enhanced as a result of this project. While the first two categories addressed the cognitive aspects of biblical fellowship (i.e., understanding and knowledge), the final two categories addressed the application of that knowledge to the participant's actual practice of fellowship. The following report shows the results of the quantitative portions of the survey (by category), as well as my interpretation of them, along with my assessment of how the practice of *koinōnia* has changed at CCBC as a result of this project.¹²⁵ The survey questions themselves were reliable, consistent, and valid, most falling within the range of moderate correlation (0.4–0.6) to high correlation (0.7–1.0), either positive or negative.

Understanding of How to Achieve Spiritual Community (Items 1–13)

This portion of the survey tested the participant's understanding of what constitutes spiritual community and, thus, what is necessary for achieving spiritual community. The questions were highly-correlated (.777, according to Cronbach's Alpha test), so I had confidence that the results were accurate. The statistical evidence indicates that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, favoring the experimental group. In short, home-fellowship exposure significantly changed the participants' understanding of how to achieve spiritual community.¹²⁶ In fact, based on this data (see table 1), the probability of being wrong that these two groups are significantly different in their post-survey understanding of how to achieve spiritual community is less than 4 out of 10,000. The following results of an independent samples *t*-test on post-survey items 1–13 shows the difference in mean scores between the groups:

¹²⁵ Subcategories and other pertinent data were analyzed using simple bar charts, histograms, or percentages to depict the changes from pre- to post-survey.

¹²⁶ The pre-survey mean (items 1–13) for the Experimental Group was 6.4000, while the mean for the Control Group was 6.000, showing no significant statistical differences between the two groups.

Table 1. SPSS output for independent samples *t*-test on post-survey items 1–13

Group Statistics									
Experimental and Control Groups		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean				
Understanding of How to Achieve Spiritual Community	Experimental Group	15	10.0000	1.30931	.33806				
	Control Group	12	6.9167	2.50303	.7256				

Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances							
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower Upper
Under-standing of How to Achieve Spiritual Community	Equal variances assumed	3.996	.057	4.130	25	.000	3.08333	.74666	1.54556 4.62111
	Equal variances not assumed			3.865	15.750	.001	3.08333	.79774	1.39002 4.77664

Based on these results, I conclude that the experience of gathering in homes has enlightened the participants as to the comprehensive nature of biblical fellowship, namely that it involves more than just meeting twice a week on “neutral” territory, sacred and holy as that territory might be. Simply put, the participants learned that biblical fellowship is more holistic. It involves knowing the intimate dimensions of one another’s lives. It involves knowing how and where their brothers and sisters in Christ live on a regular basis.

The Value of Homes versus the Value of Church Buildings (Items 14–15)

This portion of the survey served as a subcategory under the larger category of “Understanding How to Achieve Spiritual Community.” Although it consisted of only

two questions, it provided me with valuable data, revealing how my congregants understood the value of gathering in homes for the purpose of enhancing fellowship. The two questions were moderately reliable, scoring a .581 on Cronbach's Alpha test.

Pre-survey results revealed that most of my church members viewed the church building as the most valuable space for gathering in fellowship. When asked how important it was to gather regularly at the church building, 93 percent answered either "important" or "extremely important." Only 43 percent of the participants answered that gathering regularly in homes was either "important" or "somewhat important." Post-survey results, however, reveal closer scores with 60 percent of participants viewing home gatherings as being important for church fellowship. The percentage of those who view gathering in church buildings as being important for fellowship dropped slightly to 87 percent (see fig. 1 and fig. 2).

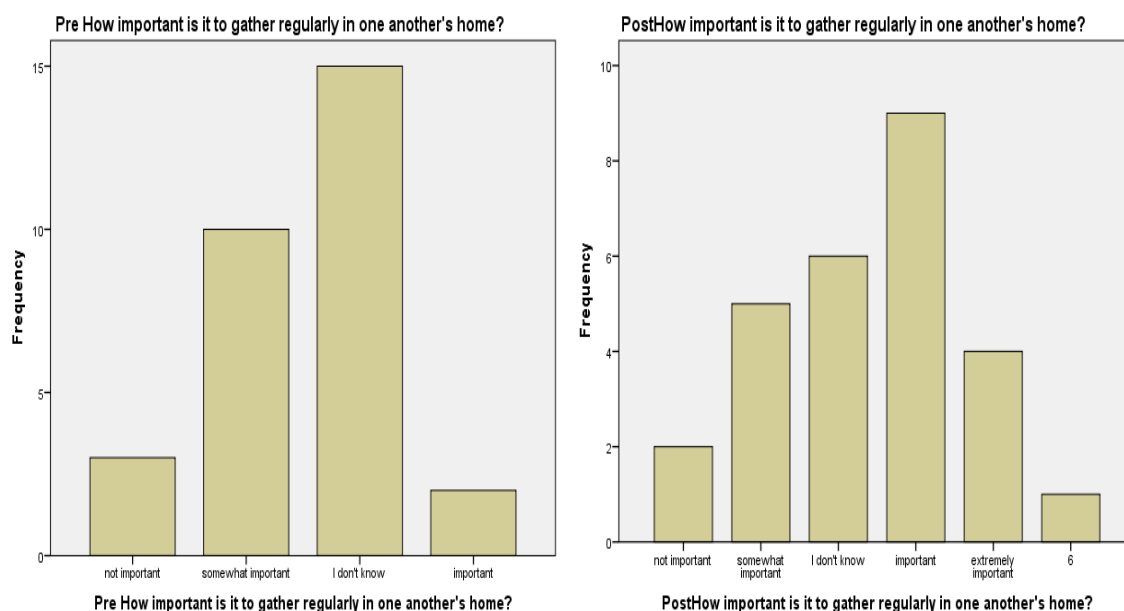


Figure 1. Bar charts comparing the pre- and post-importance of gathering in homes

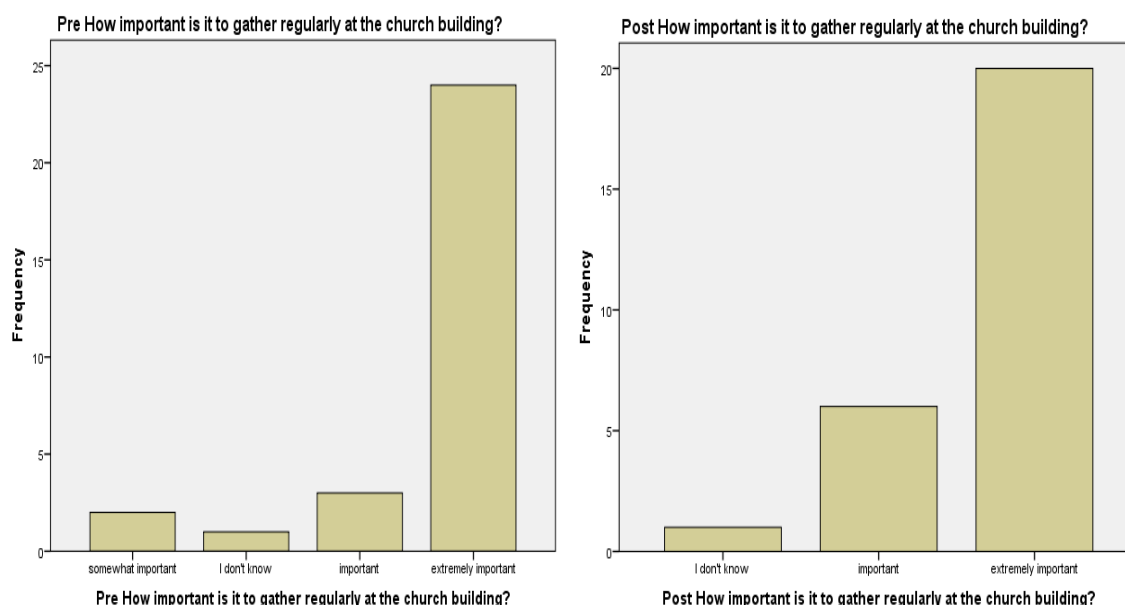


Figure 2. Bar charts comparing the pre-and post-importance of gathering at church

While the results indicate that the members of CCBC have changed significantly (by 20%) on how they value home gatherings, it also indicates that the majority of my congregants still view the church building as the most important location for gathering. My interpretation is that the members of CCBC still need a physical space apart from homes in which to fellowship. The church sanctuary has, in effect, become holy ground, too holy to share the same status as a domestic residence. Also, I assume that some of my members still consider it to be the Lord's dwelling place. Although I had hoped that my congregants would come to view *all* space as being equally sacred, I still consider the upswing in numbers regarding the value of home gatherings to be an indicator of the project's success.

Knowledge of *Koinōnia* in the New Testament House Church (Items 22–30)

This portion of the survey tested the participant's scriptural knowledge of NT *koinōnia*. Analysis was conducted with both sample groups combined (i.e., Dependent *t*-

test) and with sample groups separated (i.e., Independent *t*-test). While both tests showed an increase in the means, the independent *t*-test showed a clear distinction between the two groups concerning their knowledge of NT *koinōnia* from pre-survey to post-survey.

Based on the dependent *t*-test the mean went from 14.3333 to 16.5926. The higher number indicates that there was a significant increase in the number of correct answers for both groups, from pre- to post-survey, with an entire sample *t*-test of -4.199, which is much greater than would be expected by chance (see table 2).

Table 2. Dependent *t*-test results for pre-survey and post-survey scores on items 22–30

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PRE-SURVEY	14.3333	27	2.78733	.53642
	POST-SURVEY	16.5926	27	1.80297	.34698

Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	SIG.
Pair 1 PRE-SURVEY& POST-SURVEY	27	.319	.105

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 PRETOTAL-POST	-2.26	2.79550	.53799	-3.37	-1.153	-4.199	26	.000

The following bar chart more clearly depicts the combined total change that occurred in the mean from pre-survey to post-survey (see fig. 3). It indicates that the

koinōnia was enhanced—according to the quantitative data obtained from the surveys—for both groups when the pre- and post-surveys were combined to make one sample.

