

Copyright © 2016 Eric Mangek Ngum

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

TRAINING A NEW MEMBERSHIP TEAM TO LEAD IN
ASSIMILATING NEWCOMERS INTO VICTORY
BAPTIST CHURCH, DEKALB, ILLINOIS

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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

by
Eric Mangek Ngum
May 2016

APPROVAL SHEET

TRAINING A NEW MEMBERSHIP TEAM TO LEAD IN
ASSIMILATING NEWCOMERS INTO VICTORY
BAPTIST CHURCH, DEKALB, ILLINOIS

Eric Mangek Ngum

Read and Approved by:

John David Trentham (Faculty Supervisor)

Danny Ray Bowen

Date _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Goals	1
Ministry Context	2
Rationale for the Project	5
Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations	7
Research Methodology	9
2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ASSIMILATING NEWCOMERS INTO MEMBERSHIP	11
Genesis 17:9-14	11
Exodus 12:43-49	18
Acts 2:38-42	23
Ephesians 2:19-22	27
Conclusion	32
3. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES IN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	34
Foundations of Church Membership	35
Current Understanding of Church Membership	38
Creating Positive First Impressions	39
The Benefits of Becoming a Local Church Member	55

Chapter	Page
4. THE METHODOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO LEAD THE CHURCH IN ASSIMILATING NEWCOMERS	60
Developing the Training Curriculum	61
Training Curriculum Evaluation	62
Administering the Survey to the Church	63
Survey Analysis	64
Establishing the New Membership Leadership Team	65
Member Dedication of the New Membership Leadership Team	67
Implementing the Curriculum	67
Commissioning of the New Membership Leadership Team	72
Implementing the Preaching Series	73
Interpreting and Analyzing the Pre-Training and Post-Training Survey ...	76
Conclusion	78
5. EVALUATING THE MINISTRY PROJECT	80
Evaluation of the Purpose	80
Evaluation of the Goals	81
The Preaching Series	86
Theological Reflection	88
Strengths of the Ministry Project	90
Weaknesses of the Ministry Project	93
What I Would Have Done Differently	95
Suggestion for Future Study	96
Personal Reflection	97
Conclusion	98
 Appendix	
1. NEW MEMBERSHIP TEAM ANALYSIS	100
2. RUBRIC FOR EVALUATING NEW MEMBERSHIP TRAINING CURRICULUM	103

Appendix	Page
3. PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY	104
4. TRAINING CURRICULUM	108
5. NOTIFICATION	137
6. LETTER OF CONFIRMATION	138
7. INVITATION	139
8. FRONT DOOR MINISTRY COVENANT	140
9. MINISTRY PROJECT DATA ANALYSIS	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY	146

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Leadership team curriculum sessions, titles, topics, and memory verses . . .	62
2. Sermon series sessions, Scriptures, lesson titles, sermon titles, and memory verses	73
A1. Responses to question 6	141
A2. Responses to question 7	141
A3. Responses to question 8	141
A4. Responses to question 9	142
A5. Responses to question 10	142
A6. Responses to question 11	142
A7. Responses to question 12	142
A8. Responses to question 13	143
A9. Responses to question 14	143
A10. Responses to question 15	143
A11. Responses to question 16	143
A12. Responses to question 17	144
A13. Responses to question 18	144
A14. Responses to question 19	144
A15. Responses to question 20	144
A16. Paired <i>t</i> -test results	145

PREFACE

The encouragement and support of many people ensured the completion of this ministry project. To Christ, I give praise and glory for his unconditional love that saved and called me to be his under shepherd. Without him I can do nothing, but with him I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

It is thanks to Gladness, my loving and caring wife of eighteen years and counting, that I found the support and stability I needed. God has blessed Gladness and me with three lovely children, Eric Jr., Joy, and Eunice. They encourage, inspire, and bring to our family the laughter that keeps me going. I am also very grateful for Victory Baptist Church for their support and encouragement, both human and material. They have stood by me, loved my family, and provided all the resources that have assisted me in my studies. I must not forget my sister in the Lord, Manjit, and her generosity. I am eternally grateful for her support.

I do not know what I could have done without Miguel Echevarria at SBTS. His clear thinking and probing has not only helped focus me, but moved me along in the project. I am truly thankful for his excellent input. I am most indebted to my supervisor, Dr. John David Trentham, for his insightful feedback, push back, and loving encouragement that helped focused me to the end. My ultimate goal is that the project will help propel Victory Baptist Church, and any other church for that matter, to experience growth that brings glory to God. To the all wise God be glory and praise forever. Amen and amen.

Eric Mangek Ngum

DeKalb, Illinois

May 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of the project was to identify and train a new membership team to lead in assimilating newcomers into Victory Baptist Church, DeKalb, Illinois.

Goals

The first goal of the project evaluated how well the church was assimilating newcomers into membership at Victory Baptist Church. It was important that the active members of Victory Baptist Church understood the extent to which the church was effectively (or ineffectively) welcoming newcomers. This goal was measured through a survey given to the active membership of Victory Baptist Church.¹ The goal was deemed successful when more than 70 percent of the active members of Victory Baptist Church completed the survey.

The second goal of the project identified and enlisted active members who served in the new membership leadership team. Working in consultation with the deacon board, I selected the members who served on the new membership leadership team. Following the morning service, those earmarked to serve in the new membership leadership team were interviewed. This goal was deemed successful when a new membership leadership team of five individuals was formed on the basis of the members' commitment to serve.

¹See survey in appendix 1

The third goal of the project was to develop a curriculum to train the members of the new membership leadership team. This goal was measured by a panel of pastoral leaders who used a rubric to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.² This goal was deemed successful when each member of the evaluation panel approved the curriculum by rating at least 90 percent of all rubric indicators as “sufficient” or “exemplary.”

The fourth goal of the project utilized the curriculum to train the members of the new membership leadership team. A pre-training survey was given to the members of the new membership leadership team before they began their training.³ The survey tested the team member’s knowledge of what they understood their role to be. A post-training survey identical to the pre-training survey was administered after the training to test the new membership leadership team’s knowledge of what they had learned. This goal was deemed successful when a *t*-test for dependent samples displayed a positive statistical increase in knowledge on the part of each new member team member, of his or her responsibility between the pre- and post-survey.

Ministry Context

Victory Baptist Church is a Southern Baptist Convention church in DeKalb, Illinois. Victory Baptist church began as an evangelistic outreach to the DeKalb community, as well as to cater to the spiritual needs of those coming to the north from the south in search of work or following family members who had moved. In the first three to four decades of the church, growth was experienced as Baptist Christians from the south moved north and settled in DeKalb, Illinois, in search of a better life or following family members who had found work. Assimilating newcomers into the membership of Victory then was not a problem given the common heritage they shared geographically and spiritually. A second wave of growth was biological, as children, in-laws, and

²See rubric in appendix 2.

³See survey in appendix 3.

grandchildren became members; again, assimilation was not a problem. Growth by outreach to the DeKalb community has not been absent, but it has been minimal due to lack of a coordinated approach to assimilate those who were not southerners. The absence of a trained team to lead the church in this area of ministry is a weakness that has persisted and needs to be addressed. With fewer southerners coming to DeKalb, Illinois, and seeking membership at Victory Baptist Church there was need to prepare the church to be more effective in assimilating a different kind of newcomer.

Prior to the implementation of the ministry project, the former membership committee was put in place to welcome those who came from the south to DeKalb looking for membership and fellowship among the Southern Baptist community already in the area. The limited responsibility of the current membership committee was welcoming Christians from the south coming north or other places is clearly reflected in the constitution and by-laws of Victory Baptist Church:

If persons coming for membership are not from Baptist churches of like faith and order, their request for membership shall be referred to the membership committee for consideration and recommendation. The membership committee shall maintain a membership roll of all the members. It shall urge all non-resident members to unite with a local church of like faith and practice.

The committee has done well maintaining a membership roll, but has not been equipped to assimilate today's newcomers to the church effectively, many of whom are coming from diverse backgrounds.

There was no indication that the current membership committee had been trained to properly respond to the many visitors that come through Victory Baptist Church in the last seven years. The absence of a proactive new membership leadership team directly responsible for assimilating newcomers into active membership at Victory Baptist Church was given urgent attention. Although active members have remained faithful and committed to Victory Baptist Church's vision and mission, nothing had been done to propel growth in the last decade or more. To the credit of the current members, they have been faithful and committed to the church. However, such faithfulness has mainly served to maintain the status quo, which may provide some explanation regarding

why the church was experiencing some form of stagnation. The lack of training and material for the current membership committee stood as one clear weakness that needed to be addressed with urgency for the church to move forward.

The role of the former membership committee seems to have been the consideration of applications for membership and the recommendation of such applicants to the church for membership. Nothing required the current membership committee to proactively reach and assimilate newcomers into the church. The membership committee lacked the preparation to proactively welcome and assimilate newcomers into membership. The lack of diligence in identifying newcomers and turning them into active members was a need that was addressed. The former membership committee had not been given the resources needed to do their job. Another difficulty with the former membership committee was that they were experiencing burn out. Burn out, coupled with lack of training, likely explained why the former membership committee had not met in the last seven years. Although some of the individuals on the current membership committee have been sensitive to the visitors that come to Victory, concerted team action was lacking; thus creating an immediate need for a new membership leadership team to be put in place.

In the former method of trying to assimilate newcomers, the ushers gave a welcome package to those that visited the church for the first time. The package included literature that introduced the church and a card requesting contact information from the visitor. These cards were completed and placed in the offering plate or left in my office. I then made personal contact with the visitor through phone calls or face-to-face. If the visitor came a second and third time, I requested to meet with them. In the meeting, the visitor's questions and any concerns were addressed. I organized another meeting with the visitor during which the doctrinal affirmations of the church, the constitution of the church, and the by-laws of the church were explained to the visitor. It was also in these meetings (usually three to four meetings), that I got to know the salvation experience of these newcomers. Those who were believers were given assurance of salvation, and where there was no explicit salvation testimony, the gospel was presented to the

individual. Upon further meetings with those who are believers, their spiritual gifts were discussed and ministries fitting their gifts were considered. I then recommended them for membership. Those who did not have a clear salvation experience were given an opportunity to confess faith in Christ after the gospel had been clearly presented to them. Upon confession of faith in Christ, they were baptized and welcomed into the membership of the church.

Rationale for the Project

The ministry project put in place a team of dedicated members with the responsibility of identifying newcomers and creating a smooth process of assimilating them into the membership of Victory Baptist Church. The new membership leadership team connected with the newcomers after worship, visited them, and started relationships that ended up with the newcomers attending the new member's class. The work of connecting newcomers to the new membership leadership team put in place an effective structure of assimilation into membership at Victory Baptist Church.

In the last seven years, newcomers who became members of Victory Baptist Church came through the efforts of individuals reaching out to them. Reaching out to newcomers has not been accomplished in any organized manner. In the last seven years, ten families have been effectively integrated into membership. Within this time, four children have been baptized and welcomed into membership. The ten families are actively utilizing their gifts in the church to the glory of God. But there were many who did not become members, many who visited and fell through the cracks because I failed to contact them, or because no one was responsible for connecting with them. A new membership leadership team responsible for seeking out newcomers and encouraging them to attend the new member's class addressed this weakness.

Given that the current system had not been very effective in identifying newcomers and leading them down the pathway of becoming members, that the current membership committee at Victory Baptist Church was suffering from burn out, and also

that the current membership committee did not possess the needed physical strength to lead the church into the future, the committee was replaced with a new membership leadership team adequately prepared to face the new realities of the twenty-first century church. In light of the limitations of the former membership committee, there was need for a new membership leadership team to be disciplined, equipped, and put in place to lead the church forward. The identification and training of a new membership leadership team that is proactively leading the church in assimilating newcomers into Victory Baptist Church was the desired outcome of this ministry project.

The need to lead the church forward demanded that the church identify, train, and put in place a creative new membership leadership team responsible for the assimilation of newcomers. The former membership committee had not assisted in organizing a new member's class at Victory Baptist Church in the last seven years. No concerted effort had been made during this time to proactively assimilate newcomers into membership at Victory Baptist Church by the current membership committee. Therefore, a new membership leadership team was an urgent need that needed to be addressed, and that was what this ministry project accomplished.

The need to be highly proactive in identifying newcomers to the church was one that could not be over emphasized. If those visiting sensed that people were only nice and friendly without being genuinely interested in them, they may not come back again. It was not enough to simply ask visitors to fill a card and drop it in the offering basket and hope to see them next Sunday. It was not also enough that a phone call from me within the week would lead to the visitor returning the following Sunday. In the last seven years, this had proven to be a late attempt that did not work well. Judging from the visitor cards that had been filled out and turned in to me, an estimated 60 or more visitors had passed through Victory Baptist Church in the last seven years. Of this number, only 10 families were successfully assimilated into membership. With a proactive new membership leadership team trained and equipped, change hopefully has come to Victory

Baptist Church. That was why it was important to have a new membership team charged with the responsibility of ensuring the assimilation of the newcomer.

To incorporate newcomers into active membership effectively at Victory Baptist Church, new member classes would be organized regularly. It would be the responsibility of the new membership leadership team to lead in this area of ministry by recognizing newcomers, connecting with them, and beginning the process of effective assimilation by encouraging them to join the new member's class. In these classes, potential members would be introduced to the mission and vision of the church, taught the doctrinal beliefs of the church, and schooled on the importance of church membership. New members would also be taught the importance of effectively using their spiritual gifts in the service of the church and community. The assimilation of newcomers to the church began with the new membership leadership team making sure every visitor to the church ended up in the new member's class.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assimilation. According to Rick Warren, *assimilation* is “the task of moving people from an awareness of your church to attendance at your church to active membership in your church.”⁴

Biblical community. According to Viola, biblical community is where “within the triune God we discover mutual love, mutual fellowship, mutual dependence, mutual honor, mutual submission, mutual dwelling, and authentic community.”⁵

Biblical hospitality. According to Huttar, biblical hospitality is a biblical concept often used with the terms “guest,” “stranger,” and “sojourner.” It is useful to limit the meaning of “hospitality” to benevolence done to those outside

⁴Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 309.

⁵Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David Cook, 2008), 26, Kindle.

one's normal circle of friends, as is implied in the literal meaning of the Greek word meaning "love of strangers."⁶

Church membership. Church membership is made up of saints in Christ who come together to worship, fellowship, serve, evangelize, and grow in community. According to Dever, "It is an exclusive community in that it is only those who have been adopted into God's family by faith in Christ who have a rightful place in it. That place is called membership."⁷

New membership leadership team. A new membership leadership team is defined as a selected, unified group of Christians trained and charged with the responsibility to welcome newcomers with the goal of placing them in the new member's class where they will begin the journey of assimilation into membership. According to L. W. Osborne, there are "three irreducible components, things we must have in order to become a unified leadership team: doctrinal purity, sincere and warm friendships, and philosophical purity."⁸

The most significant limitation of the ministry project was the fifteen-week duration. In light of the time afforded, the implementation of the ministry project was somewhat limited. Consequently, the training of the new membership leadership team was therefore the first-step in the direction of a new future for Victory Baptist Church, DeKalb, Illinois.

This ministry project had two delimitations. The first was that the ministry project was carried out in one local congregation. The second delimitation of the project was that it targeted only the adult members of the new membership leadership team.

⁶David Huttar, "Biblical Hospitality," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1006.

⁷Mark Dever, "Regaining Meaningful Church Membership," in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 48.

⁸L. W. Osborne, *The Unity Factor: Getting Your Church Leaders Working Together*, The Leadership Library (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1989), 56.

Research Methodology

In order to carry out this project effectively, four goals were established to ensure the success of the ministry project. The first goal of the project employed a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the current system through which newcomers were being incorporated into membership at Victory Baptist Church. The goal was measured through a survey of the active members of Victory Baptist Church. At the beginning of the ministry project, active members were asked to complete a survey immediately following the morning worship service. All active members of the church were asked to stay for a few minutes and the deacons distributed the survey to every active member, (see appendix 1). The purpose of the survey was to measure the active member's understanding of the current method of assimilating newcomers into the church. I developed the survey consisting of twenty questions. After the completion of the survey, the deacons collected them. I then reviewed the survey and recorded the results.

The second goal of the project identified members who served in the new membership leadership team. The identification process began at Victory Baptist Church as I suggested to the deacons of Victory Baptist Church a list of people to be considered to serve in the leadership team, beginning with some of the members who were already serving in the current membership committee. In a meeting, the deacons were asked to provide additional names of those they thought qualified to serve in the new membership leadership team. Each name was evaluated based on their willingness to serve as a member of the team, spiritual giftedness, regularity in church attendance and other church gatherings, giving record, faithfulness to the other ministries of the church, the testimony of family members, and the testimony of the board of deacons at Victory Baptist Church. After further consultation with those selected, the members were brought before the entire congregation and voted to be trained as the new membership leadership team.

The third goal of the project was to develop a curriculum to train the members of the new membership leadership team. I developed a curriculum that was used to train

the new membership leadership team.⁹ The curriculum addressed issues such as team leadership, leadership skills, doctrine, spiritual gifts, church mission and vision, ministries of the church, how to reach out to newcomers, and social activities that will be helpful in engaging newcomers to the church. When the curriculum was created, an expert pastoral leadership team drawn from churches in the area was consulted to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.¹⁰ I created a rubric that was used by the expert pastoral team to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. They were each given a copy of the curriculum and invited to a meeting at Victory Baptist Church for an opportunity to evaluate the curriculum.

The fourth goal of the ministry project utilized the curriculum to train the new membership leadership team. Once the team was voted into place in a business meeting of Victory Baptist Church, I sent out letters officially informing the members that have been voted to be trained. Accompanying the letter was another letter of invitation, inviting the members to their first meeting. In the initial meeting, I presented the training agenda to the team. The curriculum was also discussed at the maiden meeting. The last thing that happened at the initial meeting was the completion of the pre-project survey. The purpose of the pre-project survey was to test the new membership leadership team's understanding of their responsibilities. A post-project survey was also administered after the training to test the new membership leadership team's knowledge of what they had learned.¹¹ A t-test analysis was used to determine this.¹²

⁹See appendix 4.

¹⁰See rubric in appendix 2.

¹¹The research instruments employed to complete the ministry project were approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research and Ethics Committee before they are used in the ministry project.

¹²Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011).

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
ASSIMILATING NEWCOMERS
INTO MEMBERSHIP

Strong biblical and theological support for assimilating newcomers into the membership of the local church can be gleaned from selected Old and New Testament texts. God, in his covenant relationship with the chosen people, provides specific guidelines for becoming a member of the covenant community. An exegetical study of Old and New Testament texts supports this assertion, leading to the overarching argument there is strong biblical and theological support for the assimilation of newcomers into the membership of God's covenant community.

To make the biblical and theological case for assimilating newcomers into the community of God's people, four texts have been selected: two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. The biblical texts are Gen. 17:9-14; Exod. 12:43-49; Acts 2:40-42; and Eph.2:19-22. The exegetical study of these texts will substantiate the thesis that there is strong biblical and theological basis in the Old and New Testaments for assimilating newcomers into the membership of the church.

Genesis 17:9-14

Genesis 17:9-14 serves as a foundation text wherein God sets apart a special community of people with specific guidelines regarding who may or may not be part of the covenant community:

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of

your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

God promised Abraham that his offspring as well as slaves born in his house or bought with his money, strangers, and aliens (newcomers) would share in the covenant community through the sign of circumcision. According to Wenham, “These verses constitute both the central and the longest divine speech in this chapter, dealing with circumcision, the principal human obligation of the covenant. Its key terms are “covenant” and “circumcise,” both of which occur six times.¹

Genesis 17:9-14 in relation to other covenant texts (Gen 9, 12, 15, and 22) is the climax and more comprehensive statement of the covenant relationship between God, Abraham, and his offspring. It is a covenant with definite instructions that must be strictly obeyed by Abraham and his descendants (vv. 10-11), with the words “covenant” and “circumcision” playing an important role in the understanding and application of the text. The Hebrew word for covenant (*bērit*), according to Smick, is

a treaty, alliance of friendship; between individuals: a pledge or agreement; with obligation between a monarch and subjects: a constitution; between God and man: a covenant accompanied by signs, sacrifices, and a solemn oath that sealed the relationship with promises of blessing for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it.²

Payne notes that the covenant (*bērit*) God makes with Abraham in Genesis 17 is a “monopleuric disposition which may indeed involve reciprocally binding conditions or promises, but which exists essentially as ‘put through’ or imposed by one party upon another,” concluding that it is “an arrangement between two unequal parties”³ The

¹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 22.

²Elmer B. Smick, “282 בְּרִית,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 128.

³J. B. Payne, “Covenant,” in *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Tenny Merrill (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 1:996

“monopleuric” concept is important because the etymology of *bĕrît* could also mean a mutual agreement between two equal parties. The covenant God makes with Abraham in Genesis 17 is a “divine ordinance with signs or pledges.”⁴ Briscoe and Ogilvie observe,

The covenant Yahweh chose to make with Abram was clearly based on His sovereignty, but at the same time it had elements of equality in the sense that Abram was known as the friend of God. But overarching equality and inequality was the sense of integrity which was fundamental to any concept of covenant. Having already pledged His integrity to Abram concerning the possession of the land (see Gen. 15:18), the Lord reaffirmed another aspect of the covenant—which He had already introduced (see Gen. 12:1–3)—the promise of progeny and worldwide blessing.⁵

According to Archer, *bĕrît* “would originally signify a relationship between two parties wherein each bound himself to perform a certain service or duty for the other.”⁶ God binds himself to the covenant with Abraham by asserting, “To be God to you and to your offspring after you . . . I will be their God” (Gen 17:7-8), with the expressed expectation, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations” (v. 9). Williams comments,

This was the best gift of all—not just forgiveness, not just acceptance, not just grace. God was giving *himself!* And the full realization of that gift came to all people when Jesus gave *himself!* to the whole world. But Abraham could not possibly grasp the full scope of this promise, for it included not only his physical heirs but the spiritual heirs of which Peter spoke: “The promise is for . . . all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).⁷

Those who become part of this religious community are “members of the household of God” (Eph 19).

⁴James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2001), 1285.

⁵D. S. Briscoe and L. J. Ogilvie, *Genesis*, The Preacher's Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 147.

⁶G. L. Archer, Jr., “*bĕrît*,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 299.

⁷W. G. Williams, *Genesis: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 1999), 143.

Williamson writes,

Although the promises of Genesis 15 are not altogether absent (c.f. Gen 17:8), the stress in Genesis 17 is on Abraham's international significance. His numerical proliferation (Gen 17:2) is elaborated chiefly in terms of his becoming "the father of multitudinous nations (Gen 17:4-6; c.f. 17:16), a prospect further encapsulated in the new name he receives at this point in the narrative."⁸

God established a community of people who would be called his people. The covenant God made with Abraham is very inclusive in the sense that it "includes non-biological members of Abraham's household. . . . Thus understood, Abraham will be the 'father of multitudinous nations' not in terms of biological ancestry but in terms of mediating divine blessing to them."⁹ In establishing a covenant with Abraham, God creates a unique community of people accessed only through the rite of circumcision, the sign of the covenant.

God's commitment to keep his covenant with Abraham and his descendants entails responsibility imposed on Abraham and his descendants—obedience; failure to obey resulted in exclusion from the community. Sailhamer writes,

Abraham's part in the covenant consisted of his obedience to the covenant: "You must keep my covenant" (v. 9). What this meant was immediately explained: "This is my covenant . . . you are to keep. . . . Every male among you shall be circumcised. To keep the covenant was to faithfully practice circumcision; to "break" (v. 14b) the covenant was to be uncircumcised" (v. 14a). Lest the reader conclude that the whole of the covenant was simply the rite of circumcision, the author has included the words "and it will be a sign of the covenant" (v. 11).¹⁰

The Hebrew word *peritomē*, the English word for circumcision, means "The ritual act of incising or removing the foreskin of a male's penis. A sign of Abraham's

⁸P. R. Williamson, "Covenant," in *Dictionary of Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003), 147.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank. E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 139.

covenant with God.”¹¹ Barry writes, “The surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis—was mandatory for inclusion in the covenant.”¹² Circumcision is the sign of the covenant, and according to Whitcomb,

God establishes a covenant with Abraham. As part of that covenant, every male living with Abraham must be circumcised; in this way, the covenant was in their flesh. In addition, every newborn male must be circumcised on the eighth day—a ritual also prescribed in Lev 12:3.¹³

The physical cutting of the skin was a reminder to Abraham and his descendants that their existence solely depended on God. Barry continues, “Physical circumcision visibly reminded both men and women (since their husbands and sons were circumcised) that their existence as a people resulted from God’s supernatural provision of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah.”¹⁴ Reno observes,

The scope of God’s commandment reinforces the way in which circumcision functions in the flesh, but not according to the flesh. Blood links the generations. Yet, in the commandment given to Abraham, the linkage of blood does not govern the law of circumcision. One need not be of the blood of Abraham in order to receive the sign of the covenant. . . . Thus, as a sign in the flesh, circumcision is a spiritual sign. It is a sign of covenant membership, not family lineage. The circumcised foreigner is a member, but the uncircumcised descendant is not: “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people” (17:14).¹⁵

Biological members of Abraham’s house are excluded if they do not take on the sign of the covenant, but non-biological members, strangers and aliens, are included upon receiving the sign of the covenant. According to Hall,

Circumcision is a mnemonic sign of the covenant with God. It reminds both God and Israelites that they are God’s and he is theirs; that he has chosen them and that

¹¹K. A. Whitcomb, “Circumcision,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Barry and L. Wentz (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012).

¹²John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012), s.v. “circumcision.”

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵R. R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 179.

they are in the sphere of his working. With circumcision Israelites commit themselves to living in this sphere; hence, to neglect it is to read oneself out of God's people.¹⁶

Circumcision was an ancient Near East practice¹⁷ to which God gave a new meaning. Walton notes,

Although the Israelites are not the only people in the ancient Near East to circumcise their sons, what is unique in their practice is that the ritual is used as a theological rite of passage into the covenant community rather than a passage into adulthood or a new family group through marriage. . . . Circumcision can be seen as one of many cases where God transforms a common practice to a new (though not necessarily unrelated) purpose in revealing himself and relating to his people.¹⁸

It is equally important to note that the permanency of the covenant God makes with Abraham and his descendants is seen in the permanency of the sign. According to Williams,

The surgery was not something entirely new. But God was designating the practice as a special sign of the covenant He was making with Abraham and his descendants. Intentionally, it would seem, God chose a sign that could not be reversed. This sign's permanence would reflect the eternal aspect of the covenant and would be a reminder of the spiritual bond that existed between the chosen and the Chooser.¹⁹

This divine human relationship necessitated Abraham and his descendants take responsibility; thus the blessings of the covenant are dependent on obedience. This was not the first time God placed a condition on Abraham (Gen 12:1), but just as he obeyed God before he obeys him now (Gen 17:26). Wenham observes,

¹⁶Robert G. Hall, "Circumcision," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1027.

