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### **Cooperation, Not Competition: Utilizing a Shared Small-Group Discipleship Experience to Create Interchurch Partnerships between First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Church in Elizabeth City, North Carolina**

Thomas Paul Batson

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COOPERATION, NOT COMPETITION: UTILIZING A SHARED SMALL-GROUP  
DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE TO CREATE INTERCHURCH PARTNERSHIPS  
BETWEEN FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH AND FIRST UNITED  
METHODIST CHURCH IN ELIZABETH CITY,  
NORTH CAROLINA

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  
THOMAS PAUL BATSON

DECEMBER 15, 2018

APPROVAL FORM

COOPERATION, NOT COMPETITION:

UTILIZING A SHARED SMALL-GROUP DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE TO  
CREATE INTERCHURCH PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
AND FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN ELIZABETH CITY, NORTH  
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And thank you to God, who not only is our source of life and salvation, but is the one who resurrects the dead, even churches who need new life. You lead us to give our best and make the most of what we have and this project is because of the belief that

You're not done with the Church, only leading us to new life and ministry out of what once seemed dead.

## ABSTRACT

The future of ministry will involve many churches forming interchurch partnerships to share resources to maximize ministry effectiveness and stewardship of assets. A small group between members of First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Church in Elizabeth City, NC, was formed to explore biblical themes of partnership and discuss logistical issues and how they might be obstacles to partnerships. Surveys measured participants' perceptions of their doctrinal knowledge, attitude toward partnership, and perceived difficulty in dealing with the logistics of partnership. Discussion, reflection, and interviews contributed to the interpretation of survey data. Results indicated that a shared small group experience between two churches can be a catalyst for the development of fruitful, interchurch partnership and participants envisioned ways the churches may be able to partner together.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The weight of imminent death hung heavy in every room. No one said much, except for the occasional story of better days gone by. A few family members shuffled through empty rooms—exhausted, but still sifting through documents, cleaning out closets, and looking for things that might be important in the difficult days ahead. They knew what was coming. Their loved one was slowly, agonizingly approaching her death and the family did not know of anything else that could be done, except continue life as normal, because although death was imminent, its timing was unknown. It could be weeks away. It might be years away.

One might find familiarity in a setting like this as they recall the experience of the slow death of a loved one who had been terminally ill for many months or years. That person would know well the feeling of entering the room where their loved one lay and the heaviness of approaching death that emotionally, physically, and spiritually took its toll on not only the sick, but the family as well. What might be unexpected, however, is that this is not the deathbed of a person, but a church, and her family (members) could find no way to stop what was inevitable.

Once large and vibrant in many years past, the church now found itself in a community much different from what it once was. The predominantly white, upper-middle class church membership reflected that of the community around it fifty years ago when it was thriving, but now that same membership—at least those who had not passed away or moved away—looks nothing like the ethnic community of a much lower

socioeconomic status. She had done nothing to reinvent herself or her programs to find ways to reach those who looked different. Over the years this series of terminal decisions had led to her terminal condition and the dozen or so members that still met together for worship on Sunday spent much of their time reflecting on the thousand-member church that had been.

I visited this church in its terminal condition as part of a mission trip I led as a youth minister. As I helped sort through boxes of ancient Sunday school material and choir music and moved unneeded classroom furniture from one empty room to another, I began to wonder what could have prevented this condition.

Could the membership recognize that they have the capital assets to do tremendous ministry, but because they lack the diversity, or desire, to reach the changing community, that they should collaborate with another church or ministry with the resources that they lack to create a partnership that could extend the kingdom of God? Can churches with limited financial resources partner together to share staff, programming, facilities, or other assets? Can they do so and maintain their own identity? Can a shared experience of discipleship—in which the participants will discuss their denominational differences and similarities, as well as biblical themes of kingdom partnership—including members of both congregations create a shift in thinking about the potential for partnership from impossibility to possibility?

### **Ministry Setting**

Many churches throughout the United States are experiencing similar situations to the one described above. Resources are dwindling and congregants are aging. They are

struggling to maintain a facility that likely was built at the height of their attendance with plans toward future growth that never occurred. The neighborhood around the church has changed but they have been slow (or resistant) to adapt. They need a new model for how to utilize resources effectively, one that leverages partnerships to create vibrant ministry opportunities. Such is the case for churches in downtown Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

Elizabeth City is a coastal town on the Pasquotank River in northeastern North Carolina. It is a colonial town with a history of being a port city. It has the largest Coast Guard base (by land area) in the world and the first community college in North Carolina (College of the Albemarle), Elizabeth City State University, and Mid-Atlantic Christian University. The town has a vibrant arts community and is actively working toward a downtown/waterfront revitalization emphasis. Elizabeth City has had stagnant population growth over the last ten years and will remain the same over the next decade. Elizabeth City has a slightly older population than the national average and is making efforts to market itself as a prime retirement area. Racially, the city is split evenly between Euro- and African-Americans, with very little representation among other ethnicities. Elizabeth City residents view it as two different cities, a “white Elizabeth City” and a “black Elizabeth City,” and while there is not much tension between the two, there is, unfortunately, not much crossover either. The main economic drivers for Elizabeth City are the Coast Guard Base and education.

This project partnered two congregations of comparable size and programming to share a ministry opportunity. I am the Pastor of First Baptist Church (FBC), which is one of the churches in partnership during this project. The other church is First United Methodist Church (FUMC) in Elizabeth City, NC. Although denominationally different,



FBC and FUMC share similar history (the two oldest congregations in Elizabeth City), programs, and even family members. FBC and FUMC share a similar vision for partnership in ministry, often planning special emphases and worship events together, but none that have forged a long-term (permanent) ministry partnership that the focus of this project explores.

First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City is a congregation much like the one described in the Introduction. It has a large, beautiful, historic sanctuary and many unused classrooms. The prime years of FBC were in the 1950s and 60s, but since then, this 232-year-old church (younger than FUMC by four years) has dwindled in membership and resources as the community around it has changed, and the church has not. The church membership is almost entirely senior adults and averages around sixty in worship attendance each Sunday with around 100 different worshippers over the course of a month. At its peak, First Baptist Church averaged 600 worshippers on any given Sunday.

First Baptist Church has a traditional, High-Church worship service, typical of a First Baptist Church. It has recently launched a Tuesday evening contemporary service. It offers Sunday School classes for all ages, as well as children and youth ministries, although it lacks the volunteers to accomplish the vision the Children's Ministry Coordinator and I have for these ministries. In addition to leading the worship services, I lead a mid-week Bible study at two separate times—Wednesday evening and Thursday morning. First Baptist Church is known in the community for its local mission efforts. It serves weekly lunch on Sundays for those in need and a semi-monthly food pantry. It partners with other congregations to provide housing for homeless people during the

winter months through a program called Room in the Inn and it partners with ECP Backpacks, an organization that provides weekend meals and snacks for food-insecure children in Pasquotank County.

First Baptist Church lacks the financial resources to fund the ministry programs it has and desires, while maintaining the large, aging buildings and paying its current staff. Because of the size of the congregation, programs and events often fail to achieve “critical mass,” an inexact but important number of attenders to programs so that momentum can build. Most of the churches in the area are in a similar position. In fact, Elizabeth City has 18,000 people within city limits and has 120 active churches of different denominations, meaning if every person in the city went to a church in the city, each church would average a membership of 150 people.

I have been in ministry for seventeen years in the roles of Pastor, Youth and Children’s Minister, and Associate Pastor. I have served as the Pastor of First Baptist Church for almost three years. My passion in ministry is helping churches and ministries to revitalize themselves and find more efficient and effective ways to reach people and First Baptist Church presents the prime opportunity to do this. In fact, the church expressed and still expresses a willingness to do what it takes to prepare for the future, although they struggle at times to shift their thinking toward new models for ministry.

First United Methodist Church began in 1782 as a post on the Methodist Circuit in northeastern North Carolina. It has been in its current sanctuary, a stately, dome-roofed building that will seat 650 since 1922. Much like First Baptist Church, the peak of attendance at FUMC was in the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with an average attendance of 450. First United Methodist has been in decline since the 1990’s with an

average worship attendance in 2017 of 128, with approximately 300 members who have some degree of participation. It has a strong weekday preschool program and a significant ministry called La Casa, an outreach to the small Hispanic community in Elizabeth City. First United Methodist Church offers two worship services on Sunday, an early casual/contemporary service at 8:30 am, and a traditional service at 11:00 am.

First United Methodist Church mirrors First Baptist Church demographically, with a mostly aging congregation that has been affected significantly in recent years by death. Many members have moved away from the area. The programming of FUMC is like First Baptist Church as well. It has small Children's and Youth Ministries and Sunday School education and discipleship for adults on Sunday morning, but struggles to find volunteers to drive the vision for these ministries. Except for 2017, FUMC has had to draw money from reserve funds each of the last five years to meet their financial needs.

At the time of this project, the Pastor of First United Methodist Church was the longest serving Pastor in the history of the church. He served for seven years at FUMC. The Pastor is in his late 50s, has pastored various sized UMC congregations since 1987, and has provided conference leadership on several boards and committees during his ministry as well. He is passionate about worship and preaching and is trained and skilled as a therapist through the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. He uses his education and experience in family systems theory to help strengthen the congregations in which he serves.

Unfortunately, as we were planning for this ministry project, the Pastor of FUMC found out that he would be reassigned to another Methodist congregation during the

reappointment process in July 2018. This was not an amicable situation between the Pastor and some of the congregation, but we still felt the project could move forward. Shortly after being notified of his reappointment, the Pastor of First United Methodist had a heart attack and subsequent bypass surgery that did not allow him to participate in the project as originally intended. This will be discussed further in the Project Description, but the shifting dynamics at play at FUMC would have a bearing on the project and what I learned through it.

The Pastors of both churches share a friendship and a great working relationship with each other. Their churches cooperate in several ecumenical efforts for missions, special worship gatherings, and racial reconciliation in Elizabeth City. First Baptist Church and First Methodist Church currently share a staff person. The Organist/Choir Director for First Baptist Church also serves as the Music Director for the Casual/Contemporary Service at First United Methodist Church. This sharing is best described not as a partnership between the churches, although they both support his work and ministry in both settings, but more as “moonlighting” where the staff member has a second job somewhere else. This arrangement has worked successfully since 2008. Even though it is not considered a partnership between churches, both Pastors have hopes that it will be a precedent for exploring future sharing of resources between the congregations.

### **Necessity for this Project**

There are many churches in America that are trying to determine ways to make the most of ministry with dwindling resources, because of declining membership, shifting giving patterns, and changing demographics in the surrounding community. There are also many churches in America that are small but growing. They are trying to make the

most of ministry with few resources. Although the circumstances of these two situations are very different, the problem remains the same: effective ministry is hindered because the individual church is unable to gather enough resources—finances, staff, programming, facilities, etc.— to meet the ministry needs of the church and community. Contributing to the continuation of this struggle is a “silo mentality” for ministry where other churches are competitors instead of teammates.

Dan R. Dick describes this mentality by highlighting four different areas where this problem is compounded in the local church. First, church members, ministries, or whole congregations have a territorial protection of their space, even within their own congregation. Certain people have privilege to those areas and one dare not enter or alter its contents. Second, church members think in terms of “Us vs. Them.” The church is meant for church members only and opening the doors to them (other organizations, people, ministries, etc.) threaten “their” church. Third, church is on Sunday only. Most members have never considered their buildings sitting empty the remainder of the week as a missed opportunity to put these large capital assets to work. Finally, pride of status and building contribute to expanding, moving, or creating new space when they do not utilize what they already have. However, the best way to utilize the resources of the church is to use what they already have, even if that means sharing it with others.<sup>1</sup> Could there be a way to move past the silo and forge partnerships where congregations share assets so that ministry effectiveness is maximized?

First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City needs to explore every possible option for creating vibrant ministry opportunities, not only for survival, but also for the extension of

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<sup>1</sup> Dan R. Dick, “Wasted Space, Wasted Opportunity,” *Ministry Matters*, (January 11, 2011), accessed March 30, 2017, <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/496/wasted-space-wasted-opportunity>.

the kingdom of God. Partnership with other congregations can create opportunities to maximize resources, mitigate weaknesses, and build momentum through positive experiences of sharing ministry. However, there are obstacles to partnership as decisions are made about the pragmatic implications. If congregants can see the theological rationale for kingdom partnerships, are they more willing to work through the obstacles that stand in the way? If they feel the thrust from scripture toward the importance of stewardship and kingdom partnership, do the obstacles become less significant? This project tested the theory that when congregants see the importance of and theological rationale for partnership in scripture, they are more willing to work through the practical obstacles that stand in the way of forging such partnerships.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PROJECT SUMMARY

#### Goals

The objective of this ministry project was to utilize a small group discipleship experience to explore the themes of interchurch, kingdom partnerships. By having discussions around the themes of similarities and differences between the denominations and the biblical foundation for kingdom partnerships, participants began to see that these partnerships are ideal to promote effective ministry and efficient, responsible use of resources. The goal for the participants was to reframe their thinking to see how this is a possibility to explore rather than an obstacle too great to overcome. As a result, this experience created a framework for helping churches with limited resources to see future pathways to partnership that will maximize ministry through shared resources including staff, buildings, programming, and funding. They would see themselves as what Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks describe as kingdom churches “that want to build the kingdom, not just their own castles; that joyfully defer their own desires in order to bless others; and that eagerly partner with other congregations, setting aside secondary theological and philosophical differences as they unite in the gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

To accomplish the main goal, three supportive goals were established. First, the small group would create an environment for developing trust and familiarity between members of the two congregations. Bruno and Dirks assert, “Partnerships strain trust, so

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together: Biblical Strategies for Fellowship, Evangelism, and Compassion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 17-18.

trust needs to be established in relationship before leaders can start to work together.”<sup>3</sup> I suspected that while the small group members may know the members of the group who were part of their own church, they would not know members of the small group from the other church well at all. I believed that to envision a partnership between churches, participants would have to become familiar with each other in order to trust one another. Therefore, space was given in each small group setting for fellowship and dialogue, as well as voicing prayer needs so that members may offer support. In addition, members of the group learned about the denominational doctrines of Baptists and Methodists so that their familiarity between the two would further develop trust on a theological, not just interpersonal, level.

The second goal was to help participants to understand that kingdom partnerships are not just a pragmatic idea, but also a needed manifestation of theological themes in Scripture. Participants studied and discussed texts from Genesis, Matthew, and 2 Corinthians that highlighted themes of stewardship, utilization of the blessings of God, and how partnership maximizes strengths and minimizes weakness. Participants were taught in the small group about these themes, invited to dialogue during the small group, and given prompts for reflection during the subsequent week.

Finally, the third goal was to evaluate some of the logistical decisions that would have to be made should two churches look for partnership opportunities, especially within already existing, similar ministries in both congregations. By bringing into focus these logistical concerns, participants could dialogue about them and effectively evaluate each as obstacles to overcome should the congregations chose to partner in future

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<sup>3</sup> Bruno and Dirks, 37.



ministry opportunities. Intentionally choosing the meeting time, location, teacher, and other considerations helped to facilitate the evaluation of these logistical issues.

### **Strategy**

To accomplish the goal of developing trust and familiarity I chose to structure the small group to allow for time of fellowship and prayer to develop interpersonal trust and rapport. Two small group sessions were written to discuss specifically “who we are.” The first small group session was a time to hear from the participants about who they are personally and for them to describe their church, its ministries, challenges, and goals. The second small group session was a discussion about the doctrines of Baptists and Methodists. Discussion centered on baptism, ecclesial structure, Baptist distinctions as expressed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. In addition, one small group meeting was devoted to attending a Sunday worship service at each church with the opportunity for dialogue about the experience following each service.

The goal of setting a theological precedent and expectation for kingdom partnership was accomplished through the remaining small group meetings. I wrote the small group curriculum (Appendices E-H) to discuss a text from the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Epistles so participants would see the themes throughout Scripture. Each session focused on understanding the context of the passage and modern application in the context of kingdom partnerships. My expectation was that understanding the importance of the themes of kingdom partnership would help participants to see the

logistical, relational, and theological concerns or differences as obstacles to overcome, rather than as terminal situations that are barriers to partnership.

The final goal of evaluating the logistical issues to consider when partnering together was executed by the decisions made to provide different settings for the small group gatherings. I chose the settings to create some potential inconvenience to some or all the group members. This project sought to develop ways for churches to consider partnering for ministries they are already doing, especially if they are a duplication of ministry that the other partner church is doing. Therefore, the small group was intentionally chosen to be at the traditional Sunday School hour for both churches (9:45 am) so that it was not a “joint venture” into a new program, but a “merger” of existing programs and resources. The locations for the small group meetings were set to have sessions at First Baptist, First United Methodist, and one session at a “neutral site”—the coffee shop near both church campuses. I intended for the curriculum to be taught by both pastors of the churches. As I will detail in the Project Description, however, the Pastor of First United Methodist Church was unable to participate in the small group. He did contribute to the preparation and writing of the curriculum, especially the session exploring Baptist and Methodist doctrines.