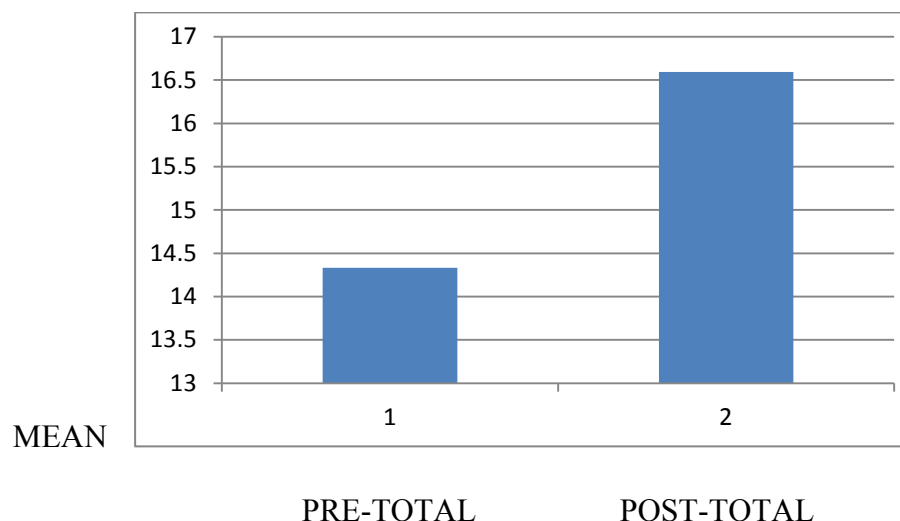


Figure 3. Total pre-survey mean versus total post-survey mean for items 22–30

As the bar chart indicates, the *koinōnia* at CCBC can be enhanced (to some extent) simply by implementing certain practices and programs (e.g., gathering more often in homes *and* in the church sanctuary, teaching extensively on the subject of fellowship, covenanting with other members, and placing phone calls to other members) regardless of the setting or location.

However, when considering which group—that is, the experimental group or the control group—contributed more to the upswing in numbers, it becomes clear that the experimental group accounts for most of the increase to the mean. Simply put, there were significant statistical differences between those who attended the home gatherings (i.e., the experimental group) and those who did not (i.e., the control group). In fact, 41 percent of the changes in answers from pre- to post-survey are accounted for by which group the participants were in, with the experimental group receiving more of the increase. This,

coupled with the fact that the pre-surveys showed no significant statistical differences between the two groups, allowed me to be reasonably sure that the survey results were both accurate and significant as they related to the participants' knowledge of NT *koinōnia*.¹²⁷ For Camp Creek Baptist Church, therefore, the data signifies with reasonable certainty that home-fellowship gatherings have enhanced the *koinōnia* by increasing the participants' knowledge of NT *koinōnia* in the first-century house church. The following descriptive statistics reveal this conclusion, highlighting the differences in mean scores for the two groups from pre-survey to post-survey (see table 3):

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for pre- and post-surveys, items 22–30

Descriptive Statistics				
	Research Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre-survey	Experimental Group	14.5333	3.06749	15
	Control	14.0833	2.50303	12
	Total	14.3333	2.78733	27
Post-survey	Experimental Group	*17.6000	.82808	15
	Control	*15.3333	1.92275	12
	Total	16.5926	1.80297	27

The following line charts depict more clearly that the experimental group is most responsible for the rise in the total mean from pre-survey to post-survey (see fig. 4). Because the only major variable (although there were many *equal* variables for both groups at the start of the project) that was different from one group to the next was the location, or “setting,” of the fellowship gatherings, the data provides solid evidence that gathering in homes significantly enhanced the *koinōnia* at CCBC.

¹²⁷ The equality of variances is no longer assumed on the post-survey (sig. 0.021), the variable being the home meetings. On the other hand, the pre-survey significance level was 0.309, well-above 0.05, indicating that the equality of variances was assumed. Note the nearly identical mean for both groups on the pre-survey. The post-survey, however, reveals a significant difference in mean scores for both groups.

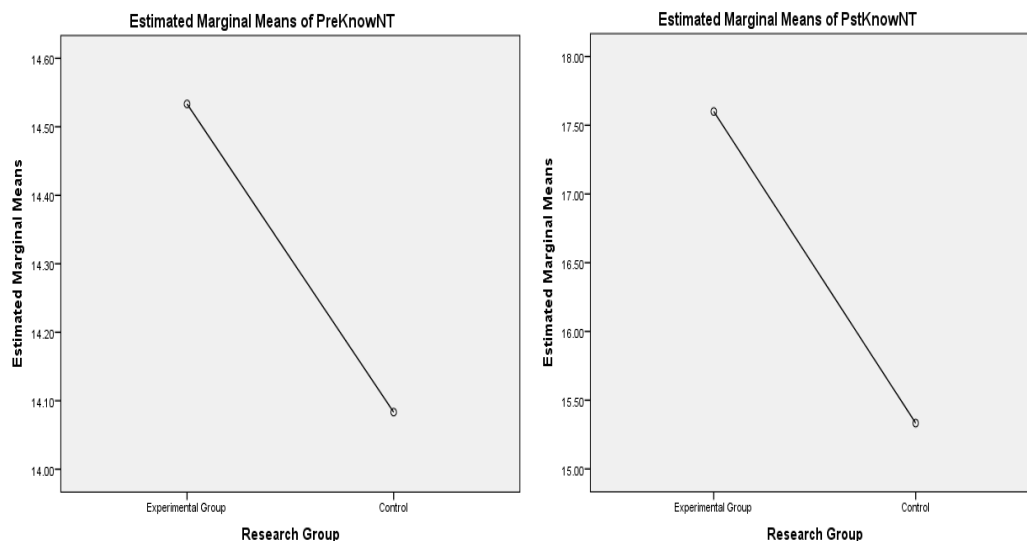


Figure 4. Total mean for both groups pre-survey versus post-survey, items 22–30

Finally, biblical knowledge increased concerning the definition of *koinōnia*. The percentage of those who knew the meaning of the Greek term went from approximately 10 percent on the pre-survey to 100 percent on the post-survey. The following bar chart depicts the radical shift on this vital piece of knowledge (see fig. 5).

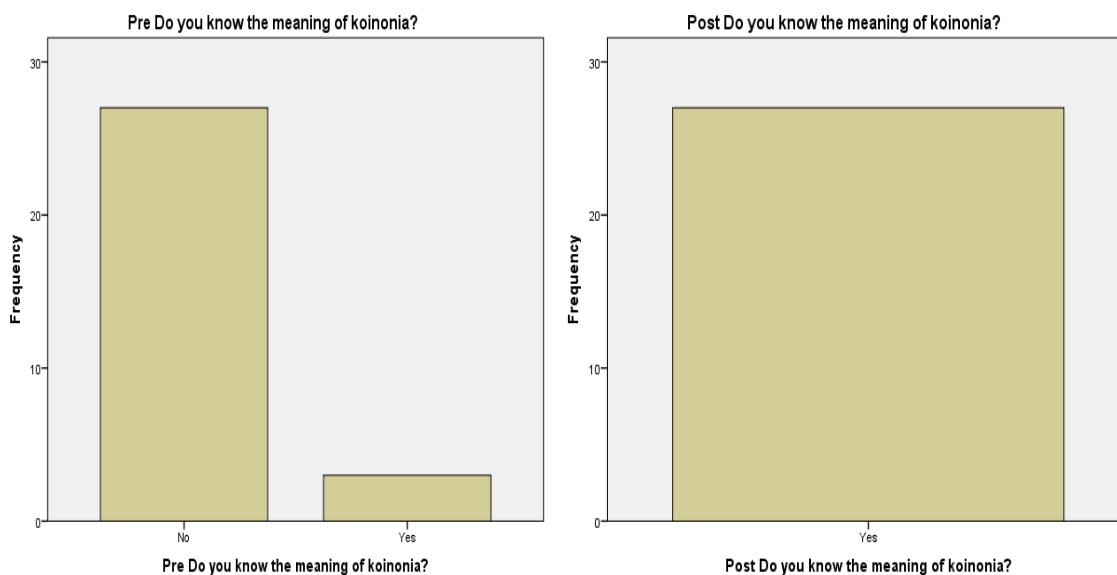


Figure 5. Pre- and post-survey percentage of those who know the meaning of *koinōnia*

Knowledge of One Another (Items 31–39)

In addition to acquiring biblical knowledge, a primary goal for this project was that my congregants would learn more personal information about one another. My theory was that knowing one another better would lead to a greater love and appreciation for one another and, thus, to a greater fellowship. Although the following percentages do not measure whether or not the fellowship at CCBC has been enhanced through knowing one another better, they do reveal that my members possess a greater knowledge of each other as a result of this project (see table 4). These percentages represent the number of participants who answered affirmatively when asked if they knew certain facts about their covenant partners (signified by “agree” or “disagree”).

Table 4. Percentage of participants who answered favorably on items 16–21

Survey Question	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Change
31. I know the color of my covenant partner’s eyes.	13.3%	93.0%	+79.7%
32. I know how my covenant partner feels about his or her job.	13.3%	93.0%	+79.7%
33. I know my covenant partner’s family situation—that is, his or her marital status, children, siblings, and parents.	33.3%	89.0%	+55.7%
34. I know my covenant partner’s educational history.	20.0%	85.0%	+65.0%
35. I know the struggles and burdens that my covenant partner currently faces.	6.6%	89.0%	+82.4%
36. I know what my covenant partner values most in life in addition to his or her faith in Christ.	16.6%	93.0%	+76.4%
37. I know what my covenant partner fears most in life.	0.0%	85.0%	+85.0%
38. I know my covenant partner’s major accomplishments and successes in life.	3.3%	89.0%	+85.7%
39. I know my covenant partner’s biggest regrets, failures, and disappointments in life.	0.0%	81.0%	+81.0%

As the data suggests, there was a vast deficit of knowledge amongst the members of CCBC before the project, concerning one another. In fact, some of the most basic biographical information about one another, such as the member's marital status and/or level of education, was unknown. The results of the pre-survey, therefore, validated my assumption that gathering only twice a week on church property fosters an attitude of anonymity within the congregation.

The increase in personal knowledge of one another was equally substantial, attesting to the benefit of being more intentional about fellowship and community. I am convinced that, without the impetus of this project, my church members would still lack this basic knowledge of one another. The assigning of covenant partners, then, along with an increase in the amount of phone calls placed between congregants, proved to be one of the most effective tools for enhancing the fellowship at CCBC (a fact to be discussed more in subsequent sections, particularly in the section dealing with qualitative data).

The Desire for Spiritual Unity (Items 40–50)

This portion of the survey tested the participant's desire and inclination to fellowship. The questions were moderately reliable, scoring a .510 on Cronbach's Alpha test. This aspect of the project was important because without the desire for spiritual unity, congregants are less-likely to concern themselves with enhancing the quality of fellowship at CCBC. Moreover, they are less-likely to gather for fellowship on a regular basis. Fortunately, the test results indicate that my church members' desire for fellowship—though strong on the pre-survey also—actually increased as a result of the project. In fact, the mean went from 36.608 to 40.892, indicating that the project was successful in this regard (see table 5).