¹⁷Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* makes the observation that circumcision was not uncommon in the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern world. There is no evidence that suggests circumcision was practiced in Mesopotamia, but it was practiced elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In non-Israelite culture, primarily adolescent and adult males were circumcised. For this reason, the ritual may have been associated with male fertility or in preparation for marriage. Sometimes the foreskin was simply incised, but at other times it was removed.

¹⁸John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 451.

¹⁹Williams, *Genesis*, 144.

So when the nation lost its freedom and was deported to Babylonia, the prophets spoke encouragingly about the permanence of the covenant relationship (Isa 24:5). In particular they looked forward to a new and eternal covenant: new in that this time Israel, not just the LORD, would observe it loyally (Jer 31:31–37; 32:40; Ezek 16:60; 37:26). Indeed, through this new and eternal covenant, all nations would be blessed (Isa 55:3; 61:8).²⁰

This new and eternal covenant finds its perfect fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Wenham notes, “The NT, of course, sees these predictions of the new covenant as fulfilled in Christ, and especially by the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God (Acts 15:16–18; Eph 3:1–6; Heb. 8:8–13).”²¹ Wenham writes,

The permanent marking of the body reflects the eternity of the covenant between God and Israel (17:7, 13, 19). The marking of a man’s most intimate member with the sign of the covenant coupled with the call to blamelessness may well have prompted prophetic criticism of Israelites as uncircumcised in heart and ears (Jer 6:10; 9:24–25[25–26]).²²

The covenant God established with Abraham concerning Israel has not been nullified. However, the meaning of the sign of the covenant has changed from circumcision of the foreskin to the circumcision of the heart. Although this is not an entirely New Testament addition (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4), it is proper to note the new meaning of the sign of the covenant received its intended significance in the New Testament as Paul concludes in Romans 2:29.

God makes a covenant with Abraham thereby setting apart a community of special people for himself accessed only by the sign of circumcision. According to Roop,

The covenant community is formed through this act of inclusion. Circumcision does not make the individual a “godly” person, but incorporates one into the community with whom God has an unending covenant. Failure or refusal to circumcise cuts one off from participation and so breaks covenant (v. 14).²³

²⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 31.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 24.

²³E. F. Roop, *Genesis*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1987), 123.

The New Testament ritual of inclusion or assimilation is baptism. Roop notes, “In the baptismal promises, one at the same time affirms Jesus as Lord and accepts participation in the body of Christ.”²⁴ The covenant God made with Abraham, according to Sproul, is not static: “The new covenant” or the “the covenant of completion, the covenant of consummation, which all of the other covenants point toward.”²⁵ Now that the foundational text for belonging to the family of God has been considered (covenant membership), attention must be turned to the implication on the nation of Israel, and by extension the church. The text that elucidates it well is Exodus 12:43-49.

Exodus 12:43-49

In Exodus 12:43-49 is found the biblical evidence for assimilating newcomers into God’s covenant community.

And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.”

In Genesis 17, God established a covenant community making provision for inclusion of biological and non-biological descendants of Abraham (Gen 17:12-13). God, in establishing a covenant with Abraham, creates a unique community of people accessed by circumcision. Every male who is “cut on the foreskin of their penis” becomes a member of the covenant community and is treated as a native born (v. 48a). As Israel sojourns out of Egypt, “a mixed multitude” followed them. The mixed multitude of foreigners, hired hands, and strangers can only partake of the Passover meal when they

²⁴Roop, *Genesis*, 123.

²⁵R. C. Sproul, *The Promises of God: Discovering the One Who Keeps His Word* (Sandford, FL: David Cook, 2012), 276.

take on the sign of the covenant. They are not excluded from the meal simply because they are “other people,” but because they do not have on them the sign of the covenant that makes them members of the covenant community. They must be assimilated into the community to partake of the Passover meal.

According to Lange, the Passover is “the religious communion of the people, for which now circumcision is prescribed as a prerequisite.”²⁶ Dunnam observes that the provision for strangers to be circumcised “meant that strangers among the Israelites who wanted to observe the Passover were required to submit to circumcision.”²⁷ Durham notes the important specification that

only members of the covenant community are eligible for Passover worship. The criterion for this membership is circumcision. Slaves bought and paid for, that is, owned outright and without question, must be circumcised before they can keep Passover. Those passing through, even those engaged for temporary work, are not to keep Passover. An outsider may be allowed to keep Passover only if he and his entire family are circumcised, that is, admitted to the covenant community. One rule applies to all: circumcision.²⁸

One must be assimilated in order to communion with the community.

Commenting on the exclusion of the foreigner, Stuart observes the word *nēkār*, a term for persons who are simply not part of the covenant community—“outsiders” might be a suitable translation. He then adds, “This does not constitute racial or ethnic discrimination. It represents proper religious discrimination.”²⁹ Anyone who has not officially become a member of the community of faith cannot partake of the Passover. However, the foreigner can partake of the Passover only after becoming part of the

²⁶John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, and Charles M. Mead, *Exodus: A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 2:42.

²⁷Maxie Dunnam and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Exodus, The Preacher’s Commentary Series*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 142.

²⁸J. I. Durham, *Exodus, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 173.

²⁹Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, The New American Commentary*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 308.

community through the ritual of circumcision. Once foreigners were assimilated into the covenant community they enjoyed the same rights as if they were native born.

Although all who took on the sign of the covenant participated in the Passover, a certain group of people are excluded; temporary residents (*tôšāb*) or hired workers (*śakîr*), those without faith in God, were not allowed to partake of the Passover. However, the case can be made that if any of these temporary workers became circumcised they would equally be allowed to partake of the Passover meal. According to Lange, Schaff, and Mead,

Yet the exclusion is not absolute, except as regards the uncircumcised; every servant, on the other hand, who submits to circumcision (for no one could be circumcised by force, although circumcision was within the option of all) assumes the privileges and obligations of the communion. Therefore, the distinction of classes, as related to the communion of the people of God, is here excluded.³⁰

Regardless of one's origin, circumcision erased all distinctions of class and race. Paul would later write in Romans 10:12, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him." He says the same thing to the Colossian church: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11).

The word foreigner or sojourner has a special place in the history of the nation of Israel: they were foreigners in Egypt. God has a special place for foreigners in his plan of salvation. He made provision for the inclusion of foreigners by circumcision, even those who lived temporarily among his covenant people. Elwell and Beitzel write,

A temporary guest or sojourner was usually someone who wanted to take up temporary residence or had moved from one tribe or people to another, and then attempted to obtain certain privileges or rights belonging to the natives. A whole tribe might be sojourners in Israel. This was the case with the Gibeonites (Jos 9) and the Be-erothites (2 Sam 4:3; cf. 2 Chr 2:17). The Israelites themselves were

³⁰Lange, Schaff, and Mead, *Exodus*, 2:42.

sojourners in the land of Egypt (Gen. 15:13; 23:4; 26:3; 47:4; Ex 2:22; 23:9) and in other lands (Ru 1:1).³¹

Christians too are foreigners in this world. Elwell and Beitzel conclude,

In the NT, “foreigner” refers variously to Samaritans (Luke. 17:18) and Canaanites (Heb. 11:9, 34). The work of Christ allowed all foreigners to become members of God’s household (Eph. 2:11–19). Christians should consider themselves foreigners in this world (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).³²

As foreigners who have been graciously assimilated into the covenant community of God’s people, their responsibility is to offer others the same opportunity they have been offered—assimilation into the community of God’s people, the local church.

The text also points out that the meal was to be celebrated in community: “It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house” (v. 46a). Although eating indoors protected the members of the household from the angel of death and prevented foreigners from partaking of the Passover meal, Durham observes, “The meal of remembrance is to be eaten inside, in the one house selected for a gathering of smaller families.”³³ The meal is not only to be eaten by the community as a whole, but in communities as families belonging to the whole. Stuart notes, “Here again God teaches his people concepts that will help them recognize the sacredness of the body of Christ as it is offered up on the cross for them as a substitutionary atonement in the future.”³⁴ Paul would later talk of those who have been redeemed as members of the household of God (Eph 2:19). To participate in the Passover meal, one had to be a member of the covenant community. To participate in the Lord’s Supper one has to be a member of the community of faith: “The gospel writers closely associated the Last Supper with the Passover.”³⁵

³¹Walter. A. Elwell and B. J. Beitzel, “Circumcision,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 807.

³²Ibid.

³³Durham, *Exodus*, 173.

³⁴Stuart, *Exodus*, 309.

³⁵Ibid., 257.

The Hebrew word for Passover is *pesah*, and when used in conjunction with *maṣṣōt* presents a powerful religious symbol for the Israelites. According to Bokser,

The Hebrew Bible employs the terms *pesah* and *maṣṣōt* to refer to two celebrations—Scripture assumes they are combined—which mark the exodus from Egypt. These festivals became not only powerful symbols of hope and redemption but also central religious experiences in the life of Israel and of people who identified with Biblical Israel.³⁶

According to Elwell and Comfort,

The Passover was of supreme theological significance for the Israelites, since it marked one of the most momentous acts of divine intervention in their history, the beginning of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt when, in the final plague, God destroyed the firstborn of the Egyptians but spared those Israelites whose homes had blood smeared on the doorposts.³⁷

The case has been made that in the New Testament the Passover finds its perfect fulfillment in Christ. He is not only the perfect Passover lamb; he reinterprets the Old Testament ritual into the Lord's Supper. Commenting on the reinterpretation of the Passover ritual into the Lord's Supper, Bokser writes,

As portrayed in the gospels, the meal is not structured to celebrate the Exodus but is reinterpreted in a way that relates to the future of the Jesus movement, that is, Christianity. The bread becomes the salvational body of Christ and the wine his blood—the sign of future redemption.³⁸

When Jesus eats the last supper with the disciples wherein he institutes the Lord's Supper, Gemeren concludes,

There is no doubt that Jesus' words and actions are best understood if the meal is regarded as taking place within the context of the Jewish Passover. In this the people of God not only remembered, but again lived through, the events of their deliverance from Egypt under the sign of the sacrificed paschal lamb as if they themselves participated in them (see Exod. 12). In this context, giving the bread and wine as his body and blood, with the words, "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus points to himself as the true substitute for the paschal lamb and to his death as the saving event that will deliver the new Israel, represented in his disciples, from all

³⁶B. M. Bokser, "Unleavened Bread and Passover, Feasts of," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 763.

³⁷W. A. Elwell and P. W. Comfort, "Passover," in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, ed. W. A. Elwell and P. W. Comfort (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 482.

³⁸Bokser, "Unleavened Bread and Passover," 763.

bondage. His blood is to be henceforth the sign under which God will remember his people in himself.³⁹

It is clear from Scripture that only those who have found this freedom in Christ can partake of the Lord's Supper just as only those who had taken on the sign of the covenant (circumcision) could partake of the Passover. In the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus ate the meal with the disciples whom he instructed to keep celebrating no longer the Passover, but the Lord's Supper in community. He ate the Last Supper meal with his disciples, and from then on the church has celebrated the Lord's Supper in community (Acts 2:42-47; 20:7-11). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

The Greek word "*koinōnou*," the English word "participation," means companionship, denoting fellowship in community. It is interesting to see from Scripture how this new covenant community grew through assimilating newcomers, and the text that illustrates this is Acts 2:38-42.

Acts 2:38-42

The exegesis of Acts 2:38-42 supports the thesis for a strong biblical and theological foundation in assimilating newcomers into God's covenant community by demonstrating how new believers were welcomed into the membership of the early church:

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

³⁹W. A. Van Gemeren, "Passover," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 704.

During Christ's ministry on earth He established a new community of faith, which are the 120 in Acts 1:15 who upon receiving the promised Holy Spirit began to preach the gospel of the new covenant. As Peter proclaimed this gospel message on Pentecost, a multitude repented, believed, and were baptized, and "there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41b). Pink observes, "By the successful conclusion of His earthly mission and work, Christ laid a sure foundation for the recovery of God's fallen people and for their true fellowship with Him."⁴⁰ To be a part of the true fellowship, three things had to happen; one had to repent, be baptized, and be added to the new community of the redeemed. Those who repented and were baptized became a fellowship; they received the promise, and they broke bread together.

According to Ogilvie and Ogilvie,

The word "repent," *metanoéō*, is a two-part word—*metá*, "after," and *néō*, "to perceive," from *noûs*, "the mind." To repent means to change one's mind, to perceive after a mind-changing truth or understanding. Peter wanted them to change their minds about Christ and to see their own desperate need for Him as Lord and Christ of their lives.⁴¹

In the words of Kistemaker and Hendriksen, "Repentance signifies that man's mind is changed completely, so that he consciously turns away from sin (3:19). Repentance causes a person to think and act in harmony with Jesus' teachings."⁴² The repentance the apostle Peter calls his listeners to is not of their own making; it is the gracious gift of God. Jamieson writes, "The word denotes *change of mind*, and here includes the reception of the Gospel as the proper issue of that revolution of mind which

⁴⁰A. W. Pink, *The Divine Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 294.

⁴¹Lloyd J. Ogilvie and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Acts*, The Preacher's Commentary Series, vol. 28 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 70.

⁴²S. J. Kistemaker and W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 17 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 105.

they were then undergoing.”⁴³ Those who repented were baptized.

The Greek word for baptize, “*baptizein*,” according to Hartman, is formed from *baptein*, “dip”:

Dip frequently or intensively, plunge, immerse. . . . Rites of immersion were not uncommon in the world in which early Christianity developed. One type of symbolism with which they were frequently connected was that of purification: from sin, from destruction, from the profane sphere before entering a holy area, from something under a taboo.⁴⁴

The significance of baptism was identification with the new community of faith. Those who repented and were baptized formed a fellowship.

According to Zodhiates, *koinonia* means “to share in, fellowship with, participation, communion, fellowship.”⁴⁵ In the New Testament, *koinōnia* often describes the association of those within the Christian community based on their mutual faith (Acts 2:42; Phlm 6). In Acts 2:42, Luke recounts that the early church was devoted to *koinōnia*. This was practiced along with a dedication to the apostle’s teaching, the breaking of bread, and prayer, indicating that the act of gathering in community was an element of their worship. According to 1 John, Christian *koinōnia* was impossible unless it was grounded in apostolic witness (1 John 1:1, 3, 6).

The apostle Paul makes it clear that fellowship only happens in the local body of Christ’s followers because it already exists in Christ (1 Cor 1:9), a point echoed by the apostle John in 1 John 1:3. *Koinōnia* therefore stresses the communion of believers in relationship with one another. Those who repented and were baptized (about 3,000) were added to the existing new covenant community of the 120 disciples including the apostles (Acts 1:15). Newcomers were added or assimilated into the existing community through

⁴³R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. “Acts 2:38.”

⁴⁴Lars Hartman, “Baptism,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 583.

⁴⁵Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2000), s.v. “*koinonia*.”

the ritual of baptism. It is in community that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” In community they grew together, studied the Word together, fellowshiped together, broke bread together, cared for one another together, and worshipped together (Acts 2: 43-47). Lenski notes,

The deduction should not be made from this passage that people may be received into the church only on their willingness to enter it and that teaching may be postponed until later. These converts were Jews who were fully conversant with the Scriptures as Peter’s quotations from Joel and from David show. The one thing they needed was the conviction that Jesus was the Christ. That Peter wrought in them on Pentecost. Thus they were fully prepared for baptism and for membership; they had what we must now first give to those who have never been properly instructed. This teaching after Pentecost was that which we now perform Sunday after Sunday, the teaching and the preaching in public worship.⁴⁶

Commenting on these verses, and especially verse 42, Polhill notes, “Thus viewed, it provides a glimpse into the manner in which the new converts were incorporated into the believing community.”⁴⁷ According to Gangel, this is a summary of the dawn of the New Testament church: “Here we have the first. In it our author describes what a biblical church really looks like, not only in the first century, but in every century from the Lord’s ascension until his second coming.”⁴⁸ Gangel further observes that the New Testament church must be engaged in the study of the doctrines of the church; in fellowship; in the breaking of bread (Lord’s Supper); and in worship—prayer: “Their work also included learning how to live and love together. They sold their possessions and made sure everybody had plenty. Communism? Absolutely not—this was voluntary, contemporary, and discretionary.”⁴⁹ While the church cannot force anyone to become a member, it is required of believers to belong together.

⁴⁶R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 115.

⁴⁷J. B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 118.

⁴⁸K. O. Gangel, *Acts*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 31.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

Now that the church has been birthed, how does it fare? To answer the question, attention must be directed to the last Scripture making the case for the assimilation of newcomers into the membership of the local church for fellowship and spiritual growth.

Ephesians 2:19-22

The exegesis of Ephesians 2:19-22 supports the thesis for a strong biblical and theological foundation in the assimilating of newcomers into God’s covenant community by emphasizing the importance of how believers who become part of the church grow and mature together:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

According to Begg, the Old Testament uses a variety of synonymous terms to designate a foreigner or stranger, including “*zār, ben nēkār, nokrî*.”⁵⁰ Begg concludes, “In most instances, the connotations attached to these terms are negative, although occasional neutral or even positive usages occur.”⁵¹ The New Testament also uses a variety of equivalent terms to refer to the foreigner or stranger, such as “*allogenēs, allophulos, xenos, allotrios*.”⁵² However, Begg’s conclusion is that “it does not, however, give the same prominence to such terminology as does the OT—primarily because through the work of Christ ethnic-religious divisions within humanity have been, in principle, overcome (see esp. Eph 2:11–21).”⁵³ Lincoln points out that in Ephesians the terms stranger and aliens

⁵⁰Christopher T. Begg, “Foreigner,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 829.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., 830.

⁵³Ibid.

“are not meant to be sharply distinguished and that, in line with the style of this letter, two terms are used, where one would have sufficed, in order to emphasize the Gentiles’ previous ‘outsider’ status.”⁵⁴ Rather than seek to make a distinction between these two terms, one should see that they are meant to stress the former status of those who are now members of the church the household of God. Those who were once strangers and aliens

are no longer completely without a homeland; they are no longer even second-class citizens in someone else’s homeland. They now have full citizenship in and belong firmly to a commonwealth, for they are fellow citizens with the holy ones . . . The readers are to see themselves as fellow citizens with the rest of believers.⁵⁵

This household of God, which is the church is *epoikodoméō*, Greek for “built, to build, to build upon, to erect a superstructure (1 Cor. 3:10, 12, 14; Eph. 2:20); to build up, edify.”⁵⁶ This superstructure is built on *themélios*, Greek for “foundation, that which is laid down.”⁵⁷ The foundation is the *apóstolos*, Greek for “apostles; one sent, apostle, ambassador,” and *prophētēs*, Greek for “prophets, a foreteller of future events, also an interpreter,” and the *akrogōniaios*, Greek for “cornerstone of the building is Christ.”⁵⁸ “The foundation cornerstone, applied figuratively to Christ who not only sustains the whole structure of the Church, but also unites Jews and Gentiles into one mystical building.”⁵⁹ It is this cornerstone who holds the entire structure together. The structure is called the set apart dwelling place of God—holy temple, verse 21.

Lange observes, “It inheres in the matter itself, that the citizens of the kingdom of God, have now filial and household privileges with Him, His whole people become

⁵⁴Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 150.

⁵⁵Ibid., 151.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

themselves the holy house, the temple in which His Spirit dwells.”⁶⁰ O’Brien notes, “Once his Gentile readers had been foreigners and aliens in relation to God’s people, Israel. Now their status has dramatically changed. They now have a privileged place in God’s new community.”⁶¹ In Christ all believers have the same privileges as children of God regardless of their Jewish or Gentile background. O’Brien writes, “In Christ Gentiles are not only fellow-citizens with Jewish believers under God’s rule; they are also children together in God’s own family.”⁶² Those who were once strangers and aliens, non-biological descendants of Abraham, became members of the covenant community by taking on the sign of the covenant—circumcision. In the New Testament, believers take on a new kind of circumcision, the circumcision of the heart. Paul’s conclusion is that those whose hearts have been circumcised have become one family in Christ just as those who were circumcised on the foreskin, although a foreigner became just like a native-born Israel. Paul brings these two together when he writes in Galatians 3:8-9, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’—So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” The blessing of the Gentiles is this: they have become not only citizens, not only with the saints, but members of the household of God who are being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Christ into a holy dwelling place of God.

In Christ both Jews and Gentiles become one household of faith who grow into a firm spiritual building by means of the Spirit of God, verse. 22 says they “are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” Commenting on Paul’s image

⁶⁰John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 97.

⁶¹Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 210.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 211-12.

of believers as a building that is being built together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of the building, O'Brien writes, "As he develops the image he speaks of both the foundation and cornerstone of the building, the structure as a whole and its individual stones, its cohesion and growth, its present function and (at least implicitly) its future destiny."⁶³ The spiritual building, the church, the temple of God, is built on Christ who is not only its cornerstone but gives the building its essence. According to Hendriksen and Kistemaker,

The cornerstone of a building, in addition to being part of the foundation and therefore *supporting* the superstructure, finalizes its shape, for, being placed at the corner formed by the junction of two primary walls, it determines the lay of the walls and crosswalls throughout. All the other stones must adjust themselves to this cornerstone. So also, in addition to resting in Christ, the spiritual house is determined as to its character by him. It is he who settles the question as to what this house is to be in the sight of God, and as to what is its function in God's universe. It is Christ who gives the house its needed *direction*.⁶⁴

Christ is not only the foundation on which the church is built, he is also the one responsible for its growth. He is the one who holds and sustains the church (Col 1:17).

Williams concludes,

It is in vital union with *him* that the entire building is "growing" or "rising." There is nothing static about this edifice. It is a living building consisting of living stones: believers. And since each living stone makes his own contribution to the growth and beauty of the building, the latter is described as "harmoniously fitted together."⁶⁵

Unlike the specific place of the Old Testament temple in Jerusalem, the temple Paul speaks of here, the church, is not a particular physical building located in a particular location, rather, it is the believer. It is both the Jew and especially the Gentile who was a stranger and an alien who now is the dwelling place of God. Dunnam writes, "Formerly outcasts, relegated to an outer court in the temple, the Gentiles are now themselves a part

⁶³O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 212.

⁶⁴William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 143.

⁶⁵Ibid.

of the temple. God has His presence in them. God's people, not a particular place or building, is the dwelling place of God."⁶⁶

The church is a living organism and not an organization, and as a result, it grows. The Jews and Gentiles who now are one in Christ, perfectly fit together to grow and mature together in Christ. Unlike a physical human building whose stones once properly fitted together become static, the living stones in the church—believers, grow once they are properly fit together in Christ. According to Lenski, “This is a spiritual, living Sanctuary. . . . Justification places us on the foundation, but this is not the whole of God's work of building us into a holy Sanctuary. We need daily forgiveness, progressive sanctification, constant blessing.”⁶⁷ Believers are not isolated stones scattered all over the place. That would make them dead stones. Believers are living stones (1 Pet 2:5) “being built up as a spiritual house.” Lincoln concludes,

The joining together of all the elements that make up the total structure of the Church is a continuous present activity. As the adjusting and fitting together take place, the Church can be seen as in the process of growth toward its ultimate condition of holiness (cf. also 5:27). Growth and holiness, here, are not simply matters for individual initiates pursuing their own ends, but notions which have a clearly corporate context. It is the growth of the community, the whole Church, which is decisive, and the growth is in this context a qualitative rather than a quantitative concept. The notion of a growing Church inevitably implies both that history and the future are important for this writer, and not totally swallowed up in his realized eschatology, and that the Church is as yet imperfect.⁶⁸

According to O'Brien

The joining together of the elements that make up the total structure of this new divine community is an ongoing activity. The building is still under construction (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6, 7; 2 Cor. 9:10), which is another way of saying that the new community of God is growing and progressing to its ultimate goal of holiness, an objective that

⁶⁶Maxie D. Dunnam and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The Preacher's Commentary Series, vol. 31 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 174.

⁶⁷R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 457-8.

⁶⁸Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 157-58.

is not simply personal or individual but in the present context must be corporate as well.⁶⁹

Conclusion

The need for corporate awareness screams from Ephesians 2:19-22 as well as from numerous other portions of Scripture. The point is clear from the texts examined that God desires to relate with the crown of his creation in community; a community he has called and set apart for himself in the Old Testament symbolized by the circumcision of the foreskin and in the New Testament symbolized by the circumcision of the heart. Although Paul argues against Gentile circumcision, it would be wrong to think he argues for less circumcision, rather he argues for more circumcision. According to Reno, “Circumcision of the heart is more visible in human flesh, not less so.”⁷⁰ The point Reno makes is that it is “humanly easy to give up one tiny part of the body than to let the whole of it be crucified with Christ.”⁷¹ While the community is inclusive in that it is not restricted,⁷² membership into the community of faith is restricted only to those who like Abraham come by faith.

When God made the covenant with Abraham, he promised to make him into the father of many nations. Paul, in Galatians 3:8-9, implies this promise has been fulfilled in the church when he writes, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” Paul echoes the same truth in Romans 4:16-17:

⁶⁹O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 219.

⁷⁰Reno, *Genesis*, 179.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²In the Old Testament not only to the biological children of Abraham, but to anyone who took on the sign of the covenant—circumcision; and in the New Testament not only to Jews who with the sign of the covenant on them had expressed faith in Jesus Christ, but also to Gentiles who in faith confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Ibid.

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written: “I have made you the father of many nations” in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Those who were once strangers and aliens have, by faith, been fitted perfectly into the family of God where they are to grow together into the holy dwelling of God. This kind of union and growth requires becoming a member of the local church. This undoubtedly calls for the assimilation of newcomers into the membership of the local church. In the next chapter attention is given to how this is presently working in the twenty-first century church.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES
IN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Biblical evangelism is not complete until those who come to faith are brought into the membership of the local church where progressive sanctification and multiplication takes place. The commission Jesus gave the church in Matthew 28:18-20 is to go make disciples, and the local church setting is the place where disciples are made, as sinners are transformed into saints and join the community of faith. Those who hear the gospel message, repent, and believe, become one with Christ are brought into membership through the sacrament of baptism where they communally participate in fellowship through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is important to observe that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper can only be properly observed when believers are in community; thus there is a need for church membership and for assimilating newcomers into the membership of the local church. Bonhoeffer writes, "It is certain that there can be no fellowship or communion with him except through his Body. For only through the Body can we find acceptance and salvation."¹ The church is therefore made up of those who have been baptized into Christ: "To be baptized therefore means to become a member of the Church, a member of the Body of Christ. . . . To be in Christ therefore means to be in the Church."² It is thus improper for one to claim to be in Christ and not a member of the body of Christ that finds its visible expression in the local church.