I chose to utilize a survey and interviews—group and individual—as the primary tools for evaluation of this project. The survey used was a pre- and post-small group survey that contained identical questions, so comparison could be made with the participants’ responses before and after the small group experience. The survey included Likert-style five-point continuum questions with additional space provided for comments regarding each issue for the participant to rate. Additionally, participants were asked to

identify other areas for consideration and rate them in the same way they were prompted for the given questions. An identical questionnaire was given to ten random members of each church for comparison purposes. These members were only asked to take the survey once. It was utilized to compare the responses of the small group participants against their own pre- and post-small group experience and against the control sample representing the general membership of each congregation.

The interviews were conducted to gain further insight into the experience and allow group members the opportunity to express lessons learned, challenges faced, and their ideas about the future opportunities for partnership between the two churches.

This project was evaluated using a few different tools. The pre- and post-small group surveys were used to determine the degree of changes in perspective of small group members because of the project. The survey results were also compared with the control sample to see how the participants responses reflected the views of the congregations upon entering the small group experience and afterward. A critical measure reflected in the surveys was the amount of change in response to each survey question. A high amount of change (considered more than 0.8 points or higher) indicates a large change in response from before the project to after the project.

Additionally, journaling/reflection opportunities were given to the participants each week to consider on the days between meeting together. At the next small group meeting, participants were invited to share their responses and I took notes on their responses and reflection. This gave me further insight into the experiences of the small group members and the effectiveness of the small group sessions. I also reflected upon each small group session in a journal. Notes were taken about the discussion, the ways I

interpreted their body language and emotion in responses, and the overall experience of the meeting that day.

### **Description**

The themes of stewardship, cooperation, and blessing in Scripture support and encourage churches to work together in kingdom partnerships. The financially precarious state of many churches in America necessitates such partnerships, as well. Therefore, this project used a small group experience to encourage members of two congregations to consider the possibilities of partnership in the future. The curriculum and discussion in the small group facilitated togetherness and understanding and helped participants to see the theological basis for exploring kingdom partnership.

This project was based on the creation of a six-session small group experience that engaged the small group participants with biblical exploration of themes of stewardship, cooperation, and blessing, as well as doctrinal study of Baptists and Methodists. In addition, participants were taken on a “field trip” to attend worship at both churches and reflect on the similarities and differences of that experience.

Prior to the small group experience, I met with the Pastor of First United Methodist Church to discuss the project idea and ask for his support and assistance with planning and leading the small group. He was very eager to work together on this project as we shared similar perspectives about the current situations of our churches and the benefits of partnering for ministry. Subsequently, we met to plan leading the small group sessions and recruiting participants to them. We each solicited participation in the small group in the bulletin, newsletter, and weekly announcements, and gained a few

participants in this manner. More participants were needed, so we directly invited several more members to participate. We sought diversity of age, gender, and church experience in our participants. Because of the general age distribution of the memberships of both churches, we were unsuccessful in recruiting participants under the age of 40.

Unfortunately, the planning and implementation of the project ran into two significant obstacles. The Pastor of First United Methodist Church was informed that he would be moving to a new church during the reappointment process for the United Methodist district. Although this move would not take place until July, the choice to reassign the pastor was not received favorably by all in the church or by the Pastor. The effects of this situation were noticeable during discussions in the small group. In addition, the Pastor of First United Methodist Church had a heart attack and subsequent bypass surgery just before the launch of the project. While he was unable to help lead the small group sessions as previously planned, the FUMC pastor contributed to the writing and planning stages of the small group curriculum. The start of the small group was delayed in hopes he would be able to return to lead some of the later sessions, but it became apparent this was not going to happen, so I led the discussion for each session.

The small group consisted of ten participants, five from each church, and I was the leader/facilitator. Not counting the facilitator, the group had two male and eight female participants. This is not an unusually skewed number when compared with the overall participation in small groups/Bible studies in either congregation. In both churches, more women participate in these opportunities than men do. The group had seven participants between the ages of 56-70, two between the ages of 41-50, and one participant who was 71 or older.

Small group sessions were held at First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, and Muddy Waters Coffeehouse, located about a block away from each church. Different settings were chosen to highlight some of the logistical decisions that would have to be made should two churches seek to partner together in future endeavors like this experience.

The small group experience began with an introductory session in which participants were asked to complete the pre-small group survey. We made general introductions, discussed who we are as individuals and churches, and signed a small group covenant (Appendix C) that detailed the commitment the participants and facilitator would make to one another. The group met for six small group sessions, including a “field trip” in which participants attended worship at both churches one Sunday morning. The small group concluded with a group interview over dessert to discuss lessons learned and paths to potential partnership. At this group interview, participants completed the post-small group survey.

### **Calendar Outline**

November 2017

- November 7, 2017 -- Met with the Pastor of First United Methodist Church to discuss the project idea and gain his commitment to participate in the project, as well as the participation of First United Methodist Church.

### January 2018

- January 14, 2018 – Discussed the project idea with the Deacons and other leadership of First Baptist Church and received approval to move forward with the project to begin in early Spring 2018.
- January 30, 2018 – Met with Pastor of First United Methodist Church to plan and write the small group curriculum.

### February 2018

- Recruited members for the small group through announcements, bulletin, and newsletters in both congregations, as well as personal invitation.

### March 2018

- Small group curriculum was finalized and prepared for teaching.
- A control sample of ten people from each church took the same pre-small group survey that the participants of the small group would take at their initial meeting.

### April 2018

- April 4, 2018 – An email was sent to all small group participants to prepare them for the upcoming small group, including a schedule for the sessions and appreciation for their willingness to participate.
- April 9, 2018 – The Pastor of First United Methodist Church underwent open-heart, triple-bypass surgery after having a mild heart attack on April 3, 2018 and subsequent tests in the days before.
- April 12, 2018 – An orientation and first small group meeting was held in the Conference Room of First Baptist Church. At this meeting, participants completed the pre-small group survey, signed the small group covenant, and had their first

group discussion. Participants were asked to share answers to several questions including: Who are you? Who is First Baptist Church? Who is First United Methodist Church? The goal was to get to know each other and to describe both churches, their strengths and weaknesses, and the perceived mission of each church.

- April 15, 2018 – The small group met for the first time on a Sunday morning. This session was at First Baptist Church. The topic of discussion was “Baptists and Methodists.” The curriculum gave a brief overview of some of the doctrinal differences and similarities of each denomination. Participants learned about the Baptist distinctions as described by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Wesley’s Quadrilateral as described by United Methodists, the differences in the practice of baptism in each denomination, and the differences in the ecclesial structure of Baptists and Methodists.
- April 22, 2018 – This small group meeting was at First United Methodist Church. The small group learned and discussed the theme, “Blessed to Be a Blessing,” taken from Abram’s covenant and blessing from God in Genesis 12. Churches resources (those “things” given by God for their use) are not just to be kept for their own benefit, but a tool to be a blessing to others. This includes using their blessings to bless other churches. Participants were asked to reflect on the idea of “kingdom partnerships” between churches and whether churches are in competition or cooperation with one another.
- April 29, 2018 – This small group was held at Muddy Waters Coffeehouse. The study focused on stewardship of the resources God has entrusted us. Using Jesus’



Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, participants learned about and discussed the role of faith and risk in stewardship. To please God, churches must be willing to risk what they have been given for the kingdom. This includes being willing to make the most of their buildings, programs, and other assets, even if this means partnering with other churches. Participants were asked to reflect on the role of faith and risk in their and their church's view of stewardship and how their view of God might shape their willingness to take a risk.

#### May 2018

- May 6, 2018 – Participants participated in a “field trip” in which they attended the Early Service (8:30 am) at First United Methodist Church and the Morning Worship Service (11:00 am) at First Baptist Church. They shared the time in between reflecting on and discussing their experience of worship at FUMC and did the same following the worship service at FBC. Participants were specifically asked to comment on the differences and similarities in the worship service and what it might look like for the two churches to share a worship service occasionally, specifically thinking about how to accommodate and adapt to the differences in worship.
- May 20, 2018 – The final small group teaching/discussion took place at First Baptist Church. Participants learned about and discussed Paul's collection for Jerusalem (as described in 2 Corinthians 8) and how kingdom partnerships can maximize the strengths of each partner, while covering for their weaknesses. While the Christians in Jerusalem were struggling, Paul made a case for the Gentile Christians in Corinth, Macedonia, and other regions, to offer support in

the form of a monetary collection. This has pragmatic and spiritual implications.

Sharing resources shows a level of faith in God that he will supply what is needed so we do not need to hoard them.

- May 29, 2018 – The final gathering for the small group was a group interview/discussion over dessert. Participants were asked to complete the post-small group survey to measure the changes in response because of the small group study. During the discussion, group members were asked to identify the most meaningful part of the small group experience, lessons they learned, issues they thought to be obstacles that had lessened, and if they felt a small group setting like this was an effective catalyst for partnerships between churches. Finally, they were asked to identify possible areas for partnership for the two churches in the future.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

As youth minister in a suburban church, I had the responsibility of finding places around town to put up outdoor banners to advertise a major community event held at my church. One of the best intersections for this advertisement happened to be where another church was located, but since I had a great relationship with that church's youth minister (having partnered together for several youth group events), I asked my colleague if I could put a sign at that intersection. The youth minister of that church did not want to decide without consulting another minister on staff, and since the senior pastor was out of town, he asked the music minister for his opinion. The music minister replied, "Why would we allow that? It would be like McDonald's advertising in the Burger King parking lot!"

Unfortunately, that churches see one another as competition is not a new phenomenon. The disciples saw threats in others casting out demons in the name of Jesus (Mark 9:38) and Paul had to clarify his role and that of Apollos to the Corinthian church who saw them as rivals rather than partners (1 Cor. 3:4-9). Throughout the centuries, especially since the Reformation, interdenominational and intradenominational competition has fractured the Church. Rather than focusing on extending the kingdom of God by conversion of new believers, churches have settled for competing with one another over the Christians who are inclined to "church swap." Competition has taken the

place of collaboration in the church world and our effectiveness and stewardship of our resources and influence has paid the price.

There is another way. It recognizes that the kingdom of God is bigger than any one church and churches are on the same “team” with the objective of advancing this kingdom on earth. Johannes Nissen describes this partnership “as a form of unity in which the varying types of ecclesial bodies continue to exist side by side in each local situation, fully recognizing one another.”<sup>4</sup> The Evangelical Free Church of America defines these kingdom partnerships as, “a relationship between two or more interdependent churches or organizations that pray, plan, leverage resources, and intentionally work together to achieve the shared vision God has given them to advance His Kingdom, in ways they could not accomplish alone.”<sup>5</sup> This way of collaboration recognizes that churches can partner for the Gospel, even while having secondary theological or philosophical differences. It believes that when churches work together, shared resources and ministries can enhance the opportunity to impact the community more than what the individual congregations can do alone. It is a risky endeavor—any partnership is—as two entities must trust each other, share a vision for ministry, and respect the diversity of the membership in collaboration. Fortunately, there is a biblical case for collaboration as a model for ministry that better positions congregations for blessing others (Abraham’s calling), stewardship of resources (the Parable of the Talents) and covering the deficiencies of each other (Paul’s collection for Jerusalem).

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes Nissen, “Unity and Diversity: Biblical Models for Partnership,” *Mission Studies* 14, no. 1 (1997), 135.

<sup>5</sup> “Reach Global Partnerships,” Evangelical Free Church of America, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://go.efca.org/resources/document/reachglobal-partnerships>.

### Abram's Call and Commission

The calling and commissioning of Abram (later Abraham) in Genesis 12:1-3 is the beginning of a sequence of covenant events between Abram and God that will establish Abram's lineage—specifically through Isaac—as his chosen people. However, the election is not meant to bring an air of exclusivity and special privilege to Israel. Rather, the call upon Abram and his lineage is to be a people who are blessed to be a blessing.

Walter Brueggemann asserts that Genesis 12:1-3 “links the traditions of God's providential care for the world and God's electing call of Israel.”<sup>6</sup> This bridge moves the narrative from stories of origin to the stories of ancestry for the people of God. Genesis 11:26 introduces Abram and his familial context. Abram is the son of Terah, who moves his family from Ur toward Canaan, but before arriving, they settle in Haran. It is in Haran where Terah dies and leaves Abram with his barren wife, Sarai. At this juncture, it seems that the provision and care of God has ended. Without an heir or the possibility of one, Abram's story seems to be one that will be short-lived. It is out of the barrenness of this situation that God calls Abram.

God tells Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3 NRSV).

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*. Interpretation, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 114.

Gordon J. Wenham describes this call from God as “a test of faith. Abram is to give up all he holds dearest for an unknown land promised by God.”<sup>7</sup> He is given no indication where he will be going, yet he is asked to leave everything he has known. It is such an example of faith that the writer of Hebrews refers to Abram’s obedience in this situation, rather than other situations from Abram’s story (Heb. 11:8-12). God’s call is “a call to abandonment, renunciation, and relinquishment. It is a call for a dangerous departure from the presumed world of norms and security...to stay in safety is to remain barren; to leave in risk is to have hope.”<sup>8</sup> However, the call of God is not simply to have faith to follow. There is a purpose to God’s call. It is through God’s command that Abram is commissioned to be a blessing.

The spoken word of God to Abram announces the plan for the people who would become the Israelites to be a conduit of blessing for the world. The promise God gives to Abram is in direct contrast to the situation in which Abram finds himself. He is a blessing out of barrenness. From a land where no one knows him, his name will be great. However, this is not just for his own benefit; it is through him that all others are blessed. Wenham asserts, “Within these verses the promise of blessing is central: five times the verb or the noun derived from בָּרַךְ ‘bless’ is used.”<sup>9</sup> Often in the Old Testament, blessing is synonymous with material prosperity, good health, peace, and longevity. Here, God promises to bless Abram by making him a nation, giving him a great name, protecting him from curses, and using him to mediate blessing.

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*. Word Bible Commentary. Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 274.

<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann, 118.

<sup>9</sup> Wenham, 275.

There is some diversity in the interpretation of “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). A footnote in the NRSV indicates that an alternative reading may be “by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.” The former reading is derived from translating “shall be blessed” in the Niphal, which is generally passive and, as E. A. Speiser states, “would imply that the privileges to be enjoyed by Abraham and his descendants shall be extended to other nations.”<sup>10</sup> The latter reading identifies parallel passages (Gen. 22:18; 26:4) that utilize the Hithpael, which can be reciprocal or reflexive and would contribute to an interpretation that “the nations of the world will point to Abraham as their ideal, either in blessing themselves or one another.”<sup>11</sup> The theological implications of the difference are significant. Either God’s people will be a conduit for blessing others (which is the understanding of Gen. 12:2) or they will be the example of a way of life by which others can find blessing by living similarly. However, in either case, Abram and his descendants will be a blessing for others. Walter Brueggemann puts it this way: “The well-being of Israel carried potential for the well-being of other nations. Israel is never permitted to live in a vacuum. It must always live with, for, and among others. The barren ones are now mandated for the needs of others.”<sup>12</sup>

This mandate is not limited to Israel. Paul instructs the early church in Philippi similarly when he was reflecting on following the example of Jesus. He told them, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4).

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<sup>10</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Genesis. Anchor Bible*. Vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 86.

<sup>11</sup> Speiser, 86.

<sup>12</sup> Brueggemann, 119.

When churches are in competition with one another, they will not bless each other. Resources are hoarded because they are needed to best the opponent. People will be commodities amassed rather than souls reached. Sharing is out of the question. Casting a common vision for their community is impossible because theological differences are too great to overcome. There is no way to be a blessing to others; all blessings are kept for personal benefit. But churches are not “called out” (ἐκκλησία in Greek means “called out” and is the word most often used for church in the New Testament) to simply receive special privilege and blessing from God. They are called like Abram: to be a blessing to others. This requires collaboration, not competition.

The commissioning of Abram required great faith. It would require the same faith for the people of God to continue to follow his lead. It also required the same faith to allow blessings to flow through them instead of keeping them for themselves. It is a risky faith that the people of God live. Collaboration requires that churches share the calling that God gave Abram to bless others through faithfulness and openness. It looks for opportunities to bless others. Churches cannot view what they have as their own. All that they have, are, and will be (the OT would view these as blessings) should benefit others. This includes sharing and partnering with other churches to accomplish kingdom goals. To do so, the church should be willing to take a risk. It must use what it is given, rather than hoard it for its own survival. Jesus had something to say about that in his Parable of the Talents.