Table 5. Total pre-survey and post-survey mean for items 40–50

Dependent Variable	Grand Mean			
	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pre Spiritual Unity	36.608	1.239	34.058	39.159
Post Spiritual Unity	40.892	.769	39.307	42.476

The following bar chart more clearly depicts the total scores for both groups combined (see fig. 6), which indicate that the participants' desire for fellowship increased no matter which group they were in. Based on this data, therefore, I conclude that focused and prolonged teaching on the subject of fellowship, along with the practice of gathering regularly, increased the participants' desire for fellowship, regardless of whether the gathering took place in houses or on church property.

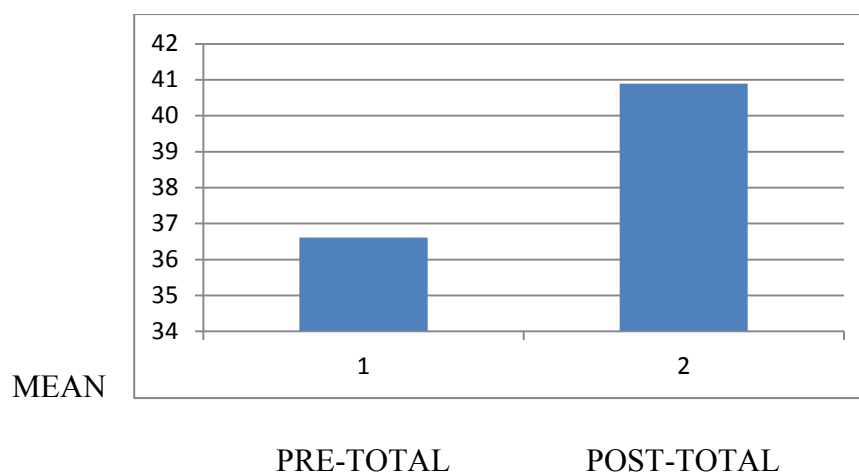


Figure 6. Total pre-survey mean versus total post-survey mean for items 40–50

Although the grand mean indicates an increase in the desire for spiritual unity in both groups, the following descriptive statistics (see table 6) shows that members in the experimental group received more of the increase, thereby accounting for more of the increase to the total mean for this portion of the survey. On the pre-survey, when equal

variances were assumed, the mean was much closer between the groups; however, on the post-survey, when equal variances were not assumed, the mean is much higher for the experimental group, thereby showing the influence that home-fellowship gatherings had on the participants' desire for spiritual unity and fellowship. Moreover, when multiple variables for both groups were compared across these pre-survey and post-survey items, the experimental and control group yielded highly-different F ratios. The results of this MANOVA, indicate that there was a significant change from pre- to post-survey for the experimental group, whereby the participants' perception of spiritual unity was increased, along with their desire, or "need," for spiritual unity. However, the pre-survey means were not significantly different between the two groups.¹²⁸

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for pre-survey and post-survey items 40–50

Descriptive Statistics				
	Research Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre Spiritual Unity	Experimental Group	37.1333	8.10526	15
	Control	36.0833	3.05877	12
	Total	36.6667	6.29408	27
Post Spiritual Unity	Experimental Group	*43.8667	4.54920	15
	Control	*37.9167	3.08835	12
	Total	41.2222	4.92508	27

The following line charts more clearly depict the difference in mean scores from pre-survey to post-survey for the experimental group and the control group (see fig. 7). The evidence indicates that the difference is best accounted for by the fact that members of the experimental group spent time in one another's homes, thus, achieving a higher-

¹²⁸ The equality of variances is no longer assumed on the post-survey (sig. 0.002), the variable being the home meetings. On the other hand, the pre-survey significance level was 0.385, well-above 0.05, indicating that the equality of variances was assumed. Note the similar mean for both groups on the pre-survey. The post-survey, however, reveals a significant difference in mean scores for both groups.

level of spiritual unity than did members of the control group who did not attend the home-fellowship gatherings.

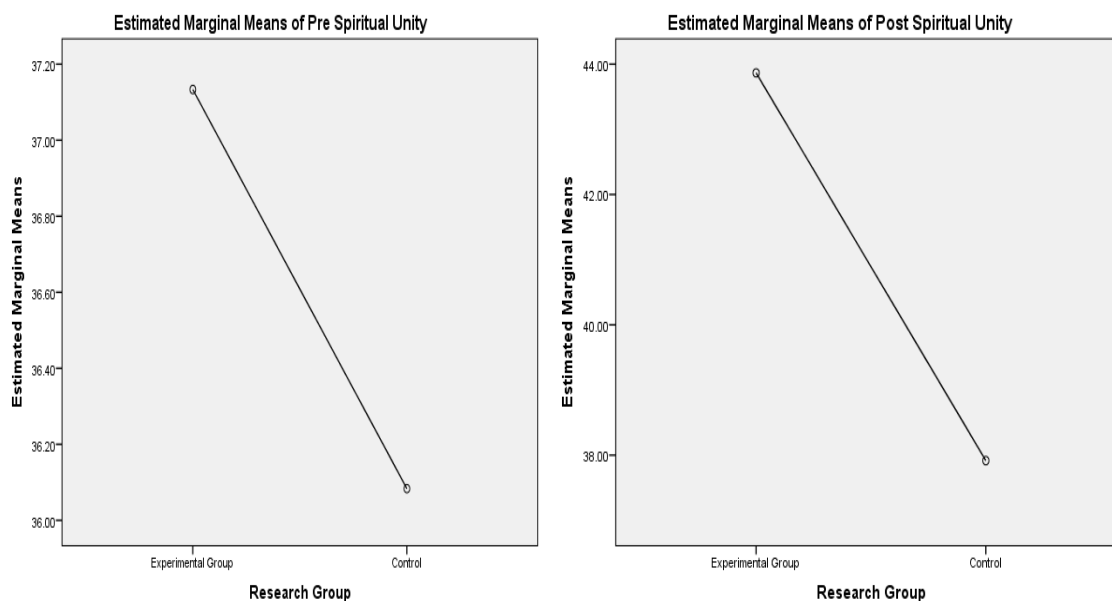


Figure 7. Total mean for both groups pre-survey versus post-survey, items 40–50

Finally, the shift in the number of church members who state that the church should gather more than twice a week indicates that the overall desire for spiritual unity, as well as the inclination to fellowship, has increased. On the pre-survey, the mode was 2; however, on the post-survey, the majority of participants stated that the church should gather at least 3 times a week. Moreover, 19 percent of those who took the post-survey stated that the church should meet as many as 4 or 5 times a week. These figures indicate that the members of CCBC have come to realize that Christian community is a lifestyle. In other words, they have begun to understand that *koinōnia* is not simply a *part* of their lives to be compartmentalized. It (*koinōnia*) is their life. The bar charts below depict the radical shift that has occurred (see fig. 8):

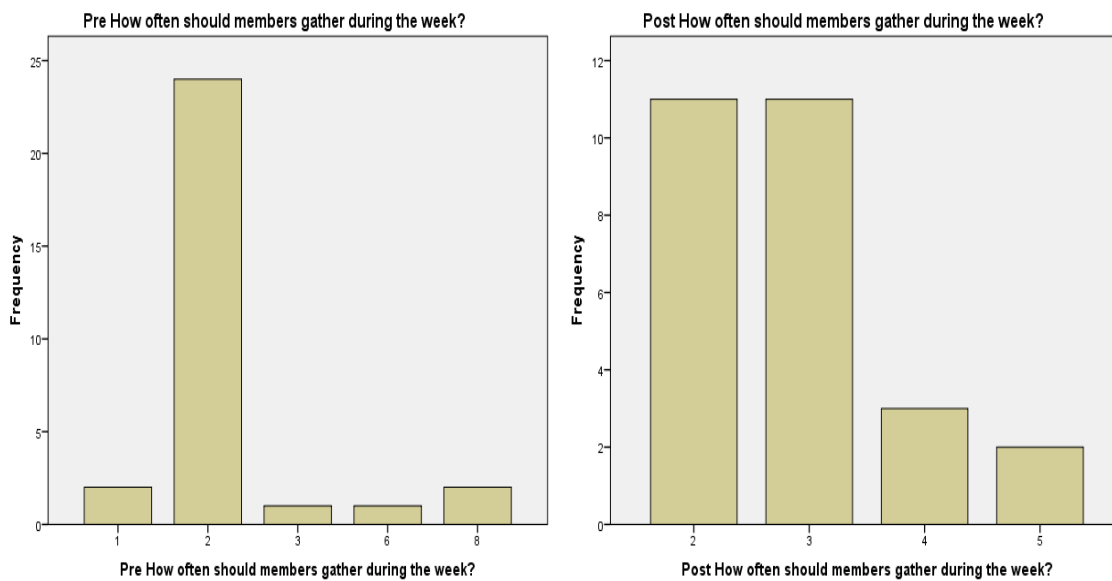


Figure 8. Pre- to post-survey results for how often church members should gather

The Practice of Fellowship

Having established the fact that home-fellowship gatherings had inspired within the participants a stronger desire for spiritual unity and fellowship, my next concern was to determine whether or not their desire had translated into practice. The questions in this section were highly-correlated and reliable, with a score of .605 on Cronbach's Alpha test. The percentages represent the number of participants who answered either "often" or "daily" when asked how frequently they engaged in specific activities related to fellowship. The following results indicate that there has been a shift in the amount of time that the members of CCBC spend in fellowship. Moreover, fellowship has begun to take place more regularly in homes, which indicates that home-fellowship exposure has inspired my congregants to draw closer to one another by sharing time, resources, and burdens. More importantly, the evidence suggests that my congregants grasp the importance of applying what they have learned (see table 7).

Table 7. Percentage of participants who answered “often” or “daily” on items 16–21

Survey Question	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Change
16. How often does your church family gather in your home?	43.3%	66.6%	+23.3%
17. How often do you talk with fellow church members about your problems or sins?	76.6%	81.4%	+4.8%
18. How often do you share meals with fellow church members in your home?	66.6%	74.0%	+7.4%
19. How often do you share with your church family the ways God is working in your life?	48.3%	88.8%	+40.5%
20. How often do you gather for fellowship at Camp Creek Baptist Church?	86.6%	92.5%	+5.9%
21. How often do you spend time with your church family outside of regular worship services?	76.6%	77.7%	+1.1%

The increase in the amount of time spent in home fellowship is not altogether unexpected since the project itself generated more home meetings. Also, some of my congregants are elderly widows who have congregated daily throughout the years prior to this project. However, the increase in the amount of time spent with members outside of regular worship services (albeit only 1.1%), the increase in the sharing of problems or sins (4.8%), and the increase in the sharing of ways that God is “working” in one’s life (40.5%) show that the participants took the initiative—presumably, inspired by the home meetings—to share with one another beyond the scope of the project. The data also indicates that members have begun to share more personal information with one another. Because sharing is central to the practice of *koinōnia*, I conclude that the knowledge and understanding gained from this project has instilled within my congregants a stronger desire for unity, which has since translated into action.