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 249, Kindle.

²Ibid., 251.

Foundations of Church Membership

Bonhoeffer is correct when he writes, “It is impossible to become a new man as a solitary individual. The new man means more than the individual believer after he has been justified and sanctified. It means the Church, the Body of Christ, in fact, it means Christ himself.”³ Bonhoeffer continues,

Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ and the Lord’s Supper confers bodily fellowship and communion with the Body of the Lord whom we receive, and through it the bodily fellowship with the other members of his Body. Thus through the gift of his Body we become one body with him. Both baptism and the Lord’s Supper give us far more than forgiveness of our sins. It would be better to describe the gift of the sacraments as the gift of the very Body of Christ in the Church.⁴

The sacraments of the New Testament church are only observed in communal fellowship. Baptism and the breaking of bread take place when the church is in community.

In becoming members of the church, newcomers are agreeing to enter into an agreement with other believers. According to Leeman, “A local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.”⁵ Dever writes, “The collection of people committed to Christ in a local area constitutes a church.”⁶ According to Bonhoeffer, “The church or congregation is an articulate organism.”⁷ If the church is the gathering of Christians, the question that must be asked and answered is, what is church membership?

According to Dever, “Church membership is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church’s affirmation and oversight of a

³Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 253.

⁴Ibid., 262-63.

⁵Jonathan Leeman, *Building Healthy Churches: Church Membership* (Wheaton: IL, Crossway, 2012), 52.

⁶Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Health Church* (Wheaton: IL, Crossway, 2004), 140, Kindle.

⁷Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 263.

Christian's discipleship and the Christian's submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church."⁸ It is this gathered body of believers called the church that God has endowed with gifts to build and edify one another as well as rights to represent him on earth: "As a result the local church has heaven's authority for declaring who on earth is a kingdom citizen and therefore represents heaven."⁹ From this perspective, Dever writes,

Membership in a local church is not an antiquated, outdated, unnecessary add-on to true membership in the universal body of Christ; membership in a local church is intended as a testimony to our membership in the universal church. Church membership does not save, but it is a reflection of salvation. And if there is no reflection of our salvation, how can we be sure that we are truly saved?¹⁰

Consequently, membership in the local church is not optional to true followers of Christ, because in order to represent Christ on earth, Christians must become members of the local church just as they have become members of his universal body. It is imperative that church membership should be given the seriousness it deserves. Bonhoeffer states, "The church is one man; it is the Body of Christ. But it is also many, a fellowship of members (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12 ff)."¹¹ According to Hammett, the church represents "those who have heard the call and are following it. . . . Thus the early church chose a term for their gathering that suggests one did not join by birth but by response to a call."¹² Those who have responded to the call of salvation must also respond to the call to belong to the local visible body of Christ—the local church.

⁸Dever, *Nine Marks*, 64.

⁹Ibid., 61.

¹⁰Ibid., 142-43.

¹¹Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 253.

¹²John S. Hammett, "Regenerate Church Membership," in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 23.

However, church membership does not come easily in the twenty-first century. According to Ratz, “Newcomers don’t come with the glue already applied. It’s up to the congregation to make them stick. But that’s easier said than done. Experience shows that not everyone who attends church once wants to return.”¹³ How then can the church ensure that those who make it to the church’s parking lot and go through the church doors come again, and stay? In this chapter the argument was made that for newcomers to come again and stay, a new membership leadership team with the right training and tools is necessary to lead the church in assimilating newcomers into the membership of the church. Given the importance of church membership, it was compelling that the church identify, train, equip, and commission a new membership leadership team equipped to identify, connect, and assimilate newcomers into the membership of Victory Baptist Church DeKalb, Illinois. It was the duty of the team to lead the church in applying the glue that causes newcomers to stick. Osborne observes,

Everything we do is aimed at helping the Christians we already have grow stronger in Christ. But everything is done in such a way that their non-Christian friends will understand all that we’re saying and doing. Bottom line: We’ve tried to create a perfect storm for come-and-see evangelism while velcroing newcomers for long-term spiritual growth.¹⁴

The goal of church membership is not just getting people through the door, taking a walk to the altar, and then back into the pews; the goal of church membership is discipleship that results in matured members maturing newcomers in the community of faith. Church membership is important because “in the Christian life the individual disciple and the body of Jesus belong inseparably together.”¹⁵ The church must be sensitive to newcomers

¹³Calvin Ratz, “Ministry to Newcomers,” in *Growing Your Church through Evangelism and Outreach*, ed. Marshall Shelley, Library of Christian Leadership (Nashville: Moorings, 1996), 225.

¹⁴Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2008, 20.

¹⁵Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 266.

who are knowingly or unknowingly seeking Christ, and this should occur through the new membership leadership team.

Current Understanding of Church Membership

According to Rainer,

The typical church in America today has “dumbed down” the meaning of membership to a point where membership means nothing. The phrase “inactive members” is often used as if it were taken from the pages of Scripture. But in reality the only inactive members we see in the history of the New Testament fellowship are Ananias and Sapphira as they are carried out feet first from the Jerusalem church (see Acts 5:1-11).¹⁶

It is one thing to establish a biblical/theological case for church members; it is completely another thing to take church membership seriously. If believers belong to Christ they must by the same token belong together. Hammett states that “the church is given assignments that require it to be a body of believers.”¹⁷ He argues that although regenerate church membership has seen its share of trouble in the American church, especially Southern Baptist Churches, the central Baptist teaching on ecclesiology is replete with regenerate church membership: “Despite the loss of regenerate church membership in practice, it remains central to Baptist ecclesiology.”¹⁸ While there is the possibility of being labeled exclusive when a church stresses regenerated church membership, Hammett argues, “It seems to me that the time is ripe for change in this area.”¹⁹ The change is for the church to go back to practicing regenerate church membership.

¹⁶Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 82.

¹⁷Hammett, “Regenerate Church Membership,” 23.

¹⁸Ibid., 27.

¹⁹Ibid., 32.

Commenting on the importance of church membership, Dever writes, “It is an exclusive community in that it is only those who have been adopted into God’s family by faith in Christ who have a rightful place in it. That place is called membership.”²⁰ The average Christian in the church probably lacks a biblical understanding of church membership. Powers states,

For too long, church rolls have carried the weight of inactive and spiritually immature people who erroneously believe they may do as little as possible, yet remain a part of the local church. Records indicate that typically, on any given Sunday, an overwhelming percentage of church members are missing. Many of them have failed to darken the door of a church in years. High opinions of ourselves have produced low living.²¹

Therefore, it is necessary that members of the new membership leadership team be taught the importance of biblical church membership so that they are adequately armed to intentionally present newcomers to Victory Baptist Church with a positive first impression. If Christians understand the importance of church membership, they are more proactive in bringing others into membership. In order to effectively attract and assimilate newcomers, the church must be willing to do a couple of things upfront. The church must be ready for the newcomer before he or she shows up, so that when the newcomer arrives, he or she thinks the church is ready for them.

Creating Positive First Impressions

The first step toward assimilating newcomers is creating a winsome and gracious positive impression. Searcy and Henson write,

More than likely, none of us are psychologists or neurogeniuses, and we don’t need to be. But if we want to successfully assimilate first-time guests into our congregations, we do need to at least recognize and embrace the power of the sub-

²⁰Mark Dever, “Regaining Meaningful Church Membership,” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, 48.

²¹John S. Powers, *Redefining Church Membership: From Myth to Ministry* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2001), 35

conscious mind and the role that it plays in forming that all-important first impression.²²

The first impression for the first-time guest is formed before a song is sung or a message is preached: it has everything to do with the parking lot, the church building, the way the facility is laid out, and the people the visitors meet when they set foot into the church compound. According to Searcy and Henson, “Your pre-service mission is to make every effort to take your guest’s guard down and even put a smile on their face—before the service begins.”²³ It is important to note that the majority of newcomers to VBC are not invited by VBC members. Given the location of the church, a lot of newcomers come to the morning and evening worship without invitation. Searcy and Henson go on to identify four actions of contact the church must work on to create a lasting first impression:

“Greeted, Directed, Treated, and Seated.”²⁴

Creating an environment that makes your first-time guests feel welcomed and respected is key to a successful Assimilation System. When God entrust you with first-time guests, you face an incredible responsibility. Those newcomers will likely make a decision about their return visit before they make it to their seats, based on the sub-conscious and conscious evaluation God has blessed them with. You can acknowledge your guests as the gifts that they are by having a pre-service system in place that will far exceed their expectations and create that elusive positive first impression. You’ll excite them to want to visit your church again and again so that they can ultimately learn about the excellence, graciousness, hospitality and generosity of the One after whom you are modeling the systems of their assimilation.²⁵

The new membership leadership team was trained to provide this pre-service positive image of the church to newcomers.

One other way to create positive first impression is what McIntosh calls “a moment of truth: “A moment of truth is any occasion in which a person comes in contact

²²Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Fusion: Turing First-Time Guest into Fully-Engaged Members of your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 49.

²³Ibid., 51-52.

²⁴Ibid., 52.

²⁵Ibid., 53.

with and forms an impression of your church.”²⁶ It could be one moment of truth or a couple of them that creates a positive impression on the first-time guest or an accumulation of moments of truth: “A single encounter may be engaging, but in most situations, it is the cumulative effect of several moments of truth that form the most powerful impact.”²⁷ The church can and should work on planning and preparing for these moments of truths.

The parking lot may be welcoming, and the greeters may wear huge smiles, but it is the love which permeates the congregation that could create the best first positive impression on the newcomer. Oswald and Leas write,

For there to be “good news” proclaimed in a community, somehow newcomers need to see that it is lived out in the way people relate to each other in the congregation. In the early church there was a quality of acceptance among believers which surpassed that found in other communities.²⁸

It is this quality of acceptance that would cause newcomers to stick around long enough to be assimilated into membership for spiritual growth and service. The new membership leadership team was provided the skills training that would prepare them to provide first-timers with an irresistible positive impression that will cause them to want to return to the church.

The church has been called to do things in a decent and orderly manner. That means taking the time and preparing for pre-service so that unchurched, church shoppers, new Christians, or backslidden Christians returning to church would have a positive impression when they come to church. According to Searcy and Henson, preparing for pre-service is important

²⁶Gary L. McIntosh, *Beyond the First Welcome Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guest to Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 28.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 33.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 25.

because everything done in preparation for the church service works together to represent God's character to unchurched people. They may not immediately understand why they like your church or why they feel comfortable, but it's because you've done the work to set them at ease before they knew they were coming. You have established an environment that resonates positively with their subconscious mind before they even evaluate that environment on a conscious level.²⁹

While the church can work on the impersonal stuff, the parking lot and the facility, there is something about the warmth of human love that sticks like glue. Commenting on the experience of a first-time guest, Searcy and Henson observe, "Something in them connects with the smile they've been offered."³⁰

Rainer shares an interesting interchange with a first-time visitor to a church that makes the point for having a well-schooled leadership team in place to create a great first-time impression on the newcomers:

"We usually don't visit a Sunday School class the first time we visit a church," Ed explained, "but we were frustrated." Melanie continued the conversation, "Ed and I have visited about ten different churches since we moved here. Though none of the churches were bad experiences, we just weren't connecting with the people. So we decided to visit a Sunday School class first this time. . . . We weren't very comfortable about going to a Sunday School class. You know how it is. You don't know anyone. You can't find the class. You don't have a clue what they will be teaching. We were really uneasy."

Ed interjected, "It didn't take long to put our fears at rest. When we got out of the car, we were met by two nice gentlemen who had name tags identifying themselves as greeters. One of them asked if he could take us into the building. . . . They took us to a welcome center, which was just a table with a nice tablecloth. Three people were standing at the table. We were introduced to all three of them."

"One of them really took the initiative with us," Melanie said. "She asked questions so that she could recommend a Sunday School class to us. When we found a class that seemed to fit us, she actually took us to the classroom. That really blew me away. She actually took us there herself. . . . When we arrived at the Sunday School class, a couple met us at the door. They talked to us and introduced us to others. Then they sat with us during the Sunday School."

"The biggest surprise," Ed offered, "was that the couple asked if they could sit with us during the worship service. We just left them a few minutes before we got here. They've invited us to lunch next Sunday." My question had such an obvious answer that I hesitated to ask. "Would they return?"

²⁹Searcy and Henson, *Fusion*, 65.

³⁰*Ibid.*

“Absolutely,” said Ed.

“We’ve found a home!” Melanie exclaimed.³¹

When newcomers visit a church they have no clue what is going on or where to go. It is evident from Ed and Melanie’s experience that the church had a well-trained team responsible for helping first-timers to the church. The greeters in the parking lot, those at the welcome center, and the couple in the Sunday School class were all skilled in meeting newcomers. It is proper to conclude that this is not an accident of chance, but rather that the church prepared itself for newcomers. That was exactly what this project set out to accomplish, training a select group of men and women whose responsibility is to give first-timers to Victory Baptist Church a positive impression so that they will want to stay; so that they will go away saying like Ed and Melanie, “We have found a home.”

It is important to reiterate a majority of newcomers to VBC come on their own initiative. VBC is located on Illinois Highway 23, so a lot of people driving by on Sunday morning stop by for services without anyone inviting them. VBC members invite many of newcomers, however, more than 80 percent of newcomers to VBC are not invited by members. The ministry project targeted uninvited newcomers. It is also important to note that whether a newcomer came uninvited or invited, the goal was for all newcomers to leave with a positive first impression.

Making the Glue Stick

Now that the glue has been applied, it must be made to stick. Now that a positive impression has been created and the first-time visitor has come again, there must be a system in place to make a lasting connection with the newcomer, which is why building and establishing a personal relationship with the newcomers to Victory Baptist Church is the second step towards assimilating the newcomer into membership. McIntosh writes, “Pathways of belonging are strategically designed ministries that assist new

³¹Rainer, *High Expectations*, 82.

people in gaining a sense of being part of your church . . . This means helping them understand what the church is all about, meet new people, and become involved.”³² It is extending the DNA of the triune Godhead in his church. Viola writes “Within the triune God we discover mutual love, mutual fellowship, mutual dependence, mutual honor, mutual submission, mutual dwelling, and authentic community.”³³ To reach authentic community, the church must intentionally connect with newcomers to the church.

According to McIntosh, a staff reception is the first step in connecting with newcomers:

A staff reception is held in a room set aside in the church where new guest may come for light refreshments to meet the pastor or pastoral staff. For best participation, the room for the reception should be close to the worship center, as well as in the natural flow of traffic.³⁴

At the staff reception, the pastor leads with a few words of welcome and the guests are given preliminary information about the church: “A staff reception for new guests helps people gain some basic knowledge of the church and staff. In smaller churches a staff reception can be offered once a month, while in large churches it could be a regular Sunday morning event.”³⁵ The staff reception is an opportunity for the church to begin showcasing biblical hospitality. It is the responsibility of the NMLT members who welcomed and sat with the newcomer to invite them to the staff reception. The staff reception is also announced during the service and newcomers are invited to attend.

According to Searcy and Henson,

The church—your church—truly is a family expecting guests. And you should be ready to show them intentional hospitality when they arrive. While they are in your company, they need to feel comfortable and valued, no matter where they are in their spiritual development. When they leave be proactive in giving them a return invitation they’ll be hard pressed to refuse. Your church is a representation of the

³²McIntosh, *Beyond the First Welcome Visit*, 132.

³³Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David Cook, 2008), 26, Kindle.

³⁴Ibid., 133.

³⁵McIntosh, *Beyond the First Welcome Visit*, 133.

bigger family of God. As you put a system in place to effectively integrate guests into the family, you will be able to fulfil part of the responsibility He placed on you when He prompted them your way. God is honored when you show your guests true biblical hospitality.³⁶

Heck observes, “If people come into the church through some method other than via friends or relatives, the church must consciously seek to build bridges between the new members and the previous members.”³⁷ Regardless of how the guest came, either by invitation of a friend or family member, if they come again biblical hospitality is one sure way to begin building a bridge toward assimilation. Biblical hospitality is the church’s way of making sure the first or second or third time guest feels good about spending their time in the church. The business world is very effective in their use of hospitality as a way of making their customers stick. Searcy and Henson write,

Unfortunately, we live in a culture in which the business world understands more about true expressions of hospitality than the church does. As Jesus taught, “It is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of light” (Luke 16:8). . . . While hotels, restaurants and stores serve their guests with intentional care, we often let our wonder in and out of our weekly services with no specific plan for showing them how important they are to us. . . . We, on the other hand, are in the business of eternity. We are in God’s business. Yet, we focus less time and energy on engaging our guests than the people who provide theirs with little more than a comfortable bed and a hot shower. The new people who walk through our doors have an opportunity to come into a relationship with their creator, a chance to discover His will for their lives and the ability to step into their place in the family.³⁸

The church, the family of God, must demonstrate to the newcomer the hospitality that should characterize the body of Christ. Biblical hospitality does not take place during the morning worship service; it is after the morning worship whether at the staff reception, in restaurants, or in homes. It is in these places as church members and newbies share a meal and drink coffee or tea that the cry of this generation for love connections is met. Peyton writes,

³⁶Searcy and Henson, *Fusion*, 40.

³⁷Joel D. Heck, *Membership Assimilation: Practical Prevention of Backdoor Loss Through Frontdoor Care* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1988), 23.

³⁸Searcy and Henson, *Fusion*, 42.

This generation is crying for love connection, and I don't mean Chuck Woolery. The Internet seems to connect us, but only in a trivial way. People are becoming less authentic in their communication. . . . People are now able to say things that they wouldn't dare say face-to-face because the Internet provides little or no accountability. What's inadvertently created is an illusion of fellowship in a virtual community.³⁹

The connection this generation is looking for cannot be found via the Internet or in man-made institution; it can only be found in the organic church that lives out the triune DNA of the Godhead. Peyton concludes, "If the gospel is anything, it's a social animal. It takes root through community and interpersonal communication."⁴⁰ Biblical hospitality, which could include sharing a cup of coffee with a newcomer at church, taking the newcomer out for dinner, or inviting the newcomer to one's home for a meal, helped facilitate the assimilation of newcomers into the membership of the church. In community believers not only share a meal, a cup of coffee, or tea, but they share their lives with one another. It is through sharing life with one another in community that newcomers experience the connection they are looking for; thus, they will want to stay.

The Importance of Follow-up in Assimilating Newcomers

Biblical hospitality is just one of the steps towards connecting with newcomers. Follow-up is the next most important step leading to assimilation. At this stage of the assimilation process, it is vital that church members begin what Walters calls "servant friendship."⁴¹ When servant friendship is lived out in the body of Christ, the outcome is that the newcomers stick around long enough they want to be assimilated into the membership of the caring community of the faithful. It is the outworking of servant friendship that does the magic. According to Walters,

³⁹Peyton Jones, *Church Zero: Raising 1st Century Churches Out of the Ashes of the 21st Century Church* (Colorado Springs: David Cook, 2013), 167, Kindle.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Richard P. Walters, *How to Be a Friend People Want to be Friends with* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981), 22.

Servant friends –

Add more to the other person’s lives than they take away

Affirm, knowing that building up another’s self-esteem does not diminish their own

Share themselves, including their flaws so that others may learn from their mistakes

Give trust, and deserve trust

Discern, recognize the difference between cold facts and a snow job

Do not insist on equality, being willing to inconvenience themselves for the convenience of others

Willingly pay the cost of friendship, even the high cost of abandoning self-centeredness

Love you because you are, not because you have or are going to

Take initiative to help

Represent our Lord. A servant leader is love in action.⁴²

The best way to connect with newcomers is to treat them with respect by showing them love in action. If they know the church genuinely cares about them, they would want to stay. Walters cautions,

A prevalent error is to assume that people are objects which can, with proper skills, be manipulated in much the same way that a car can be manipulated once the driver has learned the proper driving skills. . . . Skills are important; motives are even more important.⁴³

That is why the membership leadership team was trained to be servant leaders so that newcomers would know they are loved for who they are and not simply manipulated into becoming members. After interviewing those who had newly joined a church, Rauff concludes, “It was somewhat surprising to hear of people choosing churches on the basis of friendship . . . If the ensuing church visit is satisfying, the formerly unchurched person may be on his or her way to a well-founded membership.”⁴⁴

⁴²Walters, *How to Be a Friend*, 23.

⁴³Ibid., 24-25.

⁴⁴Edward A. Rauff, *Why People Join the Church* (New York: Pilgrim, 1979), 64.

True biblical hospitality must result in servant friendship that acts like glue causing the newcomers to want to stick around long enough that they want to belong.

It is a fundamental mistake to attract people into the church with a positive first time impression and fail to draw them into full membership so that they can enjoy the privileges that accrue to members of the local church. Consequently, there should be no uninvolved churchgoer in the local church. Lawless writes, “On any Sunday, uninvolved churchgoers sit in almost every congregation in America.”⁴⁵ In order to transition newcomers into members, the new membership leadership team must deliberately establish warm and friendly relationships. These warm friendly relationships will have a system of follow-up: “Though some church growth pundits have indicated that visitor follow-up is not welcome in today’s culture, our research indicates it is critical for both growth and ultimately retention.”⁴⁶ The follow-up can be done by the pastor or in this case the members of the new membership leadership team. Oswald and Leas indicate the importance of Christians doing follow-up: “Lay visiting . . . can also be a powerful assimilation tool. Not many churches do this. Those that do communicate to the newcomer that someone else besides the clergy are interested in their joining the parish.”⁴⁷ According to McIntosh and Martin, “Assimilation begins right at the heart of our need for relationships.”⁴⁸ It is such relationships that grow into friendships that act as glue for the newcomer. McIntosh and Martin writes,

⁴⁵Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 18.

⁴⁶Rainer, *High Expectation*, 92.

⁴⁷Roy M. Oswald and Speed B. Leas, *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation* (New York: Alban Institute, 1987), 59.

⁴⁸Gary McIntosh and Martin Glen, *Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 75.

Think of friendship as having six foundational pillars. The structure could stand with only five. It could even remain intact with four. But a real friend, the kind that people need in our churches, has six characteristics: Fun to be with; Relational; Inspiring; Encouraging; Nurturing; and Devoted.⁴⁹

The goal of this ministry project was to identify, train, and launch a team of skilled men and women who would manifest the glory of God to newcomers in these six characteristics of servant friendship—fun to be with, relational, inspiring, encouraging, nurturing, and devoted. These servants' friendship is the stepping stone into the new member's class.

The Transitioning of Newcomers into the New Member's Class

Now that the newcomers have been given a positive impression of the church, and have returned and are in a friendship with a member of the new membership leadership team, the third step in assimilation is to transition them into a new member's class. Members of the new membership leadership team must be trained on how to transition returning newcomers into the new member's class for enduring community, spiritual growth, and involvement. One of the major things that would happen in the new member's class is to ensure that the newcomer is a believer or hears the gospel so they can believe, be baptized, and join in membership. According to Reid,

During the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards broke with the Half-Way Covenant in insisting that one must be genuinely converted to have access to the sacraments and the privileges of church membership. It has been estimated that during the Second Awakening the number attending church was three times greater than the number of actual church members. By the early twentieth century, however, membership requirements in mainline denominations were less demanding. The Presbyterian J. Gresham Machen could complain in *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) of "the admission of great companies of persons who have never made any really credible confession of faith at all and whose entire attitude toward the gospel is the very reverse of the Christian attitude."⁵⁰

Church membership is not a free for all, it is reserved for those who have come into union with Christ. Whereas it is important to revitalize church membership, it is wrong to

⁴⁹McIntosh and Glen, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, 96-97.

⁵⁰Daniel G. Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), s.v. "church membership."

accept everyone who darkens the church door into membership without making sure they are part of the universal church of Jesus Christ.

After completing the new member class (four sessions) I met with the prospective candidates one-on-one. It is during these one-on-one interviews that the newcomers share their salvation testimony. Those who have a clear salvation testimony are given assurance of salvation. However, those who lack a clear salvation testimony are presented the gospel message with the hope that they will hear and believe. It is important that those who join membership have experienced saving faith, because church membership is reserved exclusively for the regenerate.

Biblical church membership is a privilege of those who have come to a genuine faith in Christ, and those who have come to a genuine faith in Christ must be taught the biblical importance of church membership. In transitioning newcomers into members of the church, it is essential true biblical church membership be emphasized, and the new member's class is the perfect place. It is not the responsibility of the members of the new membership leadership team to lead the new member's class, their responsibility it to ensure that newcomers sign up for the new member's class. In the new member' class, the newcomers would be taught the principle of surrender and commitment that saturates the images of the church in the New Testament as the body of Christ (Col 1:24), God's building (1 Cor 3:9), the temple of God (Eph 2:19), the house of God (Heb 10:21), and the bride of Christ (Rev 19:7) among others descriptions that portray the church as a living organism. It is anti-biblical, therefore, to accept into church membership those who are not true believers, which explains the one-on-one interview each newcomer must have before they join membership.

Although it is possible to have a given number of a church's members unavailable for service at any given time, it is unthinkable for anyone to claim church membership who has forsaken the regular assembly of believers (Heb 10:25). Dever argues,

A member's regular, tolerated nonattendance begins to raise further questions. What kind of leadership must a church have to allow such a misrepresentation to arise and flourish? What expectations are being communicated to those who are joining? What discipline is practiced, if any? In fact, tolerated noninvolvement among members may even call into question the kind of evangelism being done and the church's understand of conversion, even of the gospel itself.⁵¹

In the new member's class, newcomers would be taught the biblical importance of church membership given that the twenty-first century church is more inclined to count numbers rather than count souls. Hammett notes,

Today, some Baptist churches have contemplated accepting into membership those who give clear evidence of regeneration but have not experienced believer's baptism. If clear evidence of regeneration is required, such a practice would not necessarily destroy regenerate church membership, but it would involve a surrender of the traditional Baptist view that sees baptism, not as an optional step, but as a clear command of Christ to be obeyed by every believer.⁵²

For those who may come to faith in Christ through the presentation of the gospel in the new member's class, they will be baptized and assimilated into membership.