### The Parable of the Talents

Matthew's Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30) is the second of three parables Jesus teaches in Matthew 25. Each parable has an eschatological emphasis: the Son of Man (only identified by name in the third parable) will return and what his followers do in the interim is important. William McKenith states, "The 'Parable of the Talents' inspires greater personal and communal stewardship over what Jesus has entrusted to our care. While the parable speaks of individual responsibility, it also points by analogy to corporate responsibility."<sup>13</sup> Certainly, the principle of stewardship is a major emphasis of the parable, imploring the hearer to make wise use of whatever they manage—to protect their allotment and put it to use, so that there may be a greater return. It is a parable of risk and faith that emphasizes the effort to increase the kingdom rather than maintaining status quo, but it also emphasizes the effect of how one views God on his or her willingness to risk what has been entrusted to them. Carolyn Dipboye describes the parable as "a powerful indictment of the sin of presumption and holds a timely message for churches...tempted to substitute a fearful fortress-protectionist-exclusionist mentality for risk-taking, inclusive discipleship."<sup>14</sup>

The Parable of the Talents takes place in three connected scenes: the division of the talents (Matt. 25:14-15), the stewardship of the talents (Matt. 25:16-18), and the reckoning by the master (Matt. 25:19-30). In the division of the talents, the first and second servants receive five and two talents, respectively. The third servant receives only

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<sup>13</sup> William McKenith, "Parable of the Talents: Church Maintenance or Church Growth?" *The A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review* 128, no. 3 (2015): 20.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Dipboye, "Matthew 25:14-30—To Survive or To Serve?" *Review and Expositor* Vol. 92, no. 4 (1995): 507.

one. The first and second servants immediately go and put their talents to work, earning an additional five talents for the one entrusted with five initially, and an additional two earned for the servant given two. When the master returned and they presented their earnings, they were rewarded, not for what they returned or their increase, but for their effort to be faithful with what was given them. However, the third servant is the one through whom Jesus makes his point. Dipboye states that the first two “servants serve merely as ‘foils’ or background over against which the character of the third servant is developed.”<sup>15</sup> The account of the dialogue between the master and the third servant consumes, as Ulrich Luz writes, “about two-fifths of the entire parable.”<sup>16</sup> The third servant buries his talent. E. Carson Brisson states, “According to law, burying money was an acceptable way of protecting it, especially from theft. Moreover, if one buried money immediately upon receipt, one was absolved of liability if it were stolen.”<sup>17</sup> This, however, proves to be a mistake. Because the servant thought the master to be a “hard man,” he was unwilling to risk losing his talent. Yet, by risking nothing, he also gained nothing. As a result, the master took the one returned talent, gave it to the servant who started with five and had the unfaithful servant cast “into outer darkness.”

The reader of this parable may drift toward over-allegorizing it to determine the meaning of Jesus’ teaching. Luz, in his commentary on Matthew 21-28, summarizes the speculation of the meaning of Jesus’ metaphors. The master is meant to represent Christ who will return at his *parousia*. Those influenced by the Reformation, thought the

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<sup>15</sup> Dipboye, 508.

<sup>16</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*. Hermeneia. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 247.

<sup>17</sup> E. Carson Brisson, “Matthew 25:14-30” *Interpretation* Vol. 56, no. 3 (2002): 307.

servants to be “the apostles, the teachers, the doctors, or the bearers of office in the church,”<sup>18</sup> while Catholic exegetes emphasize that the servants represent all Christians. The talents have had the greatest variance in their meaning. Brisson describes the Greek term *τάλαντον* as “originally a measure of weight used in commercial activity. In a money economy, a talent evolved into a fixed amount or weight of gold or silver...the word “talent” was imported into medieval English to denote a natural ability or gift.”<sup>19</sup> Luz describes the variety of meanings of the talents to include the “varying levels of understanding the Scriptures,” “natural gifts that a person possesses,” “social position, wealth, and influence,” and “everything that a person is and has.”<sup>20</sup> However, if the force of this parable is stewardship and a faith that is willing to risk for the kingdom, the temptation of trying to determine exactly what is meant by the metaphor of the talents risks limiting the impact of the parable to specific circumstances. Instead, the hearer of this parable should recognize that the talents are “a rather general and open-ended symbol of all that Jesus has entrusted his disciples for promoting the reign of the heaven.”<sup>21</sup> What cannot be missed is the dialogue between the master and the third servant, which reveals an attitude toward the master that would prevent the servant from being willing to risk what had been entrusted to his care.

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<sup>18</sup> Luz, 259.

<sup>19</sup> Brisson, 308.

<sup>20</sup> Luz, 259.

<sup>21</sup> John Paul Heil and Warren Carter, “Matthew's Parables: Audience-Oriented Perspectives” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Monograph Series 30. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1998), 197.

The third servant brings his talent to the master and begins his explanation, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.”<sup>22</sup> Although the master entrusted him with the care of a considerable sum of money, the third servant shows no sign of gratitude or honor. Instead, fear consumes him, and he is quick to place the blame for his inaction on the master. He views the master as a harsh man (the only use of σκληρὸς in Matthew<sup>23</sup>), because he thinks the master takes what he did not himself earn. Why, then, would the servant risk his own wellbeing for what he would not be able to keep? As McKenith states, “The servant believed that if she gained a profit for the master, she would not benefit, and if she lost any portion of what belonged to the master, she herself would suffer a great loss.”<sup>24</sup> The servant’s attitude toward the master affected the choice about how to utilize what was entrusted. While the first two servants felt the freedom to risk their allotment to gain more, the third servant did not have faith that the master would respond well should the allotment be lost. Luz shares an interesting perspective that would have made the point of the parable much clearer: “It is too bad that the parable does not tell of an additional slave who invested his capital, failed, and then declared bankruptcy. Would the master have invited him to ‘enter his joy?’ One hopes so!”<sup>25</sup> The hearer is not given this privilege of another servant’s story, which leaves the hearer to

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew 25:24b-25 NRSV

<sup>23</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*. Word Bible Commentary. Vol. 33b. (Waco, TX: Word, Inc., 1995), 735.

<sup>24</sup> McKenith, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Luz, 255.

examine his or her own perspective of God: does one believe that God rewards one who risks everything in faith regardless of the results, or is God waiting to punish those who do not produce growth?

The concluding response to each of the servants indicates that the master is less concerned with the gain—for the reward is the same for the one who gained five talents as the one who gained two—than he is with their faithful effort to bring increase. He rewards faithfulness, but a lack of faithfulness results in the loss of the original amount. Matthew describes the punishment meted out to the third servant with a familiar formula. He will be thrown “into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”<sup>26</sup> Donald A. Hagner states, “These are Matthew’s favorite metaphors for the final lot of the wicked, and they stand in sharp contrast to the words of blessing spoken to the first two servants.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus uses this language in discourses about the final judgement in Matthew to describe the fate of the unfaithful. Discussions about the meaning of Jesus’ words here detract from the force of the parable, by shifting the conversation to that about whether one may gain salvation. For this parable, it is only important to realize that God rewards faithful stewardship and he shares His joy with the faithful, while the one who fails to produce growth from lack of faith is punished by the removal of what was initially entrusted to his servants. The church would do well to recognize this as a parable that not only has implications for individual believers, but for the witness and work of the church as well.

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<sup>26</sup> Matt. 25:30

<sup>27</sup> Hagner, 736.

Dipboye writes, “The Parable of the Talents confronts the church of the twenty-first century, as it confronted the church of the first century, with a critical choice, a choice that will determine how the church will use its resources and how it will influence the society in which it lives to use its resources.”<sup>28</sup> If the principles of this parable can apply to individual disciples, then they will also apply to gathered groups of disciples. At a time when many churches face dwindling attendance and giving, many are—knowingly or unknowingly—entering a protectionist mentality where their focus is preserving what they have rather than risking it for the kingdom. In trying to save its life, the church will surely lose it. However, if the church is willing to see the downfall of the third servant, it may be able to shift its focus toward faithful stewardship of any amount, no matter how great or small.

George Buttrick, in his exposition of this parable in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, describes the perspective of the third servant very well.<sup>29</sup> In describing the “One-Talent Man,” he tells the story of the small church that could benefit from utilizing its resources well, not simply for self-preservation, but for kingdom growth. Buttrick writes:

There are more one-talent men and two-talent men in the world than five-talent men...Peculiar dangers beset the one-talent man. He is tempted to say, “With my poor equipment nothing will be expected of me: what can I do?”...The one-talent man is also prone to resentment. He may hold a grudge against life and envy against his fellow men because he is poorly gifted as compared with brilliant neighbors...But the real reason for his failure was his fear...He fails to see how much he is needed...In reality he is many-talented, and the ongoing of the kingdom depends on him.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dipboye, 510.

<sup>29</sup> Buttrick aptly titles the parable in his exposition, “A Parable on the Use of Capabilities.”

<sup>30</sup> George A. Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible* 7:559-60.

In the changing landscape of church attendance, more people are drifting toward attending larger churches and away from the smaller ones. Therefore, the smaller churches are getting smaller, while the larger churches are getting larger. Couple this with the changing demographics of the neighborhoods surrounding many older churches and the aging and death of many congregants, and it is easy to see how many churches have the attitude of the one-talent man. They protect what is left. While they may see that risking what they have is a great idea, they realize that if they were to risk it and lose, then they will not have enough left to continue. As a result, self-preservation takes over and that decision proves to be fatal.

There are still many more one-talent and two-talent churches, however, than there are five-talent churches. Thom Rainer writes, “We are a nation and continent of smaller churches. Fifty percent of all churches in America average less than 100 in worship attendance. Forty percent of all churches in America average between 100 and 350 in attendance. Ten percent of all churches in America average more than 350 in attendance.”<sup>31</sup> This parable calls the one-talent churches like First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City to venture into a model of stewardship that utilizes what they have in ways that are non-traditional to benefit the kingdom. Stewardship in this way views the master (God) as benevolent and good, who rewards a venturing faith, regardless of the outcome, because his servants are faithful to make the most of what they have regardless of how much that is.

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<sup>31</sup> Thom Rainer, “One Key Reason Most Churches Do Not Exceed 350 in Average Attendance,” *Thom S. Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches Together* (blog), March 25, 2015, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2015/03/one-key-reason-churches-exceed-350-average-attendance/>.

The faithful one-talent (or two or five-talent) church will recognize that the resources given to them are not theirs to begin with. These kingdom resources have been entrusted to churches for kingdom benefit and growth. Kingdom-oriented churches recognize that proper stewardship of these resources (which may include massive buildings that sit unused, staff that are underutilized, and programs that may or may not be meeting the needs of their community) will require them to think differently about their use and expand the opportunities for their use by the community.

It will mean that one-talent churches seek kingdom partnerships with other one-talent churches to share resources, including buildings, staff, and programs. Because many churches operate with a competitive mentality toward other churches near them, this stewardship will require a shift in thinking. Never did the parable say the servants were in competition with one another to increase their master's resources. They all should have had the same goal in mind. It is the same with the church. It must recognize that every church has the same charge: the advancement of the kingdom. The church must realize that this is faithful stewardship and it is not at risk when it works to make the best use of what has been entrusted to its care, even if that means sharing it with other congregations. Dipboye writes that the church "is never at greater risk than when it becomes preoccupied with protecting that treasure than sharing it. The kingdom of God is not about building fences but bearing fruit. It is not about the church saving itself, but the church living in grateful service of a God whose mercy is totally sufficient for the church's salvation."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dipboye, 511.



Faithful stewardship means working with whatever one has to maximize its impact. The tendency for smaller, one-talent churches is to look at what they do not have and say, “If only we had this, then we would be able to do that.” Another possibility is faithful stewardship. Instead of lamenting what one does not have, the one-talent church should look to partner with other one-talent churches. This kingdom-minded option requires being willing to share resources, realizing that on their own they may not be able to accomplish all they could accomplish together. It looks toward the possibility of sharing facilities, staff, programming, and other resources, not to become a new entity, but to strengthen the effectiveness of each individually.

In describing the usage of the talents in Jesus’ parable, Buttrick says, “Money makes money if money is ventured: it is sure that money not ventured will make nothing, but at last crumble into dust.”<sup>33</sup> Sometimes, what a church needs to grow is a strategic amassing of resources in order to fill in the gaps where one or both organizations fall short. The more resources that are available, when used well, can produce a greater harvest than what each church could accomplish on its own. The idea of strategic sharing of assets between churches requires a different mindset than what most churches in self-preservation mode currently have. It is a venture of faith that breaks down walls of division between one-talent churches and denominations to meet the needs of the community more effectively. It is working together to fill in the gaps where the talents of the individual church may fall short. It requires kingdom thinking, rather than empire building and protecting. Thankfully, there is an example of this type of thinking in the New Testament with the Pauline collection.

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<sup>33</sup> Buttrick, 562.

### **The Pauline Collection**

In the days of the early church, a famine occurred in Jerusalem. Acts 11:27-30 describes the prophet Agabus foretelling the coming famine and the response of the believers in Antioch to come to the aid of the believers in Jerusalem. Potentially, the Jerusalem church was poor because, 1) the growing number of widows in their care put a strain on resources for their care; 2) the emphasis on communal living in what was believed to be a short-term interim before Jesus' return saw resources exhausted as the time lengthened; 3) economic hardships from the famine itself; 4) economic persecution limited their ability to trade and earn income.<sup>34</sup> Regardless, Paul felt compelled to offer assistance to the church in Jerusalem. This begins the collection that became a centerpiece to the ministry and travels of Paul. The elders in Antioch sent him (named Saul at that time) and Barnabas from Antioch to deliver the collection to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30). From there, Paul encouraged and gathered the collection from many of the young congregations he started around the region. While there is little effort spent in Paul's letters, or elsewhere in Scripture, to describe the amount, procedure, or method of collection directly, Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Romans describe his motivation for the collection and his exhortation toward others to contribute. This motivation becomes the rationale for kingdom partnerships that will extend beyond sharing of monetary assets to the sharing of all resources between churches.

Certainly, a main motivation for the collection was simply to help the poor. The famine created a dire situation for the Jerusalem church, while believers in other regions saw greater wealth. In Judaism, collections were a customary practice for the upkeep of

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<sup>34</sup> Scot McKnight, "Collection for the Saints," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 144.

the temple and for the poor, but they were *involuntary* taxes. In addition, Ernest Best writes, “Voluntary giving to the poor was widely stressed as a virtue in Judaism. Acts 6:1-6 shows Christians had already accepted the practice.”<sup>35</sup> Paul saw this as a way to help the poor and encourage equality among the believers. He describes in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 that this collection is not a method to deprive the Corinthian Christians of what they needed so that the Jerusalem Christians would have relief; rather, it was a contribution from present abundance for future needs as they arose. The Jerusalem church could repay the generosity.

In Romans 15:27, Paul spiritualizes this idea by telling them that the Jerusalem church shared their spiritual blessings (Jesus and the Way), so the Gentile Christians of Rome should be willing to share their material blessings in return. One should not miss the point, however, as Jan Lambrecht writes, that “spiritualization of Paul’s statement might run the risk of neglecting its evident material focus.”<sup>36</sup> The sharing of resources should be encouraged between those who have ample supply and those in need. Paul undergirded this argument in 2 Corinthians 8:15 with his reference to the gathering of manna by the Israelites during their Exodus, demonstrating that the hoarding of resources benefits no one, as what is “put away” goes to rot. The Corinthians therefore, will not benefit by keeping their surplus, but should be willing to share it to meet the needs of others.

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<sup>35</sup> Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*. Interpretation. (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1987), 76.

<sup>36</sup> Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*. Sacra Pagina 8. (Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1999), 138.

Beyond the need of the poor, however, was another reason for Paul's motivation for the collection. He saw it as an opportunity to show unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Scot McKnight writes, "Hand in hand with providing aid, Paul was motivated to demonstrate to Jerusalem that, just as there was one Lord and one gospel, so there was one church."<sup>37</sup> At a time when Jewish and Gentile Christians might drift apart over views on keeping the Law, the collection could provide a demonstration of goodwill and unity by the Gentile Christians toward Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 8:4, Paul uses "*κοινωνία*" (fellowship) to describe participation in the collection, thus reinforcing the idea that the collection is an act of unity and fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Raymond Brown writes, "The willingness of Gentiles in distant churches to share some of their wealth with Jewish Christians in Jerusalem was for Paul a tangible proof of the *koinonia* that bound Christians together—an external manifestation of the common faith and common salvation that was the heart of 'community.'"<sup>38</sup>

This partnership forged by Paul between Jewish and Gentile Christians saw the need for ministry partnership to accomplish a task that they could not accomplish individually. Ernest Best writes, "When Paul asked for a little more in the collection, he knew that what was at stake was not just some widow's next dinner but the life of the whole church."<sup>39</sup> For the Gentile churches to forsake Jerusalem would mean cutting themselves off from Christ and thus sealing their eventual demise. One community of

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<sup>37</sup> McKnight, 145.