A Final Quantitative Indicator that *Koinōnia* has been Enhanced

In addition to survey items 1–50, the participants were asked a question at the beginning of both surveys, one that gets to the crux of whether or not the fellowship has been enhanced at CCBC. When asked to rate the quality of fellowship at CCBC on a scale of 1 to 10, two-thirds of the participants gave moderate to low ratings on the pre-survey; however, ten percent of the members gave CCBC a perfect rating of 10. Answers on the post-survey, on the other hand, revealed a larger concentration of high ratings, with about sixty-three percent of the members rating the quality of fellowship an 8 or 9 (see fig. 9):

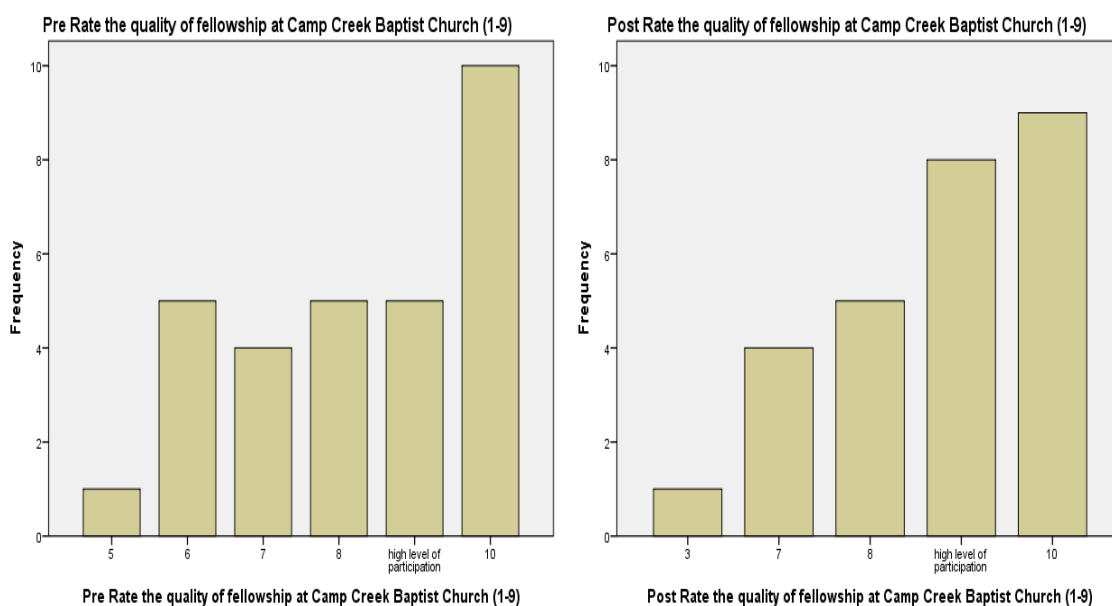


Figure 9. Pre- and post-survey rating of the quality of fellowship at CCBC

When analyzing the pre-surveys, I became concerned that some members were being overly idealistic about the pending project. Because “10” was such an unrealistic rating, I was concerned that these members were attempting to ensure the success of the project before it even began. I was also confused by the members who gave moderately

or extremely low ratings on the pre-survey because the members of CCBC get along relatively well and gather for functions on a regular basis. I assumed, then, that these members, acknowledging the need for improvement, were being overly cautious.

Answers on the post-surveys, however, seemed to be more realistic. Although there were no perfect ratings, there was a higher concentration of high ratings, especially among those congregants who had a high-level of participation in the project. Answers on the post-surveys not only seemed to be more plausible, but indicative of genuine spiritual growth. Simply put, the quality of fellowship at CCBC has improved. Based on these answers, therefore, along with the statistical data gleaned from prior sections, I conclude that the *koinōnia* at CCBC has been significantly enhanced because of this project.

A Report and Analysis of the Qualitative Data

In addition to quantitative measures, I evaluated the success or failure of my project by collecting and assessing qualitative data. Qualitative measures included the asking of open-ended questions, the encouraging of self-reporting (verbal and written), and the writing of field reports. While analyzing the data, I looked for reoccurring themes, points of continuity or discontinuity, and points of agreement or disagreement among the participants. The following section provides a report and analysis of the data.

Field Reports and Self-Reporting

The primary means for collecting qualitative data were field reports and self-reporting, whereby I observed and listened to my congregants before, during, and after the project. In doing so, I overheard several negative anecdotal comments. For example, one member expressed relief that the home meetings were over, referring to them as

“mere social gatherings,” while another complained that home meetings did not “feel like church.” However, I also received some positive feedback regarding the home-fellowship gatherings. One positive statement came from a member who shared with me that she finally understood what it meant when Christians say “we (i.e., church members) are the church, not the building.” She went on to express her joy, exclaiming, “The members of Camp Creek can have church anywhere!” Her words assured me that at least some of my congregants grasped the biblical notion of what constitutes a church.

Another positive comment came from a church member who said that she particularly enjoyed spending time with her brothers and sisters in a “home church” setting. Prior to this project, however, she had already been introduced to house churches. While living in Connecticut during the eighties, she had participated in home fellowships. The difference, according to her, was the warmth and intimacy that we expressed towards one another. Coming from a Lutheran background, she was also familiar with partaking of the Lord’s Supper weekly. The difference she professed was that, whereas the “true meaning was lost” in her Lutheran church, our weekly practice of observing the Lord’s Supper in a home setting (preceded by a lesson on the subject) maintained its relevance and vibrancy. Along with her positive statements about the home gatherings, she expressed enthusiasm for continuing to meet in homes.

Another positive statement—representative of the majority of comments that I received—came from an elderly man who, at first, felt opposed to home meetings. After experiencing the intimacy of home fellowship, this man—who is sensitive and cares deeply for others—told me that he now believed home meetings to be “a good thing.” His change in attitude came, in part, from his experience with his covenant partner, who had

recently lost a child to cancer. Having lost a wife to cancer, he was able to empathize with her. They formed a bond that, according to him, will continue into the future.

While the majority of comments were good, I was temporarily disconcerted to hear a statement made by a prominent church leader. On the first Wednesday night back in the church building, this particular member gave a loud sigh of relief and said, “It sure is good to be back in the house of the Lord!” At first I thought that all my teaching had been lost on her because of her reference to the church building as God’s “house.” However, realizing that the phrase “house of the Lord” has become a synonym for “church building,” I decided not to read too much theology into her statement.

There were also significant differences in the statements made by those who came to the home meetings and those who did not. For example, those who did not come to the home meetings consistently minimized that part of the project. Several of them insisted that they were experiencing a high-level of fellowship due to other aspects of the project, such as the assigning of covenant partners and the placing of phone calls to various church members from a list that I had made. Although I was glad to hear that progress was being made in these participants’ understanding of, experience of, and desire for fellowship (and believed that their experiences were genuine), I felt as if they were relaying the message that CCBC can enhance its fellowship *without* home gatherings (which, to an extent, is true). My concern was that their enthusiastic reaction to the other portions of the project was, in part, a response to the enthusiasm generated by those who had attended the home meetings. During the project’s implementation phase, Sunday mornings constituted a time for the experimental group to reflect on the week’s previous home meeting. My reservation was that those who had not attended the home meetings

felt the need to reply to their experiences in a positive way so as not to feel “left out.”

This, however, is a subjective analysis. Otherwise, taking the comments at face value led me to conclude that fellowship can be enhanced in various ways, but especially through home-fellowship gatherings.

As indicated above, apart from a few “naysayers,” the participants who did come to the home meetings (i.e., the experimental group), generally speaking, maximized their experiences in one another’s homes, thereby emphasizing the importance of gathering in domestic residences. However, as with most members in the control group, the majority of the members in the experimental group spoke favorably concerning other aspects of the project (esp., the assigning of covenant partners), which, for me, added credibility to their responses concerning the home meetings. Because these members also reported favorably on the other aspects of the project—yet maximized their experiences in one another’s homes—my interpretation of the data is that the home meetings were especially effective in enhancing the *koinōnia* at CCBC.

Post-Survey Qualitative Questions

While my interpretation of the participants’ comments was subjective in nature, the following post-survey questions provided me with more objective and, thus, more conclusive answers as to how my ministry project affected—positively or negatively—the members of CCBC. An analysis of the data reveals that the majority of CCBC’s members have changed significantly in positive ways as a result of this project. In fact, most of the participants, many of whom had never even heard of house churches or home fellowships, are now enthusiastic about incorporating more home meetings into CCBC’s ecclesiology (see table 8). The following data underscores this conclusion:

Table 8. Congregant's opinion of home fellowships as they relate to church unity

<p>1. Has your sense of unity with your church family been enhanced through home fellowships? If so how?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 14 (Yes) / 1 (No) Control Group: 0 (Yes) / 12 (No)</p>	<p>2. Do you desire to continue regular home-fellowship gatherings in the future? If not, why?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 14 (Yes) / 1 (No) Control Group: 4 (Yes) / 8 (No)</p>
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For example, when asked if their sense of unity had been enhanced through home-fellowship gatherings, 14 out of 15 church members who attended the home meetings answered “yes.” Only one answered “no.” Of the 14 participants, who answered “yes,” 10 said the reason why their sense of unity was enhanced was because they felt “closer” to their church family. Of the remaining four participants, one said that her unity was enhanced because she felt “welcomed.” The other three replied that the fellowship was so “good,” they felt a greater “bond” with their brothers and sisters. The one participant who answered “no” said that the home meetings “felt too much like social gatherings.”

Likewise, regarding the question of whether or not they desired to continue meeting regularly in homes, the participants who answered “yes” to question one (of those who attended the home meetings) answered “yes” to question two, as well (14 out of 15). Reasons cited for their desire to continue regular home-fellowship gatherings included the need to have home Bible studies (cited by four members), the “joyful experience” fostered in a home environment (cited by one member), and the importance of home meetings for personal and/or church growth (cited by five members). The remaining four members gave the same explanation for their desire to continue home meetings that they did for claiming an enhanced sense of unity as a result of the home

meetings, which is that they desired to be “closer to their church family.” One participant who attended the home meetings answered “no” on question two. This participant cited the same explanation for her answer on question two that she provided for her answer on question one, which is that home meetings felt “too much like social gatherings.”