Now that the elementary questions of the newcomer have been answered, questions such as finding parking in the parking lot, being greeted warmly and kindly as they step through the front door, experiencing worship without being embarrassed, and engaging in meaningful servant friendships, the work of the new membership leadership team is not yet over. The reason why their job is not over is that there are certainly more serious questions on the mind of the newcomer that may only begin to find answers in the new member's class. Consequently, transitioning newcomers into the new member's class should be a priority of the new membership leadership team.

The first step in transitioning guests into the new member's class is setting up a meeting between the pastor and the newcomer(s). McIntosh calls it the pastor's dessert: "A good way for a guest to start out on the pathway of belonging is through a pastor's

⁵¹Dever, "Regaining Meaningful Church Membership," 46.

⁵²Hamett, "Regenerate Church Membership," 28.

dessert.”⁵³ The regularity of these pastor’s desserts depends on the size of the church and the number of visitors to the church. The purpose of the desserts “is to welcome those who have attended the church a minimum of three times,”⁵⁴ and attendance is by invitation. At this pastor’s dessert, writes McIntosh, the pastor should

briefly discuss the mission of the church, its key values, and larger vision for the future. He should introduce the rest of the staff and/or other church leaders who are present. . . . After introducing the staff, the pastor ask the guests to introduce themselves and tell how they first heard about the church.”⁵⁵

It would be the responsibility of the members of the new membership leadership team to plan the pastor’s dessert.

The second step in the pathway of belonging is an orientation class. It is different from the membership class:

[The] purpose of the orientation class is to introduce people to your church culture, rather than stressing membership. . . . An orientation class encourages people to buy into your church’s mission, vision, and values from the beginning. Giving people an in-depth look at your church lets them make a well-informed decision about whether this is the church for them.⁵⁶

The orientation class must be taught by the pastor or his assistant. The orientation class is a time for the church to be authentic and not manipulative. God’s purpose in Christ is to build his church. The role of the church pastor is to simply present the true image of the church to the guests and let the Holy Spirit draw them into the church or move them to another church. According to Linn, the right way of assimilation is “to approach membership from the perspective that it is the culmination of discerning the Spirit leading

⁵³McIntosh, *Beyond First Welcome Visit*, 134.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

one into a particular community of faith.”⁵⁷ In that light therefore, care must be taken to ensure that people are not pushed around or coerced into becoming members. Linn notes,

Church membership is no willy-nilly process which the church is a witness. . . . Church membership, therefore, when one truly commits one’s self to being in the body of Christ, is a response to a divine initiative. It is not simply a matter of finding a place we like, but sensing we are being drawn into a community of people who were first claimed by God in and through Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

In the case that the guests are interested in becoming members, they are then invited to join a membership class where they will be taught church membership matters. It is also in this class that the newcomers are exposed to both the privileges of being members of the body of Christ as well as the expectations of belonging to the body of Christ. McIntosh argues, “To attract the highest attendance, it is best to stress participation in the membership class rather than membership itself.”⁵⁹ McIntosh is not saying membership should be minimized. His point is that “Once people are in the class, they naturally become interested in the deeper involvement in the church that actual membership includes.”⁶⁰ However, “Successfully integrating or assimilating new members into the congregation is too critical to be left to chance.”⁶¹ According to Tidwell, “A church is a fellowship of disciples making known to all the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its mission is not to be a fellowship. That is its nature. It is a fellowship. Its mission is to make the gospel

⁵⁷Jan G. Linn, *Rocking the Church Membership Boat: Counting Members or Having Members Who Count* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 57.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁹McIntosh, *Beyond the First Welcome Visit*, 141.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹Wanda Vassallo, *Church Communications Handbook: A Complete Guide to Developing a Strategy, Using Technology, Writing Effectively, Reaching the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 58.

known. It is a fellowship on mission.”⁶² The unity of the invisible church is maintained through the regenerate church membership. Sproul states,

All who are in Christ and all in whom Christ is are members of His invisible church. That unity is already there and nothing can destroy it. That doesn’t mean that we can rest at that point. It’s not that we can simply be satisfied with the unity of the invisible church. We should still be working as much as we possibly can for a genuine unity of the visible church.⁶³

The unity of the visible church cannot and will not be achieved if church membership is not taken seriously. Those who belong to Christ must also belong together for the body of Christ is one. It is only when the church functions as a unity of diverse parts gifted with diverse gifts that they serve one another and the community. MacArthur writes,

The church should emphasize ministry for every individual believer. Church leadership shouldn’t recruit their members to do something out of a legal obligation that they are not really motivated or gifted to do. Rather, the leadership should develop its members along the lines that the Spirit has gifted them. Aggressive, active, ministering people make a successful church.⁶⁴

In the new member’s class, newcomers would be led to discover their spiritual gifts and use them in the body for the edification of one another.

After the new member’s class, attendees are then given an opportunity to join the church. The goal of the new member’s class, therefore, is that everyone who completes it should become a member. Newcomers would be motivated to become members of the local church if they also comprehend the privileges that come with belonging to the local body of Christ, the church. These privileges would have been explained to them in the new member’s class.

⁶²Charles Tidwell, *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 1985), 67.

⁶³R. C. Sproul, *What Is the Church?* The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2013), 30.

⁶⁴John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Master’s Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 109.

The Benefits of Becoming a Local Church Member

The subject of assimilating newcomers into the membership of the local church is incomplete without a discourse on the privileges that accrue to those who belong to the body of Christ. Why is it important that believers belong together not only in the universal body of Christ but also in the visible body of Christ the local church? Searcy and Henson write, “Membership class is simply the doorway through which your attenders become connected with the church so that deeper spiritual development can begin.”⁶⁵ Deeper spiritual development comes through serving rather than being served, so newcomers who become members should be encouraged to get involved in the church. Rainer observes,

God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He places us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and in some cases to die for the sake of the gospel.⁶⁶

Many people come to church looking for someone to serve them. It is true some who darken the church door are burdened by needs necessitating the church to serve them. However, true followers of Christ are called to be servants. Rainer concludes, “Many churches are weak because we have members who have turned the meaning of membership upside down. It’s time to get it right. It’s time to become a church member as God intended. It’s time to give instead of being entitled.”⁶⁷ Members of the body of Christ are called to serve one another. In the human body, the eyes serve the rest of the body; legs too serve the entire body, so do hands, ears, feet, and the rest of the members of the body. The various members of the human body are there to serve each other for the ultimate good of the entire body which is also true of the various members that make up the church, the local body of Christ. Rainer writes, “Members of the church comprise the

⁶⁵Searcy and Henson, *Fusion*, 148.

⁶⁶Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 6.

⁶⁷Ibid.

whole and are essential parts of it.”⁶⁸ Rainer refers to this kind of church membership as functioning membership: “Biblical church membership is functioning membership.”⁶⁹ A well-connected body functions together and a body that functions together benefits every member of the body. Rainer continues,

We will never find joy in church membership when we are constantly seeking things our way. But paradoxically, we will find the greatest joy when we choose to be last. . . . True joy means giving up our rights and preferences and serving everyone else. And that is what church membership means as well.⁷⁰

The biblical metaphor, the body of Christ, makes it very clear that every member of the church is to be a functioning and contributing part of the body. The New Testament church has no place for mere audiences or pew sitters.”⁷¹

While serving one another in the body, Leeman observes, “We live out our body-ness, our bride-ness, our temple-ness, and our family-ness through accountability structures of the church’s judicial activity of member affirmation, oversight, and discipline.”⁷² When newcomers join in membership in a local church, they enter into one of the most fulfilling relationships known to man. Leeman continues,

Relationships that we share in the local church will ultimately prove more interconnected than a physical body, more safe than a father’s embrace, more collegial than brotherly love, more resilient than a stone house, more holy than a priesthood, and on and on we could go.⁷³

The intimate relationships that believers share with one another are emphasized in Scripture by the “one another” command. The over fifty verses that talk of the body of Christ as one belonging to another make the important point that Christians cannot exist

⁶⁸Rainer, *I Am a Church Member*, 12.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 36.

⁷¹Rainer, *High Expectations*, 156-57.

⁷²Leeman, *Building Healthy Churches*, 69.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 76

as isolated islands and function as the unified body of Christ. As the body of Christ church members are commanded to love one another (John 13:34-35), be of the same mind toward one another (Rom 12:16), bear one another's burdens (1 Cor 12:25-26), etc. These commands cannot be accomplished without believers belonging together. Mack writes,

It's impossible for any believer to fulfill these biblical responsibilities to other believers without some kind of formal, regular, continuous relationship. That kind of relationship is provided by church membership. By formally identifying with a specific group of people, we're able to commit our time and resources to developing close relationships with those people. We are able to meet with those people in a regular basis and depend on their continued involvement in our lives.⁷⁴

Mack concludes, "Regular, formal ministry opportunities are a privilege given to people who are willing to commit and submit without reservation to the total ministry of the church."⁷⁵

Such commitment and surrender to the local church demonstrates one's desire to grow spiritually as a member of the body of Christ. It is further a demonstration of one's desire to come under the care and protection of the spiritual leaders of the local church, and of one's desire to obey what the Bible teaches. Talking of his desire to join the membership of the local church, Spurgeon writes,

I well remember how I joined the church after my conversation. I forced myself into it by telling the pastor, who was lax and slow, after I had called four or five times and could not see him, that I had done my duty, and if he did not see me and interview me for church membership I would call a church meeting myself and tell them I believed in Christ and ask them if they would have me.⁷⁶

Commenting on Spurgeon's zeal to do the right thing, Mack writes,

Though Spurgeon was just a new believer and a relatively young man, he had a strong desire to obey and serve his Lord and he knew that this required commitment to a local church. Likewise, if we're truly believers, we will have the same desire to

⁷⁴Wayne Mack, *To Be or Not Be a Church Member? That Is the Question!* (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 2004), 30.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁶Charles Spurgeon, *Charles Spurgeon on His Best, Compiled by Tom Carter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 33-34.

obey and serve our Lord. If, however, we do not think that a local church is worthy of joining, why should we be considered worthy of serving in it?⁷⁷

In that light therefore, the privilege of serving Christ belongs to those who have come to him by faith and have also come into the membership of his body, the local church.

Although there could be a thousand and one more benefits of becoming a member of the local church, accountability is worthy of mention. Mack writes, “Every Christian should be a member of a local church because its leaders and members can hold us accountable according to the process clearly outlined in Scripture.”⁷⁸ Church members cannot love one another, care for one another, bear one another’s burdens, forbear with one another, correct and rebuke, and discipline one another when they prize individuality over community. While it is true members are individual beings and will answer before Christ individually, it is the same Christ who builds these individual living stones into one unified body called the church. In the face of western individualism being brought into the church, Mack laments,

I believe that one major reason that the church of Jesus Christ in the United States is very close to being in sheer chaos today is because so many people think of themselves as individuals rather than as part of the body of Christ. Christianity is not “every man for himself”; it’s every man together for Christ.⁷⁹

The only cure for such sheer chaos is church membership, where believers are held accountable:

Formal church membership where mutual commitments are made is a God-ordained means for keeping us from wandering into the highways and byways of sin. . . . The plain, unvarnished truth is that every one of us needs the accountability that comes from formal, regular, intimate relationships with other godly people. God knows and has told us clearly that every one of us needs the accountability that formal church membership provides.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Mack, *To Be or Not to Be?*, 54.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 64.

It was thus the goal of this project to give church membership the importance it deserves. It is not only commanded in Scripture, it is vital to the individual believer. It is only when believers are together, loving, and serving one another that the world would know that Jesus has come. While it is important to upgrade the church building so that newcomers are attracted, and put in place an attractive welcoming mat, and it is essential to apply glue so that newcomers stick, the ultimate goal is that the world would know Jesus is Savior and Lord. The ultimate goal of church membership is not to have good numbers and great ministries, the ultimate goal is the glory of him who through man's imperfections is building his church with the promise that the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Life in community must always be viewed as the work of the grace of God. It is therefore right to conclude that anyone who has experienced the saving grace of God in Christ should yearn for life in community. Although Bonhoeffer talks about community in the context of the seminary community, what he says about seminary community is also true of Christian community in general:

It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter holiness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let him who until now has the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.⁸¹

The biblical and spiritual importance of the community of faith is the driving force in executing the methodology that follows in the next chapter.

⁸¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM, 2010), 81, Kindle.

CHAPTER 4
THE METHODOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP
TRAINING TO LEAD THE CHURCH IN
ASSIMILATING NEWCOMERS

The goal of identifying and training a New Membership Leadership Team (NMLT) at Victory Baptist Church, DeKalb, Illinois, addressed the need to proactively lead the church in attracting and assimilating newcomers. The former membership committee had become inactive; thus failing to lead the church in assimilating newcomers. The responsibility of the membership committee had silently been passed onto one person and as a result many newcomers to Victory Baptist Church were not welcomed and assimilated into membership. Consequently, the best way forward was the selection and training of a NMLT to lead the church in assimilating newcomers into the membership of the church.

In this chapter, details are provided about how the NMLT was selected, confirmed, trained, and commissioned. Also included is further explanation of the survey administered to the congregation and the analysis of the pre-project and the post-project surveys administered to the members of the NMLT. The training of the leadership team focused on six key areas: (1) regenerate church membership, (2) biblical understanding of team-based ministry, (3) the unique place of first impressions, (4) the place of biblical hospitality in assimilating newcomers, (5) the biblical theology of ministry, and (6) the mission, vision, and core values of Victory Baptist Church (VBC). It was important that those leading the church in assimilating guests were thoroughly schooled in the importance of the church and church membership; hence the need for training them in these six areas. To accomplish the training of the members of the NMLT, a curriculum was developed, and from the curriculum a message series was also developed that was preached to the

congregation. While it was necessary to train and put into place a proactive NMLT to address the need identified, it was equally important to include the entire congregation in the need to be proactive in our efforts to attract and assimilate newcomers to the church; hence the sermon series was preached to the entire congregation.

Developing the Training Curriculum

In light of the need for a proactive NMLT to lead the church in attracting, retaining, and assimilating newcomers to VBC, I developed a training curriculum. Work began on the training curriculum after chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this ministry project were reviewed and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The ethics forms were submitted to the doctoral office on January 8, 2015, and approved in February 2015. These approvals paved the way for work to begin on the training curriculum and the sermon series.¹

In late March, I created an outline of the six training seminars. Given the time constraints and publication cost, I produced only one document containing all the material for the members of the NMLT and the trainer. Table 1 shows the curriculum outline, including the sessions, titles, topics, and memory verses.

¹Ethics Committee Forms, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research and Ethics Committee.

Table 1. Leadership team curriculum sessions, titles, topics, and memory verses

Session	Titles	Topics	Memory verses
1	Regenerate Church Membership	Church membership	Romans 10:9-10
2	Biblical Understanding of Team-based Ministry	Team-Based Ministry	Isaiah 6:8
3	The Unique Place of First Impressions	First Impressions	1 Corinthians. 10:31
4	The Place of Biblical Hospitality	Biblical Hospitality	Romans 12:13
5	A Biblical Theology of Ministry	Ministry	Ephesians 4:16
6	The Mission, Vision, and Core Values of VBC	What Drives the Church?	Colossians 3:17

When the curriculum outline was complete, work started on the individual lessons. It took eight weeks to complete the development of the curriculum. Each lesson was accompanied by a sermon outline to be preached to the congregation at the same time the lesson was taught to the members of the NMLT. The goal was to provide the church with the same education and motivation that the members of the NMLT would receive, so the entire church would be united in the goal of attracting and assimilating newcomers. With the curriculum completed and the sermon outlines in place, the next step was for the expert pastoral committee to review and approve the curriculum.

Training Curriculum Evaluation

The expert pastoral team selected from pastors serving in the DeKalb Sycamore County was constituted and tasked with reviewing the training curriculum. Five pastors agreed to serve on the committee. They were each emailed a copy of the curriculum (see appendix 1) accompanied by a grading rubric (see appendix 2) and given one week to review the training curriculum and evaluate it using the rubric provided. By the end of the week, the five pastors reviewed the training material and approved it. The only criterion used to select the expert pastoral team was my personal knowledge of the pastors and

their theological integrity. I had been meeting and praying with these pastors for the last seven years, so I knew them well.

I originally planned to invite the five members of the expert pastoral team to VBC where they would be given an opportunity to read and evaluate the curriculum as a group, but that did not work out. It was nearly impossible to bring them all together given the time constraints on my part, and more importantly the busy schedules of the pastors on the expert pastoral team. Consequently, I decided to email the curriculum to the pastors and asked them to individually evaluate it. Emailing the curriculum to the pastors turned out to be very effective since the evaluation was personal and not influenced by the opinions of others. By the time the first lesson was taught, I had heard back from all five pastors. They evaluated four of the five items on the rubric as exemplary. The only item evaluated as “sufficient” by three of the five pastors was the design of the curriculum.

It must be noted that throughout the curriculum writing process the support of Jane Pace was highly valuable. Jane Pace is a retired librarian whose editing skills helped tremendously with proofreading the training curriculum. I am deeply indebted to her for her help. With everything now in place, it was time to begin the sixteen weeks of ministry project implementation—the training of the members of the NMLT. The sixteen-week ministry project began on Sunday April 5, 2015, and ended on Sunday, July 26, 2015.

Administering the Survey to the Church

On Sunday, April 5, 2015, the implementation of the ministry project began with the members of VBC completing the survey that had been developed for this purpose (see appendix 1). As anticipated, 70 percent of the active membership of Victory Baptist Church completed the survey during the morning worship service. Two weeks prior to April 5, 2015, announcements were made from the pulpit, as well as placed in the church bulletin, informing the members of VBC of the survey. On Sunday, April 5, 2015, just before the sermon hour, the survey and pencils were handed to the members of VBC. They were encouraged to take seven to ten minutes and complete the two-page survey.

No one was forced to complete the survey; they were only encouraged to complete the survey. After the reading of the consent to members of VBC, I asked if anyone had a question, and there were none. The congregants then completed the survey which took between seven to ten minutes. After the surveys were complete, I asked the deacons and the youth to assist in collecting them. I then thanked the members for taking time to complete the survey and proceeded to preaching the message for the day.

Survey Analysis

The issue the ministry project was to address was the ineffectiveness of assimilating newcomers into the membership of the church. One of the goals of the ministry project was to evaluate the church's awareness of the problem. The aim of the survey was to assess how well the active members of Victory Baptist Church understood the extent to which the church was effectively or ineffectively welcoming and assimilating newcomers into membership. Using the survey (see appendix 3) the goal was deemed successfully met when 70 percent of the active members of Victory Baptist Church would participate in completing the survey. Given that the survey was administered only once, it was not possible to measure change in members' awareness. However, the goal was met as 70 percent of the active members of Victory Baptist Church completed the survey.

From the completed surveys, it was evident that very few members knew a membership committee even existed in the church, let alone the number of people who served on the committee. The majority of those who completed the survey saw the need for a NMLT to be identified, trained, and commissioned to lead the church in assimilating newcomers to the church. Consequently, the majority of those who completed the survey agreed there was a need for a NMLT to be identified, trained, and commissioned to replace the current membership committee: the new membership team would be charged with the responsibility to smooth the process of welcoming and assimilating newcomers into the membership of the church. They also thought the current membership committee should

be trained so they can do the job of proactively welcoming and assimilating newcomers to Victory Baptist Church. However, given that the members of the membership committee were well advanced in age, the survey only reinforced my objective to put a NMLT in place.

Establishing the New Membership Leadership Team

On Sunday, April 12, 2015, the deacon board met from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. to nominate and evaluate a nine-person team to be trained to serve as members of the NMLT from the active members of Victory Baptist Church. The exercise, which brought together all five deacons, the associate pastor, and myself, resulted in the establishing of the list of nine active members who were then presented in the business meeting for a confirmation vote. Those nominated were members in good standing; they were regular attendees in both on regular worship times and other planned church events, and faithful in giving support to the ministry of the church with their time, talents, tithes, and were actively involved in other ministries of the church. They also showed evidence of being mature followers of Christ.

The vote of confirmation took place on Wednesday, April 15, 2015. Prior to presenting the list in the business meeting, I personally contacted each nominated person. All the members I contacted, who had been selected by the board of deacons, agreed to be trained to serve as members of the NMLT. After talking with each member, I sent each one a letter in the mail officially informing them that they will be brought before the business meeting for a vote (see appendix 4). In the letter they were also invited to be present at the business meeting.

At the business meeting on Wednesday, April 15, 2015, the constituted list of the NMLT was presented for a vote. The aim of the presentation was for the active members of Victory Baptist Church to know the leadership team and pledge their prayer and moral support. After the presentation, the floor was open for questions, and no one asked a question. Noticing no objection, a member moved for the confirmation and

training of the nine persons to lead the church in proactively assimilating newcomers. The motion was seconded by another member, and without further discussion the matter was put to vote and all present voted in favor. After the business meeting, the members of the NMLT were given a letter confirming their selection to be trained to serve as members of the NMLT (see appendix 5). They were also given a letter inviting them to the initial meeting scheduled for April 19, 2015, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. in my office (see appendix 6). The 9 members included 5 women and 4 men. There were 2 couples and 5 singles. Of the singles, 1 was a youth and the other 1 a young adult. The rest of the participants were in their mid-sixties.

Of the 9 members, 7 attended the first meeting. The attendance was not only encouraging, but also enthusiastic. The 7 members present, 3 females and 4 males, expressed a willingness to go through the six weeks of training and to serve in leading the church to assimilate newcomers. The 2 members who did not come to the first meeting had valid reasons for not making the first meeting, but were equally committed in receiving the training and serving as members of the NMLT. One member had fallen a week prior to the first training session and was at home preparing to go for surgery. Regardless of the injury and the time it would take to recover, the member was willing to be part of the leadership team, although that was not what eventually happened. The other member, a youth, was attending a refereeing clinic that had been scheduled weeks before, he was unable to attend the first meeting. The youth too expressed his commitment to be part of the team and to go through the six weeks of training.

Those who came were welcomed and congratulated for accepting the call to lead the church in the very important ministry of assimilating newcomers. At the meeting, the dedication of the members of the NMLT was discussed, which was scheduled for the morning service that same day. The other thing discussed was the member's covenant that would be signed after the six-week training seminars (see appendix 7). The six-week training schedule was discussed, and it was agreed that the six weeks of training would

begin on Sunday, April 26, 2015, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The six training sessions were then scheduled to meet on April 26, and May 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31. The last issue at the first meeting was the pre-training survey, which was distributed and to be completed and brought to the first training session.

Member Dedication of the New Membership Leadership Team

During the morning worship service on Sunday, April 19, 2015, the members of the NMLT were presented to be trained and dedicated to lead the church in actively assimilating newcomers. In a responsive reading the church and the members of the NMLT pledged to work together to ensure that newcomers to VBC would henceforth be treated as special guests sent by God. During the service, the members of the NMLT came forward and stood in front of the church. The rest of the congregation was invited to stand. First, I read from Romans 12:6-21. Then I led NMLT members and the church in a responsive reading. In the responsive reading, the VBC members publicly pledged their unrelenting support to the team and the team in turn pledged their willingness and determination to take their ministry to the church seriously. At the end of the responsive reading, the deacons and associate pastor came forward, laid their hands on the members of the NMLT, and prayed for them. The associate pastor led in the prayer of dedication.

Implementing the Curriculum

Once the members of the NMLT had been selected by the board of deacons, approved by the business meeting, and had held their initial meeting, and the curriculum had been evaluated by the expert pastoral team as exemplary in four of its five components and sufficient in one component, the members of the NMLT had been dedicated, and it was time to begin the training seminars.

Lesson 1

On Sunday, April 26, 2015 at 8:30 a.m., 7 members completed the pre-training

survey and were present for the first lesson, “Regenerate Church Membership.” The session opened with prayer from a group member.

For this lesson, a lengthy discussion centered on the question, “how can one know they are saved?” Is there a particular way to be saved, or is there a wrong way to be saved? In other words, just because someone walked down the aisle and prayed a prayer, does that make them a Christian and a true follower of Christ? This session included a review of what the Bible says on the subject of salvation, using passages like Romans 10:9-13, Acts 4:12, John 3:16; 14:6, and Ephesians 2:8-10. It was further emphasized that fruit bearing, or righteous works of faith, and the perseverance of the saints, are some of the marks of genuine salvation. It was not so much that group members did not know they were saved as it was how they could tell whether a newcomer to the church was saved or not.

The goal of the lesson was to help the members of the NMLT authenticate their salvation and embrace the doctrine of regenerate church membership. Group members expressed satisfaction with the information presented and the discussion that was open, inviting, friendly, and inspiring. The lesson ended in time for members to attend their various Sunday school classes at 9:30 a.m.

Lesson 2

On Sunday, May 3, 2015, the lesson on “Biblical Understanding of Team-Based Ministry” convened with 7 members from the last session in attendance. As the seminar started, the enthusiasm of participants was evident through their active participation and discussion. The lesson began with a discussion using the following questions: “Have you ever served in a team either at work or in your neighborhood? How would you describe your experience? Do you consider yourself a good team player? Why and why not?” Five participants shared their experience working in a team. This discussion was unlike the first session where I waited and had to share my opinion before a few participants were willing to respond. In the remainder of the lesson, group members shared their

experiences working with teams and showed their willingness to learn. They expressed their willingness to be team members and also their willingness to learn the art of team ministry so they would succeed together. Their interest and questions demonstrated their enthusiasm to work as a team in leading the church in assimilating newcomers. The lesson emphasized that team-based ministry is patterned after what Cladis calls “a perichoretic image of the Trinity is that of the three persons of God in constant movement in a circle that implies intimacy, equality, unity yet distinction, and love.”² The lesson further explored three examples of biblical team-based ministry—Moses, Christ, and Paul. The lesson ended with group members agreeing on the important place team-based ministry must play in the church’s goal to attract and assimilate newcomers.

Lesson 3

On Sunday, May 10, 2015, the third training session, “The Place of First Impressions,” convened at 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. with all members in attendance. The “ice breaker was, “Describe a situation in which you made up your mind about someone or something or someplace based on your first impressions. Were your first impressions right or wrong? Do you think first impressions are important? Why and why not?” The response from the participants was again impressive. I had to suspend discussions on the ice breaker in order to continue with the rest of the lesson. After considering what the Bible says about first impressions (1 Tim 2: 3-7; 1 Cor 14:40; Col 4:5; Isa 52:7, John 13:35; 1 Cor 10:31), the point was made that “creating an environment that makes first-time guests feel welcomed and respected is key to a successful assimilation system.”³ In the rest of the lesson, assimilation was defined, newcomers were defined, what newcomers

²George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 133, Kindle.

