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**A MODEL FOR SMALL GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT AT
ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WISCONSIN**

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APRIL 28, 1997

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**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT
TIMOTHY ERIC WENGER
OCTOBER 1996**

**CONCORDIA SEMINARY
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI**

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to Kathleen, my wife, who has the God given gift of encouragement. Her gentle yet firm style of challenging has been most helpful in completing this project.

I also dedicate this paper in loving memory to my father, Rev. Gilbert K. Wenger, who demonstrated to me that love for God and for His people is the motivation for the mission and ministry of Christ and His Church.

**A MODEL FOR SMALL GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT AT
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THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE INTRODUCTION	1
A. The Importance and Need for Small Groups	1
B. The Purpose of This Paper	5
C. The Background for Development of Small Groups in the Church	6
D. The Definition of Small Groups	11
E. The Steps to be Taken to Develop and Enrich Small Groups	12
F. Conclusions	12
I. CHAPTER ONE: FURTHER ANALYSIS OF SMALL GROUP BENEFITS, HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE, AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR SMALL GROUPS	 18
A. FURTHER ANALYSIS OF SMALL GROUP BENEFITS	18
B. HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE FOR SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH	22
C. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH	24
1. Three Greek Words: Ekklesia, Koinonia, and Agape	
2. God Given Goals for the Christian Community	
3. God Given Purpose for the Christian Community	
4. Mutual Care and Support as Members Focus on One Another	
D. CONCLUSIONS	47
II. CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTERISTICS AND DYNAMICS OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH	 52
A. CATEGORIES OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH	52
B. THE WORD IS CENTRAL AND GIVES BIRTH TO STUDY AND EDUCATION, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, COMMITMENT, AND SERVICE	54
1. Study and Education	
2. Interpersonal Relationships	
3. Commitment	
4. Service	
C. SIZE OF SMALL GROUPS AND LENGTH OF SESSIONS	62
D. LEADERSHIP FOR SMALL GROUPS	63

E.	STYLE AND COMMUNICATION WITHIN SMALL GROUPS	66
F.	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND FEATURES OF SMALL GROUPS	68
G.	UNIQUE FEATURES OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH	73
H.	CONCLUSIONS	76
III.	CHAPTER THREE: BUILDING A POTENTIAL GROUP MODEL AT ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH	80
A.	FAVORABLE CHARACTERISTICS AND DYNAMICS OF EXISTING GROUPS AT ST. LUKE'S	80
	1. Veterans of the Cross	
	2. St.Luke's Women's Ministry Circles	
	3. Small Group Bible Studies	
	4. Committee or Ministry Group	
B.	SELECTING AND DEVELOPING SMALL GROUP LEADERS IN THE CONGREGATION	87
C.	THE DEVELOPMENT OF HELPFUL CHARACTERISTICS FOR A SMALL GROUP	91
D.	DEVELOPING GOALS NEEDED FOR SMALL GROUPS TO FUNCTION PROPERLY	96
E.	UTILIZING SPIRITUAL RESOURCES FOR SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH	99
	1. Prayer	
	2. The Bible	
	3. Witnessing and Sharing	
	4. Worship and Communion	
	5. The Blessing	
F.	CONCLUSIONS	106
IV.	THE CONCLUDING CHAPTER: STRENGTHENING THE MINISTRY AT ST. LUKE'S WITH A MODEL FOR SMALL GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT	111
A.	REASONS FOR ATTENTION TO SMALL GROUPS AT ST. LUKE'S	111
B.	ENRICHMENT OF CURRENT GROUPS	115
	1. The Model--Style A	
	2. The Model--Style B	
	3. The Model--Style C	
C.	THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORE SMALL GROUPS	121
D.	EVALUATION OF GROUPS	125
E.	THE CONCLUDING STATEMENT	126
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	129
	Appendix A	135
	Appendix B	175

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ABSTRACT

**A MODEL FOR SMALL GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT AT
ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WISCONSIN
BY TIMOTHY E. WENGER**

The project was begun with the assumption that a greater use of small group ministry could strengthen the congregation as a whole and provide better opportunities for individuals to experience spiritual growth and a deeper sense of fellowship within the church. The approach to this project included research into the theological foundation of small groups and research into the utilization of small groups in society. The observance and appraisal of current small group ministry at St. Luke's and the enrichment and development of other small groups supported the assumption of the project. A model with three styles is included in the final chapter.

THE INTRODUCTION

A. The Importance of and Need for Small Groups

Throughout history persons of all ages and both genders have joined together in groups. These groups vary in size, interest, purpose, longevity, and structure. Indeed, the world is oriented toward group activity. Most people belong to an average of five or six groups at any one time, and it is estimated that the number of existing small groups in the United States is as high as five or six billion.¹ These groups include those based on academic, religious, athletic, social, economical, and political interests.

However, the closeness of families, communities, and neighborhoods is not what it once was. Part of this closeness has been hampered as the mobility of the world increased, as the single parent family increased, and as older community functions decreased.² Also, the United States has become a nation of spectators. We watch television, sports events, movies, and videos. These activities do not provide the same interaction and involvement that was common with lifestyles of the past. Even in the job field there seems to be less closeness.³

Still, people have a hunger to build relationships which are positive and satisfying, and healthy small group involvement in the church helps fulfill this most important need.⁴ In a

small group, members interact, learn together, and share together. Further, the church benefits when relationships among members are fostered through small groups.

For example, one important way to learn and apply the Scripture to life is to study in small groups. Steve Barker says that in small groups, members "encourage and help one another discover and obey God's Word in ways that are simply impossible when the whole church meets together."⁵ Christian gifts and experiences are shared in small groups more easily and contribute to the growth and building up of one another. In small groups, members who experience the application of the Word, share training and resources together.⁶

The small group is also an important part of "care ministry." Care ministry is defined as a concern for the total welfare of each member in the church fellowship. It recognizes each member as important to the Lord and to the Christian community. Such ministry is implemented through the ministry of the Word and Sacraments via a network of active church life that includes involvement with one another.

The small group is a great asset for this care ministry approach because of direct interaction with others. David Zersen stresses the importance of this aspect when he says:

Preaching and teaching can summon Christians to love one another and the Spirit has power to direct us to one another, but if love is to be experienced there is a need for a setting in which people can interact.⁷

For the Christian community to grow in this area of ministry, it needs to develop and enrich group life so that people interact

and care for one another. Then the imperative of Jesus to put faith into action, as He said in John 11:34b, "As I have loved you, love one another!", is better fulfilled.

Each Christian is a partner with the Lord, encouraging one another within the Christian community and being accountable to one another for spiritual nourishment and sharing. Small group life provides opportunities for such mutual support as members carry out God's Word in Galatians 6:2,10:

Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

According to the instruction of the Scriptures and the example of the early church in Acts, the witness of the church is accomplished through the total life of the members of the church. Robert Saucy reminds us that this witness comes in "both word and action as a community and as individuals."⁸ Being a faithful part of the community brings involvement as the members seek to provide mutual support, and small groups challenge members to join in providing mutual support for their present earthly life. They also call upon members to make preparation for the ultimate oneness with the Lord in eternity, as the author of Hebrews declares in Hebrews 10:24-25:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Healthy small groups are places where Christians increase

in their love and care for one another. They provide supportive relationships which multiply Christian caring and sharing to persons outside the group as well. And it is the use of the Scripture that is the key for the Christian small group to function in this way, as Roberta Hestenes emphasizes:

As Christians experience both the joy and the struggle involved in Christian life, a small group drawing upon the resources of Scripture for inspiration and encouragement can experience the reality of the "koinonia" of Christ with His people.⁹

The church is in a position to promote a wide range of supportive characteristics which are beneficial for healthy individuals and groups. Gary Collins summarizes a variety of positive characteristics which the Lord seeks to provide through His church:

The church reinforces values, models desired behavior, serves as buffer from the pressures of life, provides stability, and gives encouragement, practical help, care, love, moral standards, hope, meaning, and support, especially in times of suffering. The Scriptures repeatedly encourage believers to support the timid, help the weak, provide for the needy, and care for the distressed.¹⁰

Small groups in the church serve well in providing opportunities for personal growth, for growth in relationship to others, and for growth in relationship with the Lord. In addition to spiritual growth, recent research shows that many groups serve as substitutes for the support once provided by the nuclear and extended family.¹¹

Small group ministry augments and benefits pastoral care and the overall ministry of the church in several ways. Kenneth Hansen summarizes these in a dictionary article on small groups:

1. Small groups can meet a wide range of human needs and offer opportunities for laypersons to use their gifts and experiences;
2. Small groups can enhance the growth and self-esteem of members as they are responsible for one another;
3. Small groups help members carry out the mission of the church; and
4. Small groups provide a setting in which to function as disciples and to grow as disciples of the Lord.¹²

Groups are part of our lives. As humans we have an inherent social nature. Our lives are filled with groups from birth through death. We play in groups, we socialize in groups, we learn in groups, we work in groups, and we worship in groups. The value of these groups is high. David and Frank Johnson have done extensive studies in group dynamics and communication.

Regarding the importance of groups, they write:

As the effectiveness of groups goes, our quality of life goes. The more effective our family, career, educational groups are depends both on our knowledge of group process and our ability to behave effectively within groups.¹³

Theologian Paul Tillich said that "no personal being exists without communal being."¹⁴ It is important to interact with each other. There is little growth in relationships without some encounters with other persons. People grow in relationship to one another through the continual process of personal interaction. One good source for these personal contacts is made available in healthy small groups.

B. The Purpose of This Paper

The purpose of this paper is to present a model for small group development and enrichment at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in

Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. To that end, information pertaining to small groups will be presented, and the paper will show how the small group concept fits into the theological framework of the church. It will use Scriptural support to do so. The Scripture texts quoted are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.¹⁵

Churches are stronger when they develop and enrich small group ministry. Individual Christians as well as churches grow as they are nourished through the Word of God in these groups. As the Word of God is used in groups, the Holy Spirit will work to nourish and strengthen God's people. The hope is that St. Luke's Lutheran Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will grow spiritually as sound Scriptural principles are used to develop and enrich small group ministry.

C. The Background for Development of Small Groups in the Church

The Mission Statements of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod provide a helpful backdrop for setting goals in individual congregations. They are also helpful in developing goals pertaining to this small group model. The following are the statements issued in 1990:

- I. Mission begins in the heart of God.
- II. The reality of sin makes the mission of God an urgent necessity for us.
- III. Jesus Christ is the center of the Gospel.
- IV. The Holy Spirit works through the Word.
- V. The mission on which Christ sends His people is universal.

- VI. The universal mission on which Christ sends His people calls for the personal involvement of each of us.
- VII. The Lord calls His people to work together in His mission.
- VIII. Through God's power we can take our place in His mission willingly and eagerly.¹⁶

Goals for small group ministry fit into a number of these mission statements. It is important to remember that the power is from God, and that growth comes through the work of the Holy Spirit as the Word is shared and lived out.

According to Saucy, ministry is divided among the various members with each being challenged to use his or her gifts for the total work of the church.¹⁷ There is much support in the Scripture for this concept:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it....From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:3-7,16.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10.

Small groups are one way for God's people to be personally involved with the Word and with each other. As members of the church work together, they use the gifts the Lord gives them for the growth of His church and the nourishment of their faith and Christian life.

The Scripture emphasizes that Christians are to work together as members joined in Christ. Several chapters of the Bible compare members of the church to the different parts of the body. These analogies are found in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12. Healthy small groups provide opportunities to carry out these functions. As the functioning of the human body demands the cooperation and interdependent action of its members, so the body of Christ demands cooperation and mutuality. Each member not only relates to Christ as the head but also relates to others.¹⁸

Believers are taught to rely on the strength of the Lord. This is firmly emphasized in Scriptures like 1 Peter 5:6-7:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

In addition to finding individual strength and solace in the Lord, Christians are to share with each other in suffering and rejoicing. There are to be no separated individuals in the church, which is His body.¹⁹

The Apostle Paul reminds Christians that the overall goal of working together is to grow in the Lord, as stated clearly in Ephesians 4:16:

From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The relationship with one another requires loving concern. Through this relationship each member enters into the lives of the others, experiencing their lives with them. This loving

concern is noted in Romans 12:15-16a:

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn; and live in harmony with one another.

As the church experiences and reinforces Biblical values, it remains firm as a community of Christians. In two pointed statements, Howard Snyder tells us that this mutual concern is an urgent one and is of ultimate importance:

No group with values that differ significantly from society can endure long in that society unless the group is a counterculture.

Christians cannot maintain Christian values in society unless they are part of a community that reinforces those values.²⁰

In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus challenged Christians to carry out the role of being "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." God has placed us in the context of the world as witnesses to His Word.²¹ This role can be partly carried out in small group settings. Small group ministry is not the only way to carry out this Scriptural goal; however, it is one of the more effective ways. Small group settings provide individuals prime opportunities to be caring, understanding, and supportive towards each other. The witness of the church is evident when the Word is proclaimed clearly with all its implications, and the application of the Word is seen in the lives of people. The Christian life is carried out in word and deed.

The world presents many dilemmas to the Christian. Small groups provide an arena to dialogue about the choices that are being faced day by day. As each person is a combination of hurts and hopes, so each Christian needs to experience the grace of

Christ in his or her life. As this grace is shared in the dynamics of a caring group, members grow by the power of Jesus Christ.²² John Casteel observes that an open small group setting may provide the support or constructive criticism of fellow Christians which may, in turn, help another person make a responsible choice.²³

One way to understand why small groups have this capacity to further the witness of believers as they make responsible choices is that small groups provide a family-like network in the church. The one time standard emotional and spiritual support systems of our society are diminishing, and the church has a good opportunity to enhance its supportive network.²⁴ In today's busy world, people may not even be aware of what they miss in the way of family enrichment and empowerment. Gail Barwis summarizes the feelings of a number of social advocates when she states:

Too often friendships are casual and shallow and fail us in time of stress and crisis. So for many people, the family of the future will be rooted in many new kinds of larger support systems.²⁵

Howard Snyder supports this concern regarding the breakdown of the old systems of support:

Many social indicators point to a breakdown of community today--in the home, the school, the neighborhood, the church. This goes hand in hand with an advancing technological society that focuses on either the individual or the mass, speeding the disintegration of small groupings.²⁶

Snyder lists a number of other factors which contribute to the changing dynamics of community life:

1. There is a growing fragmentation of family life.

2. People are often moving away from the neighborhoods in which they grew up.
3. Television is often a communication blocker.
4. Many people don't work where they live.
5. There are bigger yards, walls, fences, apartments with safety doors.
6. People are traveling to work rather than walking.
7. There is a reduction of family size.²⁷

In contrast to these factors, the church has a great opportunity to provide a network of support. The church can help isolated individuals and families rediscover the extended family within a caring Christian community.

D. The Definition of Small Groups

There are many definitions for groups. The mere gathering of people does not constitute a group. A group begins with the gathering of people for a particular purpose or interest. The following are some definitions given for groups:

A group is two or more individuals in face-to-face interaction, each aware of his or her membership in the group, each aware of the others who belong to the group, and each aware of their positive interdependence as they strive to achieve mutual goals.²⁸

We define a group as a network of people who have intentionally invested part of their personal decision making power in the authority of a larger social unit (called the group) in pursuit of mutually desired but separately unobtainable goals.²⁹

A group is two or more persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by each other person.³⁰

A group comes into existence when through interaction there is a partial overlapping of the "psychological field" or "life space" of individuals.³¹

The writer of this paper builds his definition on the process of interaction. A group is made up of two or more persons who develop a common bond by working, studying, planning, or interacting together. The group may develop to include mutual support and caring for one another as members grow in their relationship with each other. Ideally, in the church these groups include spiritual building blocks such as prayer, worship, Bible study, and witnessing. Groups may develop naturally as certain projects or studies are begun, or they may be developed intentionally with a given purpose and a distinct goal in mind.

E. The Steps to be Taken to Develop and Enrich Small Groups

The first step for small group development is to evaluate the dynamics of several small group models and choose those elements which are most helpful for small groups in the church.

The next step is to develop a small group model which can be used in a variety of group settings within the ministry of the church. Through this process a small group model can be suggested that will hopefully provide a structure that will be helpful in the overall care ministry of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.

F. CONCLUSIONS

Groups have a tremendous influence on the lives of people. Most of our beliefs, values, feelings, and habit patterns stem from our experiences in various groups, beginning with the family.³² Groups influence how people feel about life and them-

selves. Karen Rook writes about the importance of social support in the lives of people:

Social support has overarching importance in the lives of most people and is centrally implicated in how satisfied people feel with their relationships."³³

Many things in the church center around groups. This writer agrees with Howard Clinebell that "groups large and small are the fabric from which a church's program is shaped."³⁴ Many positive effects are seen in the ministry of the church when the group life is active. Jared Pingleton clearly summarized that groups are by nature and design a central focus of the church.³⁵ The small group can serve in a particularly healthy role for the individual member as well as for the community life itself. Pingleton believes that interaction is the essential ingredient of the small group which adds to the life of the church. He goes on to say that interaction in turn leads to relationships and relationships can lead to community.³⁶

As the church carries out its ministry, many people gather in small group units to study, work, learn, pray, and make decisions. As groups make good use of their time together, many benefits can be felt in the whole church. Working, caring, sharing, learning, and experiencing together provides an atmosphere for the "body of Christ" to grow and mature. As members are involved they may experience how "meaning is 'magnified' when it is shared with others."³⁷

Clyde Reid was an advocate for healthy group life in the church in the sixties. He shared the conviction that the average

pastor in the average church could do much to enhance the ministry of the church as he placed importance on small groups. Reid visualized small groups as having tremendous potential for the church in carrying out the ministry of caring, sharing, learning, working, and growing together.³⁸ Since the Holy Spirit always works through the Word of God, the growth of individuals in small group ministry must always be seen in relationship to the work of the Holy Spirit.

ENDNOTES FOR THE INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER ONE

FURTHER ANALYSIS OF SMALL GROUP BENEFITS, HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE, AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR SMALL GROUPS

A. FURTHER ANALYSIS OF SMALL GROUP BENEFITS

Irwin Yalom is one of the leading writers and proponents of this century regarding the benefits of group interaction. He writes from a social and psychological point of view, and feels the axiom "people need people" still stands as the beginning point:

People need people--for initial and continued survival, for socialization, for the pursuit of satisfaction; at no time do we become immune to this axiom.¹

Yalom sees learning taking place within a group as it acts as a social microcosm. In an interacting group people learn much about themselves and each other. The interpersonal relationships within the group itself are very important. These relationships along with the content contribute to the learning process of the group. As persons in a group grow, their ability to form rewarding relationships increases. Yalom lists a variety of positive possibilities for those who become integrated in a healthy group interaction:

1. Social anxiety may decrease for the participant.
2. Self-esteem may rise as the person grows in confidence.

3. There is less need for the person to conceal himself or herself.
4. Others find this behavior likeable and may show more approval and acceptance.²

Groups are part of the human system of integration.

"Human systems are groups of people interacting with each other for a common purpose."³ Groups exert a great amount of influence over their individual members and in turn the members exert great influence over the group. Groups are an essential part of the social development of human life and growth.

Many parts of social interaction happen within group life. We remember that small groups involve persons in family, school, church, work, neighborhood, social, political, and play groups. The impact of groups is not to be underestimated. David and Frank Johnson clearly spell out the essential purpose of groups in the following statement:

Groups are of incalculable importance in the life of every person and skills in group membership are absolutely essential for effective functioning within any society, family, organization, or relationship. We are not born with these skills, they must be developed.⁴

It is within groups that we begin to experience interaction and form skills in communication.

A communication network is formed when people interact with each other. Good communication and a positive self concept are interrelated. The impression of who we are is determined mostly by communicative experiences we've had with people important to us. These communication networks are channels over which messages are exchanged. Persons with a good self concept

seem to understand themselves better as communicators.⁵ A healthy small group setting provides an excellent arena for a positive self concept to develop.

The feedback that members of a group give to each other is carried over the communication channels and provides a basis for social bonds. These bonds permit group members to remain together, to work effectively, to build relationships, and to find support.⁶ Because many members of American society find an absence in the sense of belonging, more community oriented therapists call for a caring network, an interconnected system of family, friends, intimates, and community to help restore and sustain those who suffer from this lack of belonging.⁷ The small group can help provide this network.

There is evidence that demonstrates the interconnection between social support and health. Some feel that this evidence will serve to help strengthen the supportive aspects of informal helping networks, and that it may even provide a basis for a new partnership between lay helping resources and professional helpers.⁸ As this cooperation develops, it will contribute in various ways to the well-being of individuals, families, and society as a whole.

A study by Robert Cummins found that the effectiveness of increasing self-worth depends also on providing a sense of social connectedness.⁹ People who were part of groups in which positive communication occurred felt a greater sense of well-being and self-worth. Mutual support within a group helps to decrease

stress and may be particularly successful in developing coping skills. Conversely, these studies also found that those persons who grew in self-worth and other empowerment skills without social support often increased in their vulnerability to stressful events.¹⁰ The combination of social support and increasing an individual's skill in handling stress may account for the success of the small group movement in the form of self-help groups.¹¹ The added advantage for Christian groups is that of providing a setting in which group members can grow in their ability to draw upon their faith resources.

Small groups provide valuable contributions in many walks of life. It is reported that social support appears to be particularly effective in preventing pathogenic effects for those individuals who contend with many serious life stresses.¹² Even success at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, is partly attributed to the use of group orientation with team diagnosis instead of the old concept of one doctor treating the patient.¹³ Small groups have proven to be efficient in providing help, giving support, and creating opportunities for interacting with others. Alan Gartner and Frank Riessman feel that the self-help style of the small group comes without the characteristics of hierarchy and bureaucracy, since the member is both a consumer and a producer.¹⁴ They go on to say that the simple lines of small group interaction and the attention given to helping another person provide a setting in which there is positive feedback for the participant.¹⁵

B. HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE FOR SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

Small group activity was utilized by the head of the Christian Church. Jesus Christ taught His inner group of disciples in small group settings as they traveled with Him, listened to Him, dialogued with Him, and observed His actions. This small group style continued as His disciples gathered together after the Ascension. Then, when they were gathered together, the Lord provided the miracle of Pentecost. After Pentecost these apostles gathered every day in their homes and in the temple for activities which prepared and strengthened them for their mission. Acts 2:42 records this account:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

In other New Testament accounts, there are references to the gathering of the Apostles and other believers in groups for witnessing, prayer, study, or fellowship. The following serve as examples of these occasions:

1. When Peter escaped from prison

He went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Acts 12:12.

2. When Paul establishes a home center in Rome

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 28:30-31.

3. When Paul sends greetings from others

Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. 1 Corinthians 16:19.

4. When the author of Hebrews urges believers to meet

Let us hold on unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25.

There is additional historical precedence regarding the current small group movement. In his study David Zersen writes:

Whether secular proponents of small groups will acknowledge it or not, the historical precedent for the movement is to be found in small groups founded by Lutheran pastor Philipp Jakob Spener.¹⁶

Pastor Spener claimed that he was merely drawing implications from and providing functional realization for Martin Luther's doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers." The study of Luther's theology shows that Luther made strong beginnings toward the kind of community interaction which fosters spiritual maturity.¹⁷ Five examples from Luther's ministry are cited by David Zersen as mutual ministry or small group ministry:

1. Luther's home devotions were used as a time for family and friends to hear the Word, share it, and make practical applications of the Word.
2. His intended use of The Catechism as a face-to-face teaching of the Word to one another was applicable to the small group ministry.
3. Luther's practice of preaching in the home to family and friends lends to small group dynamics as his preaching in the informal setting provided time for discussion and dialogue.
4. His "table talks" were informal times spent with family, friends, students, and neighbors discussing, sharing, and dialoguing about a wide variety of topics which provided group learning, caring, sharing, and experiencing sessions.

