Relational Health Through The Communion Service At The Lighthouse Seventh-Day Adventist Church In Fort Lauderdale, Fl

M. Curtis Powell
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ABSTRACT

RELATIONAL HEALTH THROUGH THE COMMUNION SERVICE AT THE LIGHTHOUSE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

by

M. Curtis Powell

Adviser: Finbar Benjamin
Title: RELATIONAL HEALTH THROUGH THE COMMUNION SERVICE AT THE LIGHTHOUSE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

Name of researcher: M. Curtis Powell

Name and degree of adviser: Finbar Benjamin, DMin

Date completed: May 2017

Problem

The history of conflict at the Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church can be traced to the different attitudes and approaches toward the corporate worship experience held by the membership. One view of worship is more akin to traditional liturgy and style. One segment of the congregation, composed mainly of older members, prefers the use of hymns, emphasizes reverence in the sanctuary, and is skeptical of drums. Their posture could be considered reflective rather than overtly expressive. The other view of worship is more akin to contemporary elements and style. They prefer more contemporary genres of music, a more contemporary liturgy, and seek greater inclusivity of instruments. Their posture could be considered more expressive than reflective. These
competing views created tension within the congregation, which grew into relational strain, un-Christlike attitudes, and disengagement from some of the youth. The presence of unresolved conflict, along with the strain caused to relationships, continue to jeopardize the mission and integrity of the church.

Method

To address the issues of relational conflict a qualitative methods approach using focus groups sought to implement a new communion service that addressed the relational conflict within the church. This qualitative method will be used to assess the congregation’s attitudes and interactions during one of the most sacred services of the Christian church, namely the communion service. This has been chosen due to its unique ability to bring people together in commemoration of God’s salvation for mankind through Jesus Christ. With new features added to this service it is hoped that healing and reconciliation can take place, and originating issues of conflict can be addressed. It will seek to move the congregation toward relational health as outlined throughout Scripture.

Results

Over 90% of the members of the second focus group believed that the newly implemented elements of the communion service moved the congregation toward greater relational health. It also produced the following results: (a) the creation of a blended worship experience that incorporated cultural diversity and liturgical preferences. (b) Greater appreciation of cultural differences and reflecting these cultural differences in the communion service, (c) greater membership engagement in solution based dialogue, (d) in-
creased attendance during our preparatory services before the communion service. (e) Improved attitudes toward servant leadership.

Conclusions

The communion service may provide the following: (a) A theological platform for healing conflicted churches in a similar context. (b) Encourages church leaders be proactive and intentional in leading a congregation toward biblically based solutions for conflict. (c) Contributes to the emerging field of Black pastoral theology and Black practical theology within a Seventh-day Adventist Caribbean context
RELATIONAL HEALTH THROUGH THE COMMUNION
SERVICE AT THE LIGHTHOUSE SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH IN
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

A Project Document

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

M. Curtis Powell

May 2017
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A project document presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry

by

M. Curtis Powell

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE

[Signatures]

Adviser, Finbar Benjamin

[Signature]

John Nixon, II

[Signature]

Nilson Ferreira

Director, DMin Program
Kleber D. Gonçalves

Dean, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Jiří Moskala

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Date approved
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Personal History

My earliest memories of my Christian experience revolve around family worship on Friday evening. I have many positive memories surrounding my family unit and extended family. My journey into Christian maturity and faith in Christ grew out of this familial context. As I developed through my high school and collegiate years my introverted nature was being challenged as I felt God’s call to ministry in my life. After attending Oakwood College, now Oakwood University, I began to better understand and appreciate the African-American Adventist experience. This matriculation process was a turning point for me not only as an aspiring pastor, but I began to understand more clearly my context and identity as an African-American Seventh-day Adventist. This reshaped the lens through which I viewed my society, church, and community.

My journey of education led me to the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. At this institution, I was blessed to interact and dialogue with colleagues from around the world. This intercultural dialogue expanded my worldview of ministry and practice. I realized more than ever the need for understanding and sensitivity when approaching different cultural contexts. This broadened view aided me in my pastorate as I intersected with various cultures from within the Black Diaspora. My context as pastor has taken place under the umbrella of regional conferences. More
specifically, the Southeastern Conference whose territory includes all of Florida except a portion of the panhandle, and a small portion of southwest Georgia.