³Nelson Searcy and Henson Jennifer Dykes, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 53, Kindle.

are looking for in a church was discussed, and steps the church can take to be ready for the newcomers were considered, as well as initial follow up steps after the first visit by the newcomers. The lesson concluded on the issue that church guests are God's gift to the church and the church must be ready to welcome them.

Lesson 4

On Sunday, May 17, 2015, the fourth training session, "Biblical Hospitality—Love," convened from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. with all 7 members in attendance. Team members expressed readiness to share their experience with hospitality as they responded to the "ice breaker:" "Share with the rest of the group any unusual hospitality you have experienced in an unusual place." A member who had been to the village of Oku in Cameroon, West Africa, shared her experience with the rest of the group. She told how people who were meeting her for the first time expressed genuine love toward her as well as worked to ensure her wellbeing while she was thousands of miles away from home. She particularly mentioned the hospitality of one of her hosts who spent the whole day cooking and feeding anyone who came to the house, saying "her pot was never empty; there was always something in it for the next visitor." As we considered the biblical definition of hospitality and what the Bible says about hospitality (Matt 25:31-46; Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9; Rev 3:20), we noted from Scripture the features of biblical hospitality, answered the questions of why we practice biblical hospitality, discussed how biblical hospitality could be practiced by the members of the NMLT, the ultimate goal of Biblical hospitality, and the step-by-step process of employing biblical hospitality to attract newcomers to come a second time.

While we considered the steps of practicing biblical hospitality, members objected to what they considered over marketing and overwhelming the newcomer with information overload within the first thirty-six hours of their visit to the church. This issue was in response to the suggestion that

a newcomer to VBC for the first-time fills out a connection card. Following the

service, the first-time newcomer receives a gift and is encouraged to ask questions. Within 24 hours the newcomer receives an email that connects them to the VBC web site as well as encourages some form of feedback from the newcomer, and within 36 hours the newcomer receives in the mail a CD or DVD of a message that meets the needs of the newcomer.

Another member commented, “We should not be salesmen or act desperate.” Before the lesson ended, members agreed on the importance of biblical hospitality as a tool in the toolbox of newcomer assimilation, but cautioned that while there is need for growth in the church, it was not biblical for the church to act desperate or adopt secular salesmanship practices to attract newcomers to the church. The members of the NMLT agreed to rework the step-by-step process of following up with newcomers so that it was not overwhelming to the newcomers and thus portraying the church as desperate in the eyes of the newcomer.

Lesson 5

On Sunday, May 24, 2015, the fifth training session, “A Biblical Theology of Ministry,” convened from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. with all 7 members present. Following a brief overview of the lesson and its goals and objectives, group members spent time sharing various callings in life. In the discussion, questions were raised and discussed regarding what calling is and how to know one’s calling. The training session focused on knowing one’s calling and living it fully to the glory of God. The central thrust of the lesson emphasized the Bible’s teaching on serving, highlighting the concept that God created man with work in mind, God has redeemed man for good works, God expects man to serve him regardless of circumstances, and work ultimately validates man’s genuine faith in Christ. Before the session ended, members were in agreement that the only way to serve God is serving others, especially guests God brings to his church. It is worthy of note that immediately following the training, a member of the NMLT encountered a new couple visiting VBC for the first time and used some of the ideas discussed at the training to serve them. The member asked to sit with the new couple and by the end of the service they had started a relationship with them, which they are now pursuing.

Lesson 6

The last session on the “Mission, Vision, and Core Values of VBC” convened on Sunday May 31, 2015, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. 6 participants in attendance. This was the lowest attendance registered. At this session I took the opportunity to recast the mission, vision, and core values of VBC to the members of the NMLT. The goal was for them to become ambassadors of the mission, vision, and core values of VBC among its members and newcomers to VBC. By the end of the sixth and last training session, I informed the members of their dedication and commissioning ceremony scheduled for Sunday, June 14, 2015, at the 10:45 a.m. morning service. I registered my appreciation to the 6 of the 7 who had successfully completed the training and prayed in closing the six-week training sessions.

At the start of the sixth session I gave out the post-survey with instructions to be completed and returned the following Sunday. Two of the members completed and returned their surveys during the mid-week prayer and Bible study on Wednesday, June 3, 2015, and the rest of the completed post-surveys were returned on Sunday, June 7, 2015. With the seminar complete and all the surveys in, it was time to analyze them.

Commissioning of the New Membership Leadership Team

On Sunday, June 14, 2015, 6 members of the NMLT who had successfully completed the six training sessions were dedicated. During the service, the 7 members who had successfully completed the six training sessions were called to the front of the church where they signed a membership covenant agreeing to work as a team in leading the church toward assimilating newcomers (see appendix 8). After the signing of the covenant, the deacons came forward, laid hands on them, and I led in a dedication and commissioning prayer.

Implementing the Preaching Series

Using the texts in the training curriculum I developed the preaching series alongside the new membership leadership-training curriculum. As I used the training curriculum with the NMLT, I modified the preaching series to address some of the concerns raised in the training. I started preaching the six-sermon series after the third training session, and finished three weeks after the last training session. The goal of the sermon series was to mobilize the church to be ready for newcomers. The sermon series was titled “Getting Ready for the Guest God is bringing to His House,” with Ephesians 4:11-16 as the theme text. From the theme text, the sermon series emphasized the biblical truth that “God has uniquely positioned the church to evangelize, equip, and empower the church to serve him by serving the newcomer.” Those called to Christ are also called to belong to the body of Christ, raising the question that was addressed in the first sermon (see appendix 8), who is qualified go be a church member? The plan of the six individual sermons is illustrated in table 2.

Table 2. Sermon series sessions, Scriptures, lesson titles, sermon titles, and memory verses

Session	Scripture	Lesson Titles	Sermon Titles	Memory Verses
1	Acts 2:38-41	Regenerate Church Membership	Who is qualified to be a church member?	Romans 10:9-10
2	Exodus 18:19-23	Team Work	There is power in team work	Acts 6:3
3	Colossians 4:4-5	First Impressions	Our fruitfulness can positively impress the newcomer to the church	1 Corinthians 14:4
4	Genesis 18:3-5; Romans 12:13	Biblical Hospitality	True Christianity is hospitable	1 Peter 4:9
5	Ephesians 2:10	Theology of Ministry	Serving God is not the privilege of a chosen few	James 2:14
6	Matthew 28:18-20	The Mission of VBC	Our Mission is to reach the world for Christ by evangelizing, equipping, and empower everyone who walks through our front door of the church.	Colossians 3:17

Sermon 1

On Sunday, May 17, 2014, the first sermon was preached, “Who Is Qualified to Be a Church Member?” The sermon emphasized regeneration, repentance, baptism, and joining membership in the local church. To become a Christian is to become one with Christ, and becoming one with Christ means becoming a member of the body of Christ—the local church. Feedback was immediate as even long-term members appreciated the emphasis on regenerate church membership, saying it was a timely reminder of the hope that has kept them faithful followers of Christ.

Sermon 2

The second sermon in the series was preached on Sunday, May 24, 2015, and stressed the importance of a team-based approach to ministry with the topic, “A Careful Study of the Bible Points to a Team-Based Approach to Ministry.” The sermon pointed the congregation to biblical examples of team-based ministry exemplified by Moses and Christ, concluding that the origin of a team-based approach to ministry can be traced back to the team-based approach of the Godhead in creation and relating to man, the crown of his creation.

Sermon 3

On Sunday, May 31, 2015, the third sermon in the series, “The Unique Place of First Impressions: Living the Righteous Christian Life Creates a Positive First Impression on Guests,” was preached to a congregation already fired up for action by the first two sermons. The congregants appreciated the practical nature of the sermon with comments such as, “I never knew it could be easy for our church to impress newcomers without having to spend a lot of money or look like we were salesmen.” The members of the NMLT were particularly impressed with the response of the congregation, which re-enforced their commitment to serve in the NMLT.

Sermon 4

On Sunday, June 7, 2015, the fourth sermon in the series, “Biblical Hospitality Is a Christian Virtue for All Believers,” was preached from Genesis 18:1-5. Emphasis was laid on four truths: (1) we must be ready to show biblical hospitality in how we receive our guest, (2) we must be ready to show biblical hospitality in how we treat our guest, (3) we must be ready to show biblical hospitality in how we sacrifice for our guest, and (4) we must know that biblical hospitality will not be turned down. With further illustration from the example of Jesus, members of VBC were exhorted to utilize biblical hospitality to attract and assimilate newcomers. I cautioned VBC members to be sincere and genuine in their hospitality, noting that people are interested in genuine relationships more than they are in good food and a handshake.

Sermon 5

The fifth sermon in the series, “Theology of Ministry: Ministry Is Not the Privilege of a Chosen Few; Rather, It Is the Unique Calling of the Unified Body of Christ,” was preached on Sunday, June 14, 2015, with Ephesians 4:11-16 as the main text. I stressed the unique place and gifting of the leadership of the local church to equip saints for works of righteousness, concluding that ministry is not the unique calling of a select few, but the privilege of everyone who calls on the name of Christ. I challenged the congregation to change their attitude from ministry being the work of the professional clergy to everyone is a minister in the unified body of Christ endowed with special gifts for ministry by the Holy Spirit.

Sermon 6

The sixth and last sermon in the series was preached on Sunday June 21, 2015. Using the topic of the “Mission, Vision, and Core Values of VBC,” the question was asked, “What has God called us in Christ to do? In other words, what is the mission of VBC within the overall mission of God on earth?” The text for this sermon was Matthew

22:34-40. The pastor utilized the sixth sermon in the series to cast a renewed mission/vision of the church, which is to evangelize, equip, and empower the body of Christ for service. Emphasis was laid on the VBC mission/vision statement. VBC members were reminded of the reason for which the church exist—to evangelize the lost, equip the saints, and empower members to love the Lord and love one another (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37-40). After the service, some members voiced their appreciation and said they needed to be reminded of the mission/vision of the church, which is the reason for which the church exists and the reason they are excited being part of the church, and is the amazing privilege of partnering with Christ as he builds his church.

Interpreting and Analyzing the Pre-Training and Post-Training Survey

I used the same measurement instrument for the pre-project survey and a post-project survey in order to observe improvement in the knowledge of participants on the subject of assimilating newcomers to the church. The objective of the surveys was to have noticeable change in the attitude of participants toward the subject of the assimilation of newcomers to the church, and that after six week of training the participants' knowledge and attitude would move in the direction of enthusiastic willingness to welcome and assimilate newcomers. The goal of the ministry project was to solve the problem of the lack of initiative on the part of the current membership committee to welcome and assimilate newcomers. It was further determined the membership committee's lack of proactivity was due to a lack of knowledge on how to welcome and assimilate a more diverse newcomer to the church.

To measure for changes in knowledge and attitude, I developed a survey instrument utilizing the Likert Scale in a way that assumed a right answer for each of the fifteen statements that served to measure the distance between participant's knowledge prior to training and participant's knowledge after training. The *t*-test for dependent paired samples, which “involves a comparison of means from each group of scores and focuses

on the difference between the scores,”⁴ was used to determine if the participants gained additional knowledge due to treatment. “A *t*-test for dependent means indicates that a single group of the same subjects is being studied under the same conditions.”⁵

In this ministry project, the members of the NMLT were surveyed before and after the six-week training using the same survey instrument. The level of risk or type 1 error, also known as level of significance, was set at .05, indicating that the probability is less than 5 percent on any one test of the null hypothesis that the post-survey scores are greater than the average pre-project scores due to chance alone. It was therefore my hypothesis that after the training, the participants would perceive a greater need to assimilate newcomers.

The pre-project and post-project surveys were analyzed using the numerical distance of each actual response from the preferred response; if the participant marked “strongly disagree” (SD) with a numerical value of 1 for a statement for which the preferred answer was “strongly agree” (SA) with a numerical value of 6, then that response would be assigned a numerical value of 5, the difference between 1 and 6. Conversely, if the participant marked SA (6) for a statement whose preferred answer is D (2); the response would be assigned the value of 4 as the variation between the preferred response and the participant’s response, or the participant’s response and the knowledge I hoped they might have gained during the six weeks of training. Seven participants took the pre-project survey on the first day of the first training session. Of this number, 6 successfully completed the training sessions and took the post-project survey. The data collected from their responses were analyzed using a paired *t*-test (see appendix 10).

The paired *t*-test showed no significant improvement in any of the survey questions. There are possible reasons to explain what might have happened. First, the

⁴J. Neil Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 220.

⁵*Ibid.*, 218.

absence of a statistically significant improvement might be attributed to the sample being too small to detect a difference. A larger sample might have led to different results if the sample was at least 10 participants instead of 6, as was the case with the ministry project. Second, the absence of statistically significant improvement might be attributed to the Likert scale having only 5 possible choices; the changes that might have resulted from treatment were subtler than the instrument allowed. Third, the absence of a statistically significant improvement might be attributed to the fact that the pre- and post-surveys were given so close together and a real change may not have had time to occur. Fourth, there may have been no statistically significant improvement because the beginning ratings were already so close to the desired result that very little improvement was possible. Finally, it is possible that their affection for me could have resulted to providing the answers they thought I wanted.

Although no statistically significant improvement can lead me to conclude that the six weeks training sessions resulted in a change of attitude by the participants, it is safe to suggest that the very exercise itself—the six training sessions—had an effect on the participants. The six participants attending the six training sessions were exposed to necessary steps to proactively reach out to newcomers and to begin the assimilation process that will result in many of the newcomers joining membership at VBC. The reason for my conclusion is the noticeable change that has taken place at VBC after the implementation of the ministry project. There is now at VBC a proactive effort put forth by the NMLT to reach out to newcomers; the results of which are more newcomers returning to visit a second and third time.

Conclusion

The goal of the ministry project was to address the problem of the inactive membership committee by identifying and training a NMLT to lead Victory Baptist Church, DeKalb, Illinois, in taking a proactive approach to assimilating newcomers to the church. The absence of a strategic assimilation process in the church was deemed to be

the result of a lack of knowledge and a lack of a proactive membership leadership team. With the NMLT now trained and commissioned, there is hope for the dawn of a new day at Victory Baptist Church. Although the paired *t*- test analysis of the pre-project survey and the post-project survey did not reveal a statistically significant improvement in knowledge or attitudes as a result of the six-week training sessions, there have been changes in the way newcomers are received and treated at VBC. The problem identified—an inactive membership committee—has been resolved as the NMLT was trained as a replacement and is now doing the work of proactively reaching out to newcomers to VBC. In chapter 5, the ministry project is evaluated.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATING THE MINISTRY PROJECT

It is important to evaluate what occurred throughout the ministry project. This assessment involves acknowledging, among other things, the strengths, weaknesses, and what would have been done differently. This chapter evaluates the ministry project in light of its purpose, goals, theological reflection, strengths, weaknesses, what could have been done differently, suggestion for future exploration, a personal reflection, and a concluding thought.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of the ministry project was to identify and train a New Membership Leadership Team (NMLT) to lead Victory Baptist Church, DeKalb, Illinois, in assimilating newcomers into the active membership of the church. To accomplish the purpose of the ministry project, a training curriculum was developed, appraised, and approved by an expert pastoral team. The curriculum was then used to train the NMLT at Victory Baptist Church. The six-week training witnessed remarkable success. Seven members began the training, though six members successfully completed all training sessions. The participants met at the church every Sunday morning for six weeks, from Sunday, April 26, 2015, to Sunday, May 31, 2015, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Those trained signed a ministry covenant and were dedicated and commissioned to lead the church in assimilating newcomers on Sunday, June 14, 2015, at the 10:45 a.m. morning service. The purpose of the ministry project—putting in place a proactive membership team to replace the inactive membership committee—was accomplished with the training and commissioning of the NMLT that now leads the church in assimilating newcomers.

The shortcoming identified in the context and rationale section of the ministry project led to the development and execution of the ministry project. The shortcoming had to do with a non-active membership committee that existed just in name. The results of the church survey indicated less than 10 percent of the 70 percent that completed the survey knew a membership committee existed in the church, let alone knew who its members were. The ineffectiveness of the membership committee resulted in me having to worry about guests coming to Victory Baptist Church (VBC). Consequently, many guests to VBC went unnoticed; therefore, many did not have a reason to return. The ministry project has reset the clock. The members of the NMLT are now proactively reaching out to guests who show up for worship, as well as following up with guests after worship. When guests show up in service the pastor no longer wonders if he will get to them before they leave. Now at VBC, no one has to call the attention of the NMLT to the presence of guest, and the ushers no longer wait to remove the guest card from the offering basket and put it on my desk. However, as soon as a guest walks through the doors now, ushers immediately take them to a NMLT member. The member of the NMLT sits with the guests during service, helps them fill out the guest card, and follows up with them within the week. In the last eight months VBC has seen more guests return to worship than in the past eight years. The ministry project so far is proving to be an effective intervention as a proactive NMLT has replaced an inactive membership committee.

Evaluation of the Goals

At the beginning of the ministry project, four goals were identified to guide the planning and execution of the ministry project. The following paragraphs explain how each goal was accomplished.

Goal 1

The first goal, to evaluate how well the church was doing in assimilating newcomers, was achieved as 70 percent of the church members completed the ministry survey during the Sunday morning service. The survey that sought to evaluate the church's awareness of the work of the membership committee in assimilating newcomers was successful. Seventy percent of the members of Victory Baptist Church that attended on that Sunday morning completed the survey. With the aid of the deacons and some youth, I distributed and collected the surveys to the members.

After evaluating the completed surveys, the hypothesis that the church was unaware of the existence of a membership committee because they had failed in the work of proactively identifying and assimilating newcomers to VBC, was affirmed. Only a few senior members (less than 10 percent of the 70 percent who have been attending VBC for more than 30 years) who completed the survey knew a membership committee existed in the church. Of the 10 percent, less than 5 percent knew a member of the committee. The rest of the VBC members did not know a membership committee existed, let alone know its members. The evaluation of the surveys also affirmed the interest of the church in a NMLT to lead the church in assimilation newcomers. One hundred percent strongly agreed to statements 16 through 19 of the survey (new membership team analysis). Meaning that of the 70 percent who completed the survey, all answered statements 16 through 19 as was expected; thus supporting my projection that a membership committee was needed in the church. Today at VBC the story is a different one. After the church went through the process of identifying, confirming, training, and commissioning the members of the NMLT, I would project more than 80 percent of VBC members know about the NMLT and those who serve in it. It is thus safe to conclude that goal 1 was achieved.

Goal 2

The second goal, identifying and enlisting active members of the church to be trained to serve as members of the NMLT, witnessed remarkable success. I pre-selected and individually contacted the members. Working in collaboration with the deacon board, I enlisted qualified active, dedicated members of the church. All of them agreed to be trained to serve in the NMLT. They were invited to a church business meeting during which they were presented to the congregation for approval. Following the overwhelming vote of approval in the business meeting, the participants were presented to the entire congregation in the next morning worship service where they were prayed over and set apart to be trained to lead the church in assimilating newcomers.

Goal 3

The third goal, developing a training curriculum, was also successful. The curriculum was developed to train the participants selected to serve as members of the NMLT to lead the church in assimilating newcomers. The training curriculum specifically addressed six important subject areas.

First, regenerate church membership was developed with the goal of helping participants evaluate their own salvation. The other objective of the lesson was to prepare participants to assist newcomers in understanding the miracle of salvation that has taken place in their spirits and be able to articulate it. The participants were also educated on what to do if a newcomer did not acknowledge having experienced the miracle of saving faith in Jesus Christ.

The second lesson addressed the biblical understanding of team-based ministry and was developed with the goal of emphasizing teamwork. The lesson stressed the importance of teamwork to the members of the NMLT.

The third lesson, the unique place of first impressions, highlighted a couple of things. First, the church must be prepared for the newcomer. Second, the newcomer's decision to return to the church is formed sometimes upon arrival at the parking lot of the

church even before they have the opportunity to participate in worship. Third, the first people the newcomer meets upon arrival have a unique role in creating a positive or negative first impression on the mind of the newcomer. In that light, therefore, participants were schooled on the importance of first impressions and the important role first impressions play in turning first-time guest to second-time guests and possible members of the church.

The fourth lesson, biblical hospitality, made the point that newcomers are aware when people are just being nice for the sake of being nice and when people are genuinely interested in them as unique individuals. The lesson was developed to emphasize to the members of the NMLT that they must be sincere in their interaction with newcomers. One suggestion was that they go the extra mile, such as taking newcomers to the Sunday school class rather than just pointing them in the direction of the class. They were also encouraged to offer to sit with the newcomer during the worship service. These changes transformed the way the church receives guests as members are now alert to the arrival of newcomers as Victory members leave their usual sitting positions and offer to sit with the newcomer or invite newcomers to sit with them. It is difficult to find a newcomer sitting alone at Victory Baptist Church now.

The fifth lesson, a biblical theology of ministry, achieved two major things. First, ministry is not reserved for the professional clergy. Second, Christ has gifted the body with varying gifts so that every member can serve the body for the common good. The lesson emphasized the fact that welcoming and assimilating newcomers is a valuable ministry of the church requiring varying gifts to accomplish it for the glory of Christ and the growth of his church.

The sixth lesson, mission, vision, and core values of VBC, was designed to recast a renewed vision of the church to the members of the NMLT, as well as to the entire Victory family. This vision was achieved as the members of the NMLT can now be heard

talking to newcomers and other members about the mission, vision, and core values of the church.

Although the expert pastor team graded the training curriculum exemplary in four of the five points on the rubric, the only suggestion they offered concerned providing a participant's guide to accompany the training curriculum. As noted elsewhere, it was not possible to develop a participant's manual due to time constraints. However, a participant's manual would be a great addition to enhance the teaching methodology. Rather than heavily depending on a content delivery style, I asked many questions and motivated the participants to share their experiences in light of the various lessons. Participants were also given small group assignments on how a lesson could be practically applied in the church. For example, when the lesson on biblical hospitality was taught, rather than suggesting to the participants ways in which this could be applied, the participants themselves came up with practical ways hospitality could be practiced as a means of attracting and retaining newcomers.

Goal 4

The fourth goal, utilizing the curriculum to train the leadership team, was implemented as planned. Six of the originally selected seven participants took a pre-training survey, completed the training, and completed a post-training survey. They were then commissioned to serve in the ministry of assimilating newcomers to the church. On Sunday, April 26, 2015, the first lesson was taught, and on Sunday May 31, 2015, the last lesson was taught. The data collected from the pre-training survey and post-training survey were analyzed. The results of the post-training survey compared with the results of the pre-training survey suggested no change in attitude; thus indicating that members of the NMLT did not gain new knowledge as a result of the training.

As I look back on the NMLT training a few things stand out. The first is the lesson that was most difficult for me to teach, biblical theology of ministry. As the pastor of a small church, I found it difficult to instruct the members of the NMLT that it was

their duty to serve. Teaching the lesson on the biblical theology of ministry made me feel like I was delegating my duties to the people who were paying me to evangelize; however, I knew the truth that all Christians are called to evangelism and I did my best to teach the lesson with passion. From this perspective, the lesson on biblical theology of ministry was the hardest one for me to teach.

The second thing that stands out from the training was the lesson participants struggled with: regenerate church membership. The goal of the lesson was to reinforce the participants' assurance of salvation so that they are in a better place to understand if newcomers are saved, can help provide assurance of salvation to newcomers, or to share the gospel message with those who are not saved. The difficulty came because members of the NMLT thought it was not their place to determine whether someone was saved or not; they assumed that was the job of the pastor. It took me a few more minutes to help members of the NMLT to understand the truth that it is equally their responsibility as they interact with newcomers to be able to recognize if the newcomer knows what it means to be saved and how to help them understand what the Bible teaches about salvation.

The third thing that stands out was the lesson that had the greatest impact on the participants—the unique place of first impressions. It was interesting to listen to almost all six participants share their experiences when visiting churches and how they came away with a positive or a negative impression. As a result, the lesson on the unique place of first impressions was an exciting lesson to teach and the one I almost did not have control over since everyone had an interesting story to tell. It was therefore easy for members to understand the important role first impressions play at VBC for guests who come to worship.

The Preaching Series

The preaching series began three weeks after the beginning of the training because of special Sundays that were being observed at the church. Six messages were

prepared and preached. One overriding objective informed the preparation and preaching of the sermon series—to bring about a unity of purpose in the entire congregation on the subject of assimilating newcomers to the church. The church was better prepared to follow the leadership of the NMLT in assimilating newcomers to church because they were provided with the same knowledge as the NMLT. The information being presented through the training and sermon series worked out excellently. Not only are the members of the NMLT identifying newcomers and sitting with them during worship, but also others in the congregation are beginning to do likewise. Before the sermon series ended, it was thrilling to see how the entire congregation became not only aware of the presence of the newcomer, but also became proactive toward genuinely welcoming the newcomer.

On Sunday morning at VBC, even church members that are not part of the NMLT can be seen reaching out to newcomers; not only with warm hand shake accompanied by a broad smile, but they also make the extra effort of inviting the newcomer to sit with them or offer to move and sit where the newcomer is already sitting. Some decided to alert the members of the NMLT so they could sit with the newcomer. After service at VBC now it is common to see not only members of the NMLT visiting with guests but also church members stopping and visiting with guests. Prior to this revolution, it was common to see VBC members approach me to let me know about a guest and wondering if I had the chance to see and greet them. Now that has changed. Now at VBC I have the joy of being told who came and where they came from, from both the NMLT members and regular church members. Everyone is proactively reaching out to newcomers to the church.

The other overriding objective that motivated the preaching of the sermon series was to create a sense of urgency in the church. It was imperative that the church approach the assimilation of the newcomer as a matter of urgency. If the church grows, it must be the work of the entire congregation and not only the work of a chosen few.

The training sessions no doubt prepared the members of the NMLT to be proactively ready for the newcomers to VBC. The sermon series, while mobilizing the entire congregation to be sensitive to the presence of the newcomer and proactively reach out to them also in their own right, mobilized the members of the NMLT given they are part of the congregation. The enthusiastic reception of the message series by the entire congregation had a great impact on the members of the NMLT.

Theological Reflection

Chapter 2 provided the biblical and theological foundation of the ministry project. It examined Old and New Testament texts speaking explicitly or implicitly on the subject of church members, hence assimilation. The importance of assimilating newcomers in the church was inferred from these texts. The biblical and theological study pointed out some things that were emphasized in the training of the NMLT, as well as stressed in the sermon series preached to the entire congregation.