5. Luther's proposed order of worship for the home centered on sharing the Word and spending time developing actions to carry out the Word in day by day caring as Christians.¹⁸

Luther is clearly seen as the mentor for Pastor Philipp Spener. As Spener began to develop his groups to spur a mutual concern for Christian growth and maturation, he claimed he was able to proceed "only because he stood like a dwarf on the shoulders of a giant."¹⁹ The giant he referred to was Dr. Martin Luther.

The "class meetings" of John Wesley, an English preacher, have many of the qualities of the small group that we see being developed in today's churches. These were developed in the 1700s at the time of Wesley's ministry. His groups met for prayer, reading, and song. After such an event each person was allowed to speak freely.²⁰ These meetings certainly had small group characteristics.

The church under persecution in the former East Germany rediscovered some of its vitality in small house meetings.²¹ Evidence of the small group being used for support, sharing, learning, and caring has also come out of China and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The renewal of the small group in our country reflects again its unique place in the ministry of the church. Religion is cited as one of the most important of the many ways in which Americans get involved in community and social life.²²

C. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

The theological framework begins with the belief that

human life was created in the image of God. As Creator, God gave distinctive roles and purposes to human life. Male and female were created in God's image. This event and its purposes are recorded in Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

As the intended image-bearers of the divine, people have both the privilege and responsibility to expand their understanding of God's created order so that they rule the earth in the best ways possible.²³ This task of "ruling" is one of managing and care-taking. With the command to rule comes the challenge of being good stewards of all that God has made. This command needs continual attention as all of life is to be molded, shaped, and cared for in a manner which gives glory and honor to the Creator. This ruling process emphatically gives unique purpose to human life. It involves the interaction of God and His people and the interaction of people with each other. Small groups in the church certainly are part of this process of managing the earth as group members seek to share, to understand God and themselves, to live and serve in love, and to care for each other.

Some have proposed that there should be a thorough integration of psychology and theology in this process of subduing and ruling the earth. This is seen, for example, in the

writings of John Carter and Bruce Narramore:

An understanding of general revelation and the broad task of subduing the earth then becomes a divinely given task just as much as the proclamation of the Gospel. It is at this point that integration enters in to look for a synthesis of roles, responsibilities, and ways of understanding God's creation.²⁴

However, the integrity of Christian theology is maintained only if we reject this suggestion and allow God's primary purpose to stand clear and foremost. All events of Biblical history and record point to God's desire to maintain a saving relationship with His people. This relationship is only possible in the original perfection of creation or in the grace relationship which God announces through the saving Gospel. The ruling or subduing process is simply one way to honor and respect the God who created us and recreates us through forgiveness in Christ.

Originally, God's people lived up to His image as they began their divine duties on earth. God's earth was perfect and complete as only God could create it. When sin entered the world through the actions of Satan, Adam and Eve, all creation was thrown into disharmony and turmoil. The perfect image of God was now lost. After the fall, Adam and Eve continually desired to sin and rebelled against the God who had created them and given them all things. Their loss of the image of God not only affected them, but affected all the generations to come. The result of their sin is spelled out in Romans 5:12:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all have sinned.

This sin will continue to affect relationships of male and female

with God, and relationships of people to other people as long as the earth continues to exist.

The church seeks to use the gifts of God's grace to break down the barriers of sin and the walls which separate people from one another. It is God's action that brings the message of reconciliation, forgiveness, hope, and peace. This message came to Adam and to Eve, and it is intended for the entire world. It is this same Creator, who loved His creation and declared it to be very good, who announces the plan of salvation. In this plan, through God's forgiveness, male and female are brought back into the image of God. The Scripture records the great contrast of being apart from the family of God with being in the family of God. This is especially clear in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The Old Testament prophets faithfully announced the promises of God and the kingdom to come. The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61 was labeled by Jesus Himself as being fulfilled by Him. Jesus read Isaiah's prophecy in the synagogue in Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Luke 4:18-19.

Then, Jesus said, as recorded in verse 21, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The Messiah is Jesus. He brings healing to the sinful world. He brings renewal and life as He

lives for us, suffers for us, dies for us, and rises in victory for us. Jesus is the answer to Adam's sin, our sin, and the sin of the whole world. Paul summarizes this thought in Romans 4:15:

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many.

The reason we become Christian caregivers is quite distinctive. Two thousand years ago God identified Himself with our humanness when Christ was born. John 1 tells us that the "Word became flesh and lived among us" in the human form of Jesus. This is the Christ who showed us care and love. This is the same love and care that is therefore reflected in the church.

Christ is the Anointed One of God who gave up His life for us. However, death could not stop His life. He was not just another dead hero; Jesus Christ rose triumphantly from the grave. In the days following His resurrection, Jesus Christ established His church as He commissioned His disciples. Through the church Jesus continues His love and care for people. This love of Christ is powerful and dynamic. It is not just a good feeling; it is the basic motivation for all Christian caring. As announced in 1 John 4:19, "We love because He first loved us."

Distinctiveness of Christian care lies in why we do it. As the Holy Spirit provides guidance, Christians are motivated by the love of Christ. This love frees us to do God's bidding. It also motivates us to use our God given gifts for others, to be open with one another, and to share the effects of His love with one another. Haugk says that God "makes cared-for Christians

into caring Christians."²⁵ This caring activity can occur effectively in healthy small groups.

Small groups enhance the caregiving task of the church by providing an effective setting for carrying out this work. In small groups the love of Christ is shared and carried out in caring actions that count. As Christ becomes part of each Christian there is a relationship that needs to be carried out and strengthened. This support develops well in the small group setting. The Holy Spirit works in group members as the Word is shared and Christ's love is shared. It is consistent with Scripture that the work of the Lord is also involved in the process of Christians connecting, learning, caring, and sharing with one another. This may well be part of the emphasis of the Lord when Jesus said:

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Matthew 18:20.

Jesus wanted people to find a fullness in life. He said in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Many Christian caregivers urge the church to become a center for human care and wholeness and to train its people to be involved in caring ministries. Churches have opportunity to work with people of all ages through the various stages of life and growth. Loving actions and caregiving in all aspects are fruits of the faith. The church can do much to build a community of faith and to provide settings in which sharing and caring can take place. Howard Clinebell feels strongly about the church putting its theology into action by working with small

groups in the church.²⁶ Kenneth Haugk builds on this concept and describes it by using family terminology. He views one of Christ's goals to be that of developing a caring community, a community in which members feel and experience the love of God:

Christ created a community in our midst; He wants us to appreciate what this means. We act on our sense of community when we build deep, loving relationships with other Christians. In a family with a loving Father, a giving Brother, and an empowering Spirit, can we do otherwise?²⁷

When Jesus ascended into heaven His promises were activated. As recorded in Acts 2, the disciples became filled with the Holy Spirit giving the New Testament church its power. With the leadership of Spirit-filled persons, the church had the nucleus which Jesus promised. Small group ministry was a key manner in which these early members of the church were nourished in the Word, shared with one another, and encouraged each other.²⁸ This pattern can be seen in Acts 2:42-47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had a need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The clear message of Scripture is that God came into history to change lives. As we are called by the Spirit we, too, see ourselves fulfilling a role in His divine plan. The church and its faithful members are, indeed, a part of God's divine task of reconciling people to Himself, to themselves, and to others.

A special part of this communication of reconciliation takes place in small group ministry. The group oriented sharing and caring is a vital part of New Testament ministry and a key part of the life of the church today.

The ministry of the Spirit in the church is the ministry of the Christian community. The Spirit provides the growth for the individual and for the Christian community. The Apostle Paul stated this point emphatically:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.
1 Cor. 3:6-9.

Kenneth Haug uniquely summarizes this role distinction with this statement: "Christians are responsible for care; God is responsible for cure."²⁹ Christian caregivers prepare the ground for the Great Physician. This involves doing the best possible job to create an atmosphere of healing and then waiting on the Lord with hopeful expectation. It is essential that we remember that God provides all healing according to His will, whether it be emotional, mental, physical, or spiritual.

For the Christian the results of healing and growth are primarily what God accomplishes; yet, God wants us to be responsible. The Apostle Paul saw this combination as he stated:

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:14.

1. **Three Greek Words: Ekklesia, Koinonia, and Agape**

Three New Testament Greek words help us understand the unique role of being in the Christian community: "ekklesia," "koinonia," and "agape." "Ekklesia" emphasizes the idea of a called out people getting together. The ekklesia gathers, worships, witnesses, serves, and teaches in its role of God's called out people. "Koinonia" emphasizes the idea of fellowship or sharing together. "Agape" calls for unconditional love and acceptance for others just as God unconditionally loves us. Jared Pingleton feels that the dynamics of these three concepts become a very important spiritual foundation for a healthy small group.³⁰ Each word is looked at in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The first key New Testament term, "ekklesia," is translated church. In the Scriptures it is never used for a church building or for a denomination; it never has adjectives attached to it. Ekklesia refers to the people of God gathered as the body of Christ. It refers to the believers in Christ. The believers in Corinth, for example, are addressed as the ekklesia of God in Corinth. In other words, the believers are the ekklesia or the church by virtue of their faith given by the Holy Spirit.³¹

The following is a practical definition of ekklesia, developed by Howard Snyder:

Church is a community of people gathered around Jesus, committed to Him, worshipping Him, and ready to serve His kingdom in the world.³²

Snyder quotes five portions of Scripture that provide support for Biblical images of the church.³³ These images support and affirm small group functions in the church. Small groups are certainly not the only way these functions are carried out, but they serve as one very effective way. The following is Snyder's list of functions with Scriptural support:

1. In the world but not of the world

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. John:18-19.

2. Conformed to Christ and not to the world

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2.

3. The Flock of the Kingdom

Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:29-32.

4. Sent into the world

My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth, Your word is truth. As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. John 17:16-18.

5. Contributing to culture

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is written in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 21:23-27.³⁴

As a small group in the church carries out its goals, the group promotes the principles of these Biblical images and contributes to the spiritual growth and well-being of God's family.

When the small group functions as a Christian community, it is functioning as part of the ekklesia or church. The sharing, caring, and encouraging helps the members honor their Lord and helps them build up one another as fellow members in Christ. The Christian small group involvement enables the members to keep focused on the task and responsibility of being in the church, ekklesia, as Scripture suggests:

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

Warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:14b.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2.

The second key New Testament word is "koinonia," which is translated fellowship, community, or gathered people of God. The church, ekklesia, is called out of the world to be in koinonia, fellowship. A theological dictionary defines koinonia as a mutual religious fellowship of giving and receiving "which

includes participation, impartation, and fellowship."³⁵ The following are some examples of the use of the term in the New Testament [term in parenthesis added by author]:

So if you consider me a partner (koinonon) welcome him as you would welcome me. Philemon 17.

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation (koinonia) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation (koinonia) in the body of Christ? 1 Corinthians 10:16.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship (koinonia) with the Spirit, if any tenderness or compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Philippians 2:1-2.

They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to the fellowship (koinonia), to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Acts 2:42.

The Christian's closest koinonia experience is in unity with Christ through His suffering, death, and resurrection. We note this emphasis in the epistle of 1 John [terms in parenthesis added by author]:

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship (koinonia) with us. And our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3.

If we claim to have fellowship (koinonia) with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship (koinonia) with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:6-7.

Koinonia experiences occur with fellow Christians who are united with one another as members of God's family. The small group setting is one in which the fellowship, koinonia, grows in a variety of dimensions. Koinonia grows as one member becomes closer to another, koinonia occurs as the group becomes

closer corporately, and koinonia develops as members spiritually become closer to their Lord.

The third key New Testament word is that of "agape," which is God's kind of love. Agape is distinguished from two other Greek words for love which were used by the New Testament writers. These words for love are "phelos" and "eros." Phelos is brotherly love, and eros is sensual love. The following description, from a theological dictionary, refers to the results of agape:

Jesus brings forgiveness of sins, and in those who experience it a new and overflowing love is released.... The new relationship of God to man lays the foundation for a new relationship of man to man.³⁶

The Scriptures refer to God's love as an unconditional love. It is pure grace. God's love, His grace, is undeserved and cannot be earned; it is God's gift to unworthy sinners. With His love comes the great plan of salvation and the gift of forgiveness of sins. Scripture clearly announces this agape, this love of God [term in parentheses is added by the author]:

For God so loved (agapasen) the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16.

Jesus wanted His disciples to practice the same kind of agape love as noted in these examples: [terms in parentheses are added by author]:

A new command I give you; love (agapate) one another. As I have loved (agapasa) you, so you must love (agapate) one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love (agapan) one another. John 13:34-35.

My command is this: Love (agapate) each other as I have loved (agapasa) you. John 15:12.

This is the love, "agape," which the Christian community, "koinonia," shares so that the church, "ekklesia," is built up and grows according to God's will. The relationship of these terms can also be explained from the opposite starting point. The church, "ekklesia," is made up of the called out people of God who are to share His blessings and be strengthened within the fellowship, "koinonia," using the motivation of His love, "agape," so that its love is genuine and caring.

Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we truly be His church, grow in fellowship, and continue to experience His love. God's gifts are for the nourishment and edification of His kingdom. Small groups are in a good position to be units which share His love, grow in community, and experience what it means to be people of God.

As the small group utilizes the Word, there is a clear foundation for it to function as part of the church, ekklesia, and to grow in fellowship, koinonia. Members who are committed to relate to the Lord and to one another as He commanded will seek to employ God's kind of love, agape, in their interactions with one another. A small group which has a spiritual commitment to the Lord and to fellow members provides a setting for members to experience growth in fellowship, in love, and in being a meaningful part of the church. When these dynamic, Biblical concepts are actively experienced, they give a great lift to the individuals, the small group, and to the church.

2. God Given Goals for the Christian Community

In a sense, the Christian community has not fully arrived yet. That is, the church is made up of persons who are "saints and sinners" at the same time. God's people are in continual need of spiritual renewal and growth. God desires His people to grow, to serve, to care, and to share. One goal that God has for us is to live in the identity which we have been given in Christ. This goal is clearly seen in the following Scriptures:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Ephesians 1:3.

This newness in Christ comes as a result of being forgiven by God's grace, and gives persons the ability through the Spirit to lead a God pleasing life. This relationship enables those in Christ to experience greater peace and joy, and it also provides the means to grow in a day by day trust of God's guidance.³⁷ Small group ministry fosters this relationship with God by providing a way to strengthen Christians in their daily challenge of living the new life in Christ.

The way of growth provided by the small group is that of mutual caring, sharing, and challenging. The Christian small group creates an atmosphere in which Scriptural principles are tried and tested. As the small group functions around the Word, members gain first hand experience of being in the Christian

community. As the group functions in a God pleasing way, the experience brings spiritual growth and affirmation.

A second goal is to recognize the uniqueness which people have as a community in Christ. Snyder points out that the early Christians began to think of themselves as a third race: neither Jew nor Gentile but something transcending both.³⁸ This goal is seen in the epistles of the Apostle Paul, for example, consider these Pauline texts:

...for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:27-28.

...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Colossians 3:10-11.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility. Eph. 2:4.

Small group settings enable Christians to remember and practice their uniqueness and provide opportunities to strengthen one another through the Word. The Holy Spirit is present through the study of the Word together with Christian sharing and encouragement.

The uniqueness of the Christian community comes from the spiritual dimension God gives to the members. Growth is not merely academic or gained through empirical information. Growth uniquely occurs as the Spirit works through the Word in the hearts and lives of each Christian. As members recognize this God-given uniqueness, they become aware of the power of God that

is involved in individual and mutual growth. The healthy small group provides a setting for this goal to be realized.

A third goal is to appreciate that we owe everything to God. A small group with a focus on God's grace enables members to appreciate God's love. We are accepted into a loving relationship with God by grace. It is not by our deeds or by our own self that we are saved. God offers salvation and wholeness in the gracious gift of Christ. Harold Wilke ties grace into healing and wholeness:

A person's power, beauty, majesty, and strength all combined cannot save him; salvation comes through grace. Illness, physical handicap, decrepitude, old age, or mental retardation cannot destroy a person in the sight of God; he or she is saved by grace. The condition of everyone of us before God is the same.³⁹

Mutual acceptance, in a small group that shares God's love, helps individuals experience what it is to be under God's grace and peace. To help us appreciate the depth of God's love, the Scripture stresses that God makes an individual perfect in weakness and that God has chosen the weak of the world to demonstrate life's meanings to the wise. It is not intended that we see weakness as glorified, but that we understand that in weakness we see God's intent for the world. Wilke reminds us that God's intent is for the power of Christ to dwell within us.⁴⁰ As we appreciate the overwhelming grace of God, we approach our ministry in the Christian community with humility and respect. Successful small group ministry enhances our appreciation for God's grace as we experience His grace in action with others.

This goal of giving God credit for all good gifts is partly realized as individual and group needs are put into prayer. Prayers of thanksgiving also reinforce the fact that all good things come from God. As small group members seek God's Word for direction and guidance, they are demonstrating that they give God first priority. This practical use of God's Word and prayer allows group members to grow in the appreciation that they owe everything to God.

Small groups help us carry out our goals. These groups provide ways for persons to learn and to serve as they study the Word and share with one another.

3. God Given Purpose for the Christian Community

Small groups help carry out the mission of the church. Healthy group life is essential in living out the purpose of Christ's church. Some have stated that the church has four purposes:

1. To unify the kingdom of Christ
2. To evangelize the world
3. To promote spiritual growth and maturity
4. To praise and glorify the Father.⁴¹

The following paragraphs show how each of these four parts of the church are fostered by small groups.

The first purpose is to unify the kingdom of Christ. The small group setting is a good place for one on one discussion and provides opportunities to knock down dividing blocks. The setting allows time to accent the common gifts

people have as members of God's family. The gathering is also a time to support each other and uplift one another in a personal way. The following Scriptures are just two of many that emphasize this unifying purpose:

This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus. Ephesians 3:6.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:3-6.

The second purpose is to evangelize the world. The support of other people in the efforts of evangelism is most encouraging. This group activity helps motivate, encourage, and strengthen one another for the work of evangelism. The small group itself can be a strong witness to the salvation message of Jesus. The following two Scriptures record strong commissions given to the church to be about the task of witnessing and evangelizing:

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8.

The third purpose is to promote spiritual growth and maturity in the church. The gifts of the church are never given in isolation. The gifts are to be used for the growth of the church and for spiritual maturity. Gifts are tested in groups.

Small group interaction provides a setting for persons to use their talents within the group and serve as a springboard to use their spiritual gifts in a variety of settings outside the group. Small group interaction helps reinforce an ability that a person is testing or helps narrow down the list of gifts, so energy is best used in these areas. This testing of gifts and talents aids the process of growing and maturing as a Christian. The following Scriptures point out the need for spiritual growth and maturity in the church:

As you come to Him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him--you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-5.

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13.

The fourth purpose of the church is to praise and glorify the Father. An active small group can be very helpful in this process of praising and glorifying the Lord. People often share with each other more comfortably in a smaller setting. The small group also provides an opportunity to develop an open spirit in regard to sharing. Prayer and praise can be spontaneous as well as personal. The group provides a setting in which to share creative ways to give praise and glory. The small group setting fosters ways in which each member can become personally involved in sharing. These

Scriptures impact the Lord's challenge to give frequent praise and glory to the Lord:

Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again; Rejoice!
Philippians 4:4.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
Hebrews 13:15-16.

Certainly there are other ways to define the purposes of the Christian community. However, these four cover a wide scope. Healthy small groups in the church will be part of all these purposes in the various ways noted above.

4. Mutual Care and Support as Members Focus on One Another

People grow by giving of themselves. Acts 20:35 says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Galatians builds on this concept:

...serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
Galatians 5:13-14.

Christian theology clearly places the motivation with the Lord in 1 John 4:19, "We love because He first loved us." Gene Getz provides an interesting approach to the mutual help and support injunctions which are given in the Pauline epistles. He divides this injunction into twelve concepts. These twelve "one another" concepts fit well as applications to the community of the church. The Greek word "allelon" is translated "each other, mutual, or one another."⁴² Getz indicates that "allelon" occurs fifty-eight times in the New Testament and Paul uses it forty

times to describe the wide scope of loving, mature, interpersonal relationships.⁴³ These collected injunctions reveal significant actions which Christians are to take towards one another. Here is Getz's list and a supportive Scripture passage for each one [terms in parentheses are added by author]:⁴⁴

1. Be Members of One Another

So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (allelon).
Romans 12:10.

2. Be Devoted to One Another

Be devoted to one another (allelon) in brotherly love. Romans 12:10.

3. Honor One Another

Honor one another (allelon) above yourselves.
Romans 12:10.

4. Be of the Same Mind with One Another

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves (allelon) as you follow Christ Jesus. Romans 15:5.

5. Accept One Another

Accept one another (allelon), then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.
Romans 15:7.

6. Admonish One Another

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (allelon). Romans 15:14.

7. Greet One Another

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. ... Greet also the church that meets at their house. ... Greet one another (allelon) with

a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. Romans 16:3,5,16.

8. Serve One Another

You my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge yours sinful nature; rather, serve one another (allelon) in love. Galatians 5:13.

9. Bear One Another's Burdens

Carry each other's (allelon) burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2.

10. Bear With One Another

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another (allelon) in love. Ephesians 4:2.

11. Submit to One Another

Submit to one another (allelon) out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21.

12. Encourage One Another

Therefore encourage one another (allelon) and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

The building up of the church occurs as members of the church are in action with one another. Small groups that function as caring units will provide many opportunities for mutual support elements to occur. As this activity happens spontaneously or even intentionally the church will be built up. As members of small groups are motivated by the love of Christ they will carry out functions of mutual care and support.

Martin Luther refers to the activity of the fellowship of believers in the Smalcald Articles when he writes that one way of sharing the Gospel is "through mutual conversation and consolation of brethern."⁴⁵ This sharing of the Gospel fits well

into the concept of small group ministry. As Christians gather in groups for study, fellowship, service, or sharing, they have opportunities to encourage and console one another.

Christians are challenged by the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount to be the "light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." Practice is needed to meet this challenge. The small group provides an excellent opportunity to carry out these commands of the Lord and to experience some of the fruits of Christian support and mutual care.

D. CONCLUSIONS

The historical and Scriptural evidence for the use of small groups in the church is extensive. Throughout the history of the Christian church there is historical precedence of small group life in carrying out the functions of the church as it gathers, worships, witnesses, serves, and teaches. The social and psychological disciplines also add understanding to group process and give explanations for some of the dynamics involved with small groups. As a church we listen and learn from other insights that the Lord gives to His created beings; however, we clearly maintain the unique foundation which Christian theology provides for the small group process within the life of the Christian community.

God's plan continues to unfold and it is exciting to view and experience just a part of His plan in relation to small group dynamics. Getz provides a paraphrase of Ephesians 4:15-16 which connects the "now" and "then" concepts of God's plan:

God has an eternal plan, but that plan begins in space and time. God desires that every believer be a functioning member of a local church--a local "body" or "family" of believers. These believers mutually care for one another, minister to each other, and consequently build one another up in Christ.⁴⁶

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians expresses his concern for their unity. He wants them to be united so that they may experience the full riches of God's mystery in Christ. God desires this also for His people today. Hopefully, the experiences of participating in small groups within a congregation will help to reaffirm Christ in the hearts and lives of Christians and open up the treasures He provides. Colossians 2:2-3 sums up this hope:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

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CHAPTER TWO

CHARACTERISTICS AND DYNAMICS OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

A. CATEGORIES OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

There are a variety of small groups in churches and various ways to categorize these groups. In general, groups are formed intentionally or develop non-intentionally.