<sup>38</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Anchor Bible Reference Library. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 287.

<sup>39</sup> Best, 81.

faith cannot rest in the comforts of its abundance while their brothers and sisters in another suffer. When one member suffers, all do.

The Pauline collection provides rationale for contemporary kingdom partnerships by highlighting the need for the partnership of resources to insure the success of all. Just as the collection emphasized the unity of the Jewish and Gentile Christians, kingdom partnerships rely upon the idea that all congregations are part of one body and one mission. As each congregation is gifted differently, partnership allows for more efficient ministry and stronger bases for the work of the kingdom. There should be no “Burger King vs. McDonald’s” competitions in God’s kingdom. All work together to steward their resources. Each has something to offer. In fact, Paul made it a point to the Corinthians to emphasize the Macedonian Christians’ generosity even in their own poverty! Even the poorest and weakest members of the kingdom have something to offer and the churches who recognize the strength in partnership will be able to maximize their results.

When writing about the collection, Paul uses several different words with different meanings to describe it. Included among them in 2 Corinthians are grace (*χαρις*), ministry (*διακονία*), glory (*δοξα*), fellowship (*κοινωνία*), and service (*λειτουργία*).<sup>40</sup> Another term used in 9:5 is gift (*εὐλογία*), which is elsewhere more commonly translated as “blessing.”<sup>41</sup> While Paul likely was not thinking of the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1, the comparison is worthwhile in this case. Christians should look at their blessings as a means to bless others. In doing so, they are exercising

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<sup>40</sup> Best, 88.

<sup>41</sup> Best, 84.

good stewardship of what God has entrusted to their care, much like the servants in The Parable of the Talents. Kingdom partnerships seek to extend the kingdom of God through working together to make best use of the pool of resources available when churches work together toward a common goal. In doing so, they bless one another and their community through a more efficient and effective use of resources. In addition, they can do this because they see the benefit of working together in cooperation, trusting that God will reward the efforts to risk everything for the kingdom.

### **Historical and Contemporary Context**

In recent Christian history, church partnership within denominations has been forged, especially in missionary efforts. Emphases such as the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention saw the ability to partner financial resources to fund missionaries around the world. On a local level, churches of different denominations have come together to plan and lead joint worship services around Advent and Holy Week. They have also created what the business world would call “joint ventures” in which they combine efforts for a new emphasis in their community. These ventures do not seek to combine existing foci that are similar in both congregations, but rather to allocate resources toward new goals and emphases. While these are worthwhile goals, in many cases they stretch already limited resources in each congregation even further. What this work advocates are not “joint ventures” but a combining of like efforts and resources to get better results.

A similar idea was envisioned in Fort Myers, Florida, in the late-2000s by First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, and First Presbyterian Church, called “Trinity Village.” Pamela Sustar describes Trinity Village as:

A campus of three churches of different denominations focusing on cooperation instead of competition, seeking ways to eliminate duplication in terms of programs, ministries, properties, and buildings—reducing costs, increasing effectiveness, and creating a critical mass in all age groups, as well as providing a pool of more leaders—resulting in more enthusiasm, energy, financial resources, and a greater impact for Christ upon the city.<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately, Trinity Village fell victim to the real estate market crash in 2008. In reflecting upon this effort to launch Trinity Village, then-Pastor of First Baptist Church, Rev. John Daugherty raised several questions that congregations seeking this type of partnership must answer. “The challenge was remaining three distinct congregations; which church would the new retirees choose? How would the congregations navigate the natural competition for those new members?”<sup>43</sup> Regardless of its unsuccessful launch, the effort to create Trinity Village highlights the vision and need for forging kingdom partnerships that rely on cooperation instead of competition and sharing rather than hoarding.

In the wake of Trinity Village’s demise, First Baptist Church eventually partnered with another congregation seeking space for worship, Elevation Ministries. The opening statement of their covenant agreement for shared ministry describes exactly what the theological rationale for shared ministry should be:

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<sup>42</sup> Pam Sustar, *Historic Lee County: The Story of Fort Myers and Southwest Florida*. Ed. by Matt Johnson. (San Antonio, TX.: Historical Pub Network, 2008), 67.

<sup>43</sup> John Daugherty, “The Beginning of a Kingdom Partnership,” *cbf blog*, November 18, 2013, accessed January 22, 2018, <https://cbfblog.com/2013/11/18/the-beginning-of-a-kingdom-partnership/>.

Believing we have been brought together under the power of the Holy Spirit, and believing God has called our congregations for the purpose of building God's Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven, and believing we can do more together sharing our resources, gifts, and passions than we can apart, the congregations of the First Baptist Church of Fort Myers and Elevation Ministries commit to a partnership of shared ministry.<sup>44</sup>

Eventually, the path for First Baptist Church of Fort Myers and Elevation Ministries was to merge into a single congregation. Certainly, this path was right for these congregations to follow. However, this ministry project will contend that merging congregations is not always necessary; that different congregations can maintain their identity while still sharing resources and ministries through cooperation and a shared vision for the kingdom of God.

I am leading First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City through a revisioning process. In this process, everything is on the table for evaluation and review, including existing ministries, use of facilities, needed staff, and budget requirements. On several occasions during these discussions, ideas of partnership with neighboring congregations have been raised for a variety of ministry opportunities. This project will benefit these discussions by fostering a positive mindset toward the potential for partnership. It seeks to transform thoughts about barriers to partnership from "discussion enders" to "discussion starters." The project will help the congregations to see the big picture of the kingdom of God and the role that individual congregations can play as partners rather than foes. They will begin to see the blessings of sharing something with others and stewarding toward its maximum potential. The desire is that First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City and First

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<sup>44</sup> John Daugherty, "The Beginning of a Kingdom Partnership Part 4," *cbf blog*, November 19, 2013, accessed January 22, 2018, <https://cbfblog.com/2013/11/19/the-beginning-of-a-kingdom-partnership-part-4/>.



United Methodist Church of Elizabeth City will see new vitality and vision for their future through shared partnership of ministry and resources.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

The tools to measure the success of this project were quantitative and qualitative in nature. The quantitative measure for this project was a combination of pre-small group and post-small group surveys. Members of the small group were asked to complete the pre-small group survey (Appendix A) at the initial meeting before any discussion or material was taught. Participants completed the post-small group survey (Appendix B) at the end of the final small group meeting.

The qualitative measure for this project included weekly reflection prompts. During the subsequent small group meeting, a time was given to sharing these reflections with the group. I made notes on the responses for further consideration and interpretation as they applied to the goals of the project. Additionally, the group interview at the end of the small group experience garnered vital information as the participants reflected on the experience, offered insight into what was most valuable, and what could be changed to create a more effective environment to foster interchurch partnerships.

The project surveys were intended to evaluate each of the three goals while the journal responses helped to offer interpretive insight into the effectiveness of the curriculum and small group experience. The first goal was for the small group to create an environment for developing trust and familiarity between members of the two congregations. The second goal was to help participants understand that kingdom partnerships are not just a pragmatic idea, but also a needed manifestation of theological themes in scripture. The third goal was to evaluate some of the logistical decisions that

would have to be made should two churches look for partnership opportunities, especially within already existing, similar ministries in both congregations. The survey results and interpretive analysis of the reflections, journaling, and interviews were evaluated with regard to each of these goals.

There were ten members, five from each church, who participated in the small group (focus group). Twenty members, ten from each church, were part of a control sample for comparative purposes. Of the focus group, 20% were male and 80% were female. No participant in the small group was under the age of 41, with 70% between the ages of 56-70 years old, 20% between 41-50 years old, and 10% were over the age of 71. In the test sample, 10% of the participants were 26-40 years old, 25% were 41-55 years old, 25% were 56-70 years old, and 40% were 71 years old or older. The test sample reflects an accurate representation of the age distribution of adults in the congregations.

### **Evaluation of Results**

#### **Goal #1: Developing Trust and Familiarity between Members of Both Congregations**

The first goal was to create an environment for developing trust and familiarity between members of the two congregations. The basis of a partnership must be rooted in a mutual trust that begins with being more familiar with each other. I suspected that many of the members of both congregations would know one another, but not well enough to build trust. In the small group, I discovered the members did not know each other well, even among the participants from the same church! They knew who the others were, but did not really know them well. Therefore, it was important to establish a routine in our meetings that allowed them the opportunity to share about life to develop trust. Trust

built very quickly, even in our introductory meeting. The responses of the participants to the questions, “Who is First Baptist Church?” and “Who is First United Methodist Church?” were very similar. Participants realized quickly that both churches shared the same struggles with diminishing financial and attendance numbers. They both had large, mostly unused, facilities. Many shared concerns for future viability of their congregations. In the closing group interview, it was noted by several participants that the most meaningful part of the experience was the fellowship created between the members of both churches. Another shared that one of the primary lessons learned was “just learning each other” and “how similar we really are.”

In addition, the goal of familiarity extended beyond getting to know each other personally. I determined that if this small group could serve to help members become more familiar with their own denominational doctrine, as well as that of the other church, then those differences that might have been viewed as significant obstacles to partnership would be lessened. The results in Graph 4.1 and Table 4.1 show that the small group was effective in increasing the knowledge of the participants’ own denominational doctrine and Graph 4.2 and Table 4.2 shows it was also effective in helping the participants understand the doctrine of the other church better. In fact, the amount of change in response to these two survey questions was greater than any other change. To interpret the survey results more accurately, they are reported as “I have a strong understanding of my own church’s doctrine” and “I have a strong understanding of the other church’s doctrine” rather than “I have a strong understanding of Baptist/Methodist doctrine.” I did this by referencing the identified church participants recorded on their survey.

GRAPH 4.1

PRE- AND POST-SMALL GROUP RATINGS OF PARTICIPANTS' KNOWLEDGE  
OF THEIR OWN CHURCH'S DOCTRINE

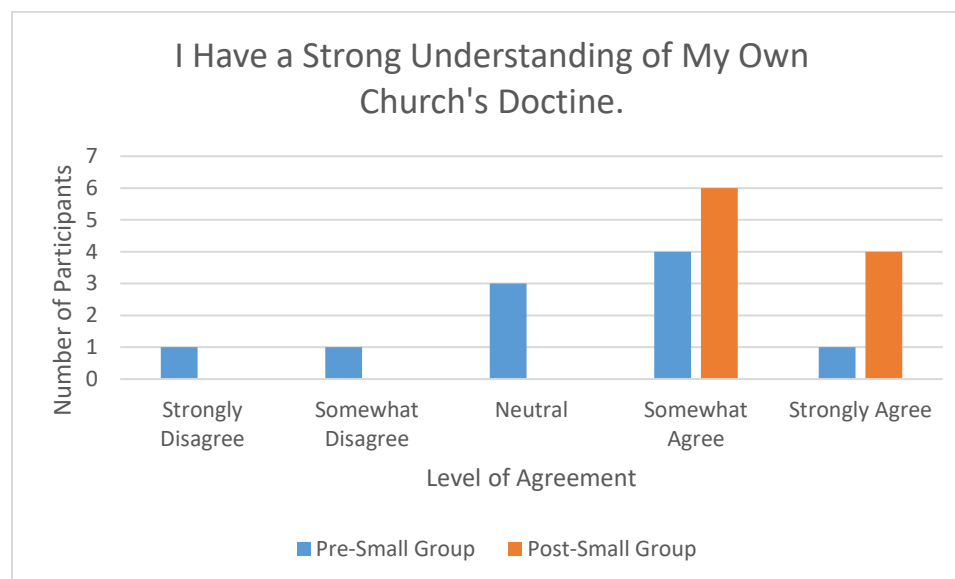


TABLE 4.1

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL  
GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING KNOWLEDGE OF OWN  
CHURCH'S DOCTRINE

Pre-Small Group	Post-Small Group	Amount of Change in Response	Test Sample
3.30	4.40	1.0	3.60

GRAPH 4.2

PRE- AND POST-SMALL GROUP RATINGS OF PARTICIPANTS' KNOWLEDGE  
OF THE OTHER CHURCH'S DOCTRINE

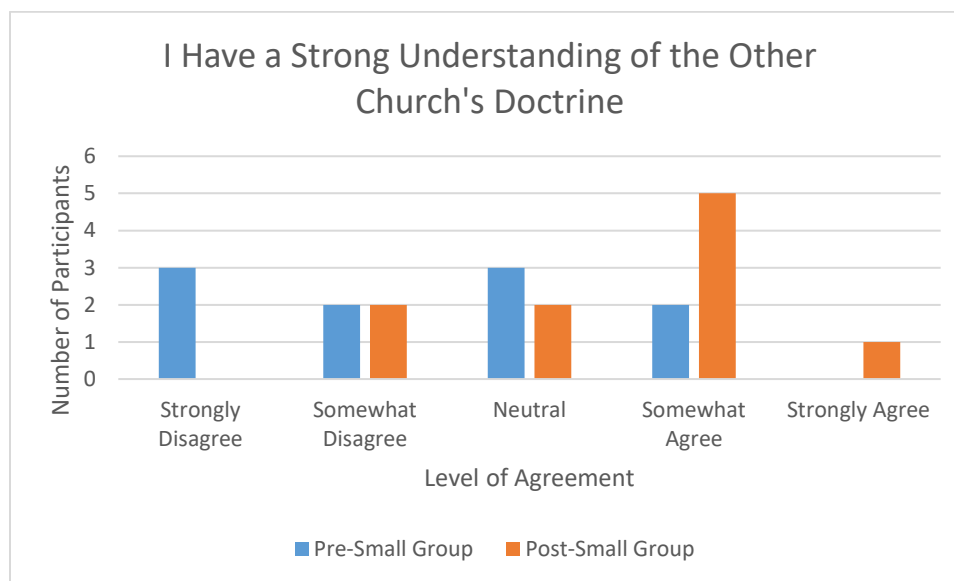


TABLE 4.2

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL  
GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING KNOWLEDGE OF THE  
OTHER CHURCH'S DOCTRINE

Pre-Small Group	Post-Small Group	Amount of Change in Response	Test Sample
2.40	3.50	1.1	2.25

Participants were also asked to rate their agreement with the following statement: "The Methodist and Baptist denominations are very dissimilar." Disagreement with this statement would indicate that the participant thinks the two denominations are similar. However, participants had trouble with the wording and this led to some confusion when attempting to answer. Therefore, the results of this question are suspect and should be

considered as such when interpreting the response. The survey responses decreased by 0.40 from before the small group to after, indicating participants learned the denominations were more similar than they thought.

GRAPH 4.3

PRE- AND POST- SMALL GROUP RATINGS OF PARTICIPANTS' AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT, "THE METHODIST AND BAPTIST DENOMINATIONS ARE VERY DISSIMILAR."

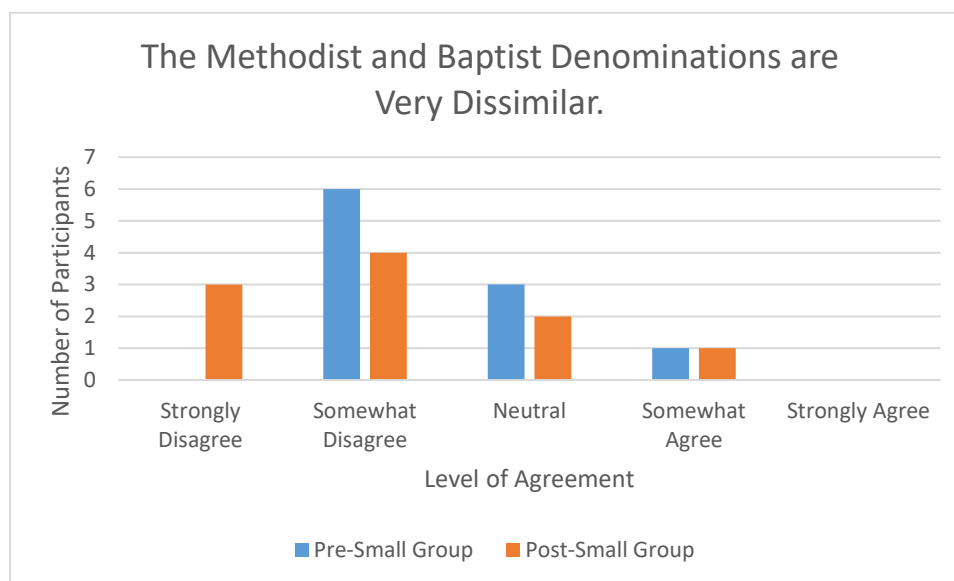


TABLE 4.3

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING THE SIMILARITY OF BAPTIST AND METHODIST DENOMINATIONS

Pre-Small Group	Post-Small Group	Amount of Change in Response	Test Sample
2.50	2.10	-0.4	2.65

Finally, participants were given a hypothetical scenario in which First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Church were considering combining youth ministries. They were asked to rate predetermined factors on a Likert-style scale by identifying how much of an obstacle to partnership each factor might be. One of those factors was “Doctrine-Will children and youth be taught from Baptist, Methodist, or both doctrines?” The pre-small group response (Table 4.4) to this question averaged 3.40 while the post-small group response was 4.10, representing a high amount of change at 0.70. The responses (Graph 4.4) indicated that doctrine moved from being a “somewhat insignificant obstacle” to an “insignificant obstacle.”