From the Old and New Testaments texts, the case could be made that God intended for his covenant people to congregate together and that those who came under the covenant of God were incorporated into the covenant people of God—the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament. Beginning with the call of Abraham, God made it clear that his desire was to set aside a unique group of people in the world to reflect his glory. The various Old Testament covenants point to God's desire for a group of people separated by his love and their willingness to obey his law. This idea of a set apart group of people for God's own glory is reinforced in the New Testament covenant; thus the case was made in the biblical and theological segment of the ministry project that God's desire was and still is to set apart a group of people for himself for the sake of his glory. The local church is a proper reflection of what God intended for his called out ones. Those who identify with Christ in his death and resurrection also identify with him in his body, which is represented by the local church. Hence, Christians must be assimilated into the membership of the local church.

The second truth gleaned from the biblical and theological studies pointed to the fact that not everyone, either in the Old or New Testament, belonged to this set apart group of people. Only those who had been specially marked by the circumcision of the flesh (as was the case in the Old Testament) or the circumcision of the heart (as is the case in the New Testament) became part of the covenant community. The biblical and theological study, therefore, emphasized regenerate church membership as the qualification for becoming a member of the local body of Christ—the church.

The third and final truth gleaned from the biblical and theological study that heavily influenced the implementation of the ministry project, especially the preaching series, had to do with the corporate unified body of Christ working together to welcome and assimilate the newcomer. The growth of the church depends to a larger extent on the church's ability to effectively and efficiently assimilate those God is drawing to himself and to his church. The purpose of the ministry project was proactively assimilating newcomers into the membership of the church. The training of the NMLT accomplished this purpose by preparing the leadership team to effectively lead the church in assimilating newcomers. The sermon series mobilized the entire church toward achieving the purpose of the ministry project, which was to prepare the church to welcome and assimilate newcomers.

If there is one thing I am thankful for in this experience it is seeing the entire congregation awaken to the reality of its calling to work together for the common good of the body of Christ. It is a thrilling experience on Sunday mornings to see all church members are almost in the language of Scripture outdoing one another in serving the newcomer. There is nothing as fulfilling as seeing those who once ran to me to report the presence of a newcomer now trying to outrun others toward the newcomer.

When God made a covenant with Abraham, God essentially gave of himself to Abraham and his offspring. God gave Abraham and the church the gift of forgiveness, acceptance, and grace, but even much more the gift of himself. To the NT believer, God

has given his one and only son, Jesus Christ. It has been a blessing to see VBC members, especially the members of the NMLT, now giving of themselves, time, and resources to the newcomers to VBC. It was evident from God's relationship with Abraham and the church that obedience leads to promised blessings. I am witnessing the blessing of obedience as VBC members and the members of the NMLT in obedience are reaching out to newcomers, resulting in more newcomers returning to worship a second and third time. In reaching out to newcomers, VBC members and the members of the NMLT are doing exactly to others what God has done to them, accepting and seeking to include newcomers into the covenant community.

The reinforcement that God means business when he desires that those who have received Christ also become part of the body of Christ through regenerate church membership, has personally enriched me. Church membership is not optional or an ancient practice, it is scriptural and must be taken seriously in the church of Jesus Christ. As I look back at VBC after the implementation of the ministry project, it is almost as if the church has undergone some form of circumcision—the circumcision of the heart. It has been an amazing journey seeing Scripture come to light that says the body grows and matures together for the common good as the majority of VBC members are now working together, at least in a purposive manner, for the newcomer. Although the need for numerical growth might have given rise to the ministry project, I come away from this project with the realization that a small church can be growing and maturing although it may not necessarily be increasing its membership at the pace it wants. It is not as if the church has arrived completely mature in Christ; however, the concerted efforts are now evident in the entire congregation and provide enough fuel to stay the course of faithfully leading VBC toward assimilating many newcomers.

Strengths of the Ministry Project

The primary strength of the ministry project was the development of the curriculum that assisted in training the members of the NMLT. The six lessons, covering

regenerate church membership, a biblical understanding of team-based leadership, the unique place of first impressions, the place of biblical hospitality, the biblical theology of ministry, and the mission, vision, and core values of VBC, served as a viable tool to train the NMLT, could be used to train future members to serve in the NMLT, and could also be used by other churches to train their leadership teams. The curriculum was not necessarily unique to Victory, so can be used by any Bible believing evangelical church.

The sermon series was another strength of the ministry. The six sermons reminded the congregation of who is qualified to be a church member, the power of team work, the positive impression the faithfulness of Victory members can create in newcomers, the unique place of Christian hospitality, the blessings to the church when all members are serving together, and the reason for which the church exists—its mission, vision, and core values. Recasting the vision of the church in light of the overall mission of God’s kingdom work also turned out to be just what the church needed. The sermon series created a renewed enthusiasm and a contagious readiness in the church for newcomers.

The third strength of the ministry project was undoubtedly the training of the NMLT. The NMLT is doing an exceedingly purposive job of welcoming and smoothing the way for the assimilation of newcomers. Compared to the inactive membership committee that was unknown to the members of VBC, the NMLT members sacrificing their preferred seat in church so that they can sit with a newcomer is nothing short of purposive. To move from ushers collecting guest cards from the offering plate and leaving them at the pastor’s office to now receiving information from the NMLT about who was present at worship, where they came from, why they are in town, and whether they will be returning next Sunday, is nothing short of being purposive. From VBC members running to the pastor to alert him of the presence of guest in the church to now NMLT members following up with newcomers who visit the church within the week, without the pastor even knowing, are nothing short of purposive. Those who come to

VBC following the implementation of the ministry project are no longer sitting in a pew by themselves; they are invited to sit with Victory members. Many of them have been invited for dinner after the service. More letters have been sent out to newcomers in the last couple of months than before the ministry project. Follow-up with newcomers is now completely out my hands. Ministry to newcomers who show up at VBC is no longer the work of one person; it is now the responsibility of a team who is passionate and purposive about newcomers to the church.

The fourth strength of the ministry project was the effective implementation of the project within the time allotted. The six lessons where taught to the point and did not exceed the one-hour time planned for each lesson. Participation at every training session was enthusiastic. Although the pre-project and post-project surveys did not make the case for knowledge gained by the participants as a result of the treatment given them, the sessions still provided the members of the NMLT with the information needed to effectively receive newcomers to VBC.

The fifth strength of the ministry project came from the comments of those who received the training as well as from the sermon series. Some members of the NMLT are still expressing their gratitude for the opportunity to serve the church in such a simple yet significant area of ministry. One member said, “I did not think welcoming newcomers to the church could be an exciting ministry. That was not my idea of ministry at all. It is not a big deal giving up sitting in my preferred spot in the church so that I can sit with a newcomer to our church. If that is what it would take for them to come again let alone join the church, I am glad to do it.” A comment like the one above undoubtedly points to the strength of the ministry project.

The final strength of the ministry project has been the overwhelming awareness of newcomers in the church. The majority of Victory Baptist Church members are more aware of the presence of the newcomer now than at this time a year ago. Victory members no longer look for the pastor to tell him there is a newcomer. When a newcomer shows up

at Victory, those who are still cautious look for a member of the NMLT and bring them to the newcomer. Others simply welcome the newcomer and offer to sit with them during service. Most of the time I am only informed of what they have already done. For example, those who are not members of the NMLT come to me asking about the next step they can take with the newcomer they sat with in the worship service.

It would not be an overstatement to say the implementation of the ministry project began a movement at Victory Baptist Church. The majority of members no longer see the newcomer as the work of the pastor or even that of the NMLT, but that of the entire congregation, which is a completely different attitude from what the survey revealed at the beginning of the ministry project. This new attitude in the church is no doubt a significant strength of the ministry project now that almost all Victory members know the members of the NMLT, what they are doing, and are prepared to assist them.

Weaknesses of the Ministry Project

Every human endeavor is bound to have weaknesses; I have identified five weaknesses of the ministry project. The weaknesses include, among others, timing and producing just one document for the training of the members of the NMLT.

The first weakness of the project came from changing the original schedule of the start of the ministry project. The implementation date was originally set for January 2015, but was changed to April 2015. The original schedule had intended to capitalize on the beginning of the New Year as a way to get the church motivated on the new approach to assimilating newcomers. By changing the schedule to April, I felt strongly that the motivation that comes with the beginning of a new year was a missed opportunity. More people visit Victory Baptist Church at the beginning of the year, and people are motivated to make new commitments at the beginning of the year. I cannot explicitly say this is what was missed by not starting the implementation of the ministry project in January, but there is the possibility the level of motivation and commitment might have been

greater at the beginning of the year than in April when people are already beginning to make plans for the summer season.

The second weakness of the ministry project was the development and production of one document for the training of the members of the NMLT. Due to cost, only one document was produced. I take personal responsibility for overlooking the cost of production; consequently, failing to secure enough funds for the production of the training curriculum. It would have been better to develop a participant guide to go along with a leader's manual. This addition might have enhanced teaching and learning. It might have also given the participants a better chance of personally reflecting on the material after class. A participant guide would have asked the members insightful questions to further probe the depth of their understanding of the subject as well as questions that would have allowed them to wrestle with the application of the material. It would have also granted the opportunity for homework, further creating the possibility of more lively discussions in the next training sessions.

The third weakness of the ministry project was the lack of a post-survey administered to the entire congregation after the sermon series. The congregation was surveyed at the beginning of the implementation of the ministry project, and although the 70 percent goal was achieved, it was impossible to know if the congregation's attitude changed after the preaching of the sermon series. It would have been better to administer a pre-sermon survey and a post-sermon survey, as was the case with the pre-training and post-training surveys given to the members of the NMLT. This additional survey would have given me data for a more nuanced understanding of the congregation's attitude.

The fourth weakness of the ministry project was limited publicity. Although the project was discussed in the deacon's board, the business meeting, and put in three Sunday bulletins prior to the beginning of the implementation of the ministry project, there was no mention of it on the church's website or the monthly newsletter. I imagine

more publicity might have engendered more enthusiasm resulting in more commitment on the part of Victory Baptist Church members.

The fifth weakness of the ministry project relates the timing already mentioned. Because the timing changed, the training of the members of the NMLT ended too close to the start of 2015 Vacation Bible School. In fact, the last sermon in the series was preached the Sunday just before the beginning of VBS. As a result, the members of the NMLT felt rushed, I felt rushed, and the congregation felt rushed also.

Although these were weaknesses that I noticed, it is worthy to note that the church and the members of the NMLT have not yet called my attention to any of these weaknesses. All who participated felt the project went well. However, it does not cancel the fact that these are weaknesses of the ministry project. I take full responsibility for these weaknesses and if I completed the training or sermons again, I would ensure these weaknesses were minimized.

What I Would Have Done Differently

As I look back at the conception and implementation of the ministry project there are a few things I would do differently if I were to do the ministry project all over again. The first thing I would do differently would be to maintain the original schedule of starting at the beginning of the year. This timing would allow for the opportunity to build on the enthusiasm that comes with the start of a New Year. It is also at this time that more newcomers visit the church; consequently, the church would utilize the opportunity to assimilate more newcomers.

Second, I would make sure that the implementation of the ministry project was not scheduled so close to another major ministry outreach event in the church. Avoiding these scheduling conflicts would give the church and myself ample time to finish the ministry project and evaluate it without rushing to begin a new ministry outreach event. Given the size of the church, a lot of people get involved in multiple ministry events. Rushing them may compromise the quality of performance.

The third thing I would do differently would be to produce a leader's manual and a participant's guide. It would take a lot of work as well as cost a little more, but the benefit of a participant's guide would mean better involvement and better treatment of the subject matter. A participant's guide would also make it very easy for another church to use the curriculum to train their leaders. In the future, I would develop a participant's guide to go with the training curriculum.

The fourth thing I would do differently is to schedule and start the training sessions and the sermon series the same day. This change would avoid the three Sundays of overlap, which I believe would create greater unity in the church.

That fifth thing I would do differently would be to conduct a pre-sermon survey and post-sermon survey to the congregation. This survey would provide me with a more accurate assessment of the church's understanding of the subject of assimilating newcomers before and after the series.

The sixth and last thing I would do differently would be create a seventh lesson on the subject of the church. A lesson on the nature and function of the church would serve as an important addition to the six lessons addressed in the current training curriculum.

Suggestion for Future Study

The journey from the beginning of my studies in November 2012 to the time that I am writing this chapter has been an amazing one. I would not trade it for anything. The development and the implementation of the ministry project provided me with a better understanding of the ministry of the church in general, and of assimilating newcomers to the church in particular. Future studies in this area might survey guests who do not return to the church, in order to understand why they do not return after their first or second visit. Newcomers who return and remain in the church do so because the church did the right things to attract and retain them, but what about those who do not return, what did the church do wrong that kept them from coming back? It would be possible to design a survey that can be mailed out to those who visited and have not

returned and ask them to fill it out and return it to the church. The answers they provide would lead to a better understanding of why they did not visit again. This type of survey would undoubtedly enhance the church's endeavor to welcome and assimilate newcomers.

Personal Reflection

The entire experience of studying for the D.Ed.Min in Leadership, as well as developing and implementing the ministry project at the church, has been interesting, challenging, and fulfilling. When I started the program in November 2012, my aim was to sharpen my skills as a spiritual leader and to be a better under-shepherd of the flock of Christ for his glory. I come away from this amazing experience with a renewed perspective on leadership, a renewed enthusiasm for ministry, a heart on fire for the ministry of assimilating newcomers into the membership of the local church, and a humble spirit when it comes to leading the flock of Christ.

The interesting part of the journey has no doubt been the amazing nature of my professors—their professionalism, dedication to academic excellence, shepherd hearts directed at their students, and hospitality. Every one of my classes brought me into contact with servants of God who not only demonstrated aptitude within their discipline, but also a genuine interest in the holistic wellbeing of their student. Another development has been the priceless relationships that I have developed with my fellow classmates. Some of these relationships are already bearing ministry fruit to the glory of God.

A challenge for this program has been leaving my family and travelling to Louisville to take classes and study. As a father of a young family this was not easy on my wife, our children, or myself. Long hours in studying and writing outside of the house only added to the challenge. The other challenge has been financial. Paying for classes, books, room and board while on campus, and travelling expenses have been quite a challenge. However, God has provided in amazing ways.

As I see the end of the journey approaching, I can testify that it has been a fulfilling experience. Beyond the academic exposure to a holistic approach to leadership, I come away from this experience humbled to be a useful tool in the hands of God. I am also better prepared to lead the church, not only toward maturity, but also toward reaching the community for Christ.

The most fulfilling experience for me has been the development, production, and use of the training curriculum to train new leadership for the church. The experience has given me a renewed appreciation for the newcomer as well as the role of the church in attracting and assimilating the newcomer. The retention of guests to the church is not a matter of wishful thinking; it takes intentionality on the part of the leadership of the church and for it to work it must involve the entire congregation. We have a saying in Cameroon that “one bad cocoyam can spoil a basket of cocoyam.” Applied to our church, this means that one bad example in the church is enough to destroy its ministry of assimilating newcomers.

Even more fulfilling has been the realization of some in the church that ministry is not something just paid professionals do; ministry is something the body of Christ gets involved in. The fact that many at Victory Baptist Church now feel at ease to invite newcomers to sit with them, or relocate so that they can sit with a newcomer to the church, is truly phenomenal. That change has been the most fulfilling and humbling part of this journey.

Conclusion

I take away from the ministry project a renewed realization that assimilation of newcomers into the local church does not just happen on its own. When it comes to assimilating newcomers into the membership of local church, no magic wand can be waved for things to perfectly fall into place. Assimilation takes time; it takes intentional planning, and rigorous execution and follow-up. It takes more than just training a group of men and women to watch out for the next guest. Assimilation takes preparing the

manpower, the internal, and the external property to communicate to the newcomers that the church is ready for them. This is not something the church does in preparation for a special event; rather, getting ready to receive the newcomers should become part of the DNA of the church that wants to witness sustained growth.

I have learned a great deal throughout this project; however, my greatest learning experience came from developing and utilizing the training curriculum. Although it might have taken me at least twenty-five hours to prepare each of the six lessons and about twelve hours per sermon, the overall experience was worth every minute spent. As a result, I intend to use the training curriculum to continue training new members to serve not only in the NMLT, but in other front door ministries in the church, like the parking lot service, greeters, ushers, and children and youth leaders.

Given that the sermon series was received enthusiastically, it is my plan to preach a miniature of the sermon series once every eighteen months to reinforce, reemphasize, and recast an assimilation vision for the church. With the close to fifty newcomers that come through Victory Baptist Church doors every year, the church could see a significant growth if 20 percent of those visitors are welcomed and assimilated into the membership of the church.

In a little over six months of the development and execution of the ministry project, God has taught the church and I some great lessons. One of those lessons is that when God's church works in unity, God will begin to do great things. God will build his church just as he promised, but he works in and through the local body of believers. God draws men and women to himself, and the church is to assimilate them into the body of Christ where they grow into the image of Christ and for his ultimate glory. I am most grateful to my family, for their unconditional love and unrelenting belief in me during this amazing journey. For all that I have learned and will continue to learn, I thank the members of Victory Baptist Church for their support. In this and all things, whether I eat or drink, or whatever I do, I will do for the sake of the church of Jesus Christ and for the glory of the Father.

APPENDIX 1

NEW MEMBERSHIP TEAM ANALYSIS

Consent to Participate: The analysis you are about to complete has been constituted with the aim of analyzing the effectiveness of assimilating newcomers into Victory Baptist Church. The data collected by the researcher will help facilitate the process of putting in place a new membership leadership team that will enhance the process of assimilating newcomers into the church. The information you provide will be confidential. Your name or personal information will not be identified with your answers any time in this project. You can withdraw your participation at any time. By completing the analysis, you are giving informed consent for the use of your response in this ministry project.

Background Information:

Guidelines: Please, place a check mark in your answers.

1. What is your gender?
 Male
 Female
2. What is your age?
 18-20
 25-34
 35-44
 45-54
 55-64
 65 and over
3. What is your marital status?
 Single
 Married
 Divorced
 Widowed
4. How many children do you have?
 0 4
 1 5
 2 6 and more
 3
5. How long have you been a member of Victory Baptist Church? ____ Years

Membership Committee

Guidelines: Check **Yes** or **No** to indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- 6. Victory Baptist Church has a membership committee. ___Yes ___No
- 7. The current membership committee is made up of three members. ___Yes ___No
- 8. I know the members of the current membership committee. ___Yes ___No
- 9. The current membership committee has met in the last six years. ___Yes ___No
- 10. The current membership committee should meet regularly. ___Yes ___No
- 11. The current membership committee should be maintained. ___Yes ___No

Duties of the Membership Committee

Guidelines: Rate the following statements using the scale below. Space is provided after each statement if you wish to comment.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

- 12. The current membership committee has done a good job identifying newcomers to the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

- 13. The current membership committee needs to do a good job identifying newcomers to the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

- 14. The current membership committee has done a good job assimilating newcomers into the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

- 15. The current membership committee should be trained.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

16. A new membership team should lead in assimilating newcomers and the current membership committee should be replaced.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

17. The church needs a new membership team.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

18. The church needs volunteers who will serve in the new membership team.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

19. A new membership leadership team is needed for assimilating newcomers into the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

APPENDIX 2

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATING NEW MEMBERSHIP
TRAINING CURRICULUM

Name of Panel Expert: _____

Date: _____

The curriculum you are about to evaluate has been constituted with the aim of training a new membership leadership team at Victory Baptist Church to lead the church in assimilation of newcomers into membership. Your objective evaluation of the curriculum is highly coveted for the success of the ministry project. You can withdraw your participation at any time.

Guidelines: Rate the following curriculum items using the rubric provided below. Space is provided after each statement if you wish to comment.

	Insufficient	Sufficient	Exemplary
1. Aim/objectives	_____	_____	_____
2. Content accuracy	_____	_____	_____
3. Ease of use	_____	_____	_____
4. Design	_____	_____	_____
5. Learning Outcomes	_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX 3

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Choice private identification #: _____

Date: _____

Consent to Participate: The research you are about to take part in has been constituted with the aim of identifying and developing a new membership leadership team at Victory Baptist Church. The data collected will assist the researcher in identifying and training a new membership leadership team at Victory Baptist Church. The information you provide will be confidential. Your name or personal information will not be identified with your answers anytime in this project. You can withdraw your participation at any time. By completing the survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your response in this ministry project.

Background Information:

Guidelines: Please place a check mark in your answer.

1. What is your gender?
 Male
 Female
2. What is your age?
 18-20
 25-34
 35-44
 45-54
 55-64
 65 and over
3. What is your marital status?
 Single
 Married
 Divorced
 Widowed
4. What level of education have you completed?
 High School Diploma
 Associate Degree
 Bachelor's degree and above
 other

5. Concerning spiritual gifts:
- I know my spiritual gifts.
 - I do not know my spiritual gifts.
 - I am using my spiritual gifts.
 - I am not using my spiritual gifts.
 - I would love to know and use my spiritual gifts.

Section 1—Current state of Victory Baptist Church

Guidelines: Rate the following statements using the scale below. Space is provided after each statement if you wish to comment.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

6. From your personal observations, the church is doing well in assimilating newcomers.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

7. From your personal observations, the church needs to do better in assimilating newcomers.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

8. From your personal observations, newcomers are being assimilated into the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

9. From your personal observations, a small number of newcomers are being assimilated into the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

10. From your personal observations, many newcomers are visiting Victory Baptist Church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

Section 2—Leadership development

Guidelines: Rate the following statements using the scale below. Space is provided after each statement if you wish to comment.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

11. I am confident meeting new people.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

12. I present an authentic self that encourages others to be forthcoming with me.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

13. I am genuinely interested in people.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

14. I understand what the Bible teaches about church membership.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

15. I am committed to encouraging newcomers to become members of the church.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

16. I am a member of the church in good standing.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

17. I am committed to serve as a member of the new membership leadership team.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

18. I am committed to receive the training that would make me to a better team member.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

19. I am committed to be a participatory team member.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

20. I am committed to ensuring the success of other team members.

SD D DS AS A SA

Comment:

APPENDIX 4
TRAINING CURRICULUM

Victory Baptist Church

1930 Sycamore Road

DeKalb, IL 60115

Office Phone: (815) 756-6212

Email: victorybaptistdekalb@gmail.com

Web address: vbc-dekalb.org

New Membership Leadership Team

Training Curriculum

Spring 2015

Trainer

Rev. Eric M. Ngum

D.Ed.Min. Student SBTS

Pastor

Table of Contents

I.	Curriculum Overview	3
II.	Goals/Objectives	3
III.	Regenerate Church Membership	4
IV.	Biblical Understanding of Team-based Ministry	9
V.	The Unique Place of First Impressions	13
VI.	Biblical Hospitality	17
VII.	A Biblical Theology of Ministry	21
VIII.	The Mission, Vision, and Core Values of VBC	25
IX.	Appendix	28

Curriculum Overview

How can the church retain the majority of those who walk through her doors as first time visitors, returning visitors, or new Christians to the area looking for a church family? If Jesus has said he will build his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, what is the role of the Christians, or better still how does the corporate body of Christ fit in? How can the church use the authority that Christ possesses and has elected to empower his bride with in building and maturing the bride? The answers to these question hinge on all members of the body of Christ clearly understanding the important role they have been given to play in the body and to actively and enthusiastically offer themselves to be used of God.

It is also incumbent on the leadership of the church to assume their proper role of teaching and equipping the body for works of righteousness. The goal of this curriculum; therefore, is to guide the information, formation, and transformation of the members of the New Membership Leadership Team (NMLT) with the training intended to change their attitude towards newcomers to Victory Baptist Church (VBC) (Titus 2:1-15). It is hoped that the NMLT will be the beginning of the growth that is very much needed at Victory Baptist Church as the team leads the church in attracting and assimilating most of her newcomers.

Goals/Objectives

1. Broaden the NMLT understanding of biblical church membership.
2. Provide the NMLT with a biblical understand of team-based ministry.
3. Train the NMLT on how to create a positive first time impression on newcomers to VBC.
4. Cast the vision of VBC to the NMLT members.
5. Educate the NMLT on how to use social events to engage newcomers to VBC.
6. Drill the NMLT on the core values of VBC.

Lesson 1: Regenerate Church Membership

Lesson Overview

Those who serve in the New Membership Leadership Team must be true followers of Christ with a sound Biblical and theological knowledge of regenerate church membership. First, they must themselves be saved and able to clearly share their testimony of salvation. Second, they must embrace, live out, and articulate a biblical and theological view of regenerate church membership. Third, then they can passionately attract others both to Christ and to His church. Christ must be in them for others to see and be drawn to Him.

Goal/Objective

The goal of this lesson is to help the members of the New Membership Leadership Team to authenticate their salvation and to embrace regenerate church membership and all that it entails.

Key Texts:

Acts 2:38-41, “Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” ⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!” ⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.”

Ice Breaker: My friend Curtis possesses a contagious Christian joy. He loves the Lord and is zealous in evangelism. Curtis’s zeal is marked by his willingness to “do whatever it takes to have someone profess faith in Christ.”

One day Curtis, with his usual joy, told me of a mutual friend, Kenny, who “got born again.” I was struck by Curtis’s choice of words. Pressing past his excitement, I asked “How do you know he was ‘born again?’”

Curtis withdrew slightly, head tilting with the curiosity puppies sometimes display at odd human behavior, “What do you mean?”

“Well, how can you be so confident that spiritual rebirth occurred?”

Relief washed over Curtis’s face and shoulders. “Oh. That is easy. He came down from after the service and prayed to receive Christ – the way lots of people get saved.”

About a year after my conversation with Curtis, he telephoned, quite concerned. A problem that periodically troubled him was again causing him discomfort – only this time it was our friend Kenny. Curtis told me how Kenny began the Christian race well, attending services, praying fervently, going out with evangelism teams, and sometimes showing great emotions during services. “The first year was great,” Curtis reported. “But then,” his voice quieted, Kenny just faded away. It’s like he just petered out . . . and now he’s having marital problems and considering leaving the faith.”

Silence occupied the phone line for a moment. Then Curtis asked, “Do you think Kenny was ever really saved? How can you tell if someone is born again?”¹

Memory Verse: Romans 10:9-10 “If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.”