Some of small groups are developed intentionally for the sake of sharing and for developing interpersonal growth. These intentional groups come with many different names. They have in common the opportunity for personal sharing, for communication, and for growth in spiritual dimensions.

Other small groups happen naturally in the life of the church. These are different than those begun intentionally for interpersonal interaction. These groups develop due to interest areas, time schedules, tasks of committees, or needs within the church. According to Lyle Schaller, the most widespread small group model is responsive to the differences among people and to the fact that few people socialize primarily with their geographical neighbors.¹ Schaller continues with this statement regarding the natural development of the small group:

In this version of the small group model, individual interests and concerns, rather than the member's place of residence, is the central organizing principle in creating small groups. This version includes all the classes, circles, choirs, cells, fellowships, committees, and

organizations in which the members enjoy being part of that group.²

Howard Clinebell divides small groups in the church into the following five areas:

1. Task, Service, and Action Groups
2. Study Groups
3. Supportive, Self-Help Groups
4. Counseling and Therapy Groups
5. Share Groups and Interpersonal Growth Groups.³

The growth group is perhaps one of the most common groups within the church structure. Small groups known as growth groups cover a wide range. The emphasis of such a group depends on whether it is organized primarily around sharing, studying, or some action. In the church, the purpose of the group is supported by prayer and reflection on the Word. Growth groups have many dynamics and characteristics which are helpful in developing a small group model.

Clinebell comments that, in the church, spiritual growth is an overall consideration for the growth group.⁴ He also lists the following six general characteristics of these growth groups:

1. The dominant purpose of the group is the personal growth of participants.
2. The style of leadership is group-centered.
3. The group-orientation is the emphasis as it aims toward a here and now effectiveness.
4. It is comprised of relatively functional people.
5. It is small enough to develop group trust and for in-depth relationships to develop.

6. There is a back and forth movement from sharing growth issues to considering content which is relevant to the growth needs of participants.⁵

The command of the Lord "to love one another" is linked together with the process taking place in a small sharing group. There is much potential for this kind of caring interaction for persons involved in some type of growth group.

The guiding principle of the small sharing group, according to Clinebell, is to "enhance the quality of life" and therefore to help each participant become more fully alive.⁶ The drive for growth seems to be stimulated or blocked by the quality of the relationships. Clinebell's high regard for growth groups is seen in this statement:

The small sharing group is the ideal arena for deepening relationships and consequently accelerating growth.⁷

For the purpose of this paper, this author will concentrate on the characteristics and dynamics of growth groups. The dynamics and characteristics of growth groups encompass service, study, and share groups. Because of this, many features of growth groups are helpful in the development of a small group model for the church.

B. THE WORD IS CENTRAL AND GIVES BIRTH TO STUDY AND EDUCATION, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, COMMITMENT, AND SERVICE

The Word is the foundation of the Christian small group. As the Word is shared God's promises to His people in both the Old and New Testament unfold:

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
Psalm 119:105.

All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

It is through the Word that the Holy Spirit works. As the Word is present, a variety of gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit grow and develop for those in the Christian community.

God makes promises about the strength and effect of His Word in the lives of His people. The Lord, through Isaiah, proclaimed:

The grass withers and flowers fall, but the Word of our God endures forever. Isaiah 40:8.

So is My Word that goes out from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11.

Christians have the benefit of coming to know the Word in the person of Jesus Christ. The Scripture shares this insight in the Gospel of John and in Romans:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14.

"The Word is near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the Word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:8-10.

For the Christian, the Word is central for personal growth and for growth within the Christian community. As the relationship with Jesus Christ develops depth for an individual, he or she has more to offer to fellow Christians and more to share as a witness to others.

1. Study and Education

The small group is ideal for study and teaching. Ed Barlow's research indicates strong success for small groups in the area of teaching:

Modern researchers suggest that the small group discussion method of teaching is the most effective way to influence human behavior.⁸

Participants who feel a part of a small group are able to speak up and share with each other without being intimidated. This lends toward learning as members are willing to ask questions, to reflect on various viewpoints, and to listen to one another's opinion. A good teaching atmosphere is developed as members develop a trust and comfort with each other. Much helpful discussion occurs in a small group as ideas, questions, answers, and experiences are shared.

Small group dynamics deal with both feelings and content. Both of these levels need attention as groups develop. The amount of time spent on each of the two levels will vary greatly depending on the purpose of the group. Both feelings and content will be present and both need to be taken into account if the group is to progress. According to Pingleton, an advantage of a church group is that the trust factor can generally grow quickly. This in turn produces security and freedom to apply energies to deeper levels.⁹ The healthy balance of feelings and content contributes to the small group creating an atmosphere which is conducive to study and learning.

2. Interpersonal Relationships

Another characteristic of the small group is that it can provide an open atmosphere for members to get to know one another and to share with each other. There is much potential in the small group setting for spiritual growth. Thomas Oden writes:

There is also almost limitless opportunity for deep, caring, prayerful intermember support embedded in the process.¹⁰

He attributes the potential to the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word.

Small groups in the church can strengthen relationships. For this to happen it needs to activate many of the ingredients of Christian love. These characteristics include acceptance, listening, openness, empathy, commitment, and genuine concern. God's love put into action with a humble yet direct approach, by its very nature, brings out the God-given gifts in one another. A small group functioning from a Christian focus is part of the process of sanctification within the body of Christ.

The personal contact within a small group enables members to develop social contacts with persons of like concerns or interests. Egan cites that each person becomes an enabler and helper for the other as genuine concern and support are given. He says that the joining of a group for a special reason puts "people into growthful contact with one another."¹¹ The self-disclosure that often happens as a small group develops is closely tied to interpersonal growth.¹²

The small group Bible study in the church provides a

unique opportunity to promote the growth of interpersonal relationships. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit is working to enable growth for individuals independently and interdependently. Jared Pingleton is very pointed about the work of the Holy Spirit in the small group interaction. He says that the dynamic operation of the Holy Spirit provides comfort, brings peace, and promotes healing by revealing the truth. This takes place as members of the body of Christ are using their gifts for the sake of one another in the Christian community.¹³

Genuine interactions from Christian people are seen, in the church community, as examples of Christian love and care. Active listening and other communication skills may increase the ability of members of the Christian community to witness to their faith in Christ and to hear the witness of others. Active listening is one of the key skills needed for groups to develop. By listening in a genuine fashion, members demonstrate acceptance of one another and interpersonal warmth. Social sciences, according to Egan, would call the best of these interactions a time to build "unconditional positive regard."¹⁴ In Christian terminology we simply call this love. The small group style provides an atmosphere in which members grow in their ability to share the love of the Lord while experiencing a caring small group fellowship.

3. Commitment

As groups develop trust and closeness, growing commitment will follow. Yalom emphasizes self-disclosure from member to

member as an important step in the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships. He lists growth and commitment as by-products of self-disclosure:

As disclosures proceed in the group the entire membership gradually increases its level of involvement, responsibility, and obligation to one another.¹⁵

A central element in many growth, sharing, and small fellowship groups in churches seems to be interpersonal relationships and a desire to grow in understanding and awareness. Members in small church groups desire to grow in love for the Lord, love for each other, and love for themselves. This small group sharing and caring is part of carrying out Jesus' "new command." This was the command given to His original disciples and intended for all His disciples. With the command to love one another came the needed commitment to one another.

Strong benefits emerge as members are committed to each other. Thomas Gordon observed the following positive changes as members were committed to one another in small group interaction:

1. There was a growing perception of the climate in the group from more members.
2. Members were more responsive to each other and reacted with less stereotyping as the group progressed.
3. Group members learned to listen and understand others while decreasing in the need to defend their own ideas or positions.¹⁶

Gordon also noted that the following changes in the methods of decision making occurred as small groups matured:

1. The early impatience and pushing for one's own decision led to increased tolerance of the group decision-making process.

2. In later development the group used a variety of methods to make decisions. These methods included: voting, consensus, postponing decisions, and delegation of decision-making authority.¹⁷

As small groups of any type are formed in the church and a good trust develops, deep personal commitment will occur. The increase in small group ministry shows the need among people to have close, meaningful relationships. As Christian values are put into action, the Holy Spirit will bring growth.

The small group has a great effect on life in the church today. The results of one study showed that programs of small groups greatly enhanced "church member cohesiveness, attendance, and the perceived level of belongingness."¹⁸

4. Service

Each member in the body of Christ is challenged to carry out the new command which Jesus gave to His disciples. This command was to "love one another" as Jesus had loved them.

When Jesus had washed the disciples feet, He also taught them about serving one another. He shared with them these commands as recorded by John:

Now that I your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.
John 13:14-17.

A new command I give you; Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
John 13:34-35.

One Christian goal is to carry out the love of Christ in

everyday life; the small group setting is conducive for carrying out this goal. A number of church leaders link expectations of church renewal and growth with small group ministry. Robert Leslie reflects a high expectation:

I see the best hope of church renewal in the small sharing group.¹⁹

Howard Clinebell also recognizes the great potential of groups within the church as given in his following statements:

Every class, committee, society, circle, board, commission, and fellowship group should strive to become more and more healing and growth-stimulating. . . . Church groups in general cannot and should not be "therapy" groups, but they should be increasingly therapeutic in their effects.²⁰

The benefits of small groups are often measured by observing interaction between members as caring and accepting. Spontaneous, open communication may not have occurred unless the group members had been drawn together for a common task, purpose, interest area, or cause. Bonds between persons grow as they find self-satisfaction in learning and accomplishing goals together. This often happens as members are involved in projects to serve others in the church or outside the church.

Mutual help and service fits into the concept of New Testament ministry as recorded, for example, in the book of Acts where the early believers helped and cared for one another. Also, in several New Testament epistles the believers are urged to encourage one another, to care for one another, and to help one another. As the New Testament is read, it is evident that believers gathered in supportive groups for prayer, fellowship, encouragement, and study. After the Reformation, the Protestant

mutual help movements united the caring and sharing concepts with the practices of Christianity. As the church encourages small groups, it provides settings for members to find identity, to gain spiritual insight, and to serve one another.

C. SIZE OF SMALL GROUPS AND LENGTH OF SESSIONS

In general, the small group will contain three to twelve members. Two persons function together but do not engage in group dynamics as groups with three to twelve members. Sometimes a group of more than twelve functions as a small group if it is well structured. However, group dynamics usually change when there are more than twelve, and the group loses the small group identity. Groups of more than twelve serve many other purposes, accomplish tasks, and share information.

The small group organized to perform or complete a task or project can be very efficient. The small group size is ideal for the sharing of ideas and allows consensus to be met much easier than with a larger group. Much can be accomplished in a small group when members are committed to its activities and understand their roles. The small group size is advantageous for sharing ideas and fostering creativity and has enough people to accomplish tasks between meetings.

Most groups meet from one to two hours with the norm being one and a half hours. Some groups have longer single sessions, but groups are discouraged from meeting more than three hours due to the fatigue factor which may introduce unwanted psychological phenomena. These phenomena might include a group member becoming

overly controlled by another, a member accepting a idea because of weariness rather than from a normal deductive process, a member losing patience due to the length of the session, a member feeling stress because of the continued need to concentrate, or a member simply becoming worn out and unproductive.

D. LEADERSHIP FOR SMALL GROUPS

In general, a leader in a small group may be defined as a group member who exerts more influence on other members than they exert on him. The leader enables members to work together with the least friction and the most cooperation. David and Frank Johnson state that the leader may need to persuade and inspire members to follow his or her view of what needs to be done in order to achieve the group goals.²¹ As a member of the group, the leader is able to respond as a real person. The leader does not need to use an artificial approach nor hide his or her real reactions. Egan strongly emphasizes that the leader needs to have a genuine empathy for people and be able to get in contact with people's feelings without manipulating them.²²

The leader seeks to keep the communication open in the group. In being the leader he or she keeps in mind that the responsibility for effective interaction is a corporate one. The leader seeks to keep the members of the group involved so that there is an atmosphere of growth for each person.²³ The leader observes communication and diagnoses possible sources of difficulty so that the proper skill can be introduced to improve the communication. Communication is continually affected by the

relationships within the group. The following statement by Johnson and Johnson refers to this interdependence:

Because communication is interpersonal, whatever interferes with the relationships among group members interferes with their communication. If there is a difficulty and the relationship is improved then there is often a basic improvement in the communication in the group.²⁴

Leadership in small groups requires someone who is willing to look at the whole person. Kenneth Haugk writes pointedly about the approach of the Christian caregiver:

Christian caregivers follow the example of Jesus Christ and cannot avoid being holistic to the best of their abilities. Christian caregivers understand that the whole person needs ministry. Christian caregivers realize that some needs are more immediately compelling than others. Christian caregivers know that God alone is the one who takes broken individuals and makes them whole.²⁵

Pastors do not need to lead each small group, but they have a unique position in which to be sensitive and supportive to growth opportunities. Clinebell feels strongly about this as he states:

Clergymen have exciting, demanding jobs as growth facilitators in churches seen as human-development centers. Their commitment is to liberate, enlarge, deepen, and enrich the pro-life forces in families, individuals, and social institutions--and to equip laymen for their enlivening work in the congregation and community.²⁶

The pastor is also the person accountable for the small groups in the church. Accountability of small groups is important. The pastor may designate another person to be the immediate contact for a particular ministry, circle, Bible study, or other small group, but the pastor is accountable to the church. This accountability is facilitated by regular reports submitted by the leader/facilitator of the individual group. The pastor is

encouraged to periodically discuss group progress with the leader/facilitator or with the contact person assigned to the group.

Clyde Reid takes a practical view of leadership. He comments that the characteristics of a positive group leader is "parallel in many ways to that of a good parent."²⁷ Reid's view of effective leadership qualities is compiled in this list:

1. The ability to communicate love and acceptance
2. The willingness to set firm limits
3. The skill of affirming the worth of individuals by words and actions
4. The foresight to help group members assume an increasing share of responsibility and leadership
5. The desire and ability to develop honest, authentic leadership in the group
6. The ability to create a climate in which group members can feel free to care for each other
7. The capacity to help the group evaluate its own behavior, goals, and progress.²⁸

Leadership can bring in freshness and creativity.

Creativity develops from productive dialogue and discussion.

Johnson and Johnson remind us that the "problem solving process as used effectively lends toward creativity."²⁹ The leader of the small group will want to be familiar with problem solving techniques. There are various ways to list the steps of the problem solving process. These steps given in the Johnson study for problem solving are similar to those included by others:

1. Defining the problem
2. Diagnosing how big the problem is and what causes it

3. Formulating alternative strategies or plans for solutions to the problem
4. Deciding upon and implementing the most desirable strategies
5. Evaluating the success of the strategies used.³⁰

Using these steps is helpful even in informal problem solving. As the leader is aware of the steps, he or she can move the discussion towards a resolution. This process seeks to bring a win-win solution which maintains the self-esteem of members and helps to focus on the issue and not the personal disagreement.

E. STYLE AND COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE SMALL GROUP

The style of a small group often varies with the style of leadership. Leadership style will vary from leader dominance to leader flexibility. The leader's authority is often in a continuum with the group freedom.³¹ According to conclusions drawn by Johnson and Johnson, groups have three core activities which affect the dynamics:

1. Accomplishing its goals
2. Maintaining itself internally
3. Developing and changing in ways that improve its effectiveness.³²

It is important that a leader be aware of the various bases of power in a group. This knowledge enables a leader to be aware of the dynamics that occur because of his or her position. The following is a synopsis by Johnson and Johnson of the various bases of power which are linked with leadership and group dynamics:

1. Reward--Power: The ability to produce positive consequences or remove the negative ones.
2. Coercive Power: The leader can mete out negative consequences or remove positive ones in response to the behavior of members.
3. Legitimate Power: Group members believe the leader ought to have power over them because of his or her position in the group or organization.
4. Referent Power: Group members identify with or want to be like the leader and therefore do what the leader wants out of respect, liking, or wanting to be liked.
5. Expert Power: Members see the leader as having special knowledge or skill and as being trustworthy.
6. Informational Power: Group members believe that the leader has resources of information that will be useful in accomplishing goals or tasks.³³

In group dynamics it is important to understand that group goals and group tasks are interrelated. Edward Mabry and Richard Barnes write:

The objectives for group membership that keep a group together help the group define relevant tasks and, conversely, the tasks a group works on help to reinforce and fulfill group goals.³⁴

As leaders and members assess group dynamics they must be continually aware of communication. Communication helps the group understand the relationship of process and content. Johnson and Johnson boldly and concisely say that "communication is the basis for all human interaction and for all group functioning."³⁵ They support this summary statement with more inclusive statements regarding the importance of communication:

The very existence of a group depends on communication, on exchanging information and transmitting meaning.

All cooperative action is contingent upon effective communication, and our daily lives are filled with one communication experience after another.

Through communication members of groups teach some understanding of one another, build trust, coordinate their actions, plan strategies for goal accomplishment, agree upon a division of labor, conduct all group activity, and even exchange insults.

It is through communication that the members interact and effective communication is a prerequisite for every aspect of group functioning.³⁶

The Johnson study stresses how effective communication is important in all aspects of group dynamics. Effective communication can be observed when the receiver interprets the sender's message in the same way the sender intended it.³⁷

The sending and receiving of communications can be non-verbal as well as verbal. The alert leader and group member will learn to observe and listen effectively. Clyde Hendrick points out that individuals in a group generally feel more positive about an interaction in which their own attention is highly focused. This positive feeling is even more highlighted if all the group members are fully attentive. Hendrick observes that the more members are focused the more the participants are able to adjust their behavior to one another. This results in favorable interaction and a growing rapport among members.³⁸

For groups to be most effective they need to have a process of communication which remains open and provides a way for members to share their feelings as well as deal with content. The open style within an ongoing consistent structure allows for member participation. An implicit goal of the small group is to

utilize, as fully as possible, the resources of each person. A leader who is sensitive to this goal can be instrumental in providing an atmosphere that creates opportunities for each member to share and participate. For this reason Thomas Oden advocates that the group size should ideally be more than five so that there is a variety of human resources and that the group can practice coordination between members and thereby utilize more ideas and thoughts.³⁹

F. DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND FEATURES OF SMALL GROUPS

Group dynamics involve developmental stages. Small groups formally or informally go through these stages. As group leaders are aware of these stages, they help the members develop an effective group. The stages, as compiled by Johnson and Johnson, include:

1. Defining and structuring procedures and becoming oriented
2. Conforming to procedures and getting acquainted
3. Recognizing mutuality and building trust
4. Rebelling and differentiating
5. Committing to and taking ownership for the goals procedures, and other members
6. Functioning maturely and productively
7. Terminating.⁴⁰

An effective leader can help the group work through these stages. The leader in this style of group dynamics serves in the role of a coordinator. This leader/coordinator, as seen by Johnson and Johnson, has the following tasks in small group development:

1. To introduce, define, and structure the learning group
2. To clarify procedures, reinforce members for conforming to procedures, and help members become acquainted
3. To emphasize and highlight the cooperative interdependence among group members and encourage their engaging in both trusting and trustworthy behaviors
4. To accept the rebellion by and differentiation among group members as a normal process and use confrontation and constructive negotiation to help members establish their independence from each other and the prescribed procedures
5. To facilitate the members committing themselves to and taking ownership for the group's goals, procedures, and other members
6. To be a consultant to the group and providing needed material and informational resources for the group to function effectively
7. To signal termination and help the members move on to future groups.⁴¹

For many small groups to be successful the ownership needs to change from leader/coordinator to group members. This involves working through the seven stages as outlined above. The following explanation, as summarized by Johnson and Johnson, is very helpful in perceiving the dynamics of this transition:

The "changing of hands" of perceived ownership of goals and procedures from coordinator to group members is a gradual process that takes place as the group matures. Very briefly, during the first two stages the goals and procedures are basically the coordinator's, as the coordinator explains the goals and procedures of the discussion group and reinforces group members for engaging in appropriate tasks and maintenance actions. When group members begin to recognize their mutuality and build trust the changing of hands begins. The rebellion is an essential aspect of the group members beginning to restate the goals and procedures in their own terms and take ownership for them. Through the final three stages the group members perceive the group's goals and

procedures as being essentially theirs, not the coordinator's.⁴²

Group cohesion is an important feature needed to help a group maintain itself. Johnson and Johnson conclude that highly cohesive groups are a source of security for members. These groups serve to reduce anxiety and to heighten self-esteem.⁴³ Interestingly, groups with good cohesiveness allow for greater development and allow for more open expression of hostility and conflict than do noncohesive groups.⁴⁴ How does one know if a group is cohesive? A simple answer is that when group members like one another and wish to remain in one another's presence the group is cohesive. Certainly, cohesiveness may not be automatic in the gathering of a group and sometimes needs to be developed. With effort a group can increase and develop in cohesiveness. The following list compiled by Johnson and Johnson reflects several ways to develop cohesiveness:

1. By structuring cooperation among members
2. By successfully meeting the personal needs of members such as mutual inclusion, mutual influence, and mutual affection
3. By maintaining a high level of trust among members
4. By promoting group norms that encourage the expression of individuality, trusting and trustworthy behavior, and concern and affection among group members.⁴⁵

Building trust is a significant factor in maintaining cohesiveness. The crucial elements of trust are openness and sharing on the one hand and acceptance, support, and cooperative intentions on the other hand. The Johnson and Johnson study

states that a member can express acceptance and support for the openness and sharing of other members and at the same time express different ideas and opposing points of view.⁴⁶ Egan points out that some leaders advocate that a contract be subscribed to by the members and leaders as a group forms. Egan states that this process lends toward cohesiveness as the members agree on the general purpose, scope, and goals of the small group.⁴⁷

Another feature involved in group dynamics is that of norms. Norms of a group are the group's common beliefs regarding appropriate behavior for members. Johnson and Johnson remind us that all groups have norms, whether formal or informal, which tell how members are expected to behave.⁴⁸ These norms are important in that they help maintain behavioral consistency among members. Norms are not imposed but rather develop out of the interaction among members. The Johnson study says that they are actually "social products."⁴⁹ Norms may include some of the following:

1. Not speaking while another person speaks
2. Keeping confidential the personal information shared in the group
3. Within reason, allowing another person to finish what they have to say
4. Respect the differences in approach and ability of the members
5. Recognition of a person's right not to share if they choose to pass or not comment
6. Giving the leader the right to make decisions which keep the group process moving.

Groups start with some norms and develop others as they meet. Some norms are agreed to as group members raise questions in regard to procedures and expectations.

G. UNIQUE FEATURES OF SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

In the church a small group made up of confessing Christians has the underlying foundation of faith. Reliance on God provides tremendous freedom to grow and change through a helping relationship. The person receiving care is free to receive God's love through caregivers. Kenneth Haugk has observed that the person with faith and receiving care will be able to risk change, realizing that God will provide the cure.⁵⁰ This foundation provides a dynamic in the group that facilitates the progress of the group. Group acceptance of this common ground keeps stress off the leader. Haugk cautions church leaders and groups not to get complacent because of this faith factor. He reminds leaders and members of their responsibility to use their resources properly:

Being a recipient of care does not mean the person is simply acted upon. The one receiving care still needs to work hard at expressing feelings, sharing self, being honest, and being open to receiving care. The freedom provided by trust in the almighty Caregiver is not freedom to be irresponsible. God is providing the freedom to participate in and receive care. It is freedom that commits the whole person to the healing process.⁵¹

Small group ministry supported by the church provides an atmosphere of openness. These settings provide opportunities for members to witness in non-threatening ways. These groups help integrate new members into congregational life and provide a

structure where faith is shared and explored in a personal way. The small group provides a place for members to pray together, witness to each other, study together, and work together. The group can provide a close fellowship time and orient members toward the richness of Scripture. This activity in turn exposes people to the Holy Spirit as He works through the Word. Barlow emphasizes that the Word is also lived out as Christian people share faith, hope, and love with each other.⁵² God through His Word, as in 2 Peter, challenges the members of the Christian faith to grow:

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18.