Most congregations in Florida consist of members from the African-American, and African-Caribbean communities. Most of the congregations I pastored preceding the Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church (LSDAC) were a mixed blend of both populations. The Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church was the first church I served where the congregants were entirely of Caribbean origin. This new dynamic proved both challenging and rewarding as I had to learn, listen, and lead in a context different from my own. This proved to be a theological journey of self-discovery, and theological practice.

This congregation, unlike others I had pastored, had a history that had been marred by significant conflict. These challenges though daunting and disturbing, positioned the church for a new journey through the discipline of practical theology. The prevailing conflict provided a targeted context for pastoral care. Although all my attention was not absorbed by this reality, the conflict affected mission and even reputation. I realized more than ever the need to move the congregation toward relational healing and unity. Ken Sande (2004) notes in his work that conflict provides an opportunity to Glorify God. It was my hope that this project that originated from a place of hurt could lead the congregation to a place of healing.

Statement of the Problem

The Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church is primarily a Caribbean congregation located in Ft. Lauderdale, FL; the vast majority of members are first generation citizens. Conflict within the congregation arose from various views on
corporate worship. One group consists of members who are generally older in age, traditional in their view of worship, and comprise most of the leadership positions. The worship liturgy could be described as conservative, reflective, predictable, and rigid. This style of worship was in deep contrast with the preference of another section of members, many of who were younger in age. Their preference could be described as more contemporary, more inclusive of various instruments, including drums, and more expressive. These competing views caused tension between members within the congregation. This historical marker of conflict manifested in relationships that were strained. While there is significant data from outside the theological community on conflict, and prescribed resolution practice, there is little to no data on liturgical responses to conflict within an African-Caribbean congregational context.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project is to use the communion service to foster relational unity in the congregation. A new Communion liturgy that focused on unity, reconciliation, and healing would be developed and implemented to foster unity among the members. This process will be evaluated by focus groups, as to how it improves relational unity. Theological reflection will be discussed in four broad categories along with minor subdivisions. The first section will focus on the institution of Passover and its historical foundation in the Old Testament. The second area will provide an overview of the New Testament transition from Passover to the Lord’s Supper, and the resulting implications. Paul’s letter to Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11 and its relationship to the reality of conflict will also be examined. Selected excerpts from the writings of Ellen G. White will be
previewed. At the conclusion, a synthesis of the major themes will be discussed and their implications for practical theology within an African-Caribbean context.

A series of sermons based on reflection of theological themes and current literature will be preached on relational unity in the context of the communion service. Specifications for focus group participants will be shared with congregants. Congregants who desire to participate in the focus group will sign an interest sheet posted in the church. A focus group of 10 congregants will be approved by the church board from the names registered. The focus group will discuss with the Pastor how biblical principles can be implemented as a process before, during and after the quarterly communion service. The process suggested by the focus group will be developed and implemented. A quarterly review by the focus group with pastoral oversight will analyze the effectiveness of the communion process.

Justification for the Project

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church there are numerous accounts of growing congregations and vibrant ministries. There are, however, congregations where internal conflict has impacted the mission and vibrancy of the church. Churches are not immune to discord and relational strain. However, there is a liturgical setting where conflict can be addressed and remedied. The liturgy of the communion service provides a theological setting for congregants to move toward unity. The elements of the table, the bread and wine combined with the foot-washing ordinance provide a theological context like no other liturgy. During the Communion service the emblems speak to a common theme of forgiveness, reconciliation, reverence and unity. When this new worship liturgy is experienced, it can address the issues that originate with congregational conflict. Its
rediscovery and application on the local church level may add a new balm for healing and unity.

More specifically this project may also contribute to Afro-Caribbean theology. There is growing interest in theology that includes the Caribbean perspective and experience. My context of ministry and my identity as an African-American pastor may add a unique perspective and contribution to this ever-growing field of study. My pastoral role of preacher or prophet changed during the project and I had to operate from a mediatory priestly role. Seventh-day Adventist pastors and theologians may be able to draw priestly theological themes from this model of pastoral care. This thematic pastoral lens of priestly mediation may be a subject worthy of future study and consideration.

**Expectations for the Project**

This project seeks to move the Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church toward healthier relationships, by providing a biblical foundation for healing damaged relationships within the congregation. This project is intended to engage church leaders and congregants during the focus group research process, and lead them toward solutions for their church.