GRAPH 4.4

PRE- AND POST- SMALL GROUP RATINGS OF PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTION  
OF DOCTRINE AS AN OBSTACLE TO PARTNERSHIP

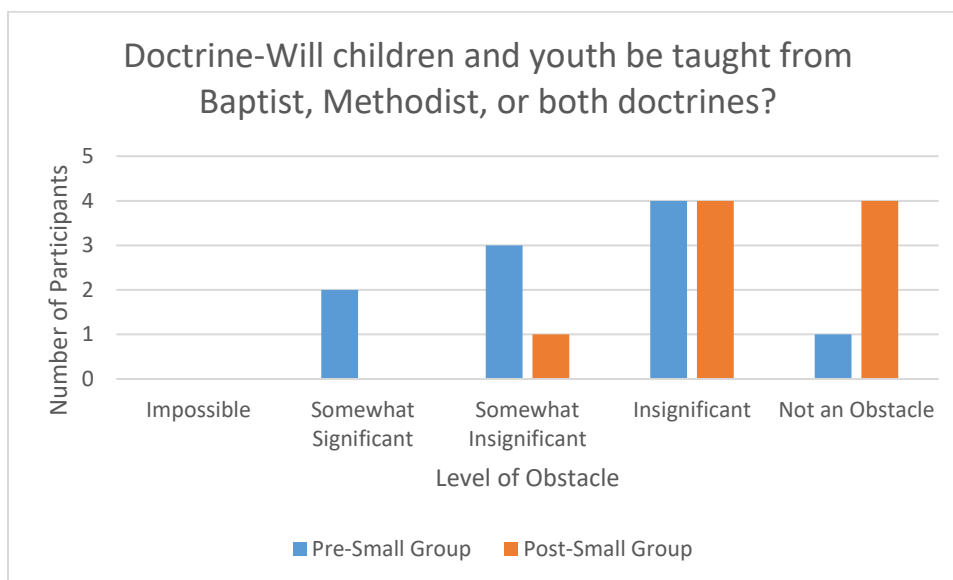




TABLE 4.4  
COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL  
GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING THE LEVEL OF  
OBSTACLE DOCTRINE WILL BE IN CONSIDERING PARTNERSHIP

<b>Pre-Small Group</b>	<b>Post-Small Group</b>	<b>Amount of Change in Response</b>	<b>Test Sample</b>
3.40	4.10	0.7	3.50

In summary, the project was successful in creating an environment to develop trust and familiarity between members of the two churches. The numerical data, as well as the interview responses, clearly indicate that participants became more familiar with each other and with their doctrine. It is very encouraging for me to see that the small group was effective in helping participants to understand their doctrine and the doctrine of others better. I am convinced that when there is a lack of knowledge, especially about “the other,” then there is also a lack of trust. When trust is not established, partnership will not develop. I was surprised at how quickly trust developed with this group, but because this was established early, the group discussions were more open and free. Participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and situations because they realized they had more in common personally and ecclesiastically than they assumed. They were able to dream together about what kingdom partnership might look like between the churches. What once seemed to be significant obstacles now were smaller. It is encouraging to see that developing familiarity through a small group experience between two churches can help participants envision kingdom partnerships. The challenge for the future is how to make an experience like this feasible for the whole congregation so that kingdom partnerships are envisioned by more people. As a minister and teacher, working

toward this goal in the project has taught me the value of helping people in my congregation become more familiar with their own doctrine as well as that of other churches in our community. I should also not take for granted that the people I am pastoring already know what makes them Baptist or any other denomination.

### Goal #2: Kingdom Partnerships are not Just Practical, but Theological

The second goal of the project was to help participants understand that kingdom partnerships are not just a practical strategy, but a necessary manifestation of theological themes in Scripture. I was surprised to find that this group already had a largely positive perception of the idea of kingdom partnerships. In the first small group meeting I noted that “this group seems to embrace the idea of cooperation already.” The pre-small group survey indicated likewise. The average response to the statement, “The Bible gives a theological basis for partnership between churches” received an average pre-small group score of 3.9, indicating the group “somewhat agreed” with the statement (Table 4.5). Participants responded that they “somewhat agreed” (Table 4.6) that “First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Church have the same purpose.” Also, they “strongly disagreed” (Table 4.7) with the statement, “I view other churches in my town as being in competition with my church.” Based upon their responses, the participants saw the idea of partnerships as having a theological basis. Not only did they see the idea of partnership as rooted in Scripture, they saw the churches as having the same purpose and not being in competition with one another.

TABLE 4.5

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING THE LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT, “THE BIBLE GIVES A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CHURCHES.”

<b>Pre-Small Group</b>	<b>Post-Small Group</b>	<b>Amount of Change in Response</b>	<b>Test Sample</b>
3.90	4.90	1.0	3.90

TABLE 4.6

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING THE LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT, “FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH AND FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HAVE THE SAME PURPOSE.”

<b>Pre-Small Group</b>	<b>Post-Small Group</b>	<b>Amount of Change in Response</b>	<b>Test Sample</b>
4.40	4.70	0.3	4.10

TABLE 4.7

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING THE LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT, “I VIEW OTHER CHURCHES IN MY TOWN AS BEING IN COMPETITION WITH MY CHURCH.”

<b>Pre-Small Group</b>	<b>Post-Small Group</b>	<b>Amount of Change in Response</b>	<b>Test Sample</b>
1.60	1.50	-0.1	2.40

I did not expect such agreement in the pre-survey responses to these questions and noted in my journal that I did not expect significant growth to be made in this goal, simply because there was already such agreement with what this goal was trying to accomplish. Plainly put, they were already convinced. In the end, however, there was some growth in the post-small group survey with the statement, “The Bible gives a theological basis for partnership between churches.” The average score of this statement increased by a full point, from 3.9 to 4.9, indicating that every participant but one gave this statement the highest possible score (and the lone person who did not still scored it a 4). The other survey questions with this goal as listed above showed very little change from pre- to post-small group.

In reflecting on this data, I think the participants of the small group were already convinced that there was a theological basis for partnership, but they were not able to articulate it well nor identify specific stories or themes that would support it. The project was successful in that it gave the participants specific texts that supported what they already believed to be true about the biblical themes of partnership. I hoped that I would have some participants who were truly skeptical of kingdom partnerships and the small group experience would convince them that churches should work together in interchurch partnerships. This did not happen. I think the participants who chose to be a part of the small group were already open to the idea of partnership between the churches. They were open to the small group because they were open to partnership. In the control sample, the average score for the statement, “The Bible gives a theological basis for partnership between churches” was the same as the pre-small group survey for small group participants. However, the control sample responses to the statements about similar

purpose and competition were less positive than the pre-small group survey results (Table 4.7). These responses indicated that the congregations saw a biblical basis for partnership, but were more likely to see the other churches as competitors, rather than potential partners.

This introduces a significant issue that must be addressed if churches are to look toward partnering together in the future. Does the theological emphasis on themes of partnership shift the way church members view the other church as cooperative or competitive? If members know the Bible encourages partnership for the benefit of the kingdom because of being better stewards, maximizing strengths, and being able to bless others, what causes them to still view the other as a competitor? The answers to this question may come from the open responses on the control sample survey when responders were asked to list any other logistical issues that might be obstacles to partnership. Responses included, “Who will control the program?” and “They have a ‘my way or the highway’ attitude.” Clearly, for partnerships to develop, theological emphasis is not enough to overcome other concerns. Ultimately, trust between the partners will make or break partnership opportunities.

In summary, while the survey results did not indicate significant growth toward the goal of helping participants see the biblical basis and theological themes for kingdom partnerships, the information gained while pursuing this goal was invaluable. Participants in the small group already were convinced that the Bible spoke to such partnerships; they just did not know how to articulate what it said. This project helped them see specifically how Scripture promotes kingdom partnership. This goal also highlighted a distinct concern when trying to develop these partnerships. While the goal was to help

participants see that kingdom partnerships are a theological emphasis as well as a practical idea, the response to it indicates that theological basis alone is not enough to overcome some of the logistical and practical issues that present as obstacles to partnership. As a pastor and leader, I must be mindful of this as I lead a congregation to consider partnering with another. Pastors and leaders have to remember that while theological rationale might be enough for those who provide spiritual leadership, it will likely not be enough to convince others that partnership is a good idea. I must look for a multifaceted approach to guiding my church to consider partnership. It must be an approach that includes building trust, increasing knowledge and familiarity, and addressing the practical obstacles that may prevent partnership, while encouraging the membership to see partnership as a biblical emphasis that promotes the kingdom of God.

### Goal #3: Evaluating Logistical Decisions to be Made for Partnerships

The third goal for this project was to highlight some of the logistical decisions that would have to be made should two churches look for partnership opportunities, especially within already existing, similar ministries in both congregations. This project explored possibilities for churches to partner together in ministries, staffing, and other areas that they are already doing, rather than creating new ministry areas that would spread already limited resources even thinner. This goal sought to garner the perspectives of the small group participants about some specific logistical areas that may be obstacles to partnership. Participants were also asked to identify other areas that might be obstacles and rate them using the same scale. Comparisons were made between pre- and post-small

group responses to see if the small group experience changed the minds of participants about the size of the obstacle to partnership.

To accomplish this, participants were given a hypothetical scenario in which First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Church were considering combining youth ministries. The prompt for this section of the survey was:

First United Methodist Church and First Baptist Church have agreed to have discussions about what it would look like to combine to do their entire Children's and Youth Ministries programming together. Nothing has been determined about what this partnership will be so the leadership of the two churches have asked you to help them identify and evaluate areas the partnership will have to address to move forward. Please help the leadership rate the following areas and how much of an obstacle you think they will be. *"Obstacle" can be defined as an area or issue where both parties must find a way to move forward with an arrangement/agreement about how to share or utilize it in partnership.* For example, by rating something as an "impossible obstacle (1)," you think it will be impossible for the two churches to find agreement about how to share or utilize a resource. By rating it as an "insignificant obstacle (4)," you think it will be something to address, but see little opposition toward finding agreement.

Survey responders were asked to rate the following issues:

- Location-Where will the Children & Youth Ministries meet?
- Time-When will the Children & Youth Ministries meet that fits the schedule for both churches?
- Volunteers-How will we decide how and where we recruit volunteers?
- Financial-How do we share the financial needs of the ministries?
- Doctrine-Will children and youth be taught from Baptist, Methodist, or both doctrines?
- Staff-Will the minister(s) for these ministries be from FBC or FUMC?
- Visitors/Growth-Will visitors to these ministries be guided toward FBC or FUMC?
- Imbalance-If more children or youth are part of one church, is that church responsible for more of the funding/support?

Participants of the small group rated these issues before and after the small group. The small group met at both churches and at a "neutral location" to expose participants to decisions that would have to be made when determining location for shared ministry. A

time was chosen for meeting together that was at the same time as existing small group opportunities for both churches. It was a time when significant effort would have to be made to accommodate the schedule for Sunday morning. Curriculum was written by the pastors of both churches so participants could hear from different denominational perspectives on the differences of a few key theological points. Other issues were discussed in the small group setting. The purpose of this exposure was to gauge the change in response of the participants after having experienced some of these obstacles. A change in response could indicate that having experienced the obstacle, a participant would find that it was either not as significant or perhaps more significant than he or she thought. The following table (Table 4.8) records the average responses of the small group participants pre- and post-small group, as well as the average of the test sample responses.



TABLE 4.8  
COMPARISON OF AVERAGE RATINGS OF PRE-SMALL GROUP, POST-SMALL  
GROUP, AND TEST SAMPLE RESPONSES REGARDING THE LEVEL OF  
OBSTACLE EACH LOGISTICAL ISSUE MIGHT BE

Potential Obstacle	Pre-Small Group	Post-Small Group	Amount of Change	Test Sample Average
Location-Where will the Children's & Youth Ministries Meet?	3.50	3.90	0.4	3.35
Time-When will the Children & Youth Ministries meet that fits the schedule of both churches?	3.80	4.00	0.2	3.75
Volunteers-How will we decide how and where we recruit volunteers?	3.40	4.00	0.6	3.30
Financial-How do we share the financial needs of the ministries?	3.10	3.70	0.6	3.25
Doctrine-Will children and youth be taught from Baptist, Methodist, or both doctrines?	3.40	4.10	0.7	3.50
Staff-Will the minister(s) for these ministries be from FBC or FUMC?	4.00	4.00	0.0	3.60
Visitors/Growth-Will visitors to these ministries be guided toward FBC or FUMC?	3.30	3.90	0.6	3.30
Imbalance-If more children or youth are part of one church, is that church responsible for more of the funding/support?	4.00	3.90	-0.1	3.20

As previously stated, I was surprised at the open and supportive spirit among group members about kingdom partnerships. I expected more skepticism, especially regarding logistical concerns, from members before the study, but group members came to the experience with a positive, hopeful approach to the obstacles presented. Because of this, there was very little change in the pre- and post-survey responses. Participants saw the issues suggested in the survey as obstacles, but they saw them as insignificant. No

logistical issue presented had a change large enough to move it out of the category of the average score in the pre-small group survey. However, all logistical issues except for two showed an increase in average indicating a slight shift in perception toward them being less of an obstacle. The exceptions were Staff (Will the minister(s) for these ministries be from FBC or FUMC?), which saw no change in response average, and Imbalance (If more children or youth are part of one church, is that church responsible for more of the funding/support?), which had a very slight decrease in average response. The highest average change in response was with Doctrine (Will children and youth be taught from Baptist, Methodist, or both doctrines?).

The high rate of change in response to Doctrine is attributed to the growth in familiarity with the doctrines of both churches. As participants learned that their doctrines share much in common, they discovered that those are the areas on which a shared ministry should focus. In addition, understanding the differences in the denominations helped participants to see that the differences were not “deal breakers” to partnership. Instead, they add depth of understanding to faith that participants who are not involved in kingdom partnerships might not be able to experience. The increase in familiarity led to a level of trust that reduced some of the hesitation in considering doctrine as an obstacle.

Survey responders were given the opportunity to list other logistical issues that should be considered when churches think about kingdom partnerships. When participants listed the issue, they were also asked to rate it in the same way they did for the other provided issues. The responses (Table 4.10) were widely varied as it seemed the responders used the opportunity to list and rate obstacles and the ability to overcome

them, or they listed areas where the two churches should consider partnering together and rated the feasibility of those partnerships happening. In either case, the results were insightful, especially paired with dialogue from the small group discussions and group interview. It is important to note that the control sample participants also had the opportunity to list these ideas and rate them as well.

TABLE 4.9

RECORDING THE OPEN RESPONSES OF LISTING OTHER LOGISTICAL ISSUES  
THAT MIGHT BE OBSTACLES WHEN CONSIDERING PARTNERSHIP (WITH  
ACOMPANYING RATINGS OF OBSTACLE SIGNIFICANCE)

<b>Logistical Issue</b>	<b>Obstacle Rating</b>
Community Affairs	4
Outreach/Missions	4
Joint Sunday Services	2
Bible Study	4
Fellowships	4
Support Staff	4
Vacation Bible School	4
Presenting Partnership to Congregation	2
Communication/Marketing	2
Music	4
Baptism	2
Communion	2
Control of Program	1
Transportation	2
Personalities	2

These responses indicated some significant obstacles when churches consider partnership. Some respondents listed ways they felt the two churches could partner together in the future. Some common responses were missions, outreach, fellowships, and Bible study. One indicated that sharing support staff could be a possibility. In the

cases where respondents listed ways they felt the two churches could partner together, I interpreted their ratings to be their perception of the feasibility for these opportunities to transpire. For instance, those who listed missions, outreach, and fellowship opportunities listed them as 4 out of 5. I think these are rated this highly because the respondents already see the churches engaged in partnership in these areas through several ecumenical community outreach and mission projects. In contrast, the one who listed “joint Sunday services” only listed it as 2 out of 5, probably because it was not as easy to see how it could work.