The growth of the individual and the church can be accomplished and accelerated as members learn and grow together. John Casteel accents the potential of the small group in the church. He says that a Christian small group that is functioning in a healthy and open fashion provides an atmosphere with these characteristics:

1. Self-understanding and self-acceptance
2. Understanding and acceptance of others
3. Knowledge and understanding of Christian faith as in the Bible and Christian writings
4. Personal and experiential knowledge of God.⁵³

Small groups in the church provide significant personal sharing. When this occurs these groups serve as vehicles for individuals to be caring, loving, and honest with each other.

Participation in the Christian community is essential for genuine Christian life and for an alive faith. Expression of the

Christian faith is carried out not only in words but with feelings and actions. The church is under the imperative of Jesus' commission as recorded in Matthew:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20.

The small group in the church is one avenue of carrying out this great commission of our Lord. The functions of the small group fall primarily under the imperatives of "making disciples" and "teaching." The assurance of Jesus' presence is an irreplaceable gift given to individual Christians as well as Christians gathered in groups.

A disciple of the Lord is committed and willing to follow Christ's way. This includes a life that seeks God's will, and a desire to obey the principles taught by the Lord. Some of those principles and values are carried out in relationship to other people. Both one on one and group relationships are vital in the Christian community. Jesus worked with groups as He taught and shared His ministry with the twelve disciples and other groups of listeners. The disciples gathered with one another in homes and other places for mutual support, for study of the Word, for prayer, for communion, and for fellowship with each other.

The Scriptural reference to the dyad and small group implies a dimension of the Lord's presence that was different than the personal assurance of the Lord's presence to each individual Christian. His presence is instrumental in building

Christian bonds between His people. His presence opens up new avenues of relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ and sons and daughters of God. This small group gathering for Christians is a family affair in which the Triune God is involved. The Heavenly Father shares His care and His love; Jesus forgives, renews, and rejoins people in the Christian family; and the Holy Spirit invites people to faith, enriches them with spiritual gifts, and keeps them in the faith.

H. CONCLUSION

The spiritual dimension of small groups in the church can assist in the task of providing Christian support and care, of providing a Christian atmosphere for learning and sharing the Word, and of providing an opportunity for Christians to share and experience the living faith. The values of the Christian faith challenge Christians to develop relationships as well as to seek ways to become closer to the Lord and all His family members. The Scriptures challenge Christians to be active in this task of building up one another as in the following texts:

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Romans 14:19.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:10.

Small groups have many characteristics and dynamics which can help the church in providing a setting in which members can build up one another in love and good works.

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CHAPTER THREE

BUILDING A POTENTIAL GROUP MODEL AT ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

A. FAVORABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF EXISTING GROUPS AT ST. LUKE'S

This chapter begins by exploring some favorable characteristics of several existing groups at St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.

1. The Veterans of the Cross

The Veterans of the Cross reflects a number of positive characteristics of a small group. This is a group made up of retired men of the church who meet twice a month for Bible Study and service tasks. Also included in the time together is a social time with coffee and light refreshments. The group meets from 8:30 a.m. till noon. The Bible study is led by the pastor with time for reflection by the group members. Members share in the reading of the Scripture text. The study is based on a book of the Bible and is open ended with no need to complete a certain portion. The structure already lends toward an informal time with little stress for the members and leader. Following the Bible study is a discussion for reviewing tasks that could be done in and around church. Most of these tasks have to do with maintenance of property and grounds. A few tasks have to do with helping in other areas. For example, The Veterans of the Cross

annually help put up the Christmas trees for the Special Decoration Committee. The Veterans of the Cross have also served as pallbearers upon the request of a family in the church.

The informal and cooperative spirit of the group allows members to feel comfortable in the group without a great demand for production. Some of the retired men have health problems and share only in light tasks. The group was begun in 1974 and has not changed significantly in its structure. The group varies in size from about eleven to sixteen. Over the years the group has continued to recruit retired men of the congregation.

The group has a positive image in the congregation and is often complimented for the support it gives in helping the church maintain its property and facilities. The group also meets some social needs of the retired men and aids the development of friendships. New members of the congregation who are retired often become involved and quickly meet other members. The Bible knowledge of the men varies widely, but the informal style of study allows participation by listening or conversing.

The group does have a chairman, secretary, and refreshment coordinator. Decisions of the group are made after the Bible study and before the group breaks up for tasks. The process of assigning tasks is done by volunteering and consensus. In general, men volunteer for tasks based on their interests or skills.

The informal and open style of this group lends toward a sense of well-being for members who participate. As the men

participate, they are being supportive of their church and of each other. The group remembers one another in prayer when there are special needs. The group has an honorary plaque listing those who have died. The Veterans of the Cross come together as an honorary group for the funeral of a fellow member.

The group continues to maintain itself as the needs for fellowship, learning, and usefulness remain. If the group got larger it would probably need to divide to continue to meet the needs of individuals. Perhaps the start up of another group on different days with a slightly different style would attract men who are not currently involved.

2. St. Luke's Women's Ministry Circles

Another small group structure is that of the circles for the Women's Ministry of St. Luke's. The circles are groups of women who join together to support a common interest area. They also share a topical Bible study and support a mission area. Some may join the circle because of the time it meets, but most join because of the interest area the circle supports. Currently there are ten circles. This structure for ministry among women started in 1971 at St. Luke's. Interest areas vary greatly and are listed here:

Anna Circle	-Maintains St. Luke's Book Store
Dorcas Circle	-Produces quilts and gathers items for Lutheran World Relief & other charities
Elizabeth Circle	-Maintains and promotes a church library
Eunice Circle	-Supports Sunday School & Christian education with materials & resources

Lois Circle	-Operates St.Luke's Pre-school
Lydia Circle	-Visits homebound and nursing home residents
Martha Circle	-Supports a variety of activities with crafts
Priscilla Circle	-Is the altar guild for the church
Rebekah Circle	-Assembles St.Luke's Newsletter and helps send other mailings
Sarah Circle	-Supports activities & supplies activity materials at nursing homes.

In addition to the interest area, the circles share topical Bible studies and devotions suggested by the International Lutheran Women's Missionary League of which the Women's Ministry of St. Luke's is an active member. The circles also support the common inreach and outreach missions of the entire Women's Ministry of St. Luke's. Each circle chooses a special mission area to support.

The individual circle meetings do vary in content and style but are expected to include these three areas:

1. Devotion and Bible topic
2. Business items
3. Mission and interest area planning.

Depending on the nature of the interest area, a circle may meet for project work days as well. The circles each have a chairperson, a secretary, and a devotion leader. Some circles have a treasurer and/or other officers as needed. The regular monthly meetings for circles are about one and a half hours to two hours. The time together is extended with light refreshments

and time to share informally.

The sizes of the circles, with one exception, fall into the small group structure. Many of the benefits of fellowship, cohesiveness, and cooperation are seen within the circle groups. Countless friendships have been fostered in these groups. These friendships have been a supportive feature for women involved in the life of the church. Originally, as the circle structure was developed, it was thought women would switch circles periodically to work in other areas and get to know more women of the church. This has not happened to any great extent due to the preferred time slots and interest areas of the individual women.

The longstanding membership of the circles has been positive for the women because solid friendships and mutual understanding has developed. However, this sometimes seems to make it harder for a new person to break into a circle. Martha Circle developed in 1994. It's members are generally women who have not been involved in other circles or who are new to the church. This factor supports the concept of developing new small groups as a church grows or changes.

The strength of these circles is the shared study, the common interest, the mission pursuits, and the fellowship. The time for informal sharing also provides a good atmosphere for the development of relationships. The stability of membership indicates positive feelings and personal satisfaction for the members.

3. Small Group Bible Studies

Several small group Bible studies have also provided positive characteristics. These Bible study groups have varied in their membership from couples, women, men, or mixed. Some of these studies were short term and others long term.

In addition to exploring the content of the study, these groups provided time for relationship building and sharing. Usually sharing occurred at an informal time. This informal time was at a break or when refreshments were served. As openness and sharing developed, it carried over into the study itself. Generally, these groups met for at least an hour and a half.

A marriage enrichment study done several years ago is a good example of a positive functioning small group. There were twelve persons enrolled with a wide range of ages and years of marriage. The study material provided a good basis for discussion, and the informal break and refreshment time allowed the group members an ideal setting for developing deeper relationships. The time scheduled for each meeting was an hour and a half and included study, prayer, break, discussion, and sharing. Members could stay longer as they chose. The group decided to end the study with a worship service in which vows could be renewed. Group members invited other members of the church to join them for this renewal service. Members expressed many positive feelings about the group interaction and the uplifting experience of learning, sharing, and growing together.

In addition to the Bible study groups above, there are

Sunday morning Bible studies between our church services. These groups meet only one hour due to time constraints. These classes generally concentrate on content. The nature of the structure limits the time for the development of personal friendships and sharing. Even though these Bible study groups primarily meet educational purposes, they also meet some of the goals of small group ministry.

4. A Committee or Ministry Group

Sometimes a committee or ministry will function with positive small group characteristics. This may happen informally as a more open style develops and the group takes time for personal interaction in addition to the business at hand. Many times this interaction occurs at a break time or social time. There have been short term committees at St. Luke's that were sorry to see their task end because of the "good time" they had together. This positive reflection was a result of the open style of the meeting in which friendships and sharing could develop. It also referred to serving in the work of the Lord and His church with a sense of joy and fulfillment. The members had moved beyond task to interaction and mutual care.

A feature that seemed important to this positive feeling of the committee or ministry was unpressured time for sharing personal thoughts and feelings. When a break time or sharing time is included, this provides opportunity for members to get past task oriented discussion to personal discussion and sharing.

The first pages of this chapter have traced the favorable

characteristics and dynamics of existing groups at St. Luke's. The rest of the chapter will focus on the selection and development of leaders, the development of helpful goals and characteristics, and the utilization of spiritual resources in the small group ministry of the church. This focus provides a foundation for building a model for the development and enrichment of small group ministry at St. Luke's.

B. SELECTING AND DEVELOPING SMALL GROUP LEADERS IN THE CONGREGATION

As summarized in chapter two, leadership is very important. First and foremost, leaders need a strong love for their Lord and the ability to exude care to a variety of persons. Persons chosen as leaders would be active in their worship life, in their study of God's Word, and in their participation of Holy Communion. Ideally, leaders should have good communication skills, a willingness to learn, the ability to keep the group focused, and a style of leadership that is flexible.

Leaders for small groups are endorsed or selected by church leaders on the basis of being qualified. Willingness is important, but it is not enough if other qualifications are not present. The desire to personally learn and grow is a favorable characteristic to look for in persons being considered.

Leaders are developed and mentored as they are part of other small groups and experience group dynamics for themselves. Church leaders need to utilize ways to track members who are leaders in professional, volunteer, and community groups.

Persons with these experiences and who share an open love and commitment for the Lord are potential small group leaders for the ministry of the church.

As stated above, the first priority of selecting and developing leaders for church groups is in choosing persons with clear spiritual qualifications. Naturally, there are a number of traits that are desirable. Characteristics listed by Ed Barlow include:

1. Love of people
2. Humility
3. Desire to grow with others
4. Testimony of Christ and His church
5. Ability to relate to people
6. Desire to witness
7. Flexibility
8. Emotional maturity and stability
9. Willingness to admit error and learn from mistakes
10. Dependence on prayer.¹

Christians who feel they have abilities to lead should be encouraged to develop this interest. There should not be a false humility that keeps them from developing their desire to lead. Griffin reminds us that there is nothing immoral or inappropriate with the desire to lead.² Paul in his letter to Timothy affirms the desire to lead as a laudable trait:

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. 1 Timothy 3:1.

Once leaders have been selected, they need to be developed for leadership in the small group context. For example, Hestenes lists important tasks for a leader in facilitating a growth group. Training for leaders should include education in these following tasks:

1. The leader is early to welcome people and is prepared ahead of time.
2. The leader sees that the seating arrangement is such that there is good eye contact with one another.
3. The leader starts on time and can simply say to latecomers: "Welcome, we are doing this or that."
4. The leader serves as a facilitator and seeks to involve all members in the discussion and helps maintain good patterns of communication.
5. The leader can ask sharing questions which gives permission for members to talk about themselves in a safe way.
6. The leader emphasizes the importance of names by having name cards or other visible means of identity.
7. The leader can gather basic data by having the member fill out an information sheet with: name, phone, address, birthday, children, place of work, etc.³

Leaders need to be instructed about the importance of the initial openness of a group. Clinebell lists as a crucial factor the need for the leader to be "open, honest, flexible, and caring."⁴ These sharing questions, which Hestenes suggests, are helpful for leaders to use in the initial group meeting:

1. What are two things about yourself that would help us to know you?
2. Won't you, please, tell us something about yourself?
3. What is one main thing you do in your work?
4. What one thing do you do for fun or enjoyment?

5. Would you, please, tell us what you are hoping to get out of this group?
6. Who are you? Describe yourself by sharing five key words.⁵

Leaders are encouraged to use and develop skills which help facilitate group interaction. Leaders learn positive ways to influence those they lead. Leaders are made aware of the fact that leadership can be shared by multiple group members. Mabry and Barnes point out that multiple leadership can be effective as long as the line of responsibility is clear:

Leaders do not always need to perform many leadership functions, and leadership may be spread among all members of a group. However, it is the task of those people accepting the label of leader to see that necessary leadership functions are fulfilled by someone.⁶

Those designated as leaders are trained to take these basic responsibilities in regard to the group:

1. Providing a structure which keeps the sense of purpose and vision
2. Initiating activities which help carry out its goals
3. Encouraging others in their involvement and interaction
4. Setting expectations with the group so there are ways to measure progress
5. Organizing and tracking the necessary logistics.⁷

As Mabry and Barnes strongly state, leaders need to be trained to clarify roles:

An effective leader clarifies group responsibility and member roles and/or facilitates discussion of these issues to the satisfaction of group members. If members clearly understand their roles, and accept the responsibility of group goals, then a leader should shape his or her style accordingly.⁸

In Christian small groups the leader learns to provide structure to help group members grow in relationship to Christ. Leaders are encouraged to provide group members time to set personal goals. These personal goals do not need to be shared in the group unless this is part of the group understanding. Steve Barker suggests these three areas in which personal goals could be set:

1. A commitment to grow in one's own relationship with Jesus Christ
2. A commitment to get involved in other people's lives in a wholesome way of listening, caring and sharing
3. A commitment to try to influence others in positive ways to develop and use their spiritual gifts.⁹

Howard Clinebell encourages churches who are developing small group ministry to have a leadership training program. This can involve role playing, learning group methods, experiential learning of leadership skills, and training and enrichment for leaders.¹⁰ Churches can add spiritual growth and relationship strengthening exercises to enrich the training program for their leaders.¹¹ The small group model can be used for the training program so that the leaders experience the small group as they learn more about leading.

C. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HELPFUL CHARACTERISTICS FOR A SMALL GROUP

Small groups in the church meet for a variety of reasons. It is important that the key reasons be developed and fostered in the church setting. Groups in churches can meet a number of needs. Roberta Hestenes lists some of these

significant reasons for meeting:

1. The need for spiritual growth
2. The need for friendship, support, and encouragement
3. The need for strength in the face of temptation and trials
4. The need to give and to receive love
5. The need to serve others.¹²

In the church's small groups, these needs should be explicitly stated and intentionally fostered. In fact, as people who commit themselves to God's Word, they find these reasons for meeting highlighted. Paul in Romans and in Ephesians emphasizes these needs:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Ephesians 3:15-17.

The small group ministry of the church benefits as leaders and members become familiar with and apply dimensions of human development into the structure. For example, the aims on which Clinebell focuses for growth groups apply very well for the small church study group as well. He suggests a balance of the three interdependent dimensions of human development which are labeled as inreach, outreach, and upreach.¹³ A brief description of each aim is useful:

1. Inreach is the growth of awareness of self as in "coming alive to oneself."
2. Outreach is the process of relating responsibly and responsively to others. This involves "living in terms of the growth needs of the family of man."
3. Upreach refers to growth of a stronger, more trusting connection with the vertical dimension; hence, with the source of all life and growth.¹⁴

It is important for group members to be made aware of these aims, since small groups in the church generally hold these aims whether they are expressed explicitly or not. Biblical principles focus on our relationship to God first with the relationship to self and to others following. A growing relationship with God provides insight and courage to grow in our relationship to self and to others. These aims are important as the small group model is developed. This multiple focus of inreach, outreach, and upreach is an important characteristic to be fostered in the church's small group ministry.

Leaders are to be made aware of the importance of primary characteristics of meaningful small groups. They need to be cognizant about the essential factors which help people fit into a group and keep them together to complete their goals. Emery Griffin writes that he has observed that in successful groups people know where they fit in.¹⁵ He lists cohesiveness, role differentiation, and common commitment as the three main signs of good groups.¹⁶ These can be fostered by the leader and members of the group as they clarify their roles and goals.

Group facilitators need to be aware that the most important of the above three signs is cohesiveness. Cohesiveness

involves a sense of group identity, a feeling of "we-ness." Griffin says that cohesiveness does not mean the absence of conflict. He states that "when people are close, they have the resources to deal with conflict."¹⁷ Groups which are close allow conflict to be dealt with rather than hiding it and merely communicating on the surface level. If the bonds are weak in a group, people seem to sense that disagreement would fracture the group, so they avoid bringing up the conflict.¹⁸ Group leaders/facilitators are to be made aware of this factor, so that they are willing to allow and to manage conflict in the group.

Another characteristic that group leaders/facilitators need to develop is that of openness. Openness is a trait which Mabry and Barnes feel is a key factor for healthy small groups.¹⁹ Openness in a group will be demonstrated by the sharing of positive and negative feelings. Openness refers to a person's willingness to honestly share inner thoughts and feelings with others.²⁰ Leaders learn by experience and observation that the openness of a group has a great effect on member satisfaction. Studies by Mabry and Barnes support the claim that, at times, process in a small group is more important, in terms of member satisfaction, than the outcome of a concrete task.²¹

Leaders and members in small groups are taught to listen to each other and to be open to each other. This process helps them develop better communication skills. Mabry and Barnes rate communication as the central theme of small groups. This is the glue, so to speak, that holds the group together, or as they say:

Communication binds the elements of small group systems into functional social entities.²²

Group identity is also an important characteristic to develop. In order to foster group identity, leaders and members learn and practice good sharing skills. Clinebell observes how emotional involvement in the group increases as its members communicate and share meaningful experiences.²³ Hestenes writes about various levels of communication. She notes that a deepening of the level of communication is a mark of growing cohesion and trust among the members of a group.²⁴ The following are the five levels as she describes them:

- Level 1 - Cliche Conversation: This includes chit-chat and safe subjects. Talk may be about the weather, sports, or local happenings. This often occurs in the first part of the meeting.
- Level 2 - Sharing of information, facts, events, and ideas: It is not really about self but responds to questions and seeks factual feedback.
- Level 3 - Sharing of ideas and opinions: In this level there are more personal ideas and opinions. There is more risk in talking about self and knowing each other.
- Level 4 - Sharing of feelings: Risk is taken to tell other members feelings and not just thinking. This takes significant trust. Self-disclosure is risked as the group benefit of being known and knowing others is highly valued.
- Level 5 - Peak Communication: Members strongly experience their sense of belonging and sharing without defensiveness or barriers. Openness and self-disclosure shape the flow of conversation. There is a rare level of intimacy and oneness.²⁵

The work of the Holy Spirit is emphasized as leaders and members seek to develop small groups in the church. Relating

with each other in the church group involves the work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit motivates through the Word. The Holy Spirit's work also takes place through the witness and living out of the Christian faith since the Word of God is the basis of faith and Christian commitment. Meaningful communication involves putting God's commands into action as He advises in Romans 12:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:9-12.

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Romans 12:15-16.

In summary, helpful characteristics for the small group model in the church include cohesiveness, openness, and an atmosphere for good communication. Good communication for the small group in the church is built around the sharing of God's Word in study and in group interaction. The multiple focus of inreach, outreach, and upreach becomes part of the group as God's people seek to honor Him and share His love with others.

D. DEVELOPING GOALS NEEDED FOR SMALL GROUPS TO FUNCTION PROPERLY

Having clear goals in a group is helpful for those participating. A goal according to Johnson and Johnson is a "desired place toward which people are working, a state of affairs which people desire."²⁶ Johnson and Johnson place high emphasis on goals as they believe them to be a key to a group's effectiveness. They refer to these goals in the following statement:

If they are accepted, understood, and desired by group members, group goals direct, channel, motivate, coordinate, energize, and guide the behavior of group members. The goals of a group, therefore, are the beginning point in evaluating effectiveness.²⁷

Some goals may seem evident by the nature of the group. Other goals need to be developed by group consensus. In either case, it is important to establish the goals during the initial meeting. It is also wise to periodically refer to the goals in order to keep the group on line with its purpose and desired outcome. Continued clarification of goals needs to take place in these initial encounters. Clyde Reid and others refer to this as setting a group contract or covenant. Reid lists the following areas as ones to be covered as group members set a contract:

1. Purpose of group to include goals
2. Size and composition
3. Time factor
4. Level of interaction
5. Leader or leadership
6. Group disciplines; for example: Attendance expectations, Refreshment decisions, Praying for each other, Confidentiality, Roles and responsibilities of members/leaders, Preparation, etc.²⁸

Members of the group need to be aware of the goals since this is an essential part of group cooperation. Johnson and Johnson strongly emphasize the importance of this awareness:

It is the awareness of group goals that solidifies cooperation among group members, because a goal helps members judge what actions by colleagues are for the good of the group and in what ways each member depends on the others. The motivation of members to work for the achievement of their group's goals is heightened by their participation in setting the goals.²⁹

Goals encompass the life of the group and serve a variety of functions. Here are four functions as seen by Johnson and Johnson:

1. Goals are guides for action. Roles and responsibilities are assigned to group members on the basis of what needs to be done in order for the group's goals to be accomplished.
2. The efficiency and usefulness of group procedures are evaluated on the basis of how they facilitate goal accomplishment.
3. Conflicts among group members are resolved on the basis of what helps the group achieve its goals.
4. Goals are the motivation for the behavior of group members. Without goals the members would not be motivated to take any action. Group goal accomplishments are based on the members' commitment to engage in the activities necessary to achieve the goals.³⁰

Margaret Sawin works with small groups in family settings. She writes about the advantages of establishing goals by contracting the family or group members.³¹ It is very important for each member to be involved in the process of contracting. This process involves goal setting and commitment to the group. Sawin emphasizes this in the following statement:

Contracting is the key to success in regard to involving everyone as much as possible. Groups that did not covenant had less success in keeping the involvement.³²

The contract or covenant can be written out for each member or placed on a large chart in the room. Even if the contract is not looked at often, it is important that the members keep in mind their agreement and goals as the group proceeds.