**Delimitations of the Project**

The scope of this project is limited to the Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is my hope that this research process can assist other churches similar in size and culture, within and without our denominational window.
Limitations

This project was challenged by some who saw no need to move the church in the direction the project group and myself were facilitating. They assumed that the church was just fine. Although opposition was not with the majority, I had to make sure to engender trust among church leaders and members of influence.

Secondly, I was often directed away from moving toward solution-focused ministry to conflict resolution and mediation between members. At times the leaders of the church would get bogged down with conflict that demanded my attention. At the outset I underestimated the amount of time and energy that were required to complete the project. The demands of ministry coupled with a second church often pulled at my attention and energy.

Methodology

Methods of this project were based on qualitative research. This research method has proven helpful for congregational studies and used within the disciplines of practical theology. The church membership was involved through the establishment of focus groups. Members were encouraged to sign the Focus Group Membership list posted in the church foyer. It was my intent to gain a convenient sample of the congregation that reflected the composition of the church in gender, age, and country of origin. The registrants, while different in their gender and country of origin, were not as diverse in age as desired. The focus groups were informed theologically from the preaching series that probed the narratives of the Passover and its corporate emancipation motifs. The series also included the institution of the Lord’s Supper and its implications for the
congregation. The overall themes presented revolved around corporate solidarity, reconciliation, forgiveness and unity. This series helped the participants have a better understanding of the intentionality of the communion service. Unlike the previous services that operated in generalities, the new communion service would be targeted toward healing and unity.

This series was driven by a quest to re-discover the implications of the Lord’s Supper in light of relational-health, which is supported by the biblical and theological messages of scripture. A questionnaire was given to the focus group by the pastor to generate discussion. Notes were taken for further reflection and content analysis. After discussing with the focus group the issues that caused destabilized relationships within the congregations, the focus group continued to work toward solutions that emerged from biblical themes that could be practiced within the communion service. This new communion service would be different in its liturgy, genres of music and sermonic intentionality.

The process was repeated with Focus Group 2 after a period of about 18 months. During the interim, pastoral observation and membership dialogue revealed that there was still a need for more healing within the congregation. When the second group was established following similar protocol aforementioned, I removed myself as moderator. A local elder was selected to serve as moderator for the group to remove any potential bias arising from my presence. Comparisons and conclusions of both focus groups will be shared and analyzed.
Focus Group Results

At the conclusion of the intervention 90% of the participants in the second focus group believed that the new communion service began the process of healing and reconciliation within the congregation. Additionally, six elements emerged from our observation and dialogue:

1. Membership Engagement: The focus group was excited to be a part of the solution process. In previous years, the voice of the people seemed muted by the leadership of the church.

2. A Blended Worship Experience: The worship experience prior to focus group involvement was dominated by a conservative style of worship that was marked by one genre of music. The focus group opened the congregation to a more balanced approach to worship that included elements from contemporary worship.

3. Created Interest in Prayer Meeting: The preaching series prior to every communion was marked by a dramatic increase in attendance. The members looked forward to the preparatory preaching series.

4. Changing Attitudes about Servant Leadership: Communion ended with a feast where the leadership would serve the meal. This further impressed upon the members the application of servant leadership.

5. Cultural Inclusivity: The Communion service was enhanced further by a Mass Choir, which was comprise of various generations and cultures. Their song selections were also in English, French, and Spanish.
6. A Priestly Ministry Model: This priestly model of ministry emerged from ministry practice. Contrasting with a more prophetic model of ministry proposed by Black theology. This ministry model grew from my ministry context.

The challenged posed by this project was the need for long-term analysis and follow-up. In the short term the consensus of the Focus Group 2 was that this new liturgy would indeed impact the congregation in a meaningful way. The long-term analysis of data was desired, but cut short by my transition to a new assignment.

**Definition of Terms**

*Black Practical Theology:* Black practical theology is the disciplined study of African-American theology, religious experience, ministry praxis, and cultural dynamics within this culturally specific domain.

*Black Theology:* A reinterpretation of the Christian faith through the context of the African-American experience for liberation during the civil rights movements during the 1960s (Cone, 1984).

*Conflict:* A fight, battle, or struggle, especially a prolonged struggle; strife (Dictionary.com).

*Content Analysis:* A method for analyzing and interpreting qualitative survey data by examining the content of written or recorded documents and recorded observations and behavior (Fink, 2003).

*Focus Group:* They are a research method for collecting qualitative data, they are focused efforts at data gathering, and they generate data through group discussion (Morgan, 1998).
**Holy Communion/Lord’s Supper:** An early Christian celebration modeled on the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples prior to his death (Powell, 2011).