Results show minor variations between the qualitative and quantitative data as it relates to how the participants’ sense of church unity was affected by home meetings, as well as to how the participants’ desire to continue home meetings was altered. Although answers on both the quantitative and qualitative sections of the survey revealed positive changes in the participants, the qualitative answers were slightly less-favorable regarding home fellowships in general. Perhaps, the variances can be explained by the differences in format (i.e., qualitative vs. quantitative). Allowing the participants to answer items in their own words provided them with more freedom to explain the various nuances in their responses. In short, questions on the quantitative sections of the post-survey were more rigid and, thus, less-suited for characterizing the participants’ precise views about certain fellowship practices. These minor variances notwithstanding, my conclusion is that the more complete and nuanced answers provided on the qualitative section of the post-survey further supports the fact that home-fellowship gatherings had a positive affect on the participants. In this regard, therefore, the project was successful.

Understandably, 12 out of 15 of those members who *did not* participate in the home meetings answered “no” to question one, citing the obvious reason: They “did not attend.” (Three members of the control group did not return the survey.). Interestingly, four of them answered “yes” to whether or not they desired to continue home meetings; however, none gave specific reasons as to why, only general ones. Moreover, their

answers reflected my teaching on the subject. For example, one member said that she would like to see home meetings continue because “that’s the way they (i.e., Christians) did it in the Bible.” Other members used phrases borrowed from the post-survey: One member said that gathering in homes will “improve our fellowship.” Another participant said that she felt the need “to gather with her church family more than just twice a week.” The remaining member said that she “feels like a part of the family when she is invited to another church member’s home.” Their responses indicate a desire to gather more regularly in one another’s home, an inclination that was inspired by this project.

The remaining eight members, who answered “no” to question two (and who did not attend the home meetings), gave reasons such as too much “traveling distance” to other member’s homes (2 members cited this reason) and busy work schedules (3 cited this reason). The remaining three members provided no reason why they answered “no.”

Based on the positive manner in which the participants of both groups answered these questions, I conclude that the home meetings affected the quality of fellowship at CCBC in a positive way, so much so, that the majority of participants desire to continue meeting in one another’s homes. The following data supports this conclusion, revealing the significant changes among those who attended the home meetings (see table 9).

Table 9. Congregant’s attitude towards changes in fellowship

<p>3. Are you satisfied with the church’s current practice of gathering in the church sanctuary twice a week and in the fellowship hall on special occasions? If so why?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 5 (Yes) / 10 (No) Control Group: 12 (Yes) / 0 (No)</p>	<p>4. What, if anything, has changed for you on the subject of fellowship?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 11 (Change) / 4 (No reply) Control Group: 4 (Change) / 6 (No change) / 2 (No reply)</p>
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This set of questions provided insight as to whether or not the participants thought that CCBC's current expression of fellowship was sufficient, or whether or not they felt as though changes should be made in the church's ecclesiology regarding the practice of fellowship. The questions also provided an opportunity for members to share openly whether or not the project affected, or "changed," them in any meaningful way regarding their appreciation and desire for biblical fellowship. The following responses reflect positive developments in the participants' lives regarding *koinōnia*:

When the participants were asked if they were satisfied with CCBC's current practice of *koinōnia*, only five (out of the 15 members who attended the home meetings) answered "yes." In short, they were satisfied with CCBC's current expression of fellowship. While this data varies slightly with prior results, it can be explained by my improper wording of the question.¹²⁹ I should have included the qualifying phrase "as opposed to gathering also in homes." However, three members in this group qualified their answers in ways that indicated positive changes in their attitudes towards *koinōnia*. For example, comments were made affirming that CCBC's members can "do better at fellowship" or that the fellowship "can improve" or that home fellowships are good "once in a while." Such comments reveal an enhanced understanding of community and biblical *koinōnia*.

However, two out of the five participants, who attended the home meetings and answered "yes" to question three, qualified their answer in ways that expressed older, preconditioned attitudes towards fellowship. For example, one of them stated that she "loved going to 'God's house' to worship" and that the church members "have sweet gatherings in the fellowship building on special occasions." The second participant

¹²⁹ Data gleaned from the quantitative sections of the survey indicated that a larger percentage of participants were unsatisfied CCBC's current expression of fellowship.

spoke about the importance of spiritual growth “through a personal relationship with God and Bible study.” While these answers are not inherently negative, they indicated a lack of understanding of the true nature of *koinōnia*, as well as the purpose behind the project.

Among the 10 participants who attended the home meetings, eight answered “no.” In short, they contended that they were not satisfied with CCBC’s current practice of fellowship. The reason cited by seven of them involved the importance of home meetings for fostering *koinōnia*. One of these members expounded on her answer, stating that she would like to see the church meet at “parks, lakes, and restaurants, in addition to houses.” Another member stated that she would like to see more “offsite” activities. Three members of this group (i.e., those who attended the home meetings and answered “no” to question three) said that they would like to participate in more home Bible studies. Another stated that “home fellowships will make us all closer.” Finally, two participants in this group complained that “twice a week was not enough time” to spend with their church family. Out of the 15 members who attended the home meetings, two simply answered “no” to this question without providing any further explanation.

The data suggests that, of those who attended the home meetings, 67 percent are not fully satisfied with either the frequency, or the location of CCBC’s fellowship practices. Such dissatisfaction implies that these members would support regular home-fellowship gatherings or at least other elements of the ministry project (e.g., the practice of covenanting with others or placing more phone calls throughout the week).

Church members who did not attend the home-fellowship gatherings all answered “yes” to the question of whether or not they were satisfied with CCBC’s current fellowship practices (12 out of 12). While this may be indicative of these participants’ absence

at the home-fellowship gatherings, four of them provided reasons why they were satisfied with CCBC's fellowship. Three of those reasons were general in nature. For example, one participant stated that she enjoyed the "extra fellowship," obviously in reference to gathering in the fellowship hall on special occasions. Another member stated that she "loved spending time with her church family." A final member of this group said that she "enjoys being close to other members." While these reasons are valid and encouraging—because these members obviously grasp the importance cultivating intimate relationships with other church members—they failed to provide me with any indication of whether or not these members desired change. However, one of these four members explained that she simply found the church's sanctuary and fellowship hall more accessible due to her health problems. I found this answer helpful; in fact, it was enlightening. It made me realize that I had not considered the issue of accessibility when planning this project.

This lack of data—aside from the helpful information regarding accessibility—led me to conclude that I should have worded question three differently. These participants had obviously answered this question without considering any alternative expressions of fellowship. In short, because I failed to clarify the question, it was easily misconstrued. Thankfully other questions provided me with clearer indicators on this subject.

The fourth question provided the participants with an opportunity to tell me if they had experienced any changes on the subject of fellowship (e.g., their understanding of fellowship or their inclination to fellowship) as a result of this project. Among the participants who attended the home meetings, 11 out of 15 answered this question in a positive and complete manner, providing me with much encouragement regarding the project's effectiveness. For example, one participant testified that the ministry project had

“brought fellowship to a more personal level.” Another member said that she “felt closer to her church family.” Four other participants responded likewise. Yet another participant stated that she “had come to cherish her church family” and that it “may not have been possible without these meetings.” Additionally, one of the members who came to the home meetings and answered question four in a positive manner stated that she “knows the true meaning of fellowshiping with the church family.” Finally, among the 11 participants who attended the home meetings and responded positively to question four, three simply stated that the fellowship was “better.” The remaining four participants left the question blank.

Among the 12 participants who did not attend the home meetings, four answered “yes” to the question of whether or not anything had changed for them regarding fellowship. However, only two members of this group qualified their answers. For example, one stated that she “felt happier.” The other stated somewhat ambiguously that “fellowship is a wonderful gift from God.” Six of the remaining eight participants in this group answered “no” without providing any explanation. Two others left the question blank.

Table 10. Congregant’s opinion of the job done by the project’s facilitator

<p>5. Did the leader demonstrate satisfactory competence and knowledge on the subject of fellowship? If not how can he improve?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 15 (Yes) / 0 (No) Control Group: 11 (Yes) / 1 (No reply)</p>	<p>9. Did the leader exhibit alertness, capability, and emotional readiness when talking to others about fellowship?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 15 (Yes) / 0 (No) Control Group: 11 (Yes) / 1 (No reply)</p>
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The next set of questions was an attempt to determine my level of proficiency as a teacher, preacher, leader, and overall project facilitator (see table 10). Specifically,

questions five and six revealed my level of competency and capability in teaching and leading the congregation to enhance its fellowship.

Among those who attended the home-fellowship gatherings, 15 out of 15 answered “yes” to questions five and six. Some of those participants added qualifying statements in support of their answers. For example, regarding question five, one member thanked me for my “efforts in teaching on the subject of fellowship,” saying that I was “very smart.” Concerning question six, this same participant said, “If we (i.e., the participants) had any questions, he stopped and explained everything as needed.” Another participant qualified her answer as to whether or not I was competent in my knowledge of the subject matter, writing “very much so.” She then elaborated on question six, stating, “The leader did communicate well, and he spoke where everyone could understand him.” While these statements are general in nature, they indicated that my congregants received clear instruction regarding biblical fellowship.

Among those who did not attend the home meetings, 11 out of 12 answered “yes” to both questions. One participant left both questions blank. One participant gave me the benefit of the doubt, writing “I’m sure that he was.” While none of these participants elaborated on their answers, the fact that 11 out of 12 participants answered “yes” affirms that both my personal study on the subject of fellowship and the subsequent relaying of that information to my congregants were proficient. Although I delivered the information to them in sermon form, they retained the information regarding fellowship.

The response from both groups indicates that my teaching was effective. I have confidence that this qualitative data is both honest and accurate, in part, because of the many thorough conversations that I had over the course of the project with members from

both groups. Judging by the questions and comments made during the teaching sessions (and after the Sunday worship services by those who did not attend the home meetings), it was evident that my teaching had stimulated their thinking on the subject of fellowship.

Table 11. Congregant's opinion regarding the leader's interaction with the participants

<p>7. Did the leader show respect for the congregation? Did he listen to others' opinions?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 15 (Yes) / 0 (No) Control Group: 10 (Yes) / 2 (No reply)</p>	<p>10. Did the leader help create a relaxed atmosphere by exhibiting a sense of humor and wholesome attitude towards others?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 15 (Yes) / 0 (No) Control Group: 10 (Yes) / 2 (No reply)</p>
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The next set of questions addressed my proficiency in fostering a respectful and relaxed atmosphere conducive to group learning (see table 11). Among church members who attended the home meetings, 15 out of 15 answered "yes" to questions seven and ten. Two participants elaborated on their answers. For example, when asked if the leader showed respect, one member wrote, "Several opinions were addressed, and he (i.e., the leader) took the time to address them all." When asked if the leader created a relaxed atmosphere, the same participant stated, "As the meetings went on, everyone became more relaxed and open with one another."