Other responses revealed some significant obstacles to overcome if the churches are to partner together. One response on a survey was echoed in the group interview at the end of the project. The survey indicated that “presenting (the idea of partnership) to the congregations” would be a somewhat significant obstacle. Because the survey was anonymous, I do not know if it was the same person who responded similarly in the interview. The person in the interview said, “The idea of partnership between the churches makes sense and the churches would benefit greatly from it, but I think it will be hard to sell it to the congregations.” What would cause such a feeling from one of the small group members? I think it is based upon trust. This participant did not feel the congregations would trust each other in partnership. They would worry too much about things being equal and fair. A protectionist mentality about the “things” each church owned would make it hard to share with others, because they were not sure what the other would do with it. One of the control sample participants echoes this when they completed the survey. They shared that they felt there was an insurmountable obstacle that would keep partnerships between the churches from happening. This person wrote, “I

know those people over there. They will want complete control of it and it will be ‘my way or the highway.’” Another respondent from the control sample wrote that “personalities” would be a significant obstacle to forging partnerships.

Notably, the survey might not have yielded these important responses had the hypothetical scenario presented been with two generic churches rather than identifying the two specific churches, First Baptist and First United Methodist. Inversely, had the scenario been generic, different responses may have been given. I am glad to have done it this way. It revealed some real perspectives that are important for the leadership to be aware of if they are to lead the churches to partner together. Churches do not operate in a hypothetical world, they minister in reality, and the opinions and perspectives of and about real people and scenarios make a difference.

It is important to identify and address these issues when considering kingdom partnerships. Responses such as these indicate more than ever that familiarity and trust are vital to the success of any endeavor to work together. Most of the respondents who listed these obstacles for consideration or had ratings on the supplied issues that indicated they felt there would be significant obstacles to partnership also responded with some level of agreement that the Bible gives a theological basis for partnership and sharing resources between churches would make ministry easier. This demonstrates that while church members may feel there is a theological and practical basis for partnership, the obstacles might be too great to make them a reality.

To summarize, this project had mixed effectiveness in evaluating potential obstacles to kingdom partnership. Because the participants of the small group already had a very positive outlook on this idea, there was not room for much improvement because

of the small group experience. It would be accurate to say that based on these results alone, the success of the project with respect to this goal would be inconclusive.

However, the project was a success in identifying areas that might be obstacles that were not identified in the survey. These responses were enlightening as they revealed some of the true feelings and thoughts of the membership of both churches with regard to partnering with the other. As a pastor of one of these two churches, I find this information vital. It reveals to me that trust and familiarity with each other might be the most important factor for the success of kingdom partnerships. This is supported by the results of the other goals as well. If my church is to partner with another church in the future, significant effort will have to be made to build fellowship and familiarity between the congregations. I have to model trust for my congregation. This has to be done—or at least offered—with the whole congregation as the distrust of a few can affect the partnerships of the whole.

I would consider myself a very trusting person and tend to assume the best about people. This leads me to believe in partnerships very quickly and easily, even without having everything figured out. For me, “it will all work itself out.” However, as a pastor and leader, I must be aware that others do not do this as easily and may even have the exact opposite reaction than I. I must lead people in both perspectives effectively, tempering my sometimes naïve trust with some caution, while urging those who have trouble trusting to give it a chance. Creating opportunities to become more familiar with all aspects of faith and life between the two churches is essential to creating kingdom partnerships.

### **Strengths**

This project is easily adaptable to a variety of church settings. This is one of its greatest strengths. The small group format for discussion is already incorporated into most churches, whether that is in traditional Sunday School, small groups, or home-based Bible studies. It did not ask the participants to engage in more than they are likely already doing in their current church setting, except for completing the surveys and making accommodations to meet in another location for some of the group meetings. As will be discussed further, this project would be more beneficial if the whole church participated; therefore, an adaptation would have to be made for other church members, in addition to or in place of the pastors, to be prepared to teach and lead small group discussions. The material is easily adaptable to different denominational and geographical settings. If used in its current format, only one session of the curriculum would have to be adapted to discuss different denominational doctrine, should churches of different denominations chose to utilize this project.

The project provided a strong opportunity for church members to learn more about their own denomination, as well as the other church. This helped participants to learn to appreciate the differences, rather than see them as competition or even heresy. The project created an environment for familiarity with each other that the participants craved, even if they did not realize they wanted it before the small group began. A strength of this project is in bringing two churches together for a specific purpose while maintaining their own, separate identity.

Opportunities for “group-think” are important. In fact, “group dreaming” is just as important. A strength of this project is that it provided a context for two different

churches to envision the possibilities of partnering together, even if there are logistical obstacles that must be managed. Participants had the opportunity to talk about what it would look like to share resources and ministry. This led to dreams like, “In a world that is as divided as it is right now, what would it say to the community that two churches are able to partner together for ministry, rather than compete with each other?” Others dreamed about ways the two churches might partner together to do youth ministry, mission outreaches, or share office staff. However, since the completion of the project, no shared ministry has developed between the two churches. This is because of one of the weaknesses of the project.

### **Weaknesses**

The most significant weakness of this project is one that developed out of the necessity for the execution of the project: it was heavily pastor-driven. For this project, it almost derailed it before it even started. Had the FUMC Pastor and I not worked out a contingency plan when he was beset by health issues, then likely I would have had to start the project over by finding another willing church and pastor with which to partner.

Many denominations have relatively short appointments for their pastors and other churches and pastors seem to separate from each other quickly. Reporting on a survey (Lifeway Research/Guidestone/Compensation Study) that mainly focuses on Baptist churches and pastors, Thom Rainer reports that the average tenure for pastors in 2016 was 6 years.<sup>45</sup> A survey done by the Duke Clergy Health Initiative reports that 43%

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<sup>45</sup> Thom Rainer, “Six Reasons Pastoral Tenure may be Increasing,” *Thom S. Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches Together* (blog), March 15, 2017, accessed November 4, 2018, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/03/six-reasons-pastoral-tenure-may-be-increasing/>.



of United Methodist clergy have served between 4-9 appointments in their career, with some as many as 18 appointments. In addition, 56% of UM clergy feel it is “very or extremely likely” that they will be moved within 1-2 years.<sup>46</sup> If the project is replicated in another setting and it relies solely on the pastors to facilitate to lead it, then it may not be effective. Additionally, the project led only by the pastors relies on the pastors to guide the next steps toward developing partnerships. Nothing has been done between the two churches after the small group because no one has taken the lead to develop anything further. If churches engage in a similar project, they should designate a team of lay leadership before the small group begins to intentionally develop a partnership strategy based on the small group results.

The small group participants identified another weakness of the project. They wished the group met for more weeks than the project allowed. They wanted to study more on the biblical themes of partnership and spend more time exploring and understanding the differences between the denominations. There simply was not enough time in six weeks of meeting for an hour at a time to go as deep into study as they desired. An emphasis like this moving forward could last longer and go deeper. This would not only allow for more biblical study, but it would strengthen the bonds for partnership as well.

Although every adult member of both churches had the opportunity to sign up to be in the small group for the project, the small size of the group limited its effectiveness for the churches. The size of the group was necessary to accomplish the purposes of this

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<sup>46</sup> “Summary Report: 2014 Statewide Survey of United Methodist Clergy in North Carolina,” Duke Clergy Health Initiative, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://go.efca.org/resources/document/reachglobal-partnerships>.

project, but I recommend that churches considering implementing this project consider a format for groups that would integrate more of the membership of the churches.

Additionally, the participants in the small group led to a limited scope of results. This was of no fault of their own; they simply already had a positive, open view toward partnership. It is likely that the participants that volunteered to participate did so because they thought partnership was a good idea. This likely skewed their responses toward more positive ratings and answers, limiting the effect that the positive impact of the project had on their responses. Careful selection of several additional participants (should they agree to participate) who had a more skeptical view of partnership might have yielded a better picture of the effectiveness of the project. In addition, to get a better picture from the general membership of the church about their views toward partnership, a simple survey could have been distributed asking participants why they chose or did not choose to participate in the small group. It would include an option to choose “I did not participate because I do not like the idea of partnership between the churches.”

Finally, the survey was flawed in several ways. The first section, in which participants were asked to rate the level to which they agree with the seven statements was the most useful and effective measure of the project’s effectiveness. There was one exception. The statement, “The Methodist and Baptist denominations are very dissimilar” was hard to understand. It was intended to be a statement written negatively to ensure the participants were paying attention to the statements they were rating. However, the wording was unclear and may have led to less than accurate ratings. The second section of the survey, in which participants responded to the hypothetical situation and the logistical issues that must be addressed for that situation, was not as effective as hoped.

While the logistical issues were rated, the opportunity to explain the rating given was underutilized or was ineffective. I could have taken more time in the instructions to ask the participants to explain in the comments sections how they arrived at their rating. This would have allowed me more accurately to interpret the intent behind the rating and not simply just the number that was circled.

### **Personal Reflection**

This project has greatly affected the way I approach ministry that may be shared between churches. As a minister, it has helped me to see areas for personal and professional growth that will make me a better minister for my congregation and the community.

Beginning this project, I had a desire to help churches like First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City, to find better ways to utilize their underused resources and maximize ministry by sharing assets, programs, and opportunities. I hoped to prove that a small group experience that was shared between two congregations would provide the theological rationale and the context for building trust necessary for kingdom partnerships to form. If small-group participants could see before they meet that Scripture encourages partnership, and if the churches built enough familiarity with each other before a project, then the logistical issues would be less of an obstacle. Simply put, I wanted participants to think, “I know there are things we’ll have to work out, but if the Bible says we should do it and I can trust you, then we’ll be able to work it all out.” It is overly simplistic to think partnership would happen that easily, but this project has shown

me that this intentional small group format for building partnerships can be successful in creating an environment where kingdom partnerships can be formed.

Of course, the role of the pastor is vitally important in leading and casting vision for the church and developing a culture that takes risks (steps of faith) for the kingdom. This project greatly improved my understanding of this role in the church. As the leader of the project, I was the planner, writer, teacher, publisher, and more. I anticipated that the role of pastor was vitally important in guiding the partnership development, but I also understand that for the long-term success of partnerships, the other lay leaders must be involved. Because the small group model will work best when it is a whole-church initiative, more leaders and teachers will be needed to lead the groups. A committed team to drive partnership initiatives forward after the groups meet is vital.

Cooperation between the pastors is key to developing a culture of partnership. Initially, the initiative may be pastor driven, but the longevity of the partnership is dependent upon the culture of kingdom partnership developing between the churches. As seen in this project, the departure—either temporarily or permanently—of one of the pastors puts an early partnership in jeopardy. However, if the culture of the churches is one that celebrates and expects kingdom partnership as a normal way of doing ministry, then pastoral transition is not as detrimental.

This project has also taught me that kingdom partnership requires proactive decision-making that is not afraid of creating more work for eventual greater reward. It is easy to keep doing what the church is already doing. It is easier to maintain control of my church's resources and not share with others. It is easier to manage staff when I am the only supervisor. Kingdom partnership means choosing to risk working with another

church, trusting that the initial hard work leads to more fruitful ministry down the road. This type of decision-making is deliberate and works against the natural tendency to make the safe, easy choice. Effective leadership requires that I keep making the proactive, difficult decision, because it is the only way to move forward. The alternative is to continue a series of lackadaisical decisions that led the church to a place of survival, which led me to wanting to do this type of project in the first place.

I have learned through this project that effective evaluation is necessary in every aspect of ministry. Typically, I immediately shift focus from the sermon that just ended to the one coming up or from one event or meeting to the next without doing essential evaluation of what just took place. Some of the tools I utilized in this project will serve to evaluate partnership opportunities and every aspect of personal and ecclesial ministry. Evaluation groups can be especially helpful to seek the perspectives of others involved in the initiative. Surveys completed after a sermon series or after a mission focus, for example, can identify key areas for improvement for the next time.

Surveys, however, must be clear and intentional. They must ask the questions in a way that gets the desired information. Some of the weaknesses of my survey have been detailed above. In addition, I could have specifically asked the small group after the fact to evaluate the material that was taught. I believe it communicated the intended information and achieved the results I intended, but a few group members wished they had more time to go deeper in study. A survey, questionnaire, or specific question in the group interview setting could have yielded crucial information for how to modify the curriculum for greater effectiveness. This did not harm the outcome of the project but could have made its use in the future more effective.

I felt that I was the leader of the project and a participant in the experience. I appreciated the active discussion in the small groups and the education I received by hearing from members of a different denomination and their experiences in church. I was surprised that only two of the eleven (including myself) group members have been in the same denomination for their whole lives. Nine of the group members have been part of at least two different denominations throughout their lives. This led to richer conversation, but I think it also contributed to this group's openness to kingdom partnership, because they have seen firsthand the differences in denominations and determined that the differences are not so big.

Finally, I felt I was part of a bigger movement in the future of the church. As I described the project to other clergy colleagues and friends, they listened with great interest and expressed their excitement about the freshness of this idea and the potential for ministry effectiveness through these partnerships in the future. In addition, I found it difficult to find research data related to interchurch partnerships for combining already existing ministry areas, mostly because this is a concept that is on the growing edge of church culture today. Being part of this process to "plow new ground" for the future church gave me joy, excitement, and a sense of purpose that my work would not be soon forgotten. It gives me hope for the future of the small (and especially urban) church for ministry in ways that it never thought possible if doing it alone.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The sobering feeling of imminent death hangs heavy over thousands of churches every year. Dr. Steve McSwain reports, “Somewhere between 4,000 and 7,000 churches close their doors every year.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, there is a way to breathe new life into a terminal condition. This project gives me hope that ministry can be revitalized in struggling congregations through interchurch partnership. The project provides a framework for creating an environment where interchurch partnerships can be developed. By combining resources, churches who might otherwise not have enough resources to survive might find new life. This project is not just for struggling churches; it is for any church who wants to maximize ministry effectiveness and stewardship by partnering with another congregation.

### **Project Results**

Success for this project was not measured in whether two churches entered a kingdom partnership by sharing ministry resources or assets; however, that may eventually happen because of this project. Success for this project was measured by the change in the members of the small group and their perspectives about interchurch partnership. It was measured quantitatively by the increase in knowledge and familiarity with their own denomination and the other church’s denomination. It was measured

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<sup>47</sup> Steve McSwain, “Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore,” Huffpost (blog), The Huffington Post, January 13, 2014, accessed November 4, 2018. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mcswain/why-nobody-wants-to-go-to\\_b\\_4086016.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mcswain/why-nobody-wants-to-go-to_b_4086016.html).

qualitatively by listening to the small group discuss and share their thoughts about the logistical issues that could be obstacles to partnership. Ultimately, it was measured by the ability of the small group to dream and envision a future of interchurch partnership and the benefits of working together.

The project met its goals of increasing familiarity and trust between members of two different churches. Participants found quickly that they had more in common with one another than they thought, even though they have some different doctrinal beliefs. Becoming familiar with these differences helped build trust so that a foundation was laid upon which partnership could be built. The discussions about the theological differences proved to be the most fruitful. The greatest increase in survey response ratings were in the areas of theological and doctrinal matters.

The project did not produce significant change in perspectives about the size of the logistical obstacles in the path toward kingdom partnership. A different plan for group member selection to include some participants who were averse to partnership may have yielded more significant results, but because the small group members were already positive about the idea of partnership, the change in survey results for these questions was not significant. However, the open-ended responses to identify and rate other logistical issues was very productive.

I considered the project a success when I heard the responses of the small group participants in the group interview at the end of the project. Although the data gained in the closing interview was not quantifiable in numbers or scales, their dreams about tangible ways the churches could work together was very encouraging. When the participants saw partnership as a reality, I knew the small group was successful.



The project did not set out to create an interchurch partnership between the two churches; it only intended to measure the effectiveness of a small group experience at creating an environment for interchurch partnerships to develop. However, I think a natural result of the small group experience could have been further conversations between the Pastor of First United Methodist and me about expanding a form of this project to the whole congregation and exploring real ways to partner together for ministry. Because of his health concerns and transition to a new appointment, this did not transpire, and a new relationship with the new pastor of First United Methodist had to be formed. The necessity of beginning interchurch partnership with the leadership of the pastors also became the obstacle to it moving forward after the project. Nevertheless, this served to emphasize the important role of the church leadership as well as delegation of responsibility to others in the church.