**LSDAC:** Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Open Ended Questions:** A question that requires the respondent to use his or her own words in answering (Fink, 2003).

**Ordinal Response Choices:** Response choices that respondents use to rate or order items, say, from very positive to very negative (Fink, 2003).

**Passover:** A religious festival commemorating God’s deliverance of the Jews from slavery (Powell, 2011).

**Practical Theology:** Practical theology focuses on human praxis as a point of departure and the mutual interlocutory relationship between practices and theory and their sources (Andrews & Smith, 2015).

**Relational Health:** Harmonious interaction between people within families, institutions, and communities.

**Qualitative Research:** Involves the studied use of a collection of a variety of empirical materials-case study; cultural texts-that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).
CHAPTER 2
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is fourfold. First, this chapter seeks to ensure that practical theology is biblically grounded. This biblical foundation will serve as a lens from which to view and critique the contributions from other leading thinkers in the field of practical theology, and researchers from various disciplines. Secondly, this chapter seeks to expand the understanding of the communion service by focusing on biblical themes that arise from selected Scriptural texts. These selected portions of scripture were chosen due to the connection with the origin of the communion service, its institution, and its application. Thirdly, due to the scant literature focusing on the communion service within a Seventh-day Adventist-Caribbean perspective, this chapter seeks to apply emerging biblical themes to a specified congregational context; thereby adding a voice to the ever-growing body of scholarship in this budding field. Lastly, this chapter seeks to draw attention to a priestly model of practical ministry, which contrasts with the prophetic model of ministry provided by proponents of black theology.

Relational health and the communion service serve as the umbrella for the following sections. The first section will focus on the Old Testament (OT) narrative of the Passover experience. The second section will focus on the institution of the Lord’s Supper. The third section will concentrate on the chaos of the Corinthian church
surrounding its abuses of the Lord’s Supper, and Paul’s counsel to this congregation. The writings of early Seventh-day Adventist church co-founder Ellen G. White, that focus on the communion service will be examined. Lastly, the theological concepts and themes that emerge when dealing with a Caribbean congregation within North America will be discussed.

**Origins of the Communion Service**

For one to fully grasp the thematic nuances of unity it is important to examine the roots of the communion service that is practiced by local congregations today. These themes provide a theological ground for application within local congregations. As stated earlier, I will emphasize the theological contributions these narratives give to congregants originating from the Caribbean. This is not an attempt to narrow its scope and focus, but rather to align the theological themes within a cultural context. Hiltner (1958) in his formative work on pastoral theology states, “All realms of theological inquiry involve relationship between faith and culture” (p. 22). The application within a cultural context allow for theology to become practical.

The communion service practiced today in local congregations is rooted in the Passover experience instituted during the emancipation of God’s people (Exod 12:1-11). The instructions given in Exodus 12:1-11 were very implicit. During these feasts the families were to gather and sacrifice a one-year-old lamb without defect and slather some of the blood on the doorpost. Next, the flesh of the lamb would be roasted and eaten in haste along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (Exod 12:8). The families were not to leave any meat for the next morning (Exod 12:10). If there were leftovers, they were to be consumed with fire (Exod 12:10). Instructions were also given as to the Israelites’
attire; they were to eat this meal with their sandals on and their robes tucked in their belt, and staff in hand, signifying preparedness (Exod 12:11).

Most readers view the narrative of Exodus 12 as an event of liberation. Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggeman (2003) makes the following observation:

While the narrative rendering of emancipatory counter-reality is characteristically Jewish and serves Judaism in a primal way (Levenson 1993, 127-59), it is also the case that the same narrative has funded the emancipatory imagination of liberation theology in many parts of the world, in circles of Christian faith beyond the concrete and immediate claims of Judaism. (Chapter 4, para. 15)

Bruggeman rightly points out the ripple effect of Jewish emancipation and its impact on theology. This liberation motif has permeated global theological insights, and more pointedly, Black theology. However, Black theologians, pastors and practitioners do not have a monopoly on liberation themes. Conversely, the theological understanding of sin and its slave-like allusions (Rom 6:16-19) illustrate the global need for liberation. This liberation marked a new period for the Israelites, as it should for new believers in Christ.