E. UTILIZING SPIRITUAL RESOURCES FOR SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

Within the discussion of purpose and goal setting, the small group in the church can also agree on ways they will utilize spiritual resources in the group. The expectation of using spiritual resources is a natural part of the church group, but it should not be taken for granted or assumed. These resources can involve Bible usage, prayer, worship, blessing, communion, and spiritual sharing.

1. Prayer

Prayer is a resource that can be utilized to begin, to conclude, and to enhance group process and discussion. God invites His people to draw near and share everything with Him. This certainly would include goals, hopes, concerns, thoughts, hurts, feelings, uncertainties, successes, thanksgivings, praise, confessions, and any other considerations. Prayer is the gift given to do this sharing. Kenneth Haugk points out how God specifically invites His people to approach Him together in prayer.³³ He points out how the context of James 5 shows that the reference to prayer is for people praying together:

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. James 5:16.

Haugk goes on to emphasize that not only do we pray for each other because God urged this, but we also pray together because Jesus added His special promises to shared prayer.³⁴ One reference to this promise is in Matthew 18:

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Matthew 18:19-20.

Unfortunately, prayer has been reduced by some to a formal ritual of opening or closing a Christian group or meeting. When the Biblical intent for prayer is utilized, it is a powerful tool of the Holy Spirit. It is an effective tool for spiritual growth, comfort, healing, understanding, and hope. Haugk has caught the great significance of prayer in group life as he writes:

It is important for us to remember that God is the third party in the praying relationship, actively concerned for you and the person with whom you are praying. In prayer God has promised to listen to you attentively, to understand your needs, and to answer your requests. Thus, your motivation for praying with others extends far beyond the fulfillment of religious formality.³⁵

Some people in the church are not experienced in a prayer life. The small group is an excellent time to provide opportunities to grow in this spiritual gift. Prayer can have beneficial effects on relationships within the small group. Haugk catches the key to this benefit in this statement:

Another reason for mutual prayer is the beneficial effects on your relationship with the other person. Consider what an intimate personal experience prayer is. As you are honest with the God, "from whom no secrets are hid," you are also honest and open with each other. As you draw nearer to God, you will naturally draw closer to each other.³⁶

In the last twenty years more members of St. Luke's have been participating in prayer at meetings and Bible studies. This is an uplifting and enriching use of prayer. There is also a prayer chain which offers prayers of all kinds on a regular basis

each week and when special needs arise. As members are open in prayer communication there is often a growing openness with one another. There is much potential for spiritual growth as prayer is utilized more fully. It's use for small group enrichment and development is especially meaningful.

2. The Bible

Using the Bible is also a goal for Christian small groups. This is the resource that over the generations has shaped the life of the church more than any other. Roberta Hestenes reminds us that the church through the years has been characterized as "people of the book."³⁷ Paul summarizes the great usefulness of Scripture as he encouraged Timothy to utilize and stay in the Word. This challenge is recorded in these words of 2 Timothy:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

Many people who do not do personal Bible reading at home will do it in the context of the small group.³⁸ The use of the Bible in small groups can help "equip the saints" as the Scripture refers to in Ephesians 4:11-12. All Christians are called to be witnesses of Christ and to serve Him by seeking His will in all things. Christians are to use their time, ability, and other resources to live as His disciples. The use of the

Bible in the small group helps Christians grow in their understanding of this calling. Hestenes refers to this process in the following statement:

In order to know and fulfill this call it is helpful to study the Scriptures with others who are attempting to learn what it means to be servant Christians. Solitary servanthood is very difficult if not impossible. The interaction and discussion within a group as each individual reflects on Biblical stories and themes can be very helpful to Christian growth and service.³⁹

Kenneth Haugk also stresses the use of the Bible in the small group setting. Haugk points out that the Bible is a record of how God ministered to the needs of people throughout the ages.⁴⁰ The members of small groups live within the real world with suffering, oppression, conflict, grief, sickness, tragedy, and death. They can use the good news of the Gospel to encourage and uplift them. When the Bible is used there are many possible applications of the Gospel for the lives of the group members. Haugk compiles a list of benefits from Bible usage for the lives of people. The following are some of them:

1. The Bible relates how God sent His Son, Jesus, to become a human being, so that He could bring love, healing, hope, forgiveness, and new life to all.
2. The Bible addresses itself to a broad range of human concerns, experiences, and situations.
3. The Bible contains reassuring words and promises of God.
4. The Psalms, for example, run the gamut of human emotions: from despair to exhilaration and from anger at God to love for Him.
5. The Parables capture various truths that enrich the spiritual lives of people.

6. The lives of Biblical characters provide examples of people with weaknesses and strengths who placed their faith in God.
7. The teachings of the Bible instruct people in the art of living in relationship to God and one another.⁴¹

3. Witnessing and Sharing

Witnessing to the faith and sharing encouragement as members in Christ are spiritual resources that can also be utilized in a small group setting in the church. Some Christians have the spiritual gift of encouragement and others have special ability in sharing their faith. These gifts contribute to the openness and closeness of the group. Spontaneous witnessing and sharing provides a way to apply Scripture to the current needs or feelings of the group. Haugk, as one among many, feels that it is important to be able to introduce Scripture and its concepts in a variety of ways to avoid the pitfall of overstating the phrase, "The Bible says."⁴²

Witnessing and sharing in the comfort of a cohesive small group provides a setting for members to grow in their confidence to share in situations where it requires more risk. Experience is a great teacher, and the Christian small group may provide this opportunity. The benefit of witnessing and sharing can be felt in several ways. Those witnessing and sharing the faith often grow in their faith as they share; those hearing the witness may be encouraged in their faith; and those who receive the sharing may feel closer to the group.

4. Worship and Communion

Worship and communion are resources used by some small groups. These are usually groups set up as spiritual growth groups. In general, the small group in the church will not be involved in formal worship or sharing communion just as a group. In the wider sense, worship is involved in praying, sharing, and Bible usage. Groups may find it meaningful to conclude a special time by attending communion together or being involved in a worship service. The marriage enrichment group, spoken of earlier in this chapter, concluded their study with a worship service that involved the renewal of marriage vows. The service was planned with group suggestions and participation. Those participating found it to be a very meaningful conclusion to the small group study.

Due to time limitations and the nature of most small groups, the sharing of Holy Communion will usually not be involved. In the wider sense, the communion or fellowship of the church is taking place as fellow Christians relate to one another. This is enhanced by sharing, praying, witnessing, and studying together. Putting the principles of faith into action brings with it communion and fellowship. Jesus challenges all His disciples to serve one another as in Mark 10:

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Mark 10:43-45.

5. The Blessing

Departing with a blessing is a special spiritual resource that small groups may utilize. Haugk calls attention to this very appropriate Judeo-Christian tradition of sharing the blessing.⁴³ The Latin root of benediction simply means "well-saying." So rather than just saying "have a good day," "take it easy," or "keep your chin up," the blessing conveys faith and farewell as a caring person.⁴⁴

God's action is the foundation of the Christian benediction. In the Old Testament God gave Moses instruction to have Aaron and his sons bless the people of Israel with these words:

The Lord bless you
and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
The Lord turn His face toward you
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-27.

In the New Testament the holy writers capture God's action with a variety of benedictions and closings. Perhaps, the most commonly used ones are these from 2 Corinthians 14 and Philippians 4:7:

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and
the love of God, and
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will
guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

These benedictions can be used in a variety of ways. They can be shared as written or changed to the first person. They can be given by the leader, given by another group member, or employed by the group. The blessing statement may be as simple as: "The

peace of God be with you," "God be with you," "God bless you," or "May God watch over you."

The blessing can be accented by personal touch. The close of a meeting or group session is a good time for a handshake, a hug, or an arm around the shoulder. It is also a good time to share a thought. Haugk feels strongly about Christian small groups sharing a blessing. He gives two good reasons for giving a blessing in this statement:

A benediction proclaims that God has you in His care and is responsible for your well-being. In this sense, benedictions are remembering tools.⁴⁵

Haugk reminds us that the benediction may be tied into a personal thought for another group member.⁴⁶ Examples of these are: "Sally, may God watch over you as you have your surgery;" "Randy, may God bless your job interview this week;" or "Tom, God's peace be with you as you meet with your kids."

There are other ways that spiritual resources and material can be used in Christian small groups, but the ones just discussed are the main ones. The Holy Spirit is at work wherever the Word is shared. This spiritual blessing adds a tremendous dimension for the small group in the church. The Word is not limited just to written and spoken avenues but is also involved in Christian activities of caring, sharing, and serving.

F. CONCLUSIONS

The approach taken in this chapter to build a small group model for use at St. Luke's was to discover and explore the favorable dynamics and characteristics of existing small groups

at St.Luke's. Other desired characteristics and dynamics, looked at in previous chapters, were also considered for the development of a potential model. The need to select and develop small group leaders is a crucial part of small group ministry. The training of leaders, the planning of a workable structure, and the development of goals are important steps for building a model. This was for the purpose of seeking those elements that are practical and beneficial for small group development and enrichment at St.Luke's. The ground work was also established for evaluating and choosing the unique goals, characteristics, and dynamics for the spiritual dimension of these small groups.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

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⁷Steve Barker, et al. Good Things Come in Small Groups: The Dynamics of Good Group Life (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 42.

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²¹Ibid., 194.

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²⁸Clyde H. Reid, Groups Alive--Church Alive (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 34-44.

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³¹Margaret M. Sawin, "The Family Cluster: Providing Hope for Families," Hope For Families, ed., Margaret M. Sawin (New York: Sadlier, 1982), 16.

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³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Hestenes, 14.

³⁸Ibid., 16.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Haugk, 118.

⁴¹Ibid., 118-119.

⁴²Ibid., 121.

⁴³Ibid., 123.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 124.

⁴⁶Ibid., 126.

CONCLUDING CHAPTER

STRENGTHENING THE MINISTRY AT ST. LUKE'S WITH A MODEL FOR SMALL GROUP ENRICHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

A. REASONS FOR ATTENTION TO SMALL GROUPS AT ST. LUKE'S

There are several reasons for attention to small groups for the ministry at St. Luke's. One reason is that small groups have been effective tools in the past and present ministry of the church. Another reason is that the small group ministry structure has the potential of meeting changing needs in our church and community. A third reason is that the small group concept appears to be a helpful tool to further strengthen the ministry at St. Luke's at this time of its history.

The third reason became evident as a result of study and reflection on the past, present, and future ministry at St. Luke's. As St. Luke's grew, its leaders felt that greater emphasis was needed in the area of Christian education, especially, with ministry to youth. Staff studies were done and the decision reached to request a Director of Christian Education (DCE) Intern for a year. This was set into action and St. Luke's was served by DCE Intern David Reineke from the fall of 1986 to the summer of 1987. Positive feelings resulted from these months of working with a DCE Intern. The Ministry on Christian Education recommended that St. Luke's call a full time DCE.

While the church council studied this recommendation, the Associate Pastor took a call to another congregation. This again was a natural time to reflect, study, and evaluate the goals and needs of St. Luke's. It was then recommended that two full time staff workers be called. Much attention was given to staff calls and job descriptions. After a staff needs study, St. Luke's entered the calling process for both an associate pastor and a director of Christian education.

In December of 1988 Rev. David Albers accepted the call as associate pastor. His call focuses on visitation ministry to active and inactive members. This focus rose out of the perceived need to give encouragement, care, and love to the members in a more personal way. It was also felt that as members were personally encouraged, more would become involved in the ministry and mission of the church. The vision of the leaders was to maintain a caring church community, meet the needs of the members in a greater manner, and increase the involvement of members in the church.

In April of 1989 John Hagge accepted the call as director of Christian education. This call focused on a more encompassing ministry to youth and greater attention to all areas of Christian education. It was felt that a full time worker could more effectively develop and maintain an active outreach to the youth of the church and help oversee the efforts of Christian education for all ages. The vision of the leaders was to strengthen and maintain learning opportunities for the entire membership and to

provide strong guidance for the ministry to and with the youth.

In 1990 the writer of this paper had an opportunity to take a course on family therapy at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The systems approach was one of the emphases of the course. The approach applied not only to families but organizations like the church. Edwin Friedman has done extensive work in demonstrating family process in church and synagogue.¹ In his book, Generation to Generation, he makes the following statement:

Religious institutions not only function like families, they also contain families. Indeed they often derive their very structure from families.²

This writer had participated in all the staff study committees and had engaged in the evaluation of the ministry at St. Luke's during the preceding years. As a summary project for the family therapy course, he did an appraisal of St. Luke's using a systems approach. This appraisal is Appendix A.³ The church council was later led in a study of this appraisal by the vice-chairman of the congregation. The comments and discussion affirmed the appraisal, and the leaders were interested in developing ministries to meet the needs and goals of St. Luke's. The current mission statement of St. Luke's has been reaffirmed by the church council at its annual retreats. The statement is printed weekly to help members keep a focus on the mission and ministry of the church. This is St. Luke's mission statement:

In joyful response to all that our gracious God has done for us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we dedicate ourselves to growing in faith and love; to working together in God's Kingdom; and to reaching out with the Gospel of Jesus.⁴

The appraisal and periodic goal evaluations are ways to direct our focus on the vision and mission of the congregation. There are several discoveries in the appraisal that contribute to the importance of small group ministry.

In life cycle terms St. Luke's is in the middle age of its life; it is forty-seven years old. Martin Saarinen has studied life cycles of congregations. He says that when a congregation moves to its "maturity" age it needs to keep a clear focus on its mission to prevent stagnation.⁵ We live in a community with shift work, changing schedules, and many demands on people's time. This is one of the reasons, for example, the Women's Ministry circles have a variety of meeting times to provide choices. Other groups and committees also have to schedule meetings and events with attention given to the many varying schedules.

The small group is one way to help meet some of the developing needs of the church. According to Saarinen's data, St. Luke's is at a time in its history when it needs to put time into restating its mission.⁶ The church needs to maintain its strong continuity and its areas of strength, yet it needs to be more willing to develop new areas of inreach and outreach. Small groups can be tried in areas where the needs are recognized. A small group was developed in 1994 when a need arose for another circle. This was the Martha circle referred to in chapter three.

The area of assimilation is also an important area that larger churches must consider to remain healthy. This was

referred to in the appraisal.⁷ In recent years orientation meetings have been held at St. Luke's for those who have joined. The orientation meeting included those who joined by transfer, reaffirmation, or adult confirmation. Even though new members attend only one orientation meeting, a format similar to Style B of the Model has been used. The Model with its three styles will be outlined later in this chapter. St. Luke's could further enhance this assimilation process by offering a special six week small group Bible study for these new members.

St. Luke's is a "ranch" according to Lyle Schaller's categorizing.⁸ A ranch is a church whose average worship size is over 450. St. Luke's average worship is about 530. Because of this size, healthy cells or groups within the church are needed to help build meaningful community. This is another good reason for further enrichment and development of the small group concept.

B. ENRICHMENT OF CURRENT GROUPS

The health of committees, ministries, and Bible study groups is an important aspect of meeting current challenges and keeping the focus on ministry. Since many of these committees, ministries, and Bible studies fall into the small group size, it is felt that the enrichment of these groups is a very positive approach to the current challenges at St. Luke's.

The model being suggested for the small groups has an open style. This open style intentionally provides the time and atmosphere for interpersonal communication. The model being

suggested provides time for sharing and prayer within the time frame the committee, Bible study, support group, circle, or ministry meets. This not a new or innovative model, but it is a time proven model. Current and past small groups at St. Luke's which used styles of this model have been healthy and meaningful small groups. The following are outlines of the model with three varying styles. These styles of the model are suggested for the enrichment of small groups in the church as well as for the development of new groups:

1. The Model--Style A

1. Greeting: Time before the start
Hello, Handshake, Hug, or appropriate greeting is shared. The leader/facilitator opens the session.
2. Sharing time: 10 minutes
Each person who chooses may share a brief experience or thought. The leader/facilitator monitors the time.
3. Agenda setting: 5 minutes
The leader/facilitator briefly shares the agenda for the meeting or study and handles any discussion regarding changes or additions.
4. A brief prayer by the leader/facilitator or a volunteer. The prayer pulls together thoughts from the sharing time and agenda of the day.
5. Main content: 40 minutes for 90 minute group
50 minutes for 120 minute group
This is led/facilitated by the leader. The leadership for a meeting can rotate as the group decides. It is best for there to be one overall leader/facilitator.
6. Break time: 10 minutes
Light refreshments are recommended.
7. Wrap up time: 10 minutes for 90 minute group
30 minutes for 120 minute group

Closing thoughts on the main agenda, Bible study, or meeting content is shared at this time. This can include unfinished items, announcements, group decisions, and/or assignments for future sessions. Generally there is no major new business or content from the main agenda or Bible study introduced in this time period.

8. The devotional closing: 5 minutes
This devotional could include a Bible text, especially, if the main content was a business meeting. It is suggested that this section close with prayer. Many styles of prayer could be used. The group members can suggest prayer needs and then a volunteer can pray; the leader/facilitator could develop a list and lead the group in prayer, or members could take turns in praying.
9. The closing blessing: 5 minutes
This blessing can vary greatly. The leader/facilitator shares a general blessing; the group shares a blessing statement together; or the meeting breaks for members to give a word of blessing to one another.
10. Extended time: Informal time after official closing
Members stay to share with each other as they choose. The leader/facilitator or a designee stays.

2. The Model--Style B

1. Call to order: Starts at the designated time
The leader/facilitator calls the meeting to order. The leader/facilitator or a volunteer opens with a brief devotion or prayer.
2. Agenda setting: 5 minutes
The leader/facilitator briefly shares the agenda for the meeting or study and leads any discussion regarding changes or additions.
3. Main content: 45 minutes for a 90 minute group
50 minutes for a 120 minute group
This is led/facilitated by the leader. The leadership for a meeting can rotate as the group decides. It is best if there be one overall leader/facilitator.
4. Break time: 15 minutes
Light refreshments are recommended. This is an informal time for members to share and interact.

5. Wrap up time: 5 minutes for a 90 minute group
20 minutes for a 120 minute group
The group gathers for a wrap up of the meeting or Bible study. Groups with 5 minutes have time only for loose ends left from the meeting or Bible study and don't have time to consider new items or content. Groups with 20 minutes do have time for some additional thoughts on the Bible study or agenda items.
6. Leader/facilitator closing remarks: 5 minutes
The leader/facilitator can clarify assignments and expectations for the future meeting or study.
7. Devotional closing: 15 minutes
This is a time for sharing, for prayer, and for the blessing. The leader/facilitator allows time for individuals to share personal thoughts, feelings, ideas, and experiences. A variety of spiritual resources can be used for the closing as in Style A.
8. Extended time: Informal time after official closing
Members stay to share with one another as they choose. The leader/facilitator or a designee stays.

3. The Model--Style C

1. Informal sharing: 15-30 minutes before session
There is an intentional time for informal sharing before the starting time of a meeting or study. It is recommended that refreshments be available at this time and throughout the meeting or study. The members are encouraged to come for this informal sharing time as a way to build relationships. This structure can also aid in starting meetings and studies on time.
2. The Model--Style A or B is used to complete Style C.

This writer has had experience with these models in various settings. The Model--Style C was introduced in our circuit pastoral conference some years ago. This style has provided a structure that lends an open atmosphere to our monthly meetings and provides informal time to build cohesive relationships.

The Model--Styles A, B, and C have been used by this writer with adult information classes and Bible studies. The model has been useful in providing the time and atmosphere for attenders to interact and develop relationships. Style B has been used most often due to the tight scheduling for most participants. Style B also works well for people who have not known each other prior to the class. The main part of the study proceeds right after the brief opening. Getting into the content gives members a common focus and builds an experience with which the class members can relate. When the class elects a 120 minute structure, the content sections in Style B are balanced well with the open time for the break and for informal discussion.

Style A has been used for some of the Bible study groups for which this writer has been the leader/facilitator. Style A helps set a tone of sharing and interpersonal interaction which carries through the study as well as through the informal sharing times. People who know one another can usually get right into the sharing session. However, in groups where people do not know each other, the initial session for the Bible study could follow Style B to give members of the class a chance to get acquainted first. Style B could then be used in subsequent weeks. The opening sharing session in Style A flows well after the members have had a chance to digest material and a chance to establish common bonds with other members.

The Model--Style B has also been used for some special committee meetings. The size and dynamics placed these

committees into the small group category. For example, the Camp Out Committee meetings have often taken an approach close to that of Style B. It seemed that the subject of the planning influenced the format. The planning meetings began with prayer and moved into the main topic. As decisions were made and business conducted the informal time began. This was usually with refreshments and in a relaxed atmosphere. During this informal time, relationship building continued, brainstorming of ideas occurred, and members had fun being part of the committee. A wrap up time followed in which tasks were outlined and plans projected for future meetings. The committee portion concluded with closing prayers and parting blessings. Members interacted with each other after the closing for various lengths of time. Even though these meetings were not conducted with Style B in mind, they fit the pattern and lend support for its value.

The enrichment of current groups is important. Many of our members live busy lives and need to make use of the natural opportunities to share and relate to one another in the Christian community. If we can enrich an existing group, this is better stewardship than establishing another group and asking members to take more time to be involved in it. Many members seem to find more joy working together in small groups that have a good balance of sharing and content. The use of The Model--Style A, B, or C may well provide a structure that helps establish this balance. The prophet Nehemiah challenged God's people in the midst of the pressures of the day to remember that:

The joy of the Lord is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10b.

C. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORE SMALL GROUPS

The Lord in the Scripture stresses the importance of God's people getting together. For example, the inspired writer in Hebrews firmly encourages God's people to assemble together, to motivate one another, and to encourage each other:

Let us hold on unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25.

It is important to explore whether or not a church needs more small groups for this encouragement to take place. Lyle Schaller has observed that when churches become larger often there are not enough face-to-face groups developed.⁹ When this happens more persons in the congregation become less involved. The worship attendance plateaus as less people are committed on a regular basis. In the 1990 appraisal it was noted that St. Luke's does have some of the warning symptoms that Schaller suggests.¹⁰ Other signs that signal concern include: not assimilating members into the life of the church; spending more time on keeping things going than on new plans and goals; taking more time for maintenance tasks than for growth ideas; having more meetings dominated by financial concerns; and recruiting volunteers becomes more difficult.¹¹

New small groups can be a healthy way to meet the needs of new members. They can also meet particular needs of members

as they encounter new stages in their lives. Established groups often continue to serve good purposes, but they may be limited in growth potential. Schaller says that most groups that have been together for an extended period of time do want new members but are perceived as closed and exclusionary by potential new members.¹² It is important that we look at areas in the church in which new groups might be helpful. Many needs or interest areas would be served well by the small group concept.

The church could be more aggressive in developing more small groups. New groups could begin on the basis of an interest area or a need that unifies the members. Many areas could be considered for small groups. For example, consideration could be given to persons in these categories: new mothers, single parents, new members, young adults, divorced persons, retired persons, married couples, pre-married couples, men in business, persons experiencing grief, persons with cancer, parents of teenagers, new parents, empty nesters, and many other possibilities. As four or five persons have the same need, interest, or common experience, a small group could be considered.

When a staff member, a congregational leader, or a member feels a small group might be beneficial, this observation should be taken seriously. Those responsible in that area of ministry can take the necessary steps to evaluate the need and help in starting the group if the need is supported. Roberta Hestenes has done an excellent job of pulling together very practical and

inclusive steps to begin small groups in the church.¹³ These steps to begin a small group are taken from her book, Using the Bible in Groups:

Get Ready!