### **Future Impact**

This project has shown me that, with the right culture and environment, kingdom partnerships are possible. These environments do not just happen by coincidence, because the natural tendency of a church is to maintain status quo—even if status quo is causing a terminal condition. It is easier than changing the matrix of ministry. If the leadership of the church sees interchurch partnership as a viable solution for maximizing resources and ministry effectiveness, it must develop the environment in which kingdom partnerships may flourish. This project can be one of the tools to create such an environment and is adaptable to many different ministry settings.

I have been very encouraged by the positive response to the project from group members, colleagues, and church members. I think there is a real sense of pragmatism developing in the church that derives from the desire to survive and change the cycle of diminishment of ministry. This project will be an asset to First Baptist Church and other ministry settings now and in the future. I intend to develop it further with the information learned through its evaluation to make the most of shared ministry opportunities in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The church I visited on the mission trip recently closed its doors.<sup>48</sup> At one time, it had another church meeting in its sanctuary, but talks of merger eventually stalled out. They did make use of their empty space through a youth Bible study ministry and leasing out space to a new school that developed out of an afterschool tutoring program. Eventually the church signed over the building to the school and the few remaining members decided to disband as a church. Not all was lost as new ministry in different ways now inhabits the buildings, but I wonder if a different outcome for this church and community could have been realized if a vision for kingdom partnership between several churches in the area was embraced. Will a project like this be what solves all the complex issues facing the church today? No. Nevertheless, it will offer a new vision for doing ministry that maximizes strengths, minimizes weaknesses, and makes better use of the resources in its care.

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<sup>48</sup> Nancy McLaughlin, "The Right Time!: After 101 Years, Florida Street Baptist To Close Its Doors," *Greensboro News and Record*, September 30, 2017, accessed November 4, 2018, [https://www.greensboro.com/news/local\\_news/the-right-time-after-years-florida-street-baptist-to-close/article\\_f001fa2a-3dc9-5194-a25c-6b71b91bce94.html](https://www.greensboro.com/news/local_news/the-right-time-after-years-florida-street-baptist-to-close/article_f001fa2a-3dc9-5194-a25c-6b71b91bce94.html).

The local church in America faces a rapidly changing time and culture in which it must be willing to explore new strategies for stewardship of resources including buildings, staff, programming, and more. For the church to flourish in Western culture, greater ecumenical partnership between congregations for the sharing of resources and mission will have to take place. I am thankful to be able to explore a new paradigm of ministry and the impact it can have on the kingdom of God. Kingdom partnerships are on the growing edge of church culture. The question will be...will we trust one another enough to work together?

## APPENDIX A

### PRE-SMALL GROUP SURVEY

April 2018

*Please do not write your name on the survey. All surveys are confidential. For comparison purposes for completing the Post-Small Group Survey, please write your Random Survey Number, given to you by drawing the number from a hat, in the upper right corner of this page. This number will be given to you at the Orientation Meeting.*

Please circle your age range:

18-25

26-40

41-55

56-70

71+

Please circle the church you regularly attend:

First Baptist Church

First United Methodist Church

*Please circle your level of agreement regarding the following statements using this scale:*

*1=strongly disagree 2=somewhat disagree 3=neutral*

*4=somewhat agree 5=strongly agree*

1. I have a strong understanding of the Baptist denomination and doctrine.

1

2

3

4

5

2. I have a strong understanding of the Methodist denomination and doctrine.

1

2

3

4

5

3. The Methodist and Baptist denominations are very dissimilar.

1

2

3

4

5

4. I view other churches in my town as being in competition with my church.

1

2

3

4

5

5. First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Church have the same purpose.

1

2

3

4

5

6. The Bible gives a theological basis for partnership between churches.

1

2

3

4

5

7. Sharing resources between churches would make the ministry of both churches easier.

1

2

3

4

5

*For the following survey statements, please use the hypothetical situation to inform your responses. When responding, please use the following scale to rate how you think the different areas listed will be an obstacle:*

*1=impossible obstacle    2=somewhat significant obstacle    3=somewhat insignificant obstacle    4=insignificant obstacle    5=not an obstacle*

*After each area, a section will be available for you to comment about how you think it rates as an obstacle to the hypothetical situation proposed.*

### Hypothetical Situation

First United Methodist Church and First Baptist Church have agreed to have discussions about what it would look like to combine to do their entire Children's and Youth Ministries programming together. Nothing has been determined about what this partnership will be so the leadership of the two churches have asked you to help them identify and evaluate areas the partnership will have to address to move forward. Please help the leadership rate the following areas and how much of an obstacle you think they will be. "*Obstacle*" can be defined as an area or issue where both parties must find a way to move forward with an arrangement/agreement about how to share or utilize it in partnership. For example, by rating something as an "impossible obstacle (1)," you think it will be impossible for the two churches to find agreement about how to share or utilize a resource. By rating it as an "insignificant obstacle (4)," you think it will be something to address, but see little opposition toward finding agreement.

Location-Where will the Children & Youth Ministries meet?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Time-When will the Children & Youth Ministries meet that fits the schedule for both churches?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Volunteers-How will we decide how and where we recruit volunteers?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Financial-How do we share the financial needs of the ministries?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Doctrine-Will children and youth be taught from Baptist, Methodist, or both doctrines?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Staff-Will the minister(s) for these ministries be from FBC or FUMC?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Visitors/Growth-Will visitors to these ministries be guided toward FBC or FUMC?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Imbalance-If more children or youth are part of one church, is that church responsible for more of the funding/support?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*What other areas or issues have been left out of this survey but are things you think should be considered when exploring this partnership? Please write the area in the space provided and then rate and comment on it in the same fashion, with the same scale, you did on the other areas.*

Area for Consideration: \_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Area for Consideration: \_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Area for Consideration: \_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### POST-SMALL GROUP SURVEY

May 2018

*Please do not write your name on the survey. All surveys are confidential. For comparison purposes for completing the Post-Small Group Survey, please write your Random Survey Number, given to you by drawing the number from a hat, in the upper right corner of this page. This number will be given to you at the Orientation Meeting.*

Please circle your age range:

18-25

26-40

41-55

56-70

71+

Please circle the church you regularly attend:

First Baptist Church

First United Methodist Church

*Please circle your level of agreement regarding the following statements using this scale:*

*1=strongly disagree 2=somewhat disagree 3=neutral*

*4=somewhat agree 5=strongly agree*

1. I have a strong understanding of the Baptist denomination and doctrine.

1

2

3

4

5

2. I have a strong understanding of the Methodist denomination and doctrine.

1

2

3

4

5

3. The Methodist and Baptist denominations are very dissimilar.

1

2

3

4

5

4. I view other churches in my town as being in competition with my church.

2

2

3

4

5

5. First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Church have the same purpose.

1

2

3

4

5

6. The Bible gives a theological basis for partnership between churches.

1

2

3

4

5

7. Sharing resources between churches would make the ministry of both churches easier.

1

2

3

4

5



*For the following survey statements, please use the hypothetical situation to inform your responses. When responding, please use the following scale to rate how you think the different areas listed will be an obstacle:*

*1=impossible obstacle    2=somewhat significant obstacle    3=somewhat insignificant obstacle    4=insignificant obstacle    5=not an obstacle*

*After each area, a section will be available for you to comment about how you think it rates as an obstacle to the hypothetical situation proposed.*

### Hypothetical Situation

First United Methodist Church and First Baptist Church have agreed to have discussions about what it would look like to combine to do their entire Children's and Youth Ministries programming together. Nothing has been determined about what this partnership will be so the leadership of the two churches have asked you to help them identify and evaluate areas the partnership will have to address to move forward. Please help the leadership rate the following areas and how much of an obstacle you think they will be. "*Obstacle*" can be defined as an area or issue where both parties must find a way to move forward with an arrangement/agreement about how to share or utilize it in partnership. For example, by rating something as an "impossible obstacle (1)," you think it will be impossible for the two churches to find agreement about how to share or utilize a resource. By rating it as an "insignificant obstacle (4)," you think it will be something to address, but see little opposition toward finding agreement.

Location-Where will the Children & Youth Ministries meet?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Time-When will the Children & Youth Ministries meet that fits the schedule for both churches?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Volunteers-How will we decide how and where we recruit volunteers?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Financial-How do we share the financial needs of the ministries?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Doctrine-Will children and youth be taught from Baptist, Methodist, or both doctrines?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Staff-Will the minister(s) for these ministries be from FBC or FUMC?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Visitors/Growth-Will visitors to these ministries be guided toward FBC or FUMC?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Imbalance-If more children or youth are part of one church, is that church responsible for more of the funding/support?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*What other areas or issues have been left out of this survey but are things you think should be considered when exploring this partnership? Please write the area in the space provided and then rate and comment on it in the same fashion, with the same scale, you did on the other areas.*

Area for Consideration: \_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Area for Consideration: \_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Area for Consideration: \_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### PARTNERSHIP COVENANT

#### **Partnership Covenant**

Between T. Paul Batson and Project Participants

The ability for churches to partner together for effective ministry is vital to the growth of the kingdom of God. But it is not easy to do. Forging partnerships where decades and centuries of division have occurred can be awkward, frightening, and difficult. This ministry project in which you are participating will explore such kingdom partnerships, the theological rationale for them, and the obstacles and opportunities churches must consider when thinking about whether it is possible to partner together.

Overall, this experience is intended to be one for spiritual growth and understanding of the differences in our denominations while considering how these differences may impact our ability to partner together. In our small group setting we will learn and study Scripture, share experiences, and reflect individually, as well as corporately, about what we have learned. What we learn and share will be compiled in my final Report and Analysis to reflect on what lessons have been learned by the group, as well as me as the project administrator.

The following covenant outlines what we should expect from each other as we begin this journey of exploration into kingdom partnerships together.

#### **Participant Agreement**

1. I agree to participate in this small group experience from the April 5 Orientation Meeting to the Group Interview/Debriefing Meeting at the conclusion of the small group gatherings.
2. I agree to make this a priority for my life for the weeks we meet. I will attend every meeting unless unavoidable circumstances prohibit me, understanding that I should miss no more than one of the small group gatherings.
3. I agree to take a pre-small group survey, a post-small group survey, participate in a post-small group individual in-person interview with the Pastors of FBC and FUMC, participate in a post-small group interview with all group members, and actively reflect through guided journaling in between each small group session.
4. I agree that I will share my journal findings as I feel comfortable during the post-small group interviews. I understand that I can turn in my journaling to the project administrator if I choose.
5. I agree to be open and honest during small group discussion and actively participate in the learning experience in the group setting.
6. I understand that I have the option to back out of this experience at any time, but I should speak with the project administrator before doing so.

7. I will abide by an oath of confidentiality with my group members. What is shared in small group will not leave the small group.

### **Administrator Agreement**

1. I agree to be actively involved in the project and small group for the duration of the project as planned between myself and the Pastor of FUMC. We will be team-leading the small group discussion.
2. I agree to be open and honest with the group and fully engaged in small group discussion.
3. I agree to inform the participants of the results of this project. Much of this will come during Group Interview/Debriefing Meeting. I will also share the results of my Report and Analysis with both congregations and make a copy of it available to anyone interested.
4. I will keep the names of the participants confidential in the Report and Analysis. Any details shared from journals, interviews, or discussion will be carefully reported to not contain any identifying information.
5. If a participant is uncomfortable with some of the qualitative research (journals or interviews), I will work with them to keep them in the project and experience.
6. I agree to provide for any costs associated with the small group experience so no participant will have any financial responsibility for this project. This includes providing coffee during each session and dessert at the final Group Interview/Debriefing Meeting.

Signed

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Rev. Paul Batson, Project Administrator

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Participant

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Date

## APPENDIX D

### INTRODUCTORY SESSION AGENDA

Welcome and Prayer

Pre-Small Group Survey

Introductions

Description of this Small Group's Purpose

- Exploring our own denominations.
- What is a kingdom partnership?

Covenanting Together

Who are we?

- Who is First Baptist Church?
- Who is First United Methodist Church?
- What does Scripture call the Church to be?

Closing Prayer

## APPENDIX E

### CURRICULUM FOR SESSION 1

#### **Similarities & Differences**

**Sunday, April 15, 2018**

Nothing or no one is completely the same as the other. There are things that are held as common, but because they are two different entities, something has to be different. The same is true for churches as well. Baptists and Methodists have many common bonds, but they have a few differences, too. Let's take a look at who we are...and who we aren't.

*Based on what you already know about Baptists and Methodists, would you say we have more in common or more differences?*

*What are the areas of faith and church-life that are essentials for you? Meaning, what are the areas where you feel it is important to find agreement rather than "agreeing to disagree?"*

#### **Common Bonds**

Baptists and Methodists have a common bond in many areas of Christian doctrine. While Baptists are "non-creedal," both denominations would find agreement in the claims of the traditional Apostle's Creed. Some would argue that this is the foundational summative statement about the essentials of the Christian faith. Here is what it says:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;  
the third day he rose from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*What else should Methodists and Baptists agree upon to be able to work together?*

### **Baptism**

The understanding and practice of baptism is an area where Baptists and Methodists disagree. There is agreement that it is an important act within the faith practice of a believer, but the role that it plays in the life of faith is different.

*For you, what is the importance of your baptism to your faith?*

#### Methodists

For Methodists, “Baptism marks the beginning of our lifelong journey as disciples of Jesus Christ. Through baptism, we are joined with the Triune God, the whole of Christ’s church, and our local congregation. The water and the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism convey God’s saving grace, the forgiveness of our sins, and new life in Jesus Christ. Persons of any age may be baptized—infants, children, youth, and adults. United Methodists baptize in a variety of ways—immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. A person receives the sacrament of baptism only once in his or her life.”<sup>49</sup>

*Let’s unpack this a little further by having our First United Methodists about what they believe about baptism.*

#### Baptists

Baptists would say that baptism is an ordinance, not a sacrament. It is a symbolic act that is “an outward expression of an inward change,” meaning it follows an individual decision to trust Christ as Savior. This is why they would call it “believer’s baptism.” While Baptist churches may differ on what they will accept from a member coming from a different denominational background, most Baptist churches only practice immersion baptism.

*Baptists, please tell more about your understanding of baptism in the Baptist church.*

### **Church Governance & Structure**

Baptists and Methodists “do church” differently. The way in which the denominations are structured lead to a difference in congregational polity, autonomy, and pastoral leadership.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/sacraments>



### Methodists

United Methodist Churches are part of a larger connection of churches for their governing. FUMC in Elizabeth City is part of the Eastern NC District, which is guided by a District Superintendent. Above the DS, is a Bishop who appoints ministers to the UMC Churches. The United Methodists do not have a single, central leader (like the Pope), but have the General Conference—a large group of representatives who gather every four years to make decisions about matters of faith and practice in the church. Decisions made at the General Conference must be followed by all United Methodist congregations. UM Churches do not select their own pastor. While this may vary widely, pastors in the UMC are changed every 3-5 years.

*Based on what you know about UM Churches, what are the strengths and weaknesses of their church governance and structure?*

### Baptists

Every Baptist church is a completely autonomous entity. Most Baptist churches belong to a larger network of Baptist churches for the purposes of mission and ministry, but these networks, associations, or conventions hold no governance over the local church. Every church sets its own structure and calls its own Pastor as it sees fit.

*Based on what you know about Baptist churches, what are the strengths and weaknesses of their church governance and structure?*

This is a brief overview of a few of the distinctives of United Methodists and Baptists. There could be much more discussed and will come out over the course of our time together. For further information about Baptists and Methodists, you may read more about Baptist Distinctives from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral from the United Methodist Church.

## APPENDIX F

### CURRICULUM FOR SESSION 2

#### **Blessed to be a Blessing**

**Genesis 12:1-3**

**Sunday, April 22, 2018**

*Have you ever been called to take a major step of faith?*

*What is the main calling of the Church?*

**The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.**

**2 “I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;**

**I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.**

**3 I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”**

We are introduced to Abram in the verses before this. He moves with his family toward Canaan from Ur, but they settle in Haran along the way. Terah dies and Abram is left. It seems God’s provision has ended. But it is out of this impossibility where God calls Abram.

*What is your understanding of the call of Abram and the Israelites?*

*What is the purpose of the blessings Abram and the Israelites will receive?*

The extension of that calling goes to the church. Paul writes in Philippians 2 that “each of you should not look to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” Christians, and by extension churches, are blessed to be a blessing.

*What prevents churches from viewing their blessings as a way to bless others?*

The Evangelical Free Church of America defines these kingdom partnerships as, “a relationship between two or more interdependent churches or organizations that pray, plan, leverage resources, and intentionally work together to achieve the shared vision God has given them to advance His Kingdom, in ways they could not accomplish alone.”