A. Understanding Biblical Regeneration

Ephesians 2:8-10 “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

Romans 10:14-15 “But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? ¹⁵ And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”

1 Corinthians 9:16 “Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn’t preach the Good News!”
Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

“Surely one of the reasons for the vast number of nominal Christians – those who hold to the faith in name only – in the history of the Christian church is that churches have failed to embrace and teach a biblical understanding of conversion. If we want to understand conversion rightly, we must begin with the Bible’s diagnosis of fallen man. To apply the proper treatment and cure, we must recognize the illness.”²

1. Salvation

- a) *How do we get saved? Or better still, why do we need to be saved?*
 - ❖ Creation (Gen. 1:1, 27, 31)
 - ❖ Fall (Gen. 3:1-7, Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 5:18; Eph. 2:1-3)
 - ❖ Redemption (Acts 2:38-42; 1 Cor. 15:3; Mark 1:15; Rom. 10:9-13)
 - Regeneration

¹Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 61-62.

²*Ibid.*, 63.

- Repentance
 - Faith
 - Baptism
 - Membership
- ❖ Consummation (Rom. 8:21; 2 Peter 3:7-13; Rev. 21:1)
- b) *Salvation is comprehensive because it involves:*
- ❖ The Head: We must first know who Jesus is and then follow him. (Matt. 16:24-26; Rom. 10:14)
 - ❖ The Heart: When we follow Jesus he changes us. (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:22-24; Gal. 5:16-17)
 - ❖ The Hand: We become fishers of men. (Matt. 4:19; 2 Cor. 5:15-20)
- c) Assurance of Salvation:
- a) *But my heart is deceitful.* (Jer. 17:9).
 - b) *God cures the heart.* (Ezekiel 36:26; Rom. 5:5; Heb. 10:22-24; John 6:35-40)
 - c) *The evidence of true faith is righteous works.* (Eph. 2:10; James 2:26; Matt. 7:16a)

According to Sproul “True faith that connects us to Christ always manifests itself in works, and if there are no works on the right side of the equation that tells us there is no faith on the left side of the equation. Sadly, if there is no faith on the left side of the equation, then there is no justification on the right side of the equation.”³

2. Evidence of regeneration:

- a) Authentic love of God and his word (1John 2:15)
- b) Authentic love of light (1 John 1:6-7)
- c) Authentic love of other Christians (1 John 5:1; 3:14b-15, 18-19)
- d) Authentic testimony of the Spirit in us (1 John 3:24b; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16)
- e) Authentic perseverance in faith (1John 5:4-5; Eph. 1;13-14; 1 Pet. 1:3-5)
- f) Authentic service (Eph. 2:10; Rom. 12:6-8)
- g) Authentic attendance (Heb. 10:24-25)

B. Understanding Regenerate Church Membership

1) The Definition of the Church

The church is not a building neither is it a denomination. The church is members of the invisible body of Christ made visible through its local representation. According to Gangel, “The universal refers to all the members of the universal body of Christ in all

³R. C. Sproul, *Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?* The Crucial Questions Series, vol. 7 (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2010), 5.

places and all ages.”⁴ On the other hand, he asserts, “The local church is a given geographical representation of the universal church.”⁵ The purpose of this organism is worship, fellowship, evangelism, discipleship (or education), and service. According to Reid et al “Historically, the Christian church is a community founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ and striving to bear witness to Christ’s gospel in its worship and faith, work and memory. Theologically, the church is a spiritual communion of the whole people of God. It is rooted in the ancient covenant with Israel and the divine promise to deliver God’s people. To use the imagery of the apostle Paul, the church is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of his body. Without Christ there is no church. The church, therefore, is an incarnate community of those who receive the Word of God in Jesus Christ and seek to express that Word in their own lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ In this light therefore, church membership is exclusive to those who have professed an authentic faith in Christ. Reid et al asserts “The exclusive tradition confined church membership to those who could give a credible profession of faith, sometimes requiring evidence of internal regeneration along with knowledge of saving doctrine and a morally upright life.”⁷

2) The features of the Christian Church

- It is a community of the saved in Christ. (Matt. 16:18, 18:17; Rom. 8:30; 1Cor. 1:2)
- It is founded and grows on the teachings of Christ. (Acts 2:41-41)
- It bears witness to Christ’s gospel in the world. (Acts 1:1-8)
- It serves five purposes: worship, fellowship, service, evangelism, and discipleship. (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:23)

3) The membership of the Christian church is therefore made up of:

- The Repentant (Acts 2:38-41)
 - The Faithful (Matt. 16:16-18)
 - Baptized (Matt. 28:19)
 - Adherent to Biblical teachings (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20)
- a) Image that illustrates the relationship of church members
- The body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col.1;18; 2;19)
 - Mutually responsible for each part of the body (1 Cor. 1:12-27; Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 4:1-4, 15-16).
- b) The benefits of church membership
- Belonging

⁴Kenneth O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 218.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Daniel G. Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990).

⁷Ibid.

- Privileged to serve the body
- Accountability

C. The Two Ordinances of the Church are:

- Baptism (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:26-40; 10:47)
- The Lord’s Supper (Matt. 26:17-30; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7; 1 Cor.11:20-34)

D. Church Discipline:

It is not only repentance, faith in Christ, baptism, and the observance of the ordinances of the church that distinguishes the community of saints from other human communities; the other distinctive feature of the church is church discipline. The goal of church discipline is creating a holy community wholly dedicated to their Holy God. The overriding principle of church discipline is; therefore, redemptive in nature and not punitive.

- Matthew 18:15-20
- 1 Cor. 5:1-13
- 2 Cor. 2:5-11

Conclusion: Back to the story of Kenny. Thabiti concludes “Over the years I’ve lost touch with Kenny. I don’t know if he is living a Christian life or if he has turned from the truth to the world. I do know that it is absolutely essential that he search himself to know whether he is in the faith. And I know that that search will only be fruitful if he looks to discover the proofs of conversion that God spells out in his word.”⁸

It is therefore absolutely imperative that those who will be involved in the front door ministry team know beyond the shadow of a doubt they are saved; otherwise, it would be the ministry of the blind leading the blind. It is high time those in the church know they are saved so that they can sincerely and faithfully lead others to the one who has saved them. God has given the keys of the kingdom to the church and the church is made of up of those who have accepted not only God’s diagnosis of them as dead in their sins and trespasses, but also those who have been regenerated to a saving living authentic faith in Christ that is evidenced by their good works.

⁸Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?*, 73.

Lesson 2: Biblical Understanding of Team-Based Ministry

Lesson Overview:

The question must be asked and answered; is there a place in the local church for team-based ministry? Or a better question to be asked is; how can the church effectively utilize team-based ministry to initiate and sustain the spiritual and numerical growth in the local church? The ministry of the New Membership Leadership Team (NMLT), in order to effectively carry out the duties the church has assigned to them, and to function effectively as a ministry team, need to understand and apply the principles of team-based ministry as espoused in Scripture. In this lesson; therefore, team-based ministry will be defined, its features outlined, and biblical examples of team-based ministry explored from both the Old and New Testaments. The ultimate outcome as Gangel asserts, is “total Christian maturity includes an individual and collective life of biblical worship, biblical fellowship, and biblical evangelism, all of which are stimulated by and produced through properly functioning team leadership.”⁹

Goal/Objective:

The goal of this lesson is simple: teaching the members of the New Membership Leadership Team to function as a team as they lead the church in assimilating newcomers. The task of identifying and creating a positive impression on the minds of the newcomers cannot be the responsibility of one person; it has to be a concerted effort of a team-based ministry. It is desired that what begins to happen with the new membership leadership team will become contagious in the body of Christ.

Ice Breaker: Have you every served in a team either at work or in your neighborhood? How would you describe your experience? Do you consider yourself a good team player? Why or why not?

Key Text: *Acts 6:1-7* “But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. ³ And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. ⁴ Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.” ⁵ Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). ⁶ These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them. ⁷ So God’s message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.”

⁹Gangel, *Team Leadership*, 354.

Exodus 18:19-23 “Now listen to me, and let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you. You should continue to be the people’s representative before God, bringing their disputes to him. ²⁰ Teach them God’s decrees, and give them his instructions. Show them how to conduct their lives. ²¹ But select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. ²² They should always be available to solve the people’s common disputes, but have them bring the major cases to you. Let the leaders decide the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you. ²³ If you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace.”

Memory Verse: Isaiah 6:8 “*Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?” I said, “Here I am. Send me.”*”

Definition of Team-based Ministry

Team-based ministry is a leadership style patterned after the revelation of God as a unified team of three equal persons working harmoniously together for the redemption of the world. It is not only biblical but the way forward for the church. According to Cladis, “The most effective churches today are the ones that are developing team-based leadership. This pattern will likely continue into the twenty-first century, both because Scripture emphasizes Spirit-led, Spirit-gifted, collaborative team fellowship and because today’s culture is receptive to such leadership.”¹⁰ He goes on to present team-based ministry as “communities that covenant to be in fellowship together and live out the love of God. The members of these teams covenant with one another both to be in relationship of God’s love and to agree on their purpose and plans and the ways to move toward their fulfillment. The covenant, either written or verbal, describes and defines team members’ relationship as a ministry team.”¹¹ Cladis anchors his idea of team-based ministry on the co-indwelling of the Godhead; “The depiction of God as perichoretic Trinity is an excellent biblical and theological model for building meaningful ministry teams in the church of the twenty-first century.”¹² A team-based leadership model is thus one that is patterned after the Triune God, “A perichoretic image of the Trinity is that of the three persons of God in constant movement in a circle that implies intimacy, equality, unity yet distinction, and love.”¹³ The New Membership Leadership Team is a team of Christians selected from among VBC Christians to be in fellowship together and to live out the love of God before the watching eyes of newcomers to the church with the goal of attracting them into the membership of the church through friendship discipleship.

The Characteristics of the team-based ministry Eph. 4:11-16:

1. Unity in diversity, v. 11-14
2. Love, v. 15, v. 16b

¹⁰George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 92.

¹¹Ibid., 203.

¹²Ibid., 147.

¹³Ibid., 204.

3. Service, v. 12, 16b
4. Intimacy, v. 16a

Biblical Examples of Team-Based Ministry

1. God (Gen. 1:26; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 3:16-17; John 10:38; 14:11, 17-18, 20; 17:11, 21).
2. Moses (Exodus.4: 27-31; Exodus 18:13-26; 33:8-11).
3. Christ (Matt. 17:1-3)
4. Paul (Acts 13:1-3, 42-47; 15:1-5; 16:1-4, 24-34). Barnabas, Luke, Mark, Titus, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, and Aquila were some of the team members. The composition of the team varied from city to city and year-to-year, but Paul is seen in the book of Acts living out the principle of team-based ministry. Even the greatest apostle of all time ministered as part of a team.

The requirements of biblical team-based ministry

1. A time of preparation
2. A heart sensitive to spiritual things
3. Organizational skills
4. Shared power
5. Modeling behavior
6. Modeling a servant's heart
7. Membership in the body

“Biblical team leadership takes place when divinely appointed men and women accept responsibility for obedience to God’s call.”¹⁴

The makeup of the ministry team

1. Members grounded in their faith – members with practical faith relevant to the ministry at hand.
2. Members willing to support each other toward achieving a common goal – at the core of team-based ministry is the willingness to succeed together as a team
3. Members willing to take action – they are willing to try something different that works
4. Members unique in their gifting – the goal is to celebrate individual difference in a manner that enhances collaborative effort

According to LaFasto and Larson, “a team is more than a collection of well-intention individuals. At its core, it is an intricate network of relationships between two or more people interacting in pursuit of a common goal.”¹⁵ According to **Lencioni** “Great teams make clear and timely decisions and move forward with complete buy-in from every member of the team; even those who voted against the decision.”¹⁶

¹⁴Gangel, *Team Leadership*, 929.

¹⁵Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson, *When Teams Work Best* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 34.

¹⁶Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 208.

The importance of team-based ministry

1. Two are better than one, Eccl. 4:9-12
2. Two encourage each other, Proverbs 27:7; 1 Thess. 5:14-22; Hebrews 10:24-25
3. Jesus sent his disciples out in teams, Luke 10:1

Conclusion: We see from Scripture that God works as a team, Moses worked with a team, Jesus worked with a team, and Paul worked with a team. There is increasing evidence in today's church that team-based ministry is the way forward for the church. After all, God created us in community and relates with us in community, so that it is just proper that we serve him in community of team-based ministry.

Lesson 3: The Unique Place of First Impressions

Lesson Overview

The church must be aware that God means business when he allows un-churched people to show up in the premises of a local church. When God brings guests to the front door of his church they should go away thinking the church was especially ready for them. Even believers looking for a church family must go away thinking the church was especially ready for them. The goal of the local church is to be the presence of Christ to those who do not know him. This shows how well how we receive and welcome guests because it will determine if they come again, more importantly, whether they want to be part of the local church.

This lesson will prepare the members of the New Membership Leadership Team to be ready to create in the minds of the newcomers to VBC such a positive impression about the church they want to come back again. This cannot be left to chance; it has to be an intentional plan of the church to get at least 20% of newcomers to the church want to come back again. The goal of this lesson is for the New Membership Leadership Team to set an example for the rest of the church by creating an environment that makes the newcomer eager to return to the church.

Goal/Objective

The goal of this lesson is to acknowledge the importance of first impressions and how they lead a lot of people, rightly or wrongly, to make decisions about the church and then to help the New Membership Leadership Team to provide the newcomers to the church with a unique first-time impression that helps them let down their guard.

Ice Breaker: Describe a situation in which you made up your mind about someone or something or some place based solely on your first impressions. Were your first impressions right or wrong? Do you think first impressions are important? Why and why not?

Key Text: *Isaiah 52:7* “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!”

John 13:35: “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

Memory verse: 1 Cor. 10:31 “*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*”

What the Bible says about first impressions

1. 1Tim. 2:3-7 “This is good and pleases God our Savior,⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.⁵ For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus.⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just

the right time.⁷ And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I'm not exaggerating—just telling the truth.”

2. 1 Cor. 14:40 “But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.”
3. Col. 4:5 “Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.

“Creating an environment that makes your first-time guests feel welcomed and respected is key to a successful Assimilation System. When God entrusts you with first-time guests, you face an incredible responsibility. Those newcomers will likely make a decision about their return visit before they make it to their seats, based on the sub-conscious and conscious evaluation God has blessed them with. You can acknowledge your guests as the gifts that they are by having a pre-service system in place that will far exceed their expectations and create that elusive positive first impression. You'll excite them to want to visit your church again and again so that they can ultimately learn about the excellence, graciousness, hospitality and generosity of the One after whom you are modeling the systems of their assimilation.”¹⁷

1. Assimilation, what is it?

According to Searcy it is “the process used to encourage your first-time guests to continue coming back until they see and understand God's power, accept Jesus as their savior and commit themselves to the local church through membership.”¹⁸ In all fairness, assimilation is broader than just seeking the salvation of unbelievers. It is broad enough to include believers who are new to town and stop by looking for a church. The church must equally be ready to put in place a process that encourages them to continue coming until they commit themselves to the local church through membership. This is equally true of those who might have been out of church for a while and are coming back. How this works may differ from one church to the other; however, I appreciate Searcy's process of:

- a) Community
- b) Crowd
- c) Congregation
- d) Committed
- e) Core

From the community guests will come to church either as unbelievers or believers looking for a church family. They should not be allowed to be lost and confused in the crowd. It will be the job of the New Membership Leadership Team to quickly move them

¹⁷Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of your Church* (Ventura: CA, Regal, 2007), 53, Kindle.

¹⁸Ibid., 336.

from the crowd into the congregation and onto making a commitment to stay; some of those who commit can begin to serve in one way or another at the church; thus forming the core of the church. The goal is to get as many believers as possible to be part of the core of the church, at least 40% of the total congregation.

2. Who are the newcomer?

There are the unbelievers who show up at church for the first time either by invitation or just checking out the church. They could also be people who left the church and are now feeling their way back to the church; maybe a child who grew up in a Christian family, went away to college and left church, but now that they are graduated and working want to check the church out again, a different church from the one they grew up in. Young families with children looking for a better way to raise their children could be another type of newcomer to the church. The other type of guest may be the believer who for some reason stayed away from church and is now looking for a church to start attending. Another type of newcomer could be believers who are new to the area and are looking for a church family. When any of these guests shows up at the front door of the church they must go away eager to return to the church. This is not going to happen by chance; that is why the church needs to be prepared for her guests.

3. What is the newcomer looking for?

One can only hope that they are looking for something more than just a church building that they are looking for Jesus. That is why it is absolutely imperative for the church to conclude that those who come have been prompted by the Holy Spirit to come and so be immediately ready to impress them with who the church of Jesus really is – **a caring community of those who have been redeemed, serious about the redemption of others.** However, most people who come to church for the first time may not know that they are looking for a relationship with Jesus. It is therefore the responsibility of the church to create an environment that leads them ultimately to Jesus. With that in the back of the mind of the church, it is proper to be realistic about what people – believers and unbelievers are looking for when they come to church.

- a) They are looking for a community in which to belong, especially one that fits their schedule.
- b) They are looking for a community that cares about them as people and not projects.
- c) They are looking for a place where they are ministered to.
- d) They are looking for a place to raise their children.
- e) They are looking for connection.
- f) They are looking for a place where they will not be judged.
- g) They are looking for something bigger to be part of.

4. How can the church intentionally be ready for the newcomer?

The pre-service preparation is essential. Searcy observes, “Seven minutes is all you get to make a positive first impression. In the first seven minutes of contact with your church, your first-time guests will know whether or not they are coming

back. That is before a single worship song is sung and before a single word of the message is uttered.”¹⁹ In order to make the first contact with the first-time guests impressive, Searcy suggests that guests should be intentionally:

- a) Greeted: Welcomed with smile
- b) Directed: Simply and politely shown to where they need to go
- c) Treated: Shown respect, and happily surprised with comfort food/drink
- d) Seated: Led to comfortable appropriate seats and possibly a volunteer should offer to sit with the guest.

The members of the new membership leadership team must know and embrace the truth that “everything speaks to first-time guests – everything.”²⁰

5. **Qualities of the front door ministry team members:** Every member of the front door ministry team must possess the following qualities:

- i. Be friendly when greeting people and maintain eye contact.
- ii. Be willing to serve as a backup sign.
- iii. Be consistent week-in and week-out in their treatment of guests to the church.
- iv. Be willing to go out of their way to make the first-time guests comfortable.

6. **Initial follow up is vital:** If we create a great first-time impression on the first-time guest but cannot contact them after they leave the church we will have failed in our goal to assimilate the newcomers to the church. That is why it is absolutely essential the members of the New Membership Leadership Team collect the newcomer’s contact information. This should be done with all politeness. The first-time guest should not be pressured to providing their information. If we have done a good job greeting, directing, treating, and seating them, they should be willing to entrust us with their information. The best way to get their information is to use what Searcy calls the communication or connection card. “The communication or connection card is just that – a card that enables you to have a dialogue of sorts with everyone who attends your church on a given Sunday.”²¹ The following steps will be taken to ensure newcomers complete a connection card:

- a) **Insert connection cards in the bulletins**
- b) **Have a time in the service which the cards are completed**
- c) **Have everyone complete one so the guests do not feel pressured**

¹⁹Searcy and Henson, *Fusion*, 656.

²⁰Ibid., 715.

²¹Ibid., 930.

d) Have everyone place their card in the offering plate

Now it is the duty of the front door ministry team to sort the cards and make sure the newcomers are contacted by a member of the New Membership Leadership Team or by a deacon. This should begin a process that should end with most newcomers assimilated into the membership of the church.

Conclusion: Every first-time guest who shows up in our premises is a gift from God to us and must be treated as we will treat every guest who visits our home. That is why it is imperative the church plan effectively for the pre-service ministry of the church.

Lesson 4: Biblical Hospitality—Love

Lesson Overview: Baptist churches are probably known for their good food. The question then is can a Baptist church use their good food as a means to an end – the end being establishing relationships with newcomers that end up with the newcomers knowing Christ and joining membership in the church? Regardless of how one looks at it, there is something about food that seems to bring people together. Jesus shared a meal with a lot of people and attended a lot of banquets and promised his followers more banquets in heaven. The Bible clearly teaches that we should be hospitable. The members of the New Membership Leadership Team will be equipped to employ biblical hospitality in connecting and building relationships with newcomers with the ultimate goal of moving them towards being assimilated into the membership of the church.

Goal/Objective: Everyone loves to experience kindness. We all love to be treated well especially in places where we are strangers. It is the goal of this lesson to put in place a system that seeks to receive and treat all newcomers to VBC with the kindness that God in Christ receives and treats us.

Ice Breaker: Share with the rest of the group an experience of unusual hospitality you experienced in an unusual place.

Key Texts:

Gen. 18:3-5 “My lord,” he said, “If it pleases you, stop here for a while. ⁴ Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. ⁵ And since you’ve honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey.” “All right,” they said. “Do as you have said.”

Memory verse: Rom. 12:13 “*When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*”

A. The definition of hospitality:

Hospitality is receiving a stranger or a guest graciously either into one’s home or into the church family. According to Elwell and Beitzel, biblical hospitality is a “biblical concept often used with the terms “guest,” “stranger,” and “sojourner.” It is useful to limit the meaning of “hospitality” to benevolence done to those outside one’s normal circle of friends, as is implied in the literal meaning of the Greek word (“love of strangers”).”²² According to Searcy, “Assimilation is simply well-planned biblical hospitality through service.”²³

What the Bible says about hospitality

²²Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1006.

²³Searcy and Henson, *Fusion*, 582.

- A. *It shines brightest when it is shown to the least among us. Matt. 25:31-46* “But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. ³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. ³⁶ I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’ ³⁷ “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? ³⁹ When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’ ⁴¹ “Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. ⁴² For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’ ⁴⁴ “Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ ⁴⁵ “And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ ⁴⁶ “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.” *The big idea of this text is that the righteous is by nature hospitable people welcoming and taking care of strangers indiscriminately. This may be referring largely to the destitute on the street; then how about those God specially brings into the church?*
- B. *It must become an integral part of who we are as believers. Rom. 12:13* “When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.”
- C. *It does not discriminate. Heb. 13:2* “Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it.”
- D. *It is not forced on the believer. 1Pet. 4:9* “Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.”
- E. *It is representative of Christ in the church. Rev. 3:20* “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”

B. What are the features of hospitality?

- a) It is practice and not just sound theology.
- b) It is expressed to strangers or newcomers.
- c) It involves sharing a meal and drink. (Matt. 8:11; 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24)
- d) It is derived from God as our host.
- e) It is a Christian virtue.

C. Why biblical hospitality?

- a) Biblical hospitality helps establish relationships (Gen. 2:18).
- b) Biblical hospitality is not an end in itself; it points others to God.
- c) Biblical hospitality keeps us real and honest.
- d) Biblical hospitality says “You are welcome” (Heb. 13:2).
- e) Biblical hospitality is Christ incarnate (Matt. 25:31-46).

D. How can the church practice biblical hospitality?

- a) Give gifts to newcomers.
- b) Provide a little refreshment to newcomers after service.
- c) Take newcomers out for dinner.
- d) Invite newcomers to our homes.
- e) Organize a pastor breakfast with newcomers.

E. The ultimate goal of biblical hospitality is to

- a) Ensure that first-time guest become second-time guest.
- b) Ensure a second-time guest becomes a regular attender.
- c) Ensure regular attenders attend the new member’s class.
- d) Ensure regular attenders are connected to a small group or Sunday school.
- e) Ensure regular attenders become fully submissive members.

F. The step-by-step process of biblical hospitality outlined (Adopted from Searcy’s “Assimilation System Outline.”)

A. First-Time Newcomers

- A newcomer to VBC for the first time fills out a connection card.
- Following the service, the first-time newcomer receives a gift and is encouraged to ask questions.
- Within 24 hours the newcomer receives an email that connects the newcomer to VBC’s website as well as encourages some form of feedback from the newcomer.
- Within 72 hours the newcomers receives in the mail a CD or DVD of the message that meets the needs of the newcomer.

B. Second-Time Newcomers

- The second time they come, they also fill out the connection card.

- Within 36 hours the newcomers will receive communication from VBC detailing how they can get connected. They are also invited to consider attending an orientation session to learn more about VBC.

C. The Regular Attender

- They are encouraged to sign up and serve.
- They are encouraged to attend the new member's class.
- They are given an opportunity to become submissive members of VBC.

Conclusion: A well-structured hospitality system will help establish relationships between VBC members and newcomers with the ultimate goal of facilitating the assimilation of newcomers into the membership of the church. It is our prayer that effective relationships with newcomers will build a bridge that connects them to an eternal relationship with the God who created them and loves to be in relationship with them, a relationship that grows and matures through the local church.

Lesson 5: A Biblical Theology of Ministry

Lesson Overview:

Immediately following the creation of man God made it clear he had created them to serve him, to have dominion and rule over all that he had created. Even when man sinned and God pronounced judgment on man, work was not taken away from him, it was only made harder. From Adam to the nation, God required one thing from his people - service. It is clear from Scripture that God desires faithful service from those he created in his own image. However, it is wrong to think that God created because he needed man to serve him; rather, God created man in his image only as an expression of himself. Fuller asserts, "Now the basic thrust of God's whole purpose of creation and redemption has become clear. It is that earth might be filled with the glory of his desire to service people and calling upon all his omniscience and omnipotence, to do them good with his whole heart and soul."²⁴ That explains why after the fall God put in place what could be called a strategic plan of ministry. He promised a seed whose duty is to restore harmony between God and man. God's plan was and is to restore a harmonious relationship between man and his Creator through the seed of the woman so that the world he created will resound with his untarnished glory. God is glorified when the crown of his creation serves him out of total obedience. According to Estep "The prophets and the New Testament writers went on to explain that this "Messiah" (seed) or savior would be the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sin of every human being who would die to himself and accept God's provision (Isa. 53:10-12; Rom. 3:20-24). This is the strategic plan of God. God embarks on the ultimate mission to enjoy communion with his most prized creation, you and me."²⁵ Through Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and others acting as foreshadowing of the woman's seed God brought forth one nation- Israel to advance his strategic plan one step at a time. Now God is working through the church as a body and as individuals to continue to advance his kingdom's work on earth. As a results, ministry is God's and not man's idea.

Goal/Objective

It is about time the word 'minister' is put in its right place. All believers are ministers and just a chosen few are specially called to certain roles. In light of Eph. 4:16 every believer is a minister. Every member of the body has an obligation to serve the body. Some in the body may have special calling but their calling is only special as they work to prepare the entire body for works of righteousness for his infinite glory. It is wrong for the church to continue to function as if the work of ministry is reserved for professional clergy. It is time the church rises up to the truth that the work of ministry is that of every believer. However, there must be intentional leadership that mobilizes the body to do what it has been placed here on earth to do - serve the Creator.

Ice Breaker: Share with the class a little bit about your work or career and why you are doing what you are doing or hope to get into the career you are preparing for. Do you

²⁴Daniel Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 226, Kindle.