1. Determine your purpose. What do you want to accomplish in this small group experience? What needs do you want to meet? What results do you hope for? What do you want to do? Pray.
2. Recruit one or two partners. Discuss with them your ideas for a small group. Ask them if they would like to be involved.
3. Discuss your idea with the appropriate leaders in your church. Ask for suggestions and consider possible resources and materials.
4. Pray and plan together. Re-define your purpose. Think about possible participants. Search for resources to help you accomplish your purpose. Decide on timing. How long will each meeting be? How many weeks will the group meet?
5. Decide on a time and place for the first meeting. Set the date several weeks in advance to give people time to plan.

Make contracts!

6. Invite people to join the group. Invite more people than you want in the group so that you will have a good size even if some turn you down. Share the purpose of the group as you invite people. Be honest; be positive.
7. Determine your leadership pattern. Will one person lead the meeting each week? Will different people lead different parts of the meeting under the direction of an overall coordinator? Or will a different person lead each week?
8. Choose resources or the methods you will use. What section of Scripture will you study? How will you approach it? Will you use a printed guide? Will everyone have copies?

Meet together!

9. Plan and conduct your first meeting. Emphasize building relationships and discussing the purpose of the group and the length of the contract period.
10. Evaluate the first meeting and decide on future directions. Pray for those who came. Contact any who did not arrive who were expected. Encourage each other. Plan next week's meeting. Ask others to help as needed.
11. Plan to have a group discussion about how the group is going about the fifth week or so. Prepare to discuss whether the group wishes to continue on to the end of the contract period. Have suggestions about what the group might do if it continues, so that a good choice can be made by the group.¹⁴

As a group begins it can use Style A, B, or C of the Model as outlined in this chapter under the title, Enrichment of Current Groups.

Small groups can be developed when normal schedules do not meet the needs of members. For example, this may be true in the area of Bible study. St. Luke's has had good response to the small group Bible studies which are offered at a variety of times for women of the church. A number of offerings for men, youth, or couples may be helpful as well. A new men's Bible study began in the spring of 1995 which is meaningful for ten more men of the congregation. It is being offered on a night and time new to the regular Bible study schedule. This is an example of how the church can accommodate the schedules of those interested.

The church needs to open up and take more risks in this area of small group development. Groups can be started with the help of staff members. With some basic leadership training and experience, many laypersons serve well as leader/facilitators. A

model provides a structure for laypersons willing to be trained and to serve in small groups as leader/facilitators. Some laypersons may have had leadership training through school or employment. The church can build on this training and help guide these laypersons in using spiritual resources for Christian small group involvement. These spiritual resources were described in chapter three.

D. EVALUATION OF GROUPS

It is important to evaluate a group when it is concluded or when it is in a time of transition. Howard Clinebell suggests a list of four statements for evaluation. Each group member is asked to attempt a response for each statement:

1. In this group the most helpful things were:
2. The least helpful things were:
3. My strongest feelings were:
4. In future groups I hope:¹⁵

Leaders learn from evaluations when they are open to comments, suggestions, and personal reflection. Clinebell's statements, as listed above, can be used for on-going groups by simple changes in the wording. Howard Kirschenbaum and Barbara Glaser, who work in the field of group dynamics, feel that it is important to evaluate a new group every four to eight sessions.¹⁶

After an evaluation the group should be part of the follow up discussion. In the discussion the group can decide to keep going as it is, to modify some procedures, to change direction, or in some cases to conclude. Evaluations are

important for the health of a group. Roberta Hestenes gives a summary of what she has discovered about the longevity of small groups in the church. Her summary is printed here since it touches on the importance of evaluation and renewing commitments:

Most small groups last for about two years if they decide to continue after the initial eight to ten weeks. A few groups will re-contract year after year. I know of more than one church that has small groups which have met for over twenty years. Such long term groups can become stale and lose a clear sense of purpose, but with periodic re-assessment, they can be deep experiences of true Christian community.¹⁷

As Christians we must keep in mind that the creation of a caring community is the work of the Holy Spirit. The leader needs abilities to lead, a willingness to facilitate, and a care for people. The leader is only preparing a place in which community can be discovered. This is one of the blessings of sharing the Word in the small group model. Where the Word is shared, the Holy Spirit is at work and many of the Spirit's gifts and fruits can be seen, accented, and experienced.

E. THE CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Even though we speak of the Model with Styles A, B, and C, there is really only one main model. The model suggests an intentional, open style that provides sharing time within the meeting of the small group. This model is suggested whether the small group is a Bible study, an interest group, a self-help group, a circle, a committee, a support group, or another type of small group in the church. The model suggests the regular use of prayer, the Bible, and shared blessings in its structure.

The regular, planned use of spiritual resources

reinforces the unique features of the small group in the church. It is within the use of spiritual resources that the Holy Spirit keeps us in the faith and growing in the faith. Jesus emphatically challenged those who believed in Him to stay faithful to His teaching:

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:31-32.

The church seal for St. Luke's imprints the reference to this passage on all certificates and official papers.

Small groups hold much hope for the ongoing growth of our church. The small groups which are now active at St. Luke's provide great opportunities for Christian fellowship, for caring for one another, for sharing God's hope, for witnessing to our faith, for learning and serving together, and for building up the body of Christ. Development of future small groups has numerous possibilities and potential. With the guidance of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit, St. Luke's can continue to meet the needs of mission and ministry in the close of this century and in the new century soon to come. As God wills, small group enrichment and development will continue to be a positive avenue for spiritual growth at St. Luke's.

ENDNOTES FOR THE CONCLUDING CHAPTER

¹Edwin H. Friedman, Generation to Generation (New York: Guilford Press, 1985).

²Ibid., 195.

³Timothy E. Wenger, "A 1990 Look At St. Luke's Lutheran Church: An Appraisal Using a Framework From Various Systems Approaches," (A Summary Project for DM-961, Family Therapy, Concordia Seminary, St.Louis, Missouri, 1990), 35. This is Appendix A.

⁴St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Rapids, WI, "Mission Statement," (Adopted by St.Luke's Congregation in 1990 and Reaffirmed in Subsequent Years). This Is Appendix B.

⁵Martin F. Saarinen, "The Life Cycle of a Congregation," Christian Digest 3 (1987): 15.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Appendix A, 23.

⁸Lyle E. Schaller, Looking in the Mirror (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 16.

⁹Ibid., 137.

¹⁰Appendix A, 29.

¹¹Schaller, 137.

¹²Ibid., 139.

¹³Roberta Hestenes, Using the Bible in Small Groups (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983).

¹⁴Ibid., 35.

¹⁵Howard J. Clinebell, Growth Groups: Marriage and Family Enrichment, Creative Singlehood, Human Liberation, Youth Work, and Social Change (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), 55.

¹⁶Howard Kirschenbaum and Barbara Glaser, Developing Support Groups: A Manual for Facilitators and Participants (La Jolla, CA: University Associates, 1978), 45.

¹⁷Hestenes, 34.

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- Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Appendix A

1990 Appraisal of St. Luke's

A 1990 LOOK

AT

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin

An Appraisal Using A Framework
From Various Systems Approaches

A Summary Project

For DM-961

Family Therapy

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri
Professor Joseph H. Barbour

by

Timothy E. Wenger

September 1990

FORWARDThe Purpose, Intention, and Overview of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to give an appraisal of St. Luke's Lutheran Church using elements from several system approaches. The paper will reflect on various systems and seek to identify how St. Luke's fits into the framework of that system. Included will be data on the human development stages, the life cycle phases, family systems elements, and a community development framework.

The intent is to present a reflection of St. Luke's from a systems approach that is helpful to staff and leaders of St. Luke's as well as to myself. It is intended to provide helpful data to understand St. Luke's present status and be useful in looking at future challenges.

St. Luke's is at a transition stage and needs to set specific goals so that the mission of the church remains the focus and so that there continues to be a central principle through which all the activities of the church are related.

A Brief History and Development of Ministry at St. Luke's

St. Luke's was organized as a congregation on April 20, 1949, with twenty-three families. The first formal worship service had been held on July 3rd at the Palace Theatre. The first resident pastor, the Reverend Leonard F. Schneider, was installed on August 7th. The cornerstone for the first house of worship was laid on October 2nd with the dedication of the church following on February 5, 1950.

The church grew rapidly and the cornerstone of the present church building was laid on September 30, 1956. Dedication took place on February 3, 1957. Ground was broken for the Schneider Educational Center on April 4, 1969 with dedication following on November 16, 1969.

In 1986 St. Luke's completed a major building and renovation program entitled "Growing in Christ". This included: the narthex addition, the art glass windows, the classroom center, the Allen digital computer organ, the nave and chancel restyling, the improvements in heat efficiency, the upgrading of the fellowship hall and kitchen areas, the additional office for staff, the computer purchase, the office renovations, and numerous other improvements.

Rev. Larry Leuthaeuser was installed as associate pastor on November 9, 1969 and became pastor upon the death of Rev.

L.F. Schneider in August of 1970. Rev. Timothy Wenger was installed as associate pastor on August 22, 1971 and succeeded Rev. Leuthaeuser in office upon his acceptance of a call to Eau Claire, Wisconsin in July of 1974. Rev. Paul Marshall was installed as associate pastor on November 9, 1975.

Rev. Marshall resigned in August of 1977 to enter graduate studies. During the interim Rev. Emil Holtzen, retired pastor, assisted. St. Luke's requested a seminary placement and the request was granted. In August of 1978 Rev. Eric Lambart was installed as associate pastor. In June of 1979, Rev. John Bramstedt was called as pastoral assistant to serve in a part-time ministry. Rev. Bramstedt had been assisting unofficially for several years prior to this call. Rev. Lambart served in the pastoral team for four and a half years before he accepted a call to Bach, Michigan. He moved in February of 1983 and in December of 1983 Rev. Gary Albert was installed as associate pastor. Rev. Emil Holtzen had assisted in the interim.

Pastors Albert, Bramstedt, and Wenger served together until June of 1985 when Rev. Bramstedt resigned his position. In the fall of 1986, Mr. David Reineke was commissioned as a Director of Christian Education Intern to serve with St. Luke's for nine months.

In June of 1988, Rev. Albert moved to Land-O-Lakes, Wisconsin after accepting a call to serve at Hope Lutheran Church. In the summer of 1988, the congregation approved the calling of both an associate pastor and a director of Christian education. Rev. Holtzen again assisted in the interim.

Rev. David Albers accepted the call as associate pastor and was installed in December of 1988. In May of 1989 Mr. John Hagge was installed as Director of Christian Education. This was the first time St. Luke's had three full-time staff members, and Mr. Hagge is the first Director of Christian Education.

Four vicars served St. Luke's from 1965-69. They were Glenn Bitter, John Bramstedt, Richard Izzard, and John Domsch. At least seven sons and nine daughters of the congregation have entered fields of full-time church work. Dale and Karen Smith serve as Lay Missionaries in Ecuador. St. Luke's Student Fund was established to encourage members to prepare for full-time ministry and to enroll in Lutheran schools for post high school education.

The Christian Education agencies of St. Luke's have been a strong force throughout its history. Sunday School and Vacation Bible School have served our children and been a continued

outreach ministry. Christian Day School education through a sister congregation has been an opportunity for all members of St. Luke's throughout its history.

In 1971, St. Luke's Preschool was established and has been an active part of the Christian Education program as well as an outreach ministry.

Women's Bible Study has been an intergral part of Women's Ministry throughout the history. Adult, Couple, and Youth Bible Studies have also been part of the Bible Study for on-going Christian Education. Youth groups have varied in size and emphasis but have always been an important part of St. Luke's ministry.

The Veterans of the Cross, for retired men, and Women's Ministry, for all adult women, continue to be strong supportive groups in congregational life and ministry.

In the fall of 1983 the Church Council held its first retreat and began a more structured way of evaluation and goal setting. This is helpful in looking at immediate needs as well as long-range objectives. In recent years there has been a renewed emphasis in adult education and Bible study. The Church Council has been helpful in renewing this emphasis.

In 1988, St. Luke's was part of the His Love-Our Response stewardship process. This process helped the leadership give additional focus to Bible study, produce a statement of mission and ministry, and raise the stewardship awareness. In 1989, members of St. Luke's updated the gift and talent surveys for entry into the computer. This data is to be helpful in involving more members in the work of Christ and His Church.

In July of 1990, Pastor Albers attended a care ministry workshop. The Elders are hoping to have a number of people complete the training so that they can extent the visitation ministry of St. Luke's. Training sessions to be conducted by Pastor Albers are scheduled for October and November of 1990. Mr. Hagge is involved with the Ministry on Christian Education in developing more areas of Youth Ministry, training youth counselors, and planning Christian Education opportunities for members of all ages. He works with Ministry on Worship in the music development and in youth visitation. Pastor Wenger in work with the Elders is looking at ways to develop support group ministries. Both Pastors share pastoral duties with Rev. Albers having more responsibilities in member visitation and Rev. Wenger more involvment in Evangelism visitation, Discipleship ministry, and administration.

CHAPTER ONE: A General Overview of Appraisals

The brief history and development was provided as a data base for information in the paper and as an outline of the forty-one year history of St. Luke's.

Churches have always done a certain amount of self-appraisal and analysis. This was frequently done informally rather than using a formal method. Analyzing the church was often a part of an effort to do a better job of relating to the community in which the church was located or to relate more clearly to the mission of the church. Appraisal was part of the effort of the church to be relevant in presenting the Gospel and in meeting the needs of the people. Self-analysis also occurred when the congregation was calling another pastor or staff member.

A variety of things in the church may be affected by the discoveries made in an appraisal. The appraisal may well have an effect on the type of staff person being called by the congregation, the focus of the mission statement, the goals of the church, and/or the approach of the ministry in a wide range of areas. Results of the appraisal may involve the approach to worship services, the type of music selected for choir and for congregational singing, the Sunday Bible class structure, the types of activities implemented, the social ministry outreach, the fellowship opportunities, the youth ministry, as well as, dozens of other areas of ministry and church life.

In recent years various church "analysts" like Wynn Arn, Lyle Schaller, and Kent Hunter have suggested that the local church can be greatly aided with a self-appraisal that reflects on life cycle and other developmental data. Schaller writes a book entitled, Looking in the Mirror, which offers churches good examples for church appraisal and accompanies the chapters with helpful questions for local congregations.¹

The Old and New Testaments suggests that the child of God should be regularly engaged in self-appraisal. This concept is central to Christian practice of confession, forgiveness, and renewal. Schaller takes this a step further when he says, "It is assumed (from Bible references) that it is appropriate, productive, and good for congregational leaders to periodically engage themselves in the process of appraising the role, ministry, internal dynamics, outreach, and life of the congregation."²

With the increased emphasis on structure and systems in the helping fields the self-study process for the churches has also

increased. Churches just like individuals and families have a life style; they go through various stages of development that can be related to human development; they have a system of interaction with many similarities to family systems; and they have stages of development which can be related to community stages of development and change. This statement is made in an article entitled, "Where is Your Church in the Life Cycle?":

For many churches, this life cycle and its stages tend to follow the stages of community development and change.³

It seems helpful to appraise the church from the systems approach by relating the church to life cycles and developmental stages.

Since each church has a unique "personality" more call committees, church councils, and congregations are putting effort into a formal self-study process in an attempt to have a good match for staff members and parish needs. Churches are also becoming more individual in their approach to goals, mission outreach, and activity development. This too prompts parishes to seek a good self-appraisal to better meet their unique goals and needs. The assumption is that if a congregation better understands itself it will be able to seek staff members with the gifts the church needs to grow and to develop the ministry needed in their unique situation.

Each of the following chapters will seek to apply data regarding St. Luke's to the system being presented.

CHAPTER TWO: Developmental Processes and The Church

Developmental processes are often looked at from the human developmental cycle which extends from birth to old age, as well as, the family developmental cycle from singleness to marriage to singleness again. John Howell says that each of these models of human interaction is important to the church's task in family ministry as it seeks to develop programs of education, enrichment, and ministry.⁴

Psychologist Erik Erikson's way of showing human life as a movement through eight successive stages of psychological growth is a popular example of a developmental approach to human experience. The following figure from Erikson's book gives us a quick picture of his eight ages of man.⁵

Eight Ages of Man

VIII MATURITY								EGO INTEGRITY VS. DESPAIR
VII ADULTHOOD							GENERA- TIVITY VS. STAGNATION	
VI YOUNG ADULTHOOD						INTIMACY VS. ISOLATION		
V PUBERTY AND ADOLESCENCE					IDENTITY VS. ROLE CONFUSION			
IV LATENCY				INDUSTRY VS. INFERIORITY				
III LOCOMOTOR- GENITAL			INITIATIVE VS. GUILT					
II MUSCULAR- ANAL		AUTONOMY VS. SHAME, DOUBT						
I ORAL SENSORY	BASIC TRUST VS. MISTRUST							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

FIGURE 12

In his writings Erikson concentrates more on understanding the crises and tasks of childhood through adolescence than he does on adult tasks. Greater attention has been given to adult

development in recent years by authors like Samuel Levinson and Gail Sheehy who wrote the books, The Seasons of a Man's Life and Passages, respectively.

Leaders in the church also can benefit from this research as it becomes part of the data base for understanding group development as well.

The family life cycle is another model of human development which can be utilized profitably in planning ministry in the parish setting. Evelyn Duvall was an early explorer of this developmental approach to family studies. A basic outline of the cycle follows:⁶

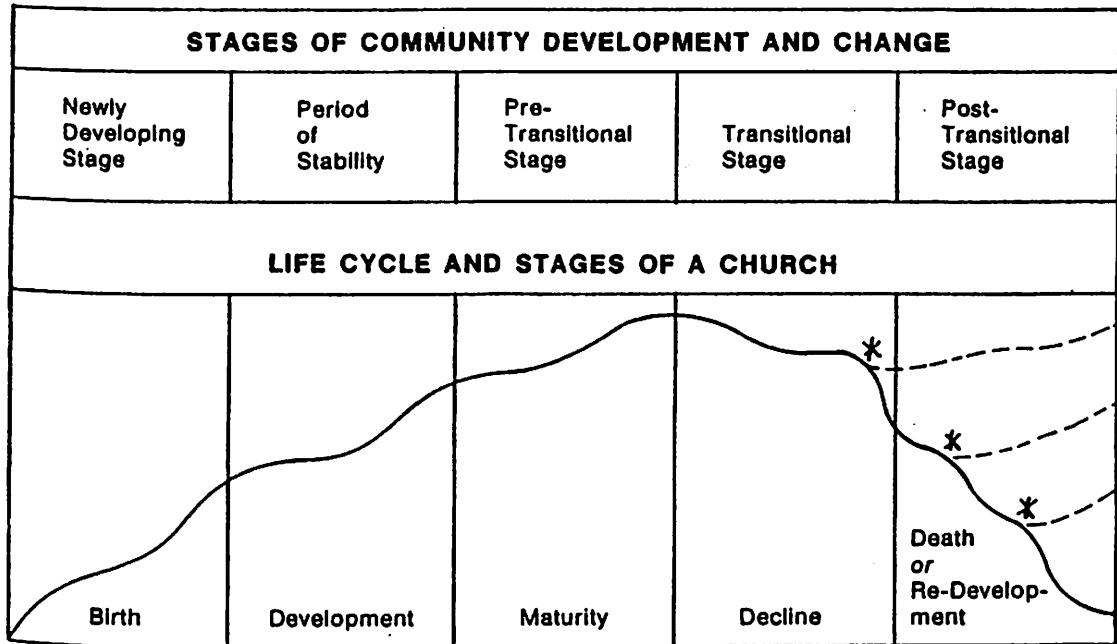
1. The Single Life - - Youth to Adult
2. From Engagement to Marriage
3. From Marriage to the First Pregnancy
4. The Child-bearing Years--Preschool Children
5. The Child Development Years--Early and Middle School Age Children
6. Adolescent Children in The Home
7. Launching Pad Years--Children Leaving Home
8. The Empty Nest--Children Out of The Home
9. Retirement for Husband and Wife
10. Death of a Mate

The family life cycle utilizes the combination of personal development plus family life experiences as a framework for aiding growth.

Howell relates Scriptural emphases to these dynamics. He says, "Since the New Testament is growth-oriented in its description of life under the lordship of Christ, adult psychological development can be related well to Biblical patterns for life."⁷

Jere Allen and George Bullard integrate ministry patterns as they look at the stages of community development and change. They make this all encompassing statement, "Every church that has ever existed has had a life cycle and various stages of development and change."⁸ It is hoped that by being aware of these cycles churches can be more prepared to meet the next challenges that await them. Many churches may find it easier to keep the focus on growth during the early years and the initial time of development than at the time of maturity. At the time of maturity the leadership of the church needs to help its membership maintain a growth orientation or it can stagnate and not make use of the many gifts it has as a church.

The following is a chart they have designed to compare the community development stages with the life cycle of a church.⁹



Edwin Friedman in Generation to Generation has done extensive work in demonstrating family process in church and synagogue. He says, "Religious institutions not only function like families, they also contain families. Indeed they often derive their very structure from families."¹⁰ He goes on to say that these institutions which include churches function as organic structures in their own right.¹¹

It is helpful to analyze the local church within the systems approach and various developmental frameworks. The purpose of analyzing and appraising a church is to develop a clear understanding of the congregation so that ministry can be planned which enables the church to best meet the goals. These goals should always be a part of the greater mission of Christ and His Church. The particular goals will be set depending on the make-up and needs of the local parish and community.

CHAPTER THREE: Family Process, The Church, and St. Luke's

Edwin Friedman feels that churches can learn much from knowing about family process. He says that emotional process in religious organizations not only mirror emotional process in personal families, but also, both types of family systems plug into one another.¹² He picks out six basic family concepts which he feels have particular relevance when applying them to religious work systems. These concepts are:¹³

1. Homeostasis
2. Process and Content
3. Nonanxious Presence
4. Overfunctioning
5. Triangles
6. Symptom Bearer

Homeostasis is the balance that is necessary to maintain a good functioning system. Friedman says, "In churches or synagogues the underlying homeostatic forces are sometimes more difficult to identify because they tend to be camouflaged in religious terminology."¹⁴ When something goes out of balance leaders can ask: "Why now?", "Why did things go out of balance?"; and "What were the factors?" St. Luke's has looked at this factor as it has grown in staff size and in the activities which happen on a regular basis. A new core of lay persons have also had exposure to process techniques and have raised questions about the balance. This has been generally good and helped the leadership define the responsibilities of each staff member in a clearer manner. The balance between the original core of members and new members is also an important part of this factor. Some years ago some of the original core did not serve in leadership positions because this balance was out of sink. When the new leadership ideas became a part of the structure without changing the overall mission and direction of the congregation many of these same people began to serve again. The Youth Group some years ago also had more girls who had leadership ability and willingness. It was difficult to keep the boys involved until we developed other ways to use their ideas and have them take part in the leadership.

Process and Content is very important to distinguish. Content issues are often red herrings according to Friedman.¹⁵ When I first came to St. Luke's there were several content

issues which kept surfacing. It became apparent that much of this had to do with the congregation going through grief. The first pastor of St. Luke's, Rev. L.F. Schneider, had died in August of 1970. Rev. Leuthaeuser who was serving as associate pastor was called to the senior pastor position. When some change was made in order of worship or organizational structure there seemed to be a lot of disagreement about the change. The stir about the content seemed to be one of the places the feelings of the membership were being vented. It is also noticeable that when there have been some financial concerns the attention gets placed on some content issues like missions, day school, or salaries rather than on the process of the concern itself or personal commitment to the mission of the church.