Another participant elaborated on question seven, writing, "When opinions were expressed, he listened intently and edified all who spoke." Regarding question ten, the same participant wrote, "The leader created a relaxed atmosphere at the home meetings and in the church setting. We gathered in a state of reverence, but our Father has a sense of humor, and I'm sure he wishes us to express ours."

Among those who did not attend the home meetings, 10 out of 12 participants answered “yes” to questions seven and ten; however, they provided no elaboration as to why. Their answers reflected their perceptions of how I conducted the Sunday worship services over the course of the project. As usual, the worship services were relaxed—though reverent—events. Among the 12 members who did not attend the home meetings, two left both questions blank.

As indicated by these answers, the home-meetings and worship services—though meaningful, relevant, and reverent—were casual and light-hearted events. This has been my manner of leadership since joining CCBC five years ago. My congregants laugh and smile a lot at church functions. Moreover, many of my church members are “comedians,” who are quick to tell jokes or make funny comments. My conclusion, therefore, is that fostering a relaxed, casual environment aided my congregants to undertake this ministry project, as well as to learn about fellowship.

Table 12. Congregant’s opinion of the leader’s skill and preparation

<p>6. Did the leader communicate well? Was he easy to follow?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 15 (Yes) / 0 (No) Control Group: 12 (Yes) / 0 (No)</p>	<p>8. Was the leader prepared and organized for each home meeting? Were the meetings well-structured? Did the leader exhibit Spirit-filled control of the meeting?</p> <p>Experimental Group: 15 (Yes) / 0 (No) Control Group: 12 (Yes) / 0 (No)</p>
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The final set of questions—though similar to questions five and nine—were an attempt to assess both my oral and administrative skills as the project’s facilitator (see table 12). Regarding question six, the consent was unanimous for both the control group

and the experimental group: Among participants who took the post-survey, 27 out of 27 answered “yes” to the question of whether or not I communicated effectively. One participant in the experimental group reiterated her previous answer, writing, “If we had any questions, he was glad to stop and explain everything as needed.” Another member reiterated that I had “communicated well and spoke so that everyone could understand and follow.” The other 13 members of the experimental group simply answered “yes.”

Similarly, members of the control group provided qualifying statements, calling me “a good communicator” and saying that I am “well-spoken.” These comments clearly indicate that my oral and written skills were sufficient for communicating my vision to the congregation regarding this project.

Likewise, 27 out of 27 participants who took the post-survey answered “yes” to question seven, which addressed issues of preparation, structure, and Spirit-filled leadership. Before distributing the post-survey I had to clarify this question for those who did not attend the home meetings. Those who did not participate in the home meetings were told to apply question seven to the Sunday worship services. While no one in the control group provided an explanation, the fact that they all agreed that the meetings were well-structured and that I was a prepared, Spirit-filled leader indicated that the project was unhindered by sloppy organization or poor preparation on my part.

Concluding Analysis of the Qualitative Data

The anecdotal comments made before, during, and after the project were not altogether unexpected. I had anticipated both positive and negative comments based on my past experiences of trying to implement “new” ministries. For example, although the participants were afforded anonymity, certain individuals were openly critical of issues

related to the project's logistics. The impression was given by these participants that home-fellowship gatherings would be too problematic an undertaking. Since these "problems" had simple solutions, I assumed that these individuals were merely nervous about change and, thus, not prepared to alter their current fellowship practices. Because of their predispositions, I determined that the remarks made by these participants during and after the project offered me only marginal data by which to measure the project's effectiveness.

On the contrary, members who were the most adamant supporters of the project during the months leading up to its implementation were the ones who gave me the most positive feedback during and after the project. In the past, these church members have generally responded to new ministries with positive attitudes. Because of their steadfast optimism, therefore, I determined that the anecdotal remarks made by these participants may not be completely reliable for evaluating the project's effectiveness either. In short, these comments told me more about the participants' personalities than the project.

Although my initial reaction to the qualitative data was to make value judgments concerning the participants' level of readiness, I realized that I had perhaps interpreted their words incorrectly. Upon further reflection, I decided that I had been too quick to judge the participants' motives. I further determined that all of the comments made by the participants were positive in that they afforded me valuable insight into the participants' theology of fellowship. Despite any indications of overt pessimism or optimism, their words were genuine, honest, and helpful.

Although these comments provided me with useful data, they were indicative of the fact that some congregants may have approached this project merely as a means to

enhance the total church program at CCBC. However, I had hoped to cultivate within them a more theological perspective regarding fellowship. My intent was that these congregants would see the need to be more intimate and to know one another better in a home setting. While I believe that the majority of my congregants have moved closer to that ideal (as the statistical evidence indicates), the statements made by this minority group indicated that this project, for them, was, in some respects, business as usual—just one more program to make CCBC a “bigger and better” church. In reality, however, my goal was not to make CCBC a “better” church, but a more “caring community.”

As with the anecdotal comments, the participants’ self-reporting also provided me with an indication of how successful certain aspects of the project were at fostering love, unity, and a sense of community. However, while each participant’s remarks to me were helpful, it was the self-reporting by specific individuals that provided me with the most useful qualitative data. When talking to the participants in private, I looked for reactions and listened for comments that I typically would not expect from certain members. For example, one of my lighthearted, easygoing members told me that she became frustrated at certain points in the project because she felt as though she was “under a microscope.” Moreover, she told me that she did not like being called “a project number.” I found her remarks helpful because this member typically says nothing negative; moreover, she has an outgoing personality that is usually projected above all others. Although I believe her frustration might have resulted, in part, because she felt as though her personality was being suppressed for the sake of my project, her remarks alerted me to the fact that I had tended to utilize too much scientific language. During the initial stages of the project—which was when this member first voiced her concerns—I had used terms such as

“experiment,” “project numbers,” “experimental group,” “control group,” “anonymity,” “theory,” and “hypothesis,” without any regard as to how they might affect or intimidate those members with spontaneous and charismatic personalities. Her remarks allowed me to consider how I might choose my words going forward. I decided to use words more familiar to my congregants, such as “programs,” “goals,” and “ministries.” This seemed to set her and other members at ease.

Likewise, I received a positive response from a man who had spoken openly of his disapproval for this project. Halfway through the project, at a home-fellowship gathering, he told me that he was now “for it.” The reason this participant changed his mind was because of the relationship that he had formed with his covenant partner. Because of this member’s honesty at the beginning of the project, I considered his comments to be an honest reflection of a change that had come about due to this aspect (i.e., the assigning of covenant partners) of the ministry project. Because his words provided me with reliable data, my theory that knowing one another more intimately enhances fellowship was, to some extent, validated.

Finally, while conducting field reports, I observed the reactions and responses of members whose attitudes I deemed “neutral” concerning the undertaking of this project. These members seemed neither overtly excited about it, nor anxious about it. Typically, these individuals are steadfast church members who maintain an emotional balance when faced with change. They also maintain a healthy distance from other members. During the project, one such member seemed to “liven-up.” I witnessed her laughing, smiling, and engaging in polite conversations. Such behavior was atypical for her considering the fact that this lady never appears conspicuously joyful (although she never seems sad or

depressed either). During the final home-fellowship gathering, she shared with the church a life-changing event that occurred when she was a child. She and her sister were involved in a car accident, and her sister almost died. Not only did her story help explain why she and her sister (who is also a member of CCBC) are so close, but it validated my theory that a home setting is more conducive for fostering intimacy than a church building. In fact, the members of CCBC have gathered for fellowship on church property many times since I have been their pastor, yet I have never heard this member speak so comfortably and candidly in the presence of other church members. For this reason, I believe that my congregants have come to recognize the value of home-fellowship gatherings for sharing and getting to know one another. Moreover, I observed that my church members have a greater love, respect, and appreciation for one another as a result of this project.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project

There were two major strengths regarding this project. The first one involved my approach to sampling. In order to minimize the influence of social demographics, such as age, gender, and marital status, I structured the experimental group and the control group to be as similar as possible in these areas. The benefit of this “convenient” sample was that it allowed me to focus on how the setting of the meetings influenced the participants’ theology and practice of fellowship, as opposed to the aforementioned demographics.

Secondly, because most of my congregants were raised in a culture where houses are sentimentalized, a project emphasizing home fellowships was highly appropriate. In fact, during the meetings, my congregants’ homes often served as centerpieces for telling their “stories.” The project demonstrated, therefore, that in the case of church fellowship,

local culture and biblical principles are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it validated my theory that biblical *koinōnia* can be expressed in way that is compatible with the rural culture of Union Mills, NC.

There were also two major weaknesses concerning this project. First, because this was not a random sample, it limited the results of my project in a significant way, namely by limiting the interpretation of the data to my specific church as opposed to churches of similar size, denomination, and demographics. This type of sampling, therefore, makes the results less-certain when transferring the project to other church settings. Simply put, the results of this project are only true for CCBC. What can be said for CCBC as a result of this project cannot necessarily be said for other churches. The project, then, has been rendered less-applicable due to my sampling methodology. Nevertheless, because my project was designed primarily to analyze how physical space affected the participants' theology and practice of *koinōnia*, not social demographics, this method was useful.

A second weakness was the large amount of data generated by this project. The problem was due, in part, to the fact that I used two sample groups in which to measure data against, thus, requiring the use of independent *t*-tests for each category of the survey. Therefore, under Dr. Carscaddon's supervision, SPSS was used to measure both sample groups together for the less-relevant categories. Having established with certainty that the experimental group accounted for most of the positive changes from pre- to post-survey, Dr. Carscaddon and I decided to make the data more manageable by running dependent *t*-tests (combining both sample groups together by category) and highlighting the changes from pre- to post-survey with bar charts and histograms. In short, having one sample group was simply more feasible for report and analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The existence of home fellowships in the NT is not merely an issue to be studied under the rubric of social science. The regular, physical gathering of Christians in one another's homes provides a means to express, in a practical way, the real spiritual unity among Christians. The characterization of Christians as being "in Christ" or "in the Spirit" has no practical meaning apart from such gatherings. Acknowledging the value of physically gathering in order to express *koinōnia*, Chance writes, "Breaking of bread requires presence, not only the presence of the living Lord, but the presence of flesh-and-blood believers sharing the same space."¹³⁰ The following evidence suggests that the *koinōnia* has been enhanced significantly at CCBC as a result of these home meetings.