²⁵Ibid., 88.

think that is what God has called you to do or you are still waiting for your special calling from God?

Key Text:

Eph. 4:11-16 “Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Memory verse: *Eph. 4:16* “*He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*”

What does the Bible say about serving?

1. *God created us with work in mind. Gen. 1:26-30* “Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.” ²⁹ Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. ³⁰ And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.
2. *God has redeemed us in Christ for better work. Eph. 2:8-10* “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”
3. *We must be ready to work regardless of circumstances. 2Cor. 6:3-10* “We live in such a way that no one will stumble because of us, and no one will find fault with our ministry. ⁴ In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. ⁵ We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. ⁶ We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. ⁷ We faithfully preach the truth. God’s power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for

defense. ⁸ We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. ⁹ We are ignored, even though we are well known. We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. ¹⁰ Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.”

4. *Work validates our genuine faith in Christ. James 2: 14-20* “What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶ and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? ¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. ¹⁸ Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.” ¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. ²⁰ How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?”

Who are we serving?

1. We are here to serve God.

- We are to know him.
- We are to love him.
- We are to worship him.
- We are to obey him.

2. We serve God by serving one another.

- God has uniquely gifted the church for his service.
- God wants us to serve him by serving those in the body.
- God wants every member of the body to get involved.

Now that we know who we are here to serve, how do we go about serving him in a manner that glorifies his holy name and brings gladness to others? When Christ (the seed) came to earth he said he had come to continue his father’s work of redeeming a people for God who will shine forth his infinite glory. John put it this way in John 5:17 “My Father is still working, and I am working also.” Jesus declares in John 17:4 “I have glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” But the work of God on earth was going to continue, which is why Jesus then commissioned the disciples to continue the work (Matthew 28:18-20), “Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The church is not here to prepare believers to live successful lives; the church is here to help every believer through the power of the preached word, the Holy Spirit, and the process of discipleship to find their

place in God's purpose and live it out with passion for God's glory and the gladness of others within the visible body of Christ – the local church.

Given that the work of ministry is unlimited and no one person or church can pretend to do all of it, the remainder of this lesson will limit itself to serving the newcomer to VBC.

How can the body of Christ serve God by serving the newcomer to VBC?

1. First, the church must be prepared for service. All believers must know that they are God's workmen created in Christ for good works.
2. Second, the church must be prepared to serve the newcomer. Every newcomer to the church is a guest sent by God and must be received and treated with respect and dignity.
3. Third, some practical steps must be taken to properly serve the newcomer such as:
 - Select, train and put in place a ministry team.
 - Provide ministry opportunities for believers to show-case their passion for their Savior such as;
 - ❖ Greet at the front door
 - ❖ Work at the welcome desk
 - ❖ Help newcomer find their way around the church
 - ❖ Take newcomers out for dinner after church
 - ❖ Collect and process connection cards with the goal of contacting newcomers within the first week of their visit.
 - ❖ Help organize orientation meetings for newcomers
 - ❖ Help organize pastor breakfast with newcomers
 - ❖ Help transition newcomers to the new members class
 - ❖ Connect newcomers to small groups/Sunday school
 - ❖ Have newcomers shadow us as we serve

Conclusion: Although we are gifted differently, we are gifted for the common good of all and especially for the sake of the glory of God. The work of spiritual leaders is not to single handedly do the work of ministry while the rest of the church takes a rest in the pews. The work of spiritual leaders or those who have been specially gifted in teaching, preaching, leadership, shepherding, administration, etc., is to equip the body for works of righteousness. Just because the pastor has gone to seminary does not mean he is the only one qualified to do ministry. If he has been properly trained his ministry is to equip the body to serve, so that all members of the body knows their gifts and are passionate about serving God with them.

Lesson 6: The Mission/Vision/Core Values of VBC

Lesson overview: The members of the New Membership Leadership Team must accept, embrace, and implement the mission/vision of VBC. This is a mission/vision casting lesson to the members of the New Membership Leadership Team with one ultimate goal in mind – to ensure that they buy into the mission/vision of the church and become its ambassadors inside and outside the church.

Goal/objective: By the end of this lesson the members of the New Membership Leadership Team will know and can enunciate the mission/vision of VBC with clarity and passion. Inspired by the mission/vision of VBC each member should craft their life mission/vision statement that will help them better serve the mission/vision of the church.

Ice Breaker: Do you have life mission/vision statement for your life, family, career, or work?

Why do you think it is important to have a life mission/vision statement?

Key Text: Proverbs 29:18 *“When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful.”*

Col. 3:17 *“And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.”*

Memory Verse: Col. 3:17 “And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.”

Our vision

At VBC we desire to Evangelize, Equip, and Empower Christ’s followers to serve. (3Es)

Our Mission

VBC is a Christ-centered love-driven church on mission to Evangelize, Equip, and Empower disciples who glorify God, love one another, and serve the community. (1 Cor. 2:1-5; Deut. 6:4-5; Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34-35; 1 John 2:9-11; 4:7-12; 1 Cor. 10:31-33; Col.3:17; Eph. 4:11-16).

Approaching our vision

Preach Christ-crucified, in soul enriching gospel messages

Engage church in discipleship opportunities for growth/maturity in small groups/Sunday school

Provide practical ministry opportunities for serving the community

Call to Action

Your participation is essential. As a member of the body of Christ, you are obligated to deploy your prayers, time, talents, and treasure to sharing the gospel of victorious life in Christ. (Romans 12:1-8).

This is a new day! We can't do things the way we've always done them. In order to reach more people with the victorious gospel message, we're launching a new ministry – **“attract and retain young families”**. We've never tried this before, but we think it will be successful if we get everyone involved. You may be someone who wants to get in on the ground floor, to take advantage of the opportunity to build this brand-new ministry. The church will help you discover and utilize your gifts and blessings toward accomplishing our vision through **leadership development**.

We need to take a hard look at all that we do here at VBC and ask ourselves how the things we are doing will help us accomplish our vision of **“attracting and retaining young families.”** If the things we are doing are not helping us advance our vision to evangelize, equip, and empower members to serve we will have to restructure those ministries and focus our resources on ministries that are advancing our vision. *From now on any ministry that is not serving our vision or fails to pass the test of the **seven questions** below needs to be seriously considered for restructuring/replacing with one that is helping us fulfill our vision.*

1. Is what we are doing sharing the gospel of victory in Christ? (evangelize)
2. Is what we are doing glorifying God and are we experiencing joy in the process?
3. Is what we are doing helping us mature in our faith and love each other? (equip)
4. Is what we are doing helping connect us with the larger community?
5. Is what we are doing helping attract young families?
6. Is what we are doing helping retain young families?
7. Is what we are doing offering opportunity to showcase our passion? (empower)

Our Core Values

At VBC we thrive on the truth that the triune God has given us a life changing and life transforming gospel to evangelize, equip, and empower Christians to live authentic lives for his infinite glory.

1. *Authentic Gospel:* It is the gospel that exposes sin and its eternal consequences, expresses hope in the salvation found in the death and resurrection of Christ alone, and explains the grace needed for everyday living with God's glory as our ultimate goal.
2. *Authentic Life:* It is a life transformed by the power of the gospel and lived for the infinite glory of God and the gladness of others.
3. *Authentic Preaching:* As God's ordained means of saving sinners, authentic preaching declares the whole gospel from the whole Bible for the benefit of the whole church in the whole community.
4. *Authentic Faith:* It is faith that comes by grace and is evident through love and works of righteousness. It is faith anchored in the living Jesus, which is lived out

- in works of righteousness both privately and publicly as Christ lives his life through every believer.
5. *Authentic Community*: It is the necessary outcome of authentic preaching marked by love for one another that demonstrates to the world the authentic nature of true faith in Jesus Christ. We will therefore make available ministry opportunities to enrich the spiritual growth of our members and visitors. We will also become a vital voice in the larger communities beyond our church by increasing our outreach, service, and social action efforts.
 6. *Authentic Worship*: It is worship that is centered on one object – Jesus Christ. It is thus a glorious, heartfelt time of praising God that takes place when authentic community congregates together. It is not necessarily the style of worship that matters, but the object of worship that unites our hearts when congregated together as a body.
 7. *Authentic Mission*: It is the declaration of the authentic gospel to every nation, people, language, tongue, and tribe with the single purpose of filling the world with the glory of God.
 8. *Authentic Leadership*: It is servant leadership faithfully proclaiming the authentic gospel and harnessing the resources of the church to evangelize, equip, and empower members of the authentic community for works of righteousness. Such leadership is manifested in team-based approach to ministry.

We will adopt the PLEAD Model as we accomplish the mission/vision of VBC towards our guests.

1. P-Pray for them
2. L-Listen to them
3. E-Eat with them
4. A-Actively serve them
5. D-Dive into our story of redemption when the opportunity presents itself

Making it personal

1. How has God gifted you?
2. How do you plan to exercise your gifts to the glory of God and the benefit of his church?
3. What is it that brings the best out of you?
4. How do you intend to live the rest of your life?

Conclusion: God is on mission and the mission is to create a people for himself. People, who know him, love him, worship him, serve him, and tell others about him. This has been God’s mission from the beginning of time. It has, in the past, been advanced through Israel, Christ, the apostles, the early church, and now us. Every church and every believer must find his/her unique place in the overall purpose of God in the world and live it out with passion and for the glory of God and the gladness of others. The ultimate goal of life is not success; it is the glory of God. “Therefore every enjoyment of this life and the next that is not idolatry is a tribute to the infinite value of the cross of Christ – the burning center of the glory of God. And thus a cross-centered, cross-exalting, cross-saturated life is a God-glorifying life – the only God-glorifying life. All others are

wasted.”²⁶ It is therefore proper to conclude that any believer without a vision, any family without a vision, and any church without a vision is wasting their life.

²⁶John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 189, Kindle.

APPENDIX 5
NOTIFICATION

To the members
New Membership Leadership Team
March 8, 2015

Beloved in the Lord,

A letter of notification

You are hereby notified via this medium that the leadership of VBC has placed their confidence in you to serve as a member of the New Membership Leadership Team. The goal of this team is to lead the church in proactively assimilating newcomers to the church. On behalf of the entire church body, I want to thank you for accepting to serve God and your church in advancing the cause of Christ here in DeKalb.

I will also like to invite you to be personally present at our next in the morning worship service on March 8, 2015 when you will be dedicated. Thanks in advance for accepting the privilege to be more useful for your Savior.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Eric M. Ngum
Pastor, Victory Baptist Church

APPENDIX 6
LETTER OF CONFRIMATION

To the members

New Membership Leadership Team

March 8, 2015

Beloved in the Lord,

Letter of confirmation

I write again to let you know that following todays vote at the business meeting you have been confirmed to be trained to serve as member of the New Membership Leadership Team. Congratulations on your confirmation vote. Your fellow brothers and sisters have given you their vote of confidence to lead the church to experience a new day of growth.

Thank you for accepting to serve.

Sincerely in Christ,

Eric M. Ngum

Pastor, Victory Baptist Church

APPENDIX 7

INVITATION

To the members
New Membership Leadership Team
March 8, 2015

Beloved in the Lord,

Letter of invitation

Following the vote confirming your nomination to serve as members of the NML you are invited to the initial meeting on Sunday March 8, 2015 at 8:30am in the church sanctuary.

The purpose of this meeting is for us to get to know each other, to discuss the training schedule, and to review the training curriculum. At the meeting you will also complete a pre-training survey. I am excited for the opportunity work with you as we trust God for great things for his church. Thanks for accepting to serve as a member of the NMLT.

Sincerely in Christ,

Eric M. Ngum

Pastor, Victory Baptist Church

APPENDIX 8

FRONT DOOR MINISTRY COVENANT

The VBC Front Door Ministry Covenant:

We appreciate the fact that you have agreed to serve as a member of the front door ministry team. As part of the front door ministry team you are in a prime position to introduce the church to those who are not Christians or those who are Christians looking for a church family. You are the first step in our goal of attracting young adults to VBC. We are therefore asking that you make the following commitments:

1. I will embrace and reflect the core values of VBC as well as do my best to live a godly life, attend Sunday services/mid-week services regularly, and systematically honor God with my time, treasure, and talents.
2. I understand that I am responsible for an authentic first time impression for each guest.
3. I will commit to help the guest find their way around the church.
4. I will collect useful information from the first time guest for follow-up.
5. I will meet with the leader of the front door ministry for prayer and fellowship.
6. I will help recruit others to serve in my team.
7. I will be a dependable member of the front door ministry team.

Name/Signature

Date

APPENDIX 9
MINISTRY PROJECT DATA ANALYSIS

Table A1. Responses to question 6

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	4	4
2	6	4
3	5	4
4	4	5
5	5	5
6	3	5

Table A2. Responses to question 7

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test
1	6	6
2	4	6
3	6	5
4	6	5
5	6	4
6	5	4

Table A3. Responses to question 8

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	4	4
2	6	4
3	6	4
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	4	5

Table A4. Responses to question 9

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	5	5
2	3	5
3	2	5
4	4	4
5	5	4
6	4	5

Table A5. Responses to question 10

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	2	5
2	4	4
3	6	6
4	5	5
5	1	3
6	6	5

Table A6. Responses to question 11

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	5	5
2	6	6
3	3	5
4	3	3
5	4	3
6	6	6

Table A7. Responses to question 12

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	5	6
2	6	6
3	3	4
4	4	5
5	5	4
6	5	5

Table A8. Responses to question 13

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	4	5
2	6	6
3	6	5
4	6	6
5	5	5
6	6	6

Table A9. Responses to question 14

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	5	6
2	6	6
3	5	5
4	3	5
5	5	5
6	4	5

Table A10. Responses to question 15

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	5	5
2	6	6
3	6	5
4	3	3
5	6	5
6	4	4

Table A11. Responses to question 16

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	6	6
2	6	6
3	5	5
4	5	6
5	6	6
6	4	5

Table A12. Responses to question 17

Participants	Per-test	Post-test
1	6	6
2	6	6
3	6	5
4	5	6
5	6	6
6	5	5

Table A13. Responses to question 18

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	6	6
2	6	6
3	5	5
4	6	5
5	6	6
6	5	5

Table A14. Responses to question 19

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	6	6
2	6	6
3	6	5
4	5	5
5	6	6
6	5	5

Table A15. Responses to question 20

Participants	Pre-test	Post-test
1	6	6
2	6	6
3	6	5
4	6	6
5	6	6
6	5	4

Table A16. Paired *t*-test results

Question	<i>t</i> -(5)	P
6	0	.5
7	0.89	.2075
8	1	.1816
9	1.39	.1121
10	1.08	.1638
11	0.42	.3476
12	1	.1816
13	0	.5
14	2	.0510
15	1.58	.0873
16	1.58	.0873
17	0	.5
18	1	.1816
19	1	.1816
20	1.58	.0873

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Anyabwile, Thabiti. *What is a Healthy Church Member?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Barclay, William. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Daily Study Bible Series. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1953.
- Barry, J. D., M. R. Grigoni, M. S. Heiser, M. Custis, D. Mangum, and M. M. Whitehead. *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012.
- Blaiklock, E. M. *The Acts of the Apostles: An Historical Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Touchstone, 1995.
- _____. *Life Together*. London: SCM, 2010. Kindle.
- Briscoe, D. S., and L. J. Ogilvie. *Genesis*. The Preacher's Commentary, vol. 1. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of Acts*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Bryan, Doug C. D. *Learning to Teach Teaching to Learn: A Holistic Approach*. Nashville: B & H, 1993.
- Calvin, John, and John King. *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010.
- Cladis, George. *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders*. San Francisco: Joss-Bass, 1999.
- Coloson, Charles, and Nancy Pearcey. *How Now Shall We Live?* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999.
- Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Wheaton: IL, Crossway, 2004.
- Dockery, D. S., and G. A. Thornbury, eds. *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Higher Education*. Nashville: B & H, 2002.

- Duckworth, Jessica Krey. *Wide Welcome: How the Unsettling Presence of Newcomers Can Save the Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.
- Dunnam, Maxie, and Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *Exodus*. The Preacher's Commentary Series, vol. 2. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987.
- Durham, J. I. *Exodus*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3. Dallas: Word, 1998.
- Elwell, Walter, A., and Barry J. Beitzel, eds. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.
- Enns, Peters. *Exodus*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Estep, J. R., and H. K. Jonathan, eds. *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*. Nashville: B & H, 2010.
- Estep, J. R., J. A. Michael, and R. A. Greg. *A Theology of Christian Education*. Nashville: B & H, 2008.
- Fernando, Ajith. *Acts*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Gangel, K. O. *Acts*. Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 2. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998.
- Green, Joel B., ed. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.
- Hammett, John S. *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005.
- Harris, Robert A. *The Integration of Faith and Learning: A Worldview Approach*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2004.
- Heck, Joel D. *Membership Assimilation: Practical Prevention of Backdoor Loss through Frontdoor Care*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1988.
- Hendriksen, William, and Simon J. Kistemaker. *Exposition of Ephesians*. New Testament Commentary, vol. 7. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Jamieson, R., A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997.
- Jones, T. P., and R. Stinson, eds. *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011.
- Kaiser, Walter C. *Exodus*. In vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by F. E. Gaebelin, 288-497. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
- Keener, Craig S. *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012.

- Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996.
- Keller, Timothy. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Penguin, 2008.
- Kistemaker, Simon J., and William Hendriksen. *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*. New Testament Commentary, vol. 17. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Knight, George R. *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*. 4th ed. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006.
- Lange, John Peter, Philip Schaff, and Charles M. Mead. *Exodus: A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*. Vol. 2. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008.
- Lawless, Chuck. *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Members Class and Assimilation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Leeman, Jonathan. *Building Healthy Churches: Church Membership*. Wheaton: IL, Crossway, 2012.
- _____. *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrine of Church Membership and Discipline*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961.
- _____. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*. Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42. Dallas: Word, 1990.
- Linn, Jan G. *Rocking the Church Membership Boat: Counting Members or Having Members Who Count*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2001.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *Acts*. In vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by F. E. Gaebelein, 207-573. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
- _____. *The Acts of the Apostles*. In vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by F. E. Gaebelein, 207-573. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- MacArthur, John F. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. Chicago: Moody, 1991.
- Mack, Wayne. *To Be or Not to Be a Church Member? That is the Question!* Amityville, NY: Calvary, 2004.
- Matthew, K. A. *Genesis 11:27-50:26*. The New American Commentary, vol. 1B. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005.
- McIntosh, Gary L. *Beyond the First Welcome Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guest to Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
- _____. *Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church*. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.

- Michael, J. A., and S. B. Warren. *Exploring the History of Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003.
- Montague, Brown. *Freedom, Philosophy, and Faith: The Transformative Role of Judeo-Christian Freedom in Western Thought*. New York: Lexington, 2011.
- Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- _____. *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008.
- _____. *Desire and Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008.
- Niebuhr, Richard H. *Christ and Culture*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- O'Brien, Peter Thomas. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Ogilvie, L. J., and L. J. Ogilvie. *Acts*. The Preacher's Commentary, vol. 28. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983.
- Osborne, Larry. *Sticky Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Oswald, Roy M., and Leas Spped B. *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation*. New York: Alban Institute, 1987.
- Pagitt, Doug. *Church in the Inventive Age*. Minneapolis: Sparkhouse, 2010.
- Pazmino, Robert W. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction to Evangelical Perspective*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008
- _____. *God our teacher. Theological Basics in Christian Education*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Pearcey, Nancy. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Peyton, Jones. *Church Zero: Raising 1st Century Churches out of the Ashes of the 21st Century Church*. Colorado Springs: David Cook, 2013.
- Pink, A. W. *The Divine Covenants*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973.
- Polhill, John B. *Acts*. The New American Commentary, vol. 26. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- Powers, John S. *Redefining Church Membership: From Myth to Ministry*. Nashville: LifeWay, 2001.
- Rainer, Thom S. *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church*. Nashville: Broadman, 1999.
- _____. *I am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference*. Nashville: B & H, 2013.

- Rauff, Edward A. *Why People Join the Church*. New York: Pilgrim, 1979.
- Reid, Daniel G., Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, and S. Harry. *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990.
- Reno, R. R. *Genesis*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010.
- Robertson, A. T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman, 1933.
- Roop, E. F. *Genesis*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1987.
- Sailhamer, John H. *Genesis*. In vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein, 3-284.. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
- Salkind, J. Neil. *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2011.
- Schaller, Lyle E. *Assimilating New Members*. Nashville: Parthenon, 1978.
- Searcy, Nelson, and Jennifer Dykes Henson. *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guest into Fully-Engaged Members of your Church*. Ventura: CA, Regal, 2007.
- Sheridan, Mark. *Genesis 12-50*. Ancient Christian Community on Scripture: Old Testament, vol. 2. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2002.
- Skevington, A. Wood. *Book*. In vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelein, page-page. Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1981.
- Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. *Genesis*. The Public Commentary. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909.
- Sproul, R. C. *The Promises of God: Discovering the One Who Keeps His Word*. Sandford, FL: David Cook, 2012.
- _____. *What Is the Church?* The Crucial Questions Series. Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2013.
- Spry, Phil. *Guerrilla Evangelism: 23 Free Things You Can Do Right Now To Get People Into Your Church*. Phoenix: Church Plant, 2012.
- Spurgeon, Charles. *Charles Spurgeon on His Best*. Compiled by Tom Carter. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.
- Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2001.
- Stuart, Douglas K. *Exodus*. The New American Commentary, vol. 2. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006.
- Sunshine, Glenn S. *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home*. Grand Rapids. Zondervan, 2009.

- Tidwell, Charles. *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry*. Nashville: B & H, 1985.
- Van Germeren, W. A., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2nd ed. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Vassallo, Wanda. *Church Communications Handbook: A Complete Guide to Developing a Strategy, Using Technology, Writing Effectively, Reaching the Unchurched*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998.
- Vincent, M. R. *Word Studies in the New Testament*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887.
- Viola, Frank. *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity*. Colorado Springs: David Cook, 2008.
- Walters, Richard P. *How to Be a Friend People Want to be Friends with*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981.
- Walton, H. John. *Genesis*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Waltz, Mark. *First Impressions: Creating Wow Experiences in Your Church*. Loveland, CO: Group, 2005.
- Wenham, J. Gordon. *Genesis 16-50*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2. Dallas: Word, 1998.
- Wilkins, M. J. *Ephesians*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
- William, R. Hoyt. *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting what Counts in the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007.
- Williams, W. G. *Genesis: A Commentary for Bible Students*. Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 1999.
- Williamson, Paul R. *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promises and its Covenantal Development in Genesis*. Sheffield: Sheffield, 2000.
- Woo, Rodney M. *The Color of Church. A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches*. Nashville: B & H, 2009.
- Wright, Tim. *Unfinished Evangelism: More than Getting Them in the Door*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995.
- Yvon, Prehn. *Church Connection Cards: Connect with Visitors, Grow Your Church, Pastor Your People: Little Cards, Big Results*. Ventura, CA: Effective Church, 2011.
- Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2000.

Articles

- Archer, Gleason Leonard, Jr., “*bĕrît*,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2nd ed. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Begg, Christopher T. “Foreigner.” In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Bokser, Baruch M. “Unleavened Bread and Passover, Feasts of.” In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Dever, Mark. “Regaining Meaningful Church Membership.” In *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, edited by Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, 45-61. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008.
- Hammett, John S. “Regenerate Church Membership.” In *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, edited by Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, 21-43. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008.
- Hartman, Lars. “Baptism.” In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Leeman, Jonathan. “Twelve Reasons Why Membership Matters.” *9Marks Journal*. May-June 2011. Accessed January 17, 2010. <http://www.9marks.org/journal/twelve-reasons-why-membership-matters>.
- Payne, J. B. “Covenant.” In *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Vol. 1. Edited by Tenny Merrill. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Ratz, Calvin. “Ministry to Newcomers.” In *Growing Your Church through Evangelism and Outreach*, edited by Marshall Shelley. Nashville: Moorings, 1996.
- Scannell, Updike A. “Focus Groups Help Congregation Improve Its New Member Ministry.” *Review of Religious Research* 45, no. 1 (2003): 68-77.
- Smick, Elmer B. “282 בְּרִית.” In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. Chicago: Moody, 1999.
- Whitcomb, Kelly. A. “Circumcision.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Edited by J. D. Barry and L. Wentz. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012.
- Williamson, P. R. “Covenant.” In *Dictionary of Old Testament: Pentateuch*. Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003.

Dissertations

- Durey, Duane, “Attracting and Assimilating the Unchurched in the 21st Century.” Ph.D. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2002.

ABSTRACT

TRAINING A NEW MEMBERSHIP TEAM TO LEAD IN ASSIMILATING NEWCOMERS INTO VICTORY BAPTIST CHURCH, DEKALB, ILLINOIS

Eric Mangek Ngum, D.Ed.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John David Trentham

The ministry project identified and trained a membership leadership team to lead Victory Baptist Church DeKalb, Illinois, in effectively assimilating newcomers into membership. The ministry purpose was presented and goals set to facilitate the accomplishment of the ministry purpose were put in place. Chapter 1 delineates the goals of the ministry project as well as the context of the ministry, the rationale, defined terms, limitations, delimitations, and outlined the research methodology.

Chapter 2 examines the theological and biblical foundation of the project utilizing four texts taken from the Old and New Testament. Two texts are taken from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. The exegeses of these texts provides a solid theological and biblical base for assimilating newcomers into membership.

Chapter 3 of the ministry project examines the theoretical and practical issues of church membership. It wrestles with the current discourse of regenerate church membership traceable from the pages of the Scripture. It further stresses the benefits of church membership to the individual members and the entire church body, insisting that regenerate church membership should be given the seriousness it deserved in the local church.

Chapter 4 builds on the strong theological and biblical evidence of regenerate church membership to put in place a workable plan to proactively transition newcomers into active members. This was accomplished through the training of a new membership

leadership team that was dedicated and tasked with the assimilation of newcomers into the membership of the church.

Chapter 5 draws conclusions on the strengths, weaknesses, lessons learned, and what could have been done differently.

VITA

Eric Mangek Ngum

EDUCATIONAL

B.A., University of Yaounde, Cameroon, 1992

M.A., Moody Graduate School, 2002

M.A., Northern Illinois University, 2004

MINISTERIAL

Interim Pastor, Victory Baptist Church, DeKalb, Illinois, 2003-2004

Associate Pastor, Christ Redeemer Church, Cameroon, 2004-2007

Ministry Administrative Director, Network of Nations, Sycamore, Illinois,
2008-2010

Senior Pastor, Victory Baptist Church, DeKalb, Illinois, 2007-