Nonanxious Presence is noted by Friedman to be one of the most significant characteristics that the leader or leadership can portray.¹⁶ It aids in avoiding triangles and in diffusing the tension in various situations. It can help modify anxiety throughout the entire congregation. Friedman feels that this ability can sometimes do more to resolve issues than the ability to come up with good solutions.¹⁷ Part of this nonanxious presence may come through with humor at an appropriate time. I have seen humor change the process of a Church Council meeting several times. The humor gave enough break for members to see each other as persons before they got back to the "heavy" issues at hand. One of the Council members at a long budget meeting offered to send out for pizza if we could find a place for it in the budget. By itself it was not so funny but the timing was just right. The relabeling technique from paradoxical theory is also helpful. When the opposition is looked at as "fellow loyal members" the high tension can be lessened. Even the statement, "It's good we are all so concerned about this issue that we have come up with several solutions," can help reframe the verbal battle that was beginning. The nonanxious presence by a leader or leaders helps focus on many positive factors which can be easily overlooked when the anxiety level begins to accelerate.

Overfunctioning by a clergyperson or leader is called by Friedman "playing hero".¹⁸ The overfunctioning person can too often be the one who feels let down when others don't accept responsibility. Oddly, this overfunctioning one is the one whose birthday is forgotten, who is not forgiven as easily for a mistake as others are, and where the balance of "past credit"

for good performance is easily passed over.¹⁹ The sharing of leadership is a very helpful place to begin in lessening the temptation to be an overfunctioning leader. One advantage in a larger congregation is that it is clearly evident that one or even several leaders can not handle all the responsibilities. St. Luke's has worked hard in past fifteen years to develop a staff and a structure in which the leadership of the various areas is delegated so that it does not continually fall back on one or two individuals. Overfunctioning by a pastor can affect spiritual growth of members in the sense that they do not get to share their gifts or to develop the abilities which the Lord has given to them. During some of the vacancies which we have experienced when an associate pastor moved we have seen new leadership come forward. This does indicate that, perhaps, we had not tapped that leadership prior to the vacancy. Planning, goal setting, and involving others in this process can build a structure in which more members do get invited to use their skills and abilities. Overfunctioning can result in burnout because there is not enough feedback or opportunities for personal nourishment and growth. The church council or congregation can place a pastor or leader in front of this overfunctioning temptation if the role or task description is not clear or too open ended. In the past eight years St. Luke's has sought to develop a non-threatening manner of evaluating a staff member's performance and dialoguing about any changes that are suggested. This has been a useful procedure when it is used. Perhaps, this would also be helpful for other leadership positions in the church. Too, often, we see evaluation as a negative rather than a potentially helpful procedure. Evaluation and dialogue can help curb the problem of overfunctioning and increase the effectiveness of team ministry.

Triangles place families and churches in emotional binds. As we learn to be aware of the triangles we can understand the process that is involved in and around the content being presented. Whenever someone shares information with a third person about another person and wants them to solve or confront a situation then they place the listener in a potential triangle. The listener can learn to avoid the emotional triangle. In churches this can occur between three staff members, between any combination of members and staff, or between spouses of staff or members. Triangles can be harmful as they pit one

person against another. Often the would be rescuer becomes the victim. The overfunctioner must be careful of this pitfall as they have a tendency to want to deal with or rectify each situation. An emotional triangle can simply develop because two of the three persons have a different view of the situation. E.G. A preschool teacher was very upset on Monday morning because the Sunday School had not rearranged the area after using it on Sunday. The preschool teacher confronts the pastor about this problem. He could say, "I'll take care of it." However, this can place him in the middle, especially, if the situation is more complicated than it appears. It would be much better if he asked the teacher to call the Sunday School personnel directly or offered to have the Sunday School person in charge give her a call. Some years ago the Vacation Bible School superintendents were upset with the staff advisor and spoke with me about it. I mistakenly spoke to the advisor about the concerns thinking that he'd want to be aware of their feelings. He in turn confronted them angrily because they had not spoken with him directly. They were upset that I had spoken to him and I was upset that he broke my confidence. I can certainly understand this emotional triangle and do try to handle situations like this much better. I would ask if they'd go with me to speak with the advisor or that they go directly to him. I have found that many times people will share their feelings directly if one provides an avenue they are comfortable with.

Removing oneself from a triangle can also help the other persons grow. The situation can be used to help them settle issues and share feelings directly. The pastor or leader can serve as a facilitator rather than a rescuer/victim.

A Symptom-bearer is the one called the "identified patient" in family therapy. If pastors, other staff, or other leaders are becoming stressed out, emotionally fatigued, or losing the usual energy level they might be labeled as a symptom-bearer. That person or persons might be bearing the label for a system that is having a problem. If these symptoms are seen in a person on the staff or in church leadership then the Elders or Church Council could not only be concerned about the individual but analyze what might be going wrong in the "church family" network. This approach helps move toward change rather than blame, helplessness, or repetitive symptoms.

In one situation some years ago a woman was selected as a leader for a small group. Later she learned it was her turn

to organize and be in charge of a large group function. She became stressed out. The symptoms seemed to be hers, but they really represented a problem in the system. She was a symptom-bearer. Unfortunately, we lost her to any more leadership in this area of church work, but we did learn to spell out in a more thorough way the job descriptions involved. We also have learned to be more watchful for leaders and members who might be getting into stress binds.

Symptoms are occurring for reasons. If staff members and other leaders are alert and sensitive to these signals then proper action can be set in motion. Dysfunctions in a church family can also be approached through systems process, just as dysfunction in a family can be approached through family therapy.

The pastor is often the leader who is in a position to help "coach" the members of the team. Friedman stresses the importance of the clergy leader being able to self-differentiate. He feels so strong about this that he makes this bold statement:

The key to successful spiritual leadership, therefore, with success understood not only as moving people toward a goal, but also in terms of the survival of the family (and its leader), has more to do with the leader's capacity for self-definition than with the ability to motivate others.²⁰

The Scriptures remind us to be straight forward with one another with our interactions. Of course, the self-confident one must accompany his speaking with love. Look at the formula for growth in Ephesians 4: 15-16 NIV:

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

As we give attention to the system we make it possible for the members of the team to function in the best way possible.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Life Cycle, The Church, and St. Luke's

Church appraisers have found community development stages and changes to be helpful in looking at the church. On page 8 of this paper there is the chart given by Allen and Bullard. Martin Saarinen in an article entitled, "The Life Cycle of a Congregation," adds more data to the various life cycle stages.²¹ There is good support for placing St. Luke's in the "maturity" stage. The following is Saarinen's various descriptions under the age of maturity:²²

Maturity

Major Characteristics: Well established fellowship structures, administrative procedures, staff, programs & support

Major Strengths: Stability, sense of self-worth, continuity

Major Weaknesses: Energetic but unenthusiastic

Dangers: Unresponsiveness to new opportunities & changed conditions

Developmental Intervention: Analyze congregation's history & current context. Restate its mission

In the various age stages Saarinen rates four major factors which he feels are important in an overall evaluation of a church. The four factors are: Energy, Program, Administration, and Inclusion. These four factors can be considered the gene structure of the congregation. The strength of these four vary in the various life cycle stages. The following will give the life cycle in terms of the church and list which of the gene factors is more dominant in that age cycle:²³

<u>Life Cycle Stage</u>	<u>Dominant Gene(s)</u>
BIRTH of Church	- Energy
INFANCY of Church	- Energy, Inclusion
ADOLESCENCE of Church	- Energy, Program
PRIME of Church	- Energy, Program, Administration, Inclusion
MATURITY of Church	- Program, Administration, Inclusion
ARISTOCRACY of Church	- Administration, Inclusion
BUREAUCRACY of Church	- Administration
DEATH of Church	

It is helpful to have some idea of the author's definition of each gene. Energy includes such things as vision and hope, excitement and enthusiasm, and a sense of potency and potentiality. Program involves the development of services and activities which respond to the needs of its own membership, of its environment, or the ministry of the greater church. Administration helps spell out the intention of the congregation in the form of mission statements, goals, objectives, budgets, and planning. It helps use the material resources of the church in efficient and effective ways. Inclusion relates to both groups and individuals within and outside the congregation. This is part of the spirit of the Christian community.²⁴

It is noticed that in the life stage of maturity the one gene not considered dominant was energy. The life cycle time of maturity has its strong points with program, administration, and inclusion. The lack of strength in the energy area does not mean there is no energy. It refers to the tendency to be less enthusiastic. Some of the original excitement may not be intact. The chrisma of the leaders and church is not like it was in the prime cycle. This does not mean this weakness can not be overcome or defeated. Because this factor is often a concern in the cycle of maturity the congregation and leaders would do well be be aware of this and seek ways to maintain the positive energy level of the prime years.

It must be mentioned that the life cycle of the congregation has little to do with chronological time. It has to do with the relationship and balance of the four gene factors.²⁵ I feel there is good information to support the placement of St. Luke's in the maturity life cycle stage. The following paragraphs will seek to support this position.

In regard to energy, St. Luke's still has a lot of energy, but often the energy is used to maintain the programs, activities, and structures which are already in place. This sometimes leaves less energy to try new things and use creative ideas. In the maturity stage it seems that less people have time for vision and forward insight. Too often the goals and objectives are simply accepted by the new generation or the new members. It can be helpful to renew this energy by setting aside time to reflect on the mission and goals of the church; then, the mission statement can be revised, reaffirmed, or renewed as appropriate. New staff members and new leadership can be helpful in the process of keeping the energy focused on new approaches and ideas. The Church Council and other

leaders can take an aggressive approach to retreats, evaluations, and renewed mission statements. This often sets the tone for new reflections and makes it acceptable to evaluate. If this tone is not set the difficulty in an established congregation is that leaders and members get defensive about change and take too much ownership for the status quo.

St. Luke's has been operating in the maturity stage for about the last ten years. St. Luke's has developed and been involved in many meaningful areas of ministry. The church has an active core of leaders and workers. The membership has leveled off and yet has a healthy degree of change due to mobility. The church grew with the strong leadership of Pastor Schneider and a core of committed laypersons. More structure and program has been added to give a framework of ministry for a larger congregation. The following paragraphs share data in regard to various aspects of the current picture.

Christian Education

St. Luke's has always had an active ministry to children. It was known at one time as "the children's church". The Sunday School has 290 students from nursery through eighth grade. The church provides an opportunity for students from kindergarten to eighth grade to attend Christian Day School through a sister congregation. Seventy-five currently attend Immanuel Lutheran School. Vacation Bible School has been held each year since its beginning. The Sunday School and VBS have been involved in outreach ministry as well.

The Youth Group has Bible Study and other activities. Now there are activities for Junior High and Senior High students. The Youth have been involved in Youth Choir, Servant Events, Sports Events, Money Raising Events, and Recreation Events. As time has been taken to recruit there have been willing Youth Counselors during the years.

The Adult Bible Studies have opportunities for women, couples, and mixed groups. Studies are held on Sunday morning and a variety of week-day times. There are Bible Studies with topics and books of the Bible. A two year Bible survey course was completed in 1989.

St. Luke's Preschool was organized in 1972 for three and four year olds. There are over one hundred children involved each week. This too is a good outreach ministry. The Preschool uses a Christian curriculum and utilizes parent-helpers in a cooperative structure.

A positive development in adult work has been the willingness

of more adults to teach and lead Bible studies. This factor enables us to develop and use more of the gifts of teaching which the Lord provides for His Church. The Ministry on Christian Education oversees the various Christian Education agencies.

Discipleship

The various aspects of Christian Discipleship are to be promoted at St.Luke's by the Ministry on Discipleship. In the past two years the ministry has led many persons through a talent survey and the results have been recorded in a computer system. These are to be used in a fuller way to increase the involvement of our membership. A gifts coordinator position is also being developed. This position is established to have a consistent way to organize a list of talents and enlist people to serve in the various positions of the church.

The Discipleship ministry has also presented special films and visual presentations to help develop a healthy stewardship effort and attitude. Several Bible studies have been offering in the past number of years that reflected on Biblical uses of time, talent, and treasure. There have been two every-member-visitations in the past five years and two series of cottage meetings conducted. The ministry was helpful in promoting and helping with a pictorial directory for our fortieth anniversary. In recent years we have been looking a better ways to assimilate new members. This ministry as provided some ideas in this effort.

Discipleship ministry has sought to raise the commitment level of the members. In its history St.Luke's has had many members from non-church and non-Lutheran backgrounds. It has taken time to develop first-fruit giving and tithing. We have seen growth in this area, especially, in the past seven years. There have been four special stewardship efforts in the past five years together with the yearly stewardship program. The "His Love-Our Response" process did assist in several areas of stewardship growth. The Sunday School has been involved in the fall stewardship program the past three years.

Evangelism

The focus of Evangelism has widened at St.Luke's. In its early years much of the outreach visitation was from the pastors. This has changed with the training of members in Evangelism visitation. There has been a training session the past seventeen years using Evangelism Explosion or

or the Missouri Synod training program, "Dialogue Evangelism." Three "Witness Workshops" and a "Gospel Communication Clinic" have been offered at St. Luke's in the past seven years. The ministry has encouraged the Sunday School in having visitation Sundays and been instrumental in the "greeter" program at church.

Evangelism has enlisted a number of persons in the congregation to attend synod and district "Great Commission Convocations" They have promoted several evangelism film series, as well as, two general film series on developing gifts as lay persons in the church.

The ministry has kept the focus of the evangelism task before the congregation by developing the "Evangelism Festival" into a special event. Many years a guest speaker was engaged to challenge the congregation in another facet of witnessing. With two programs the ministry has worked with other congregations in our circuit. The Ministry on Evangelism oversees St. Luke's efforts.

Missions

Missions at St. Luke's is under the Ministry on Missions but is also promoted by a variety of other mission-oriented persons, circles, and groups. This ministry has promoted missions by providing some mission education material to the members. It has held a mission fair the past two years and often hosted a mission speaker. This ministry also disperses a portion of mission funds each year. They promote synod and district missions.

The portion of St. Luke's giving to missions has increased the past several years. There was a period of time twelve years ago where this slipped but through efforts of some leaders, pastors, and Ministry on Missions the sights have been raised. The mission offering to district and synod is now sixteen percent of the budget.

The Sunday School has several mission projects each year. A good per-cent of their offerings goes to missions. The Vacation Bible School uses fifty per-cent of its offerings each year for a mission gift. Our Youth Group has promoted Dakota Boys Ranch and given gifts for other missions. Each circle of St. Luke's Women's Ministry has an individual mission area they promote and support. The Women's Ministry in total gives a good gift each year to missions, as well as, promotes the mite offerings for Lutheran Women's Missionary League. Several of our members are very active in Lutheran Laymen's

League and help us remain aware of the mission efforts of LLL. The Christian Day School is in tune with mission education and various chapel offerings are designated to these missions.

Dale and Karen Smith of our congregation have served as lay missionaries in Ecuador the past twelve years. Their visits and communication with our membership has been very meaningful and has helped us in our mission focus. We are also part of the team effort in synod and give direct support to Missionary Kuster in Pannama.

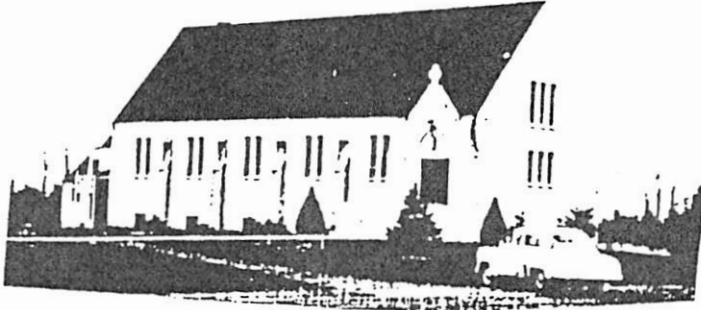
Property Care

The responsibility for property maintenance and care is given to the Ministry on Property Care. This includes a two square block area with all the buildings connected on a one-half block space. The original church is now the center building and serves as a classroom center. This was built in 1949. The current church was built in 1956 and seats four-hundred and fifty persons. The education center was completed in 1969. It houses the church offices, three larger classroom areas, and a gym. In 1986 a major renovation was completed. This added a larger narthex area for better fellowship opportunities and upgraded the classroom areas for better teaching areas. This project also added new roofing with high-grade insulation for better heat conservation. The chancel and nave were redecorated to add color, warmth, and enhance the worship atmosphere. In the area of worship a new organ was added to complement the size of our church. Many of these project areas were planned for sometime. The 1985 appeal helped consolidate the many plans and provide a structure for a unified effort.

The completion of these various plans and ideas also helps place our church in the maturity life cycle. There still are areas in the physical properties that need improvement or added space but the major areas are complete and support the current programs. The Sunday morning education program will need more space in the near future.

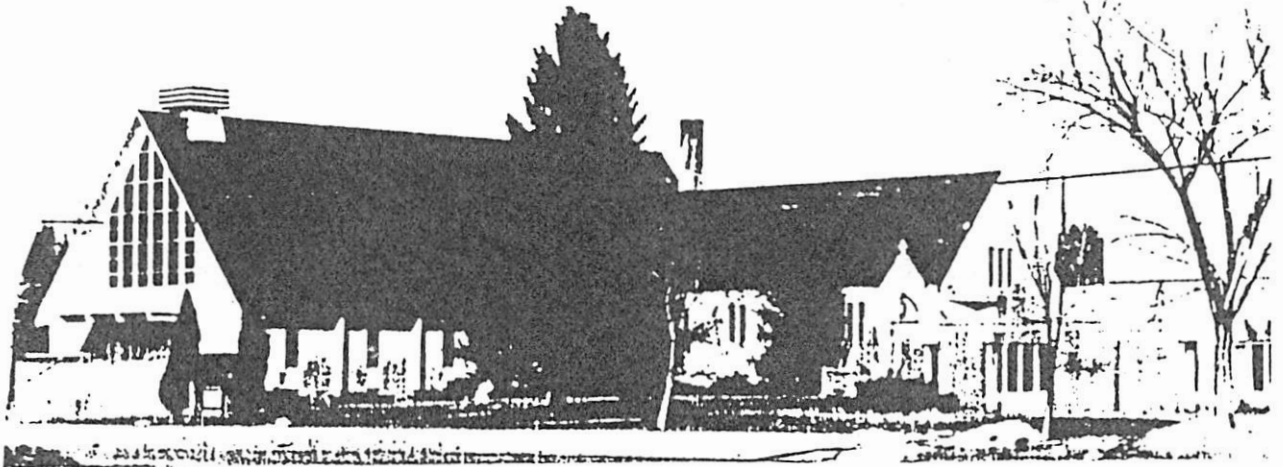
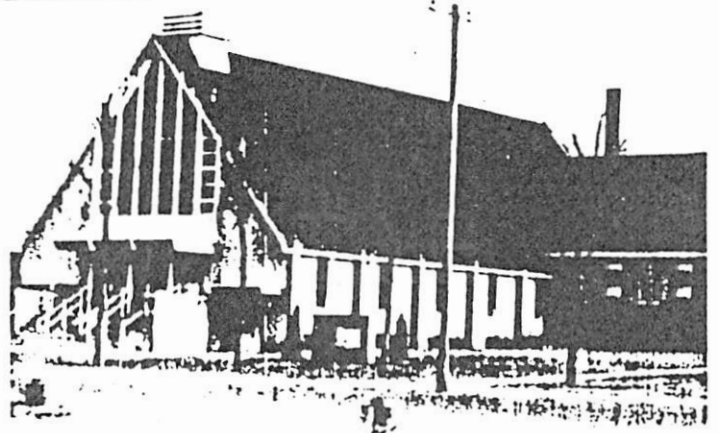
The membership and leaders takes good care of the facilities. The ministry itself is a working group that provides some of the labor for the upkeep. A retired men's group, The Veterans of the Cross, also provides much good assistance to the upkeep. They meet twice a month for Bible study, fellowship, and work projects. Legal matters are also shared by the Ministry on Property Care with the appropriate Church Council leaders. We have had many men willing to serve in this area of ministry.

The facility pictures give some idea of the progression of the physical structure of St.Luke's.



The first church built in 1949 with the help of Mission Funds.

The present church built in 1956 to meet the needs of a growing congregation. The original church is on the right and serves as a classroom center.



The 1969 education center is constructed on the far right with only a portion of the building in the picture. The education center includes staff offices, classroom areas and a gymnasium.

All the areas of the church and education center were upgraded and improved in the remodeling project which was dedicated in 1986.

Social Concerns

Through the leadership of the Ministry on Social Concerns the congregation has been involved in a number of on-going social ministry projects. These on-going ministry projects include: Lutheran World Relief blankets, kits, and clothing drive; South Wood County Food Pantry food replenishing effort; Christmas-in-July social gathering to honor our senior members; and Christmas gifts to home-bound members. They have also helped share food boxes with needy families in St. Luke's as well as the community. Social Concerns has organized members for food shower for families experiencing a loss of a family member or time of illness.

This ministry has helped distribute information on various social causes in our local community and state. They organized committees to aid in the sponsorship of Southeast Asian families. St. Luke's sponsored two different families. They helped to begin The Veterans of the Cross for retired men and Senior Women for senior women of St. Luke's. Both of these groups are involved in helping projects as well as getting together socially.

The budget for this ministry is relatively low, but they have served as advocates in helping to meet a number of needs. Our congregation participates with Wood County Community Services in meeting some of the requests from drop-ins and travelers. We also meet a few emergency needs directly through our Alms Fund.

In recent months we have supported efforts to reverse a court decision permitting unmarried couples to serve as counselors at Rawhide Ranch, a non-profit boys' rehabilitation center. We also helped support one of our members who participated in the Pro-Life Rally in Washington D.C.

Worship

The Ministry on Worship together with the pastors oversees the spiritual life of the congregation. The members of the ministry serve as the elders of the church. The developing role of the elder at St. Luke's has been very positive. In recent years they have become more involved in care-taking ministry. They initiated church attendance with a WE CARE card being filled in each Sunday by the members. This is to be one tool that can assist in soul accounting. The members of the ministry have been encouraged to be part of visitation teams. Some of them have been through evangelism training and others participated in an elder training video course produced by the Missouri Synod.

When Rev. Albers was called to be the associate pastor the church provided a job description with a high percent of time

and focus on visitation of members. He also was asked to help develop the elder training program. This summer he attended a Care Ministry Workshop developed by John Savage and will begin to train members of St. Luke's this fall. We foresee more members being willing to be involved in visitation after they have had opportunity to be trained.

This ministry has helped the congregation make a number of transitions. Lutheran Worship, the new hymnal, was introduced as material was available and the transition went fairly smoothly. Four years ago individual cups were added as an option for our communicants. Elders have assisted with communion for about twenty years and in the past five years assisted with both of the elements. The ministry has engaged lay readers in our worship services and children's services are held on a regular basis. The ministry has encouraged a warm reception of visitors and promoted ways to increase choir and music participation. When Mr. Hagge was called as director of Christian education he was given some duties to develop a youth choir and promote and organize music participation.

The ministry serves as the supervisors of the called staff. They have encouraged good team development by defining the job descriptions and structure. The ministry now has a personnel committee which looks at salaries, benefits, and needs of the called staff as well as the office secretaries. The personal concern of the director and elders is also evident. The ministry has been open to on-going education for staff members and has helped present these requests to the Church Council.

The Staff

The called staff is currently at three full-time personnel. There is also full-time secretarial coverage with two sharing the position. The goal of having three full-time workers had been present for several years and became a reality when Mr. John Hagge accepted the call as Director of Christian Education in May of 1989. The job descriptions are fairly well defined and the team is developing well. The job description provides a good and workable framework for a team effort for Pastor, Associate Pastor, and Director of Christian Education. With three full-time staff there has been more time to be creative and develop additional areas of ministry. It also has provided time and personnel with the experience to meet the needs of more people as well as maintain the established areas of ministry. The team has a good balance and benefit from one another.