The Statistical Evidence

The statistical evidence suggests that home-fellowship gatherings have greatly enhanced the *koinōnia* at CCBC. By fellowshiping in one another's homes, my church members have learned the true meaning of brotherhood and sisterhood, as well as what it means to be "members of God's own household" (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; Gal. 6:10). In short, my congregants have come to understand themselves as a family unit, whereby each member is responsible for the welfare of others. Moreover, by simulating the first-century house church, my congregants were able to cultivate at least one aspect of their ancient roots. Finally, they have learned the value of participation, as opposed to acting like mere spectators. Simply put, they have begun to act like a church, not an audience.

¹³⁰ Chance, 23–24.

Other Indications that the *Koinōnia* has been Enhanced at CCBC

There are other indicators that CCBC's fellowship has been enhanced as a result of this project. For example, attendance has increased on Wednesday nights. Members who had not been attending, but who came to the home-fellowship gatherings, have continued coming on Wednesdays even though the fellowship is once again taking place at the church. Because we have a larger percentage of members coming, CCBC's music program has been enhanced. Whereas before, CCBC's choir consisted of five to six members, it now consists of 10 to 12. Moreover, CCBC has incorporated the use of guitars into its music program, which was an unexpected result of the home meetings.

Likewise, Sunday school attendance has increased. The church has added five members to the roll since the project ended. Another positive indicator that fellowship has increased at CCBC is the fact that my members have agreed to begin home Bible studies in January 2013. Once a month my congregants will gather in small groups at several designated homes. Group members will be interspersed each month in order to avoid forming "cliques." My congregants have also agreed to form five ministry teams, which will meet quarterly in one another's homes to discuss CCBC's fivefold mission in Union Mills, NC—namely, evangelism, worship, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship. Team members will rotate annually. The significance of these future meetings is that they will take place in one another's homes, thereby decentralizing (to an extent) the church building as the location for church members to fellowship and practice ministry.

Finally, a positive indicator that the *koinōnia* has been enhanced at CCBC is the fact that church members who were previously divided from one another have now been reconciled and are actively serving together in church programs. My congregants have

even begun reaching out to former church members, brothers and sisters who are currently estranged from our congregation. With God's blessing, these former members will be completely reconciled and begin actively serving at CCBC once again.

My Personal and Professional Growth

Not only have the members of CCBC benefited from this project, but I have also profited both personally and professionally. For example, personally, I have become a more socially-interactive Christian, meaning I have spent time in all of my congregants' homes discussing personal matters with them, as well as theological issues. Both the time spent with them and the information learned about them has endeared me to them in new ways. As a result, I have grown to appreciate and respect them more. Professionally, this newfound intimacy will allow me to minister to them more effectively.

Additionally, my skills as a leader, administrator, and facilitator have grown immensely because of this ministry project, not the least of which is my newfound ability to statistically assess future church programs and ministries using SPSS. Because of the necessity for a pastor to possess such skills, this project was noteworthy in that it afforded me an opportunity to "manage God's church" (1 Tim. 3:5) in its most basic ecclesiastical function—fellowship. Specifically, the research and planning that went into this project, the securing of the resources necessary for implementing and completing this project, and the persuading of my congregants to join me in this project have made me a stronger leader. Biblically speaking, I have fulfilled my duty as a shepherd, one who not only protects and cares for the sheep, but one who leads them (Ps. 23:3).

I have also grown as a teacher as a result of this project. My success in this area was, in part, a result of the many hours that I spent researching the subject of *koinōnia*

from both a theological perspective and a historical perspective. My theory was that the more knowledge and understanding I could gain about fellowship, the more passionately I could relay that information to my congregants. Based on the increase in mean scores from pre-survey to post-survey on questions related to biblical knowledge, as well as on the positive statements (both verbal and written) made by the participants regarding my teaching, I am confident that I achieved that goal.

Moreover, my method of teaching was based on the proposition that knowledge needs to be relevant in the lives of my church members. In order for my teaching on the subject of *koinōnia* to be relevant, I knew that my congregants needed to understand why we gather as a church family (be it in church buildings or in houses), why we observe the Lord's Supper, and why close relationships are necessary for Christian community. By addressing the biblical, theological, historical, and practical issues related to church fellowship, my teaching aimed to express how living in *koinōnia* should affect their daily lives together. Teaching in home settings was appropriate for this discussion, as well as extremely effective for showing the benefit and feasibility of regular home meetings.

Finally, my teaching has grown in the area of discernment. For me, this is the most important aspect of teaching because a pastor must be able to discern the needs of the congregation in order to develop the right teaching strategy. Throughout this project, I had to continually assess and reassess my approach to teaching, which required me to discern which methods were effective and which ones were not. For example, I had originally planned for my congregants to take a lengthy quiz regarding NT *koinōnia* in the first-century house church; however, I quickly discerned that my congregants would have been intimidated by this approach and, therefore, too distracted to learn. Instead, I

allowed them to take the quiz as a group, making a game of it. Not only did my church members learn, but they also enjoyed the process. Other times, I curtailed my lecture for learning to occur through group discussion or by ceremony (i.e., the Lord's Supper).

My teaching was also successful at equipping my congregants to become better discerners themselves. My goal was for them to understand that a Christian who exercises discernment throughout life actually embodies the teachings of Scripture. This method of teaching, which exhorted the members of CCBC to live in constant anticipation of God's future promises, has aided my people in fulfilling Peter's exhortation to live holy lives in expectation of the Lord's return (2 Pet. 3:11–13). Because of this project, my congregants have begun to discern how and why *koinōnia* is a central component for practicing the Christian lifestyle. Furthermore, as it relates to Christian community, my congregants have, unquestionably, become better at discerning their abilities and obligations to love, support, and encourage one another.

Finally, because of this experience, I now lead a congregation that is more close-knit than it was before the project. The fellowship has, in fact, been enhanced. The task for me and the members of CCBC now is to sustain this enhancement, which means that we must continue expanding the *koinōnia* to all areas, or "spaces," of our existence. This project has taught me that gathering in one another's homes more regularly is crucial for achieving this. Indeed, because of this project, I now stand firm in my belief that CCBC's members simply must gather regularly in one another's homes, in addition to buildings, if they are to experience genuine, biblical *koinōnia*. Simply put, houses were central to *koinōnia* in the first-century, and they can be central to fellowship today as well.¹³¹

¹³¹ Fernando, 128.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY RESULTS SORTED BY CATEGORY

Pre- and Post-Survey Instrument for Collecting Quantitative Data

*Identify yourself according to the following information (to be kept confidential):*¹³²

My project number is _____.

My Gender: Female Male

My Age: Under 16 16–22 23–35 36–50 51–65 65–75 Over 75

The number of years that I have been a Christian is _____.

Total Mean=34.38; Std. Dev. =23.659; N=30

The number of years that I have been a member of CCBC is _____.

Total Mean=17.39; Std. Dev. =20.43; N=30

The average number of times a month that I gather with church members is _____.

Total Mean=16.46; Std. Dev. =19.989; N=30

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your current level of participation at CCBC _____.

Pre-survey: Mean=6.53; Std. Dev. =2.03; N=30

Post-survey: Mean=7.77; Std. Dev. =2.216; N=27

How often should members of CCBC gather during the week? _____

Pre-survey: Mean=2.5; Std. Dev. =1.697; N=30

Post-survey: Mean=2.85; Std. Dev. =0.907; N=27

Do you know the meaning of *koinōnia*? _____

Pre-Project Percentage of Participants Who Answered Yes: 10%

Post-Project Percentage of Participants Who Answered Yes: 100%

¹³² Questions in the first section were for my benefit only and not a part of the survey proper, which begins with the heading titled “Understanding of How to Achieve Spiritual Community.” Care was taken to divide the participants into groups of highly-similar social demographics, as well as of other identifying characteristics.

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the quality of fellowship at CCBC _____.

Pre-Project: 67% of answers ranged from 1 to 5
Post-Project: 63% of answers ranged from 8 to 9

UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO ACHIEVE SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY (ITEMS 1–13)

Answer “yes” or “no” to the following questions:

1. Would you say that Camp Creek Baptist Church is unified?
Yes or No
2. Does gathering in one another’s home in order to share a meal improve our fellowship?
Yes or No
3. Will praying together more often in church members’ homes improve our fellowship?
Yes or No
4. Will studying the Bible in members’ homes improve our fellowship?
Yes or No
5. Will singing hymns together more often in members’ homes improve our fellowship?
Yes or No
6. Can fellowship occur in places other than the fellowship hall or church sanctuary?
Yes or No
7. Do you think meeting regularly in homes is needed to experience biblical fellowship?
Yes or No
8. Do you think gathering solely in the church building is sufficient to fellowship?
Yes or No
9. Does knowing how and where members live help you to understand their needs?
Yes or No
10. Does knowing a member’s history increase your love and appreciation for them?
Yes or No
11. Can you know members’ burdens without knowing their lives outside of Sunday?
Yes or No
12. Do you feel obligated to spend time with other members outside of regular services?
Yes or No
13. Do you expect other Christians to make regular contact with you during the week?
Yes or No

Experimental Group:	Pre-project: <u>6.4000</u>	Post-project: <u>10.0000</u>
Control Group:	Pre-project: <u>6.0000</u>	Post-project: <u>6.9167</u>

THE VALUE OF HOMES VERSUS THE VALUE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS (ITEMS 14–15)

Rate the questions below according to the following scale: 1=not important; 2=somewhat important; 3=I don't know; 4=important; 5=extremely important

14. How important is it to gather regularly in one another's homes?

1 2 3 4 5

15. How important is it to gather regularly at the church building?

1 2 3 4 5

Pre-project Church Buildings: 93% "important" or "extremely important"

Pre-project Homes: 43% "important" or "somewhat important"

Post-project Church Buildings: 87% "important" or "extremely important"

Post-project Homes: 60% "important" or "extremely important"

THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP

Rate the questions below according to the following scale: 1=never; 2=rarely; 3=I don't know; 4=often; 5=daily

16. How often does your church family gather in your home?

1 2 3 4 5

Pre-project: 43.3% "often" or "daily" Post-project: 66.6% "often" or "daily"
Change: +23.3%

17. How often do you talk with fellow church members about your problems or sins?

1 2 3 4 5

Pre-project: 76.6% "often" or "daily" Post-project: 81.4% "often" or "daily"
Change: +4.8%

18. How often do you share meals with fellow church members in your home?

1 2 3 4 5

Pre-project: 66.6% "often" or "daily" Post-project: 74.0% "often" or "daily"
Change: +7.4%

19. How often do you share with your church the ways God is working in your life?

1 2 3 4 5

Pre-project: 48.3% "often" or "daily" Post-project: 88.8% "often" or "daily"
Change: +40.5%

20. How often do you gather for fellowship at Camp Creek Baptist Church?

1 2 3 4 5

Pre-project: 86.6% “often” or “daily” Post-project: 92.5% “often” or “daily”
Change: +5.9%

21. How often do you spend time with church members outside of regular services?

1 2 3 4 5

Pre-project: 76.6% “often” or “daily” Post-project: 77.7% “often” or “daily”
Change: +1.1%

KNOWLEDGE OF *KOINŌNIA* IN THE NT HOUSE CHURCH (ITEMS 22–30)

Circle whether you agree or disagree:

22. The early church expressed its fellowship by sharing meals in one another’s homes.

Agree or Disagree

23. The meal shared consisted of an unleavened wafer of bread and a cup of grape juice.

Agree or Disagree

24. Although *koinōnia* can be generally defined as “association, communion, fellowship, or close relation,” it specifically means “to share with someone in something.”