This way of collaboration recognizes that churches can partner for the Gospel, even while having secondary theological or philosophical differences. It believes that when churches work together, shared resources and ministries can enhance the opportunity to impact the community more than what the individual congregations can do alone. It is a risky endeavor—any partnership is—as two entities must trust each other, share a vision for ministry, and respect the diversity of the membership in collaboration.

*How can embracing a “kingdom partnership” mentality help churches to see that they are “blessed to be a blessing?”*

*What prevents churches from “Kingdom Partnerships?”*

For Homework

*Reflect on the kingdom partnership idea by thinking about cooperation vs. competition.*

*In what ways has FBC and FUMC collaborated and what ways have they competed?*

*What is risky about collaboration? How can the two churches use their blessings to bless one another? How can they use them to bless their community?*

## APPENDIX G

### CURRICULUM FOR SESSION 3

**Make the Most of It**  
**Matthew 25:14-30**  
**Sunday, April 29, 2018**

*How willing are you to take risks? Are you willing to risk what is certain in order to gain something that is possible, but not guaranteed?*

In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches three parables that all have to do with judgment. There is the Parable of the Bridesmaids, which teaches his followers to be vigilant because he may show up at any moment. And there is the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, which implores the reader to serve “the least of these” because he is simultaneously serving Jesus at the same time. Sandwiched in the middle is the Parable of the Talents, which we will discuss today.

*Read Matthew 25:14-30. React to the passage. What stands out to you? What are your initial thoughts that come to mind?*

*What do you think about when you think about stewardship?*

The Parable of the Talents inspires greater stewardship over what Jesus has entrusted to our care. It implores the hearer to make wise use of what they have been given, not only to protect what they manage, but put it to use so that there may be a greater return. The first two servants are foils for the third, who becomes the object lesson for the hearer. The first two are rewarded for the return that they gain, while the third is punished for being unwilling to take a risk with what little he was given.

#### **Stewardship is Risky**

It would have been customarily appropriate to bury a treasure like the third servant did. It was a way to protect it from theft, in fact, if it was stolen the steward was absolved of responsibility! But it also isn’t productive. Nothing is risked and nothing is gained. If we are learning from the parable, we might recognize ourselves as the third servant. We have all been entrusted with “stuff.” But putting it to use means that we might lose what we have. There is no guarantee of success or profit. So why put it to work and take that chance?

*We are personally responsible for the stewardship of what we have been given, but there is also a corporate responsibility for churches. In what ways do churches act and think like the third servant with regard to what has been entrusted to their care?*

### **Risk is Rewarded**

It seems that what is rewarded more than anything else in this parable is not the gain, for the reward was the same for the servant who earned two as it was for the one who earned five additional talents. What is rewarded is that the servants were “trustworthy” or “faithful.” They saw the opportunity to benefit their master and seized it. They were willing to take the chance, while the third servant was focused on what little he had and didn’t want to lose it.

*Do you think we (as individuals or churches) are more willing to take risks when we have more, or less, to work with? Is this the proper basis from which to make that decision?*

### **What you think about God matters.**

In the final scene of the parable, we see why the third servant was unwilling to take a chance. It wasn’t because he had little margin to work with or that he didn’t think he had enough to make a difference. His view of the master fueled his risk aversion. He saw the master as a hard man, one that would take what he didn’t earn. So the servant was worried about what might happen if he lost everything *and* he was worried that if he did gain something, the master would take it from him anyway. Self-preservation was the motivator for the third servant and it backfired.

*If this parable helps us to understand our responsibility as stewards of God’s (the master) resources, how does our view of Him affect our willingness to take chances with what we have?*

*What can churches learn from this parable?*

### *Homework for Journaling*

*Think about the ways that our churches have been called to steward what we have been given. In what ways have we been willing to take faithful risks and what ways have we been more willing to self-preserve? In what ways do you think your church has been affected by its view of God with regard to stewardship? How might we be willing to risk more for the kingdom?*

## APPENDIX H

### CURRICULUM FOR SESSION 4

#### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

#### **2 Corinthians 8**

**Sunday, May 20, 2018**

*Have you ever been on the receiving end of the charity of another? What happened? What were your thoughts about receiving such a gift?*

*Let's flip it...have you ever been on the giving end of charity to another? What happened? What were your thoughts and motivations about giving such a gift?*

Face it. Sometimes we need a little help. Sometimes there's an emergency that arises that requires more than we currently have. Sometimes the situation is just beyond our skillset or means to solve. Regardless, we have weaknesses and deficiencies. Fortunately, what are our shortcomings are the strengths of others. In the kingdom of God, we're not competitors, but teammates, and because of this, we should cover for one another when we have a need.

#### **Famine in Jerusalem**

In the middle of the first century, there was a famine that was especially difficult for the Christians in Jerusalem. They were poor and had little means to survive. What made them so poor? We can only speculate, but it could have been persecution in the form of higher taxes or being ostracized from the economic systems. It could have been that they were feeling the effects of what we learn of the early church in Acts 2:45 where "they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need." They thought Jesus was returning very soon, so planning for long-term existence seemed foolish. When Jesus' return tarried, they had no provisions. In any case, Paul took it upon himself to make a collection for the saints in Jerusalem a centerpiece for his ministry.

For Paul, this was not just a pragmatic necessity; it was a spiritual and theological endeavor. The Jews had given the world a Savior and shared with them their spiritual blessings. Now, in their time of need, the Gentiles should do whatever they could to support and sustain the Jewish Christians. Paul makes his case in one of his letters to the Corinthian church. In that writing we see several motivations and theological implications for the collection that teach us something about our own necessity for cooperating with others in the kingdom.

*Before looking at Paul's rationale for cooperation, what would you say are some biblical/theological reasons for churches working together?*

### **Using What We Need and Sharing the Rest**

**At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.” 2 Corinthians 8:14-15**

Remember when the Israelites were wandering through the wilderness and God provided them daily rations of manna and quail? Paul uses this story from Exodus 16, to make a theological point about the Gentile Christians’ provisions. Just as the Israelites received daily what they needed, so would God provide daily what the Gentile Christians needed. And they could trust God, too. There was no need to stockpile and hoard resources because God could be trusted to provide. What does this say to us? Churches do a pretty good job of being hoarders. We keep our “stuff” (buildings, furniture, people, money, etc.) and are not willing to share with others because “what if we need them sometime?” *How do churches hoard “stuff?” What could be done to prevent this from happening?*

### **Sharing Resources Shows Unity**

**For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. 2 Corinthians 8:3-4**

Paul uses the Macedonian Christians as an example for the Corinthian Christians in abundant giving. They gave to the collection for Jerusalem, even when their own resources were limited. Even more, they looked forward to and wanted to do it, seeing it as a privilege to do so. This attitude toward helping another congregation in need shows unity, not division. It is an attitude that views cooperation as a positive effort toward advancing the kingdom of God.

*What would sharing resources between churches show to our community? What would it teach the churches who are sharing resources?*

### **The Benefit of Cooperation**

When writing about the collection, Paul uses several different words with different meanings to describe it. Included among them in 2 Corinthians are *grace* (χαρις), *ministry* (διακονία), *glory* (δοξα), *fellowship* (κοινωνία), and *service* (λειτουργία). Another term used in 2 Corinthians 9:5 is *gift* (εὐλογία), which is elsewhere more commonly translated as “*blessing*.” This terminology expresses that not only is the opportunity to give toward the needs of others a blessing to the receiver, but it is to the giver as well. Cooperation makes everyone better as we cover the weaknesses of others with our strengths and they reciprocate.

*What word or words stand out to you as something you haven’t considered about the collection of resources to be used by others?*

The collection has its roots in utilizing the strengths of one entity to cover the weaknesses of the other. Unfortunately, we do not have a “final report” on what happened when the collection was delivered. But we do see the theological rationale behind why it was so important and the benefits of the cooperative effort, regardless of the outcome. Maybe that’s an important lesson too: we should be willing to work together even if the outcome is unknown.

*What are the strengths of your congregation and how might you utilize them to benefit the other? What weaknesses do you know your congregation to have that another might be able to help with?*



## APPENDIX I

### QUESTIONS FOR CLOSING GROUP INTERVIEW

What was the most meaningful part of this small group experience?

What have you learned as a result of our time together?

Are there logistical issues that are less of an obstacle for you now than they were when we began this study?

Why do you think the average churchgoer isn't into the idea of partnership?

Is a small group like this an effective catalyst for partnership? What could be better?

What opportunities do you see moving forward for First Baptist and First United Methodist to partner together in the future?

## APPENDIX J

### PRE-SMALL GROUP SURVEY: SECTION 1 RESULTS

*1=strongly disagree    2=somewhat disagree    3=neutral    4=somewhat agree    5=strongly agree*

Participant Number	Age	Church	Own Doctrine	Other Doctrine	3. Dissimilar	4. Competition	5. Purpose	6. Theological Basis	7. Sharing
1	56-70	FBC	4	2	2	1	5	3	5
2	56-70	FBC	4	4	3	1	5	4	5
3	56-70	FUMC	2	1	2	2	3	3	3
4	56-70	FUMC	3	1	2	2	5	3	5
5	56-70	FBC	3	4	4	2	5	4	4
6	41-55	FBC	1	1	3	3	3	5	5
9	71+	FUMC	5	3	2	1	5	5	5
10	41-55	FBC	4	2	3	1	3	5	5
11	56-70	FUMC	3	3	2	1	5	4	4
18	56-70	FUMC	4	3	2	2	5	3	3
		Average	3.30	2.40	2.50	1.60	4.40	3.90	4.40

## APPENDIX K

### PRE-SMALL GROUP SURVEY: SECTION 2 RESULTS

*1=impossible obstacle    2=somewhat significant obstacle    3=somewhat insignificant obstacle  
4=insignificant obstacle    5=not an obstacle*

Participant Number	Age	Church	Location	Time	Volunteers	Financial	Doctrine	Staff	Visitors	Imbalance
1	56-70	FBC	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4
2	56-70	FBC	4	4	4	2	4	5	3	4
3	56-70	FUMC	3	4	3	3	2	4	3	4
4	56-70	FUMC	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	56-70	FBC	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4
6	41-55	FBC	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2
9	71+	FUMC	4	5	2	2	2	5	4	5
10	41-55	FBC	3	3	2	2	3	4	5	5
11	56-70	FUMC	4	4	5	5	5	4	3	5
18	56-70	FUMC	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	3
		Average	3.50	3.80	3.40	3.10	3.40	4.00	3.30	4.00

## APPENDIX L

### POST-SMALL GROUP SURVEY: SECTION 1 RESULTS

*1=strongly disagree 2=somewhat disagree 3=neutral 4=somewhat agree 5=strongly agree*

Participant Number	Age	Church	Own Doctrine	Other Doctrine	3. Dissimilar	4. Competition	5. Purpose	6. Theological Basis	7. Sharing
1	56-70	FBC	4	3	1	1	4	4	4
2	56-70	FBC	4	4	3	1	5	5	4
3	56-70	FUMC	4	2	1	1	5	5	4
4	56-70	FUMC	4	4	2	2	5	5	5
5	56-70	FBC	5	4	4	2	5	5	5
6	41-55	FBC	4	3	2	2	4	5	5
9	71+	FUMC	5	5	2	1	5	5	5
10	41-55	FBC	5	2	3	1	4	5	5
11	56-70	FUMC	4	4	2	1	5	5	5
18	56-70	FUMC	5	4	1	3	5	5	5
		Average	4.40	3.50	2.10	1.50	4.70	4.90	4.70

## APPENDIX M

### POST-SMALL GROUP SURVEY: SECTION 2 RESULTS

*1=impossible obstacle    2=somewhat significant obstacle    3=somewhat insignificant obstacle  
4=insignificant obstacle    5=not an obstacle*

Participant Number	Age	Church	Location	Time	Volunteers	Financial	Doctrine	Staff	Visitors	Imbalance
1	56-70	FBC	4	3	2	3	3	3	4	3
2	56-70	FBC	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	4
3	56-70	FUMC	4	4	3	4	5	4	4	4
4	56-70	FUMC	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	3
5	56-70	FBC	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4
6	41-55	FBC	4	4	3	3	4	3	3	3
9	71+	FUMC	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	5
10	41-55	FBC	2	4	4	2	2	3	4	4
11	56-70	FUMC	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	5
18	56-70	FUMC	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4
		Average	3.90	4.00	4.00	3.70	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.90

## APPENDIX N

### CONTROL SAMPLE SURVEY: SECTION 1 RESULTS

*1=strongly disagree    2=somewhat disagree    3=neutral    4=somewhat agree    5=strongly agree*

Age	Church	Own Doctrine	Other Doctrine	3. Dissimilar	4. Competition	5. Purpose	6. Theological Basis	7. Sharing
26-40	FBC	4	2	2	1	4	4	5
41-55	FBC	3	3	3	2	4	4	4
56-70	FBC	4	4	2	1	5	5	5
56-70	FBC	3	3	4	2	4	3	4
56-70	FBC	3	2	3	2	5	4	4
71+	FBC	3	2	1	2	4	5	4
71+	FBC	5	3	3	4	4	3	4
71+	FBC	5	2	1	1	5	5	5
71+	FBC	2	1	2	3	4	5	5
71+	FBC	3	1	2	3	5	5	5
26-40	FUMC	3	1	2	4	4	4	3
41-55	FUMC	3	3	3	1	4	4	3
41-55	FUMC	4	3	4	3	4	4	4
41-55	FUMC	3	1	4	3	2	3	4
41-55	FUMC	2	2	4	2	4	3	3
56-70	FUMC	3	2	3	2	4	3	2
56-70	FUMC	4	2	3	3	4	4	3
71+	FUMC	5	2	2	4	4	3	2
71+	FUMC	5	2	4	4	3	2	2
71+	FUMC	5	4	1	1	5	5	5
	Average	3.60	2.25	2.65	2.40	4.10	3.90	3.80

## APPENDIX O

### CONTROL SAMPLE SURVEY: SECTION 2 RESULTS

*1=impossible obstacle    2=somewhat significant obstacle    3=somewhat insignificant obstacle  
4=insignificant obstacle    5=not an obstacle*

Age	Church	Location	Time	Volunteers	Financial	Doctrine	Staff	Visitors	Imbalance
26-40	FBC	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
41-55	FBC	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4
56-70	FBC	3	5	5	5	5	4	2	3
56-70	FBC	4	3	3	2	2	3	2	3
56-70	FBC	3	4	2	2	4	3	4	3
71+	FBC	4	4	2	3	3	4	2	2
71+	FBC	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
71+	FBC	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4
71+	FBC	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	5
71+	FBC	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	2
26-40	FUMC	3	3	4	2	3	3	4	2
41-55	FUMC	3	4	2	4	4	4	3	4
41-55	FUMC	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	4
41-55	FUMC	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
41-55	FUMC	2	4	3	3	3	4	4	3
56-70	FUMC	4	3	4	5	4	4	4	2
56-70	FUMC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
71+	FUMC	2	4	2	2	2	4	3	4
71+	FUMC	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2
71+	FUMC	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4
	Average	3.35	3.75	3.30	3.25	3.50	3.60	3.30	3.20

## APPENDIX P

### SURVEY RESULTS COMPARISON: SECTION 1

*1=strongly disagree    2=somewhat disagree    3=neutral    4=somewhat agree    5=strongly agree*

	<b>Own Doctrine</b>	<b>Other Doctrine</b>	<b>3. Dissimilar</b>	<b>4. Competition</b>	<b>5. Purpose</b>	<b>6. Theological Basis</b>	<b>7. Sharing</b>
<b>Pre-Small Group Average</b>	3.30	2.40	2.50	1.60	4.40	3.90	4.40
<b>Post-Small Group Average</b>	4.40	3.50	2.10	1.50	4.70	4.90	4.70
<b>Amount of Change</b>	1.1	1.1	-0.4	-0.1	0.3	1.0	0.3
<b>Control Sample Average</b>	3.60	2.25	2.65	2.40	4.10	3.90	3.80



## APPENDIX Q

### SURVEY RESULTS COMPARISON: SECTION 2

*1=impossible obstacle   2=somewhat significant obstacle   3=somewhat insignificant obstacle  
4=insignificant obstacle   5=not an obstacle*

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>Financial</b>	<b>Doctrine</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Imbalance</b>
<b>Pre-Small Group Average</b>	3.50	3.80	3.40	3.10	3.40	4.00	3.30	4.00
<b>Post-Small Group Average</b>	3.90	4.00	4.00	3.70	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.90
<b>Amount of Change</b>	0.4	0.2	0.6	0.6	0.7	0	0.6	-0.1
<b>Control Sample Average</b>	3.35	3.75	3.30	3.25	3.50	3.60	3.30	3.20

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