Summary Statements on St.Luke's and the Maturity Life Stage

The variety of ministries and staff comments have been made to provide data which indicates that St.Luke's is in the life cycle stage of maturity. There also is evidence that the non-dominant energy gene exists. Much energy is needed to keep the activities and programs of the church coordinated and focused. Often as one area develops and grows another area will lose some of its momentum. The following paragraphs give a few examples of this concern.

Five or six years ago the evangelism ministry started a new member visitation group. The visits were helpful in the process of assimilation. In the time that passed the visitation group got smaller until visits stopped. Assimilation has been talked about in several retreats, but the follow-up has not picked up this area of visitation. As a result a positive part of the assimilation has phased out. In the meantime there has been a good effort to host an orientation for all new members. The Family Activity Committee was organized to provide a good opportunity for members of all ages to be together in healthy family activities. This program has greatly helped with assimilation. But the key part of the one-to-one new member visit has been lost. The energy can only go so far. Maybe, a better set of checks and balances is needed to keep working on the priorities.

Now that we are bigger it seems to take longer for some of the ideas to take focus. This can be discouraging to those who want to get on with the ministry. The ideas and willingness may be there, but they may take too long to be tested or employed.

We live in an area with many shift workers. This, of course, has some real limitations. When the enthusiasm is strong for an idea it is great to see how these men and women work out the shifts and remain part of the project or activity. However, when the energy level lessens so does the commitment to make the inconvenient shifts.

By no means is the leadership of called staff or laypersons going to let the church slip into old age and death without looking at a variety of ways to keep it vitalized. There still is a good level of energy and if we team together better on the coordination of our programs, activities, ideas, and plans much can be done to move the church into renewal in the areas there are weaknesses.

The three person full-time staff has just over a year as a team. A number of areas are being developed and it will take

time for staff and lay leaders to evaluate, redevelop, and put ideas into action.

Attitudes

The general attitude of the membership which is involved is good. The leadership is positive oriented and wants to move forward. In the midst of what could have been a financial problem in 1989 they joined forces and came up with some special ways to present the concerns to the membership. The leaders in most areas work hard and want to see growth in the church in a spiritual way. More leaders seem free to share their faith and convictions. This has been exciting to observe.

The attitude of those not involved appears supportive or indifferent. This is the area of great potential. However, it will take a concerted effort over a period of time to engage these members into a more active role in the life of the church. Much attention has been given to approach this part of the membership. Some of the ideas seem very sound and now we must recruit and train persons to help in this internal growth process.

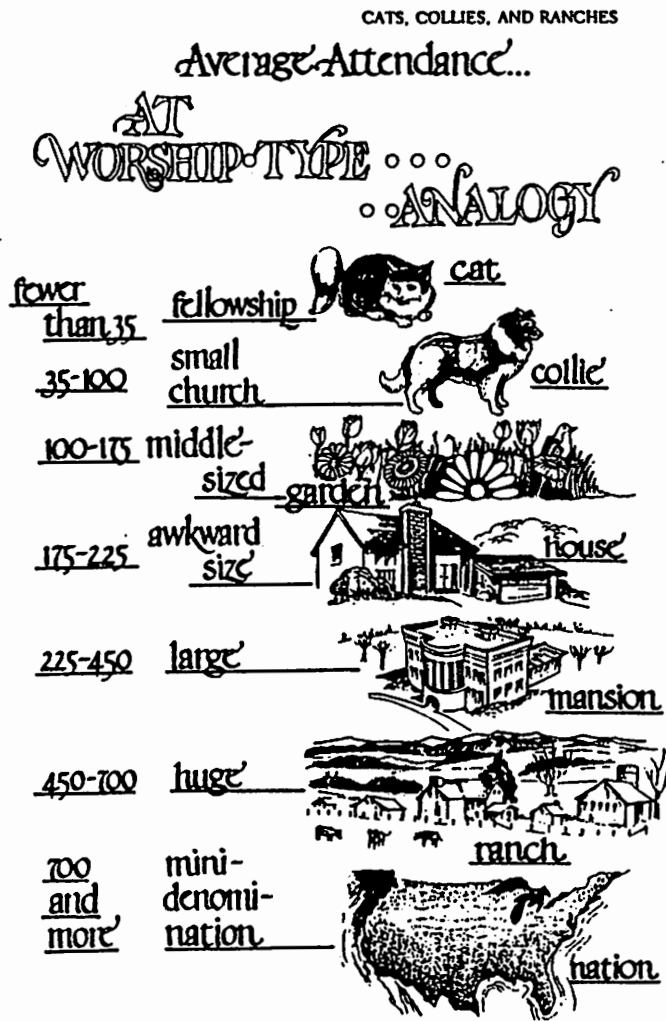
The attitude of the staff is positive, eventhough, there are some uncertainties when the support of the membership isn't evident. The leadership is supportive and as staff members we must team together with the leadership in maintaining the good focus toward meaningful ministry. The staff is willing to learn, to adjust, and to lead. There is a good amount of experience on the staff and as utilized will be of good benefit. Coordination and follow-through are key to future growth. A strong vision of ministry and foundation of faith will provide a healthy atmosphere in which the Lord can guide and lead the church. This growth can occur in the maturity stage as well. With renewal through the Holy Spirit a continued vital life will be experienced at St. Luke's. We must keep fresh in the Lord. As Martin Saarinen said, "The life cycle of a congregation has little, if anything to do with chronological time."²⁶ The life cycle has more to do with the relationship and balance of the prime structures of the congregation. These can be kept fresh with prayer, insight, mission focus, and love for God's people. With the prophet in Lamentations we need to remember:

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,
fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. The
Lord is all I have, and so in Him I put my hope.

Lamentations 3:22-24 TEV.

CHAPTER FIVE: Self-Appraisal, The Church, And St.Luke's

As Lyle Schaller suggests a church involved in self-appraisal can categorize itself according to attendance at worship. Then the church can deal with some of the unique features of its size. The following picture-graph reflects the average number of people at worship with a word description and an analogy description.²⁷



St. Luke's fits into the "huge" word description and the "ranch" analogy type with our average attendance at 530. Categorizing a church does not force it to fit all the characteristics of the category. But the explanations of the category are useful for reflection, comparison, and insight.

Factors to Face in Being a "Ranch"

There are a variety of factors that are important to look at in a "huge" or "ranch" size congregation. As large churches grow in membership they frequently find that the average attendance begins to plateau.²⁸ This has been true at St. Luke's. In the past ten years the attendance has remained about the same, eventhough, the membership has gone up some. The church attendance has been a concern of the Ministry on Worship and the Church Council for the past several years. The annual retreat has set improved attendance as one of its primary goals.

A "ranch" size congregation is marked by many activities happening at the same time in several places.²⁹ St. Luke's does fit this description. The examples of activities to support this statement are listed in chapter four of this paper.

The mission of the church is always important. It is, perhaps, more important with "huge" churches. Schaller comments that if people can agree on the larger context of the congregation (goals, mission, purpose, direction, etc.) they find it easier to agree on the details. Therefore, the church can be more effective than if there was not an over-all agreement on the bigger picture.³⁰

As a "huge" church it is important that we question ourselves frequently. Schaller suggests some questions which are listed here:³¹

- + What are we as a church trying to do?
- + Why do we exist as a church?
- + What are our priorities?
- + Do we spend most of our time trying to do yesterday over again or are we concentrating our resources on the needs of people today and tomorrow?
- + Are we interested in giving new birth tomorrow?

Schaller emphasizes that when a congregation moves from "large" to "huge" (from 400 at worship to 600) there is a substantial change in role, in self-expectations, in staffing, and in internal governance.³²

There are realities of becoming "huge" and the awareness of this must be communicated by the leadership to the membership. St. Luke's has just moved to three full-time staff. This is part of the effort to catch up on the change of our size. In the interim years some very dedicated volunteers helped bridge the gap, but with the growing needs it became important to call a third staff person. This person not only fills the need but helps maintain continuity and provide ideas for growth.

Part of the difficulty at a "ranch" is that some members are still feeling the task can be done just like before. Some don't want the additional Saturday or Thursday service. Some don't see that it is necessary to have more staff. They often look only at the visible actions. The worship services are held, the baptisms, marriages and funerals are conducted, and the sick and home bound are visited. They may think or say, "Afterall, Pastor Jones used to handle it all alone."

Leaders sometimes fail to see the nature of "hugeness" and, therefore, don't plan realistically. If there is not enough staff and leadership the volunteer does not have adequate time or opportunity to seek advice, direction, or reassurance from an "advisor". Over a period of time this has an effect on the momentum of the congregation and affects the ministry.

Larger churches also need to have a way to thank volunteers. This can be neglected because of the many things occurring at the same time. At St.Luke's we have missed opportunities to thank volunteers, because we assume someone else has or should take the task of thanking them.

Factors in a "Ranch" that Pertain to Senior Pastor

Schaller says that in a "ranch" size congregation the senior pastor may need fifty to eighty hours a week to know what's happening on the "ranch".³³ This sounds high, though, his point is good. There needs to be time for the senior pastor to oversee and stay aware of the church life. Staff members in a "huge" congregation begin to specialize in their area of work. This is reflected in the job descriptions at St.Luke's since we moved to three full-time staff members. Part of the senior pastor's role as administrating pastor is that of coordinator and supervisor.

Schaller has a variety of suggestions for the senior pastor. A number of them are listed here:³⁴

- a. Realize he is a "ranch" coordinator; he is not a ranchhand;
- b. Help the members, especially, the lay leadership realize this is a "ranch" and must be viewed and operated as one;
- c. See the larger picture and operate in a long time-frame;
- d. Spend less time doing and more time seeing that it is done; and
- e. He needs a good concept of his duties.

As a senior pastor I feel the tension between being the coordinator and wanting more one-to-one ministry. I've grown in this area and have found the church leaders and elders helpful. They have built some of the concepts of senior pastor into the job description. Both Pastor Albers and I are to spend time training lay persons so they can be more involved in the life of the church. We have lay persons doing fine work in teaching, in visitation, in administering, and in many areas of leadership. Increase in their involvement is a continual challenge to us as a congregation. The Apostle Paul shares with us a helpful summary of the proper use of gifts in the church in Ephesians:

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Eph. 4:11-12

RSV.

Factors Involving the Church's Orientation

Schaller lists the basic orientations of churches as these:³⁵

- = Denominational
- = Non-denominational
- = Transdenominational
- = Independent
- = Community

St. Luke's is denominational in its orientation. We are also community oriented as we welcome others to our worship and to our activities. We place a high goal on members growing in the faith and knowing how to share the teachings of the church. We desire that are members be able to share their beliefs and the personal experiences they have with the Lord. We seek a firm commitment from members and want them to use their gifts in service in the Lord and His Church. We are continually looking at ways we can do a better job of discipling and helping one another grow in their relationship to Christ.

Being a member of a denomination is helpful to our church. As a Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod congregation we have a strong identity. In Schaller's terminology we are also seen as an "ideological" church.³⁶ Some of our goals are established by being a member congregation of our synod. We do have traditions, rites, ceremonies, customs, schedules, and practices which are part of our heritage, identity, and focus. Schaller says, "The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is an outstanding

example of the ideological denomination.³⁷ It is also important to identify ourselves as a "confessional" church. As a confessional church we emphasize God's grace shared with His people in Word and Sacrament. The God we worship is known by faith and not by reason. We confess that we are always in need of God's grace. With His grace then we can proceed with the deeds, works, activities, and involvement of congregational life. In the letter to the Ephesians Paul shares so clearly the proper order of grace, faith, and works:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is a gift of God--- not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Eph. 2:8-10 RSV.

Factors Considered for Group Life

Whether the church is small, medium, or large the health of group life is very important. As groups are alive and meet the needs of members so the church is alive. A most common product that occurs in largeness is that not enough face-to-face groups develop. A variety of detrimental by-products are possible when face to face groups are not adequate. Schaller refers to a number of these by-products with a number of them listed here:³⁸

- a. A large number of members become inactive.
- b. Many new members have difficulties in gaining a sense of belonging.
- c. Difficulties are experienced in enlisting volunteers and it appears the burden of serving as workers and leaders "falls on the same old loyal core."
- d. Members find it easy to drop out or switch their membership to another church whenever there is an internal disruption.
- e. New members often have a strong loyalty to the minister and drop out when that minister leaves.
- f. The teaching ministry is inadequate to meet the needs of the people.
- g. Means-to-an-end issues such as real estate, finances, and personnel tend to dominate the agenda of the governing board.
- h. The pressures and strains of pluralism become increasingly divisive.

We are thankful that St. Luke's does not have all the by-products but several of them are appearing. We do have some concerns with inactive membership and difficulty in some areas to enlist needed volunteers. In the past several years the Church Council has also begun to spend too much time on finances. The other by-products which Schaller lists don't seem to be a concern here. There are enough symptoms to know that our group life does need attention.

New groups can be a healthy way to meet the needs of new members and to meet the particular need of people as they encounter new stages in their lives. Established groups often continue to serve good purposes, but they can be limited in growth. Schaller says that most groups that have been together for an extended period of time tend to want new members but often are perceived as closed and exclusionary by potential new members.³⁹ Certainly, there are exceptions to this, especially, if the group is one that must have new members to survive. Group life is considered so important that some congregations have a staff member for the purpose of working primarily with maintaining and establishing groups.

It is important to note that group life includes a wide variety of activities. It includes committees, ministries, circles, Bible studies, fellowship gathering, project meetings, training meetings, choir practice, and most any gathering of the members on a regular basis. St. Luke's has many of these groups built into its congregational and auxiliary structures. In some cases we are lacking members in our circles and ministries. If we worked together to recruit volunteers we would serve two purposes. It would help fill a needed ministry or circle and strengthen the group life. I believe there are ways we could do a better job of recruiting volunteers. This is an important goal in the coming months.

It is also important that we look at ways to begin new groups. These groups could begin on the basis of an interest area or a particular unifying factor for them. The church could become more aggressive in trying some of these groups. For example, these could include: new mothers, single parents, divorced men, parents of young children, parents of teenagers, new members, single adults, group for those going through loss, group for those experiencing depression, and many other possibilities. Many times we approach some of these needs from an individual point of view. Groups can meet some on-going needs. A church needs to open up and take some risks in this area of group development. Yes, there will be failure and some groups won't get

off the ground. However, for those groups that would succeed the benefits would be experienced by the group as well as the congregation. I would suggest that each of these groups have a portion of their time used in reflecting on the Word of the Lord. The leader or leaders could incorporate this in ways that were appropriate for the group. The author of Hebrews presents some challenges to Christians that seem to encourage getting together:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Hebrews 10: 23-25 RSV.

Factors Involved in The Growth of the Church

One of the questions a church can ask itself in self-appraisal is this, "Are the best days of our congregation behind or ahead of us?" The question can help focus on growth. Once the congregation is committed to making the focus the present and the future growth can be looked at more clearly. Growth is not to be seen as just growth in numbers. In fact, a church could decline in numbers and experiencing good internal growth. If a church focuses too much on the "good-old-days" the danger of apathy and passivity are great. Schaller feels that self-appraisal and information is a key factor of overcoming apathy and passivity.⁴⁰ A church that is willing to look at itself is willing to set goals in growing.

A clear defined commitment by the congregation and its members is important in being growth oriented. The commitment to a congregation is secondary to our commitment to Christ. But both of them go hand in hand. As faith grows and becomes a more dominant part of life the Christian looks for avenues to put the faith into action. A congregation seeking commitment needs to be firm in the Word of God and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide and lead.

Many leaders in congregations have been exposed to setting goals and establishing objectives through various business and managerial training. There are certainly some good and helpful items which can be taken from these processes and used in church life. However, we must be cautious and not make the church too business like. Schaller warns that difficulty arises when a business approach is adopted without modification by the church.⁴¹

Managerial procedures often influence the assignment of priorities and the selection of goals. Since they look for measurable, specific goals they may avoid the less measurable ones which the church really needs to be about and to maintain the mission of the Gospel. The church is to serve God and humankind. Schaller aptly states, "No one has been able to program the Holy Spirit or to budget the grace of God."⁴²

Schaller has a number of suggestions which build relationship and bring growth through group life. These ten guidelines are provided as an aid for congregations to improve group life.⁴³

1. Life Together Overnight (retreat, conference, etc)
2. Begin a New Venture Together
3. Continuity in Leadership
4. Participate in Shared-Work Experience
5. Share in a Structural Study Experience
6. Pioneer New Goals
7. Meet in the Same Place
8. Grow Old Together
9. Identify Common Enemy (cause to fight for)
10. Plan Friendship Building Events

Outreach ministry can also enhance internal and external growth. Outreach is the main mission of the church and as we are other-focused we have less time to dwell on ourselves and bicker about secondary things.

At St. Luke's we have found good growth in a number of Bible study settings and in outreach ministry. We have also seen the common project develop good group experiences. The women's small group Bible studies and circles meet many of the group needs as they are very personal and interest oriented. The producing of pictorial directories was a good example of new groups pulling together for a common purpose. We need to have an on-going awareness of areas where groups would be helpful in accomplishing tasks in the church. The ministries of the congregation also become more active when a goal or project is clearly defined. We get bogged down when just the routines are being maintained. The group life at St. Luke's has generally been healthy. We have many challenges ahead to strengthen these groups, increase the number of groups, and take risks to try new groups.

Factors Involved in Assimilation

Good group life helps assimilate new members. Congregations must encourage face-to-face groups for good assimilation and

growth. Schaller says that statistics show that for each one hundred members there should be six or seven groups.⁴⁴ He feels that people want choices and, therefore, churches need to offer a variety of opportunities. Groups that can easily incorporate new members greatly aid in assimilation. As people are assimilated they remain involved and actively participate in the new of the church. When groups are alive the church is alive.

Groups in a church can enhance their value as they recognize the opportunity they provide for face-to-face growth. A choir for example can be looked at not just to practice and sing but as a ministry of music. The youth activities can become a youth ministry. The ministry concept builds structure for relationships. These relationships meet social needs of members. These face-to-face opportunities also provide friendships which help people in their emotional well being. As the church stays on mission all of these face-to-face interactions contribute to the spiritual growth and the commitment of members to the Lord and to each other.

Another helpful area for groups in churches is the area of reinforcing each other's ministry. As new members or potential members see this common support they tend to want to be a part of the positive action. Some of this reinforcing takes place with good scheduling and awareness of other activities. But most of the reinforcement is a result of being committed to a common mission and having a good understanding of the ministry of the church to all the members. The reinforcement is also better when the church has a healthy focus on outreach and seeking ways to meet the needs of people for the seek of the Gospel. The Scripture encourages the members to recognize their connection with one another as in Romans:

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:...

Romans 12: 4-6a. RSV.

CHAPTER SIX: Concluding Notes

The systems approach has helped us look at the life of the church from a broader perspective. The systems approach enables us to look at families and not just at individuals. The systems approach has other elements which could be employed. The self-appraisal could look at vertical and horizontal flow of anxiety that is produced by stresses on the family. This would mean a more detailed look at the past generation of church members and leaders for the vertical flow. It would mean more data on the current groups and interrelationships of individuals, leaders, and groups on the horizontal flow.

The three generational aspect of family systems is important. An appraisal could also include more of these inner ties and connections. The chapters on family process, life cycles, and self-appraisal have presented data that reflected on the history of St. Luke's and has connected some of the multi-generational influences.

One of the main benefits of a systems approach to self-appraisal is that the responsibility of the church is redistributed to more people. The approach has many possibilities for team ministry and growth in development of leadership in the church.

Howell has a helpful summary statement of the work of the members of the church:⁴⁵

As a community of faith it (the church) was established by God to fulfill His purposes in the world, and it is still sustained by Him. It is often limited by human frailty and sin, but it is essential to the life of faith and to the fulfilling of God's commission to serve as a reconciling force in human relationship--the relationship between God and persons as well as the relationship between persons.

The church has a forward mission to the people of God in the active part of the congregation and to the inactive part. It also must be faithful to the mission to share the Gospel in a world with broken relationship with its Creator. Paul reminds us of our task as ambassadors who represent Christ and His Church:

Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of

reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 RSV.

The church centered in the Word and committed to Christ has many opportunities in our time. People in and out of the church are hungering for the love and acceptance that only the Lord can give. As we learn to function effectively in the family of the church and continue to seek the strength of the Holy Spirit the Lord will guide and lead us. His mission is our mission. He gave us families to share. As we understand the dynamics of the family of the church we can be more effective servants of the Lord.

St. Luke's has had many blessings and has been effective in the mission and ministry of Christ and His Church. We have many areas in which we can improve and grow. We have some danger signs as pointed out that must be avoided. We have a resource of people who love their Lord and a wealth of gifts and abilities. As we seek God's strength to work together the Spirit can bring much produce. Jesus tells us clearly to keep nourished in Him:

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15: 5 RSV.

FOOTNOTES

¹Lyle E. Schaller, Looking In The Mirror (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

²Schaller, p. 9.

³Jere Allen and George Bullard, "Where Is Your Church In The Life Cycle?", Parish Magazine (1982), 12, p. 23.

⁴John C. Howell, Church and Family Growing Together (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), p. 34.

⁵Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society, 2nd Ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 273.

⁶Evelyn Duvall, Family Development, 4th Ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1977)

⁷Howell, p. 35.

⁸Allen and Bullard, p. 23.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Edwin H. Friedman, Generation to Generation (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), p. 195.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 211.

²⁰Ibid., p. 221.

²¹Martin F. Saarinen, "The Life Cycle of A Congregation," Christian Digest (1987), 3, p. 15.

²²Ibid., pp. 16-17.

²³Ibid.

24Ibid.

25Ibid., p. 15.

26Ibid.

27Schaller, p. 16.

28Ibid., p. 29.

29Ibid.

30Ibid., p. 10.

31Ibid., pp. 96-97.

32Ibid., p. 29.

33Ibid., p. 32.

34Ibid., p. 31.

35Ibid., p. 99.

36Ibid., p. 69.

37Ibid., p. 62.

38Ibid., p. 137.

39Ibid., p. 139.

40Ibid., p. 10.

41Ibid., p. 41.

42Ibid., p. 43.

43Ibid., pp. 142-145.

44Ibid., p. 138.

45Howell, p. 15.

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Appendix B

Mission Statement of St. Luke's



SAINT LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

2011 TENTH STREET SOUTH
WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WISCONSIN 54494

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

We, the people of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, in joyful response to all that our gracious God has done for us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, dedicate ourselves:

- (1) to growing in faith and love
- (2) to working together in God's Kingdom
- (3) to reaching out with the Gospel of Jesus

IT IS OUR PLAN to pray as if everything depended upon the blessing of Almighty God - because it does - AND getting up from our knees, to work as if everything depended upon us - because Jesus has left it up to us with the help of the Holy Spirit.

OUR MINISTRY

Our ministry Goals and Plans can be realized with Christ's love and our commitment. We need your involvement by:

Praying to the Lord on behalf of our
MINISTRY

Committing yourself to regular worship
and Bible Study

Partaking often of the Body of Christ in
Holy Communion for the assurance of for-
giveness of sins and the strengthening
of faith

Accepting leadership roles when they are
offered to you

Discovering your own hidden talents while
you help others discover and use theirs in
the Lord's service

Doing the Lord's work beyond your own
physical activity through financial means
in a larger measure