Agree or Disagree

25. The nineteen uses of the term *koinōnia* in the New Testament shows that Christians used it to describe the unique sharing they had with fellow church members, but *not* with God.

Agree or Disagree

26. The common meal—known as an *agapē* meal, or “love feast”—was a complete, ordinary meal that was given new significance and meaning by our Lord’s death.

Agree or Disagree

27. There is no biblical support for the existence of house churches in the first century.

Agree or Disagree

28. In addition to texts throughout Acts 13–28, Paul’s letters also refer to private homes that were used as Christian meeting places.

Agree or Disagree

29. The Christian communities that the apostles established were centered in synagogues.

Agree or Disagree

30. The gathering of Christians in special buildings constructed solely for worship continued to be the norm until the early decades of the fourth century.

Agree or Disagree

Total Mean:	Pre-project: <u>14.3333</u>	Post-project: <u>16.5926</u>
Experimental Group:	Pre-project: <u>14.5333</u>	Post-project: <u>17.6000</u>
Control Group:	Pre-project: <u>14.0833</u>	Post-project: <u>15.3333</u>

KNOWLEDGE OF ONE ANOTHER (ITEMS 31–39)

Circle whether you agree or disagree:

31. I know the color of my covenant partner's eyes.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 13.3% "Agree"

Post-project: 93.0% "Agree"

Change: +79.7%

32. I know how my covenant partner feels about his or her job.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 13.3% "Agree"

Post-project: 93.0% "Agree"

Change: +79.7%

33. I know my covenant partner's family situation—that is, his or her marital status, children, siblings, and parents.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 33.3% "Agree"

Post-project: 89.0% "Agree"

Change: +55.7%

34. I know my covenant partner's educational history.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 20.0% "Agree"

Post-project: 85.0% "Agree"

Change: +65.0%

35. I know the struggles and burdens that my covenant partner currently faces.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 6.6% "Agree"

Post-project: 89.0% "Agree"

Change: +82.4%

36. I know what my covenant partner values most in life in addition to his or her faith.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 16.6% "Agree"

Post-project: 93.0% "Agree"

Change: +76.4%

37. I know what my covenant partner fears most in life.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 0.0% "Agree"

Post-project: 85.0% "Agree"

Change: +85.0%

38. I know my covenant partner's major accomplishments and successes in life.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 3.3% "Agree"

Post-project: 89.0% "Agree"

Change: +85.7%

39. I know my covenant partner's biggest regrets, failures, and disappointments in life.

Agree or Disagree

Pre-project: 0.0% "Agree"

Post-project: 81.0% "Agree"

Change: +81.0%

THE DESIRE FOR SPIRITUAL UNITY (ITEMS 40–50)

Using the following scale, circle your level of agreement with the following statements:

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=undecided 4=agree 5=strongly agree

40. With the aid of the Spirit, I can reach spiritual maturity apart from my church family.

1 2 3 4 5

41. A Christian is responsible only to God and his or her biological family.

1 2 3 4 5

42. Gathering with church members twice a week is sufficient to maintain community.

1 2 3 4 5

43. I feel the need to gather with my church family more than twice a week.

1 2 3 4 5

44. I feel responsible for the spiritual growth of my fellow church members.

1 2 3 4 5

45. I feel more like part of a family when the church gathers in the homes of its members.

1 2 3 4 5

46. The accountability of my church family is important for my spiritual growth.

1 2 3 4 5

47. I often depend on my church family for moral support when facing a problem.

1 2 3 4 5

48. Fellow church members often depend on me for moral support with their problems.

1 2 3 4 5

49. I have a strong desire to spend time with the members of Camp Creek Baptist Church.

1 2 3 4 5

50. I feel comfortable sharing personal information about my life with other members.

1 2 3 4 5

Total Mean:

Pre-project: 36.608

Post-project: 40.892

Experimental Group:

Pre-project: 37.1333

Post-project: 43.8667

Control Group:

Pre-project: 36.0833

Post-project: 37.9167

Post-Survey Instrument for Collecting Qualitative Data

Please answer the following questions:

The number of Wednesday night meetings that I attended during the project is _____.

The average answer for the Experimental Group was 4.

The average answer for the Control Group was 0.

The number of Sunday worship services that I attended during the project is _____.

The average answer for the Experimental Group was 5.

The average answer for the Control Group was 5.

Please provide short answers to the following questions:

1. Has your sense of unity with your church family been enhanced through home fellowships? If so how?
2. Do you desire to continue regular home-fellowship gatherings in the future? If not, why?
3. Are you satisfied with the church's current practice of gathering in the church sanctuary twice a week and in the fellowship hall on special occasions? If so why?
4. What, if anything, has changed for you on the subject of fellowship?
5. Did the leader demonstrate satisfactory competence and knowledge on the subject of fellowship? If not how can he improve?
6. Did the leader communicate well? Was he easy to follow?
7. Did the leader show respect for the congregation? Did he listen to others' opinions?
8. Was the leader prepared and organized for each home meeting? Were the meetings well-structured? Did the leader exhibit Spirit-filled control of the meeting?
9. Did the leader exhibit alertness, capability, and emotional readiness when talking to others about fellowship?
10. Did the leader help create a relaxed atmosphere by exhibiting a sense of humor and wholesome attitude towards others?

The participants' answers on this section of the survey were relatively positive and affirmative.

APPENDIX B

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA WORKSHEET

How Well Do You Know Your Brothers and Sisters in Christ?

Information collected by project number ____ from project number ____

1. Full Name?
2. Age?
3. Marital Status (including spouse's name and the couple's anniversary)?
4. Children and their ages?
5. General appearance (eye color, hair color, height, etc.)?
6. Can you describe the congregant's living arrangements (e.g., Where does this church member live? Does he or she rent or own? Can you describe the property?)
7. Occupation, including the name of the employer, as well as how the congregant feels about his or her job?
8. Level of education? Where the congregant went to high school or college?
9. Family background? (Include whatever you think is interesting, important, or relevant to his or her spiritual formation)
10. What three or four things does the congregant value most in life?
11. What three or four things does the congregant fear most in life?
12. What is this congregant's basic underlying attitude about life (e.g., "things will turn out all right", or "it's best not to expect anything in life, so you won't be disappointed")?
13. What does this congregant look for in others to deem them "trustworthy"?
14. What would cause this congregant more pain than anything else?
15. What would this person consider the most wonderful thing that could happen to him or her?
16. What three words would this congregant use to describe him or herself?
17. Outside of church, what groups does this person belong to?
18. Strongest belief?
19. Biggest regret?
20. Favorite color?
21. Favorite type of movie?
22. Favorite food?
23. Any unique mannerisms?
24. Peculiarities?
25. Major Accomplishments?
26. Major failures?
27. Any serious injuries?

APPENDIX C

KOINŌNIA IN THE FIRST-CENTURY HOUSE CHURCH

Pretest/Post test (to be taken as a group):

True or False? Circle the correct answer:

1. T/F One of the most visible ways in which the early church gave physical expression to its
2. T/F The common meal consisted of an unleavened wafer of bread and a cup of wine.
3. T/F According to the NT, The Lord's Supper is always observed in the home.
4. T/F According to Luke, the early Christian practice of sharing material goods by "pooling them together" seems to have the spontaneous result of their changed hearts brought about by indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
5. T/F The nineteen uses of the term *koinōnia* in the New Testament indicate that Christians used it to describe the unique sharing they had with fellow church members, but *not* with God.
6. T/F Although the basic meaning of *koinōnia* is "sharing," it is also used to denote "intimacy and fellowship" in general.
7. T/F Unlike Luke, Paul's idea of sharing possessions is not so much the "pooling together" of all the church members' property, but the *sharing* of their abundance to those in need.
8. T/F The common meal—known as an *agapē* meal, or "love feast"—was a complete, ordinary meal that was given a new significance by our Lord's death.
9. T/F For Paul, possessing material resources is not something to be claimed as a right, but something to be used voluntarily as an offering—a gift—to those in need.
10. T/F The host in whose home the meal was held managed the preparation of it.
11. T/F The host was responsible for the proper conduct of those observing the Lord's Supper.
12. T/F The act of eating together and drinking together reminded members of their relationship, or "unity," with Christ and one another and deepened those relationships.
13. T/F Various house churches in a given geographical region often met for larger church meetings.

14. T/F There is no biblical support for the existence of house churches in the first century. Our knowledge of them comes strictly from archeology.
15. T/F Various texts throughout Acts 13–28 depict early Christians as meeting in the “upper rooms” and private residences of individual church members.
16. T/F In addition to the book of Acts, the Pauline epistles refer to private homes that were used as Christian meeting places.
17. T/F Paul’s methodology for church planting was to convert a homeowner, who was then capable of benefaction, that is, providing a house for Christian assembly.
19. T/F Typically, there existed only one house church per city.
20. T/F The Christian communities that the apostles established were centered in synagogues.
21. T/F The gathering of Christian believers in private homes continued to be the norm until the early decades of the fourth century.
22. T/F For the first three-hundred years of Christianity, believers met in synagogues or special buildings constructed for the sole purpose of religious assembly.
23. T/F The church is, in part, a community characterized by fellowship (*koinōnia*), the emphasis of which is on communal sharing.
24. T/F *Koinōnia* was the power behind the early Christians’ desire to share all things, thereby, fulfilling the responsibilities of the covenant community.
25. T/F Because Christians are unified in the Spirit, meaningful fellowship does not require face-to-face interaction. In other words, it does not require one another’s presence.

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