**Multi-Generational Inclusivity**

Then you shall say to your son: We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. (Duet 6:21-23 NKJV)

Davidson (1994) highlights the inclusivity of Passover. He states, “Even though the whole generation who physically experienced the Exodus is dead, the Lord insisted that the succeeding generation of Israel reckons that they personally came out of Egypt” (p. 18). Davidson chronicles the Passover experience as an event not only for the generation that experienced it, but also for generations to come. He highlights quotations
from Exodus and Deuteronomy that detail God's intent on generational inclusion. Phrases such as “He brought us out” (Duet 6:23) and “He delivered our households” (Exod 12:27) point the reader to the inclusion of future generations. This “retelling” was not intended to simply be a story of what God did for them, on the contrary it is a story on what God has done for all believers. Witherington (2007) supports this by stating, “Notice that the rehearsal of the story makes it clear that it is not just a matter of Jews remembering who they were, but indeed who they are and continue to be. There is a corporate solidarity of Jews in these events over many generations” (p. 4).

The themes of liberation, rebirth, unity and purification all culminate in the Messianic reality of Jesus Christ. Davidson continues to argue that these are not truly complete without shalom! This peace is the result of the Messianic activity of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Although Witherington supports Davidson on the retelling aspect, he omits the fact that the liberation motif transcends Jewish identity and pervades New Testament theology (John 8:36).

Davidson's article contributes to the local church in this fashion. The church is Abraham’s seed (Gal 3:29) and is also included in the story telling of the Passover experience. The inclusivity Davidson highlights can be realized in the life of the church today. The “ekklesia” has been liberated from bondage (Rom 8:15) by the blood of the Lamb (1 John 1:7). The local church also has a story to tell (Matt 28:18-20) about the liberating message of the gospel. This shared reality should move the people toward greater solidarity.

We may not have Shalom in its fullness, but should strive for Shalom even though it may exist momentarily in congregational life. I believe the peace of Messiah can be
realized in the life of the people of God. Davidson seems to hold peace as the culminating experience for the believer. While this fact is true in its eschatological sense, I would argue that the local congregation should strive for Shalom! Some may ask, “Why should we wait for peace?” I would argue that this eschatological hope for peace can be both friend and foe.

When viewed through my own contextual lens I consider the proponents of Black theology who viewed the eschatological hope as an excuse for non-action. While I am not implying this to be the intent of Davidson, black scholars such as Cone, hold eschatological views of peace and justice with contempt (Cone, 1984). Others such as Andrews and Smith (2015) help explain why this element of peace and eschatology is so important to diaspora communities of faith. They note that the slaves were enamored by the story of Moses and the redemption of God’s people. The authors further reveal that early slave theology viewed Moses and Jesus along correlational lines. Therefore, for the slave, who witnessed injustice, and cruelty, Jesus was their Moses. It gave them hope in an eschatological sense of peace and safety, while hoping for peace and safety in their present state. This historical reference reveals ancient slave theology is congruent with Christological typologies. One can see in diaspora communities separated by time and space similar resonance with this redeemer/liberation motif that culminates in peace. While the term “liberation” may resonate stronger within African-American context, Davis (1990), a leading scholar on Caribbean theology notes the following:

Emancipation is for Caribbean people a strong emotive word, connoting that spirituality of freedom which they are pursuing. The word “liberation” does not offer as much. Emancipation links us existentially with the struggle of our slave ancestors, since we are the inheritors of that struggle; it also keeps before us the strongest warning away from the bondage to which God wills that we should never return. (pp. 102, 103)
Davis brings in another voice that aids in understanding the context of Caribbean congregants. The emancipation for Caribbean is akin to the liberation for African-Americans. The context for both in my view should not only be couched in eschatological terms. The hope of a coming King to bring peace on earth is a wonderful hope for all believers, but it should be counterbalanced by congregational activity to establish peace on earth. While the limitation of Christian effort and pastoral leadership may fall short, the purpose and action of such efforts is both biblical (Rom 12:18) and contextually valid. Furthermore, it is absurd for a conflicted congregation to sing and preach about the eschatological hope of peace without implementing any plan for pathways toward peace. How can the proponents of hope contrast its essence by lifestyle and attitudes? They can implement these elements by focusing on Jesus Christ the “Prince of Peace.” This discussion takes direction back to the center of emancipation and liberation, Jesus Christ. Again, we see the Christological center for both eschatology and current Christian practice.

The Passover and New Beginnings

Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. (Exod 12:1, 2)

While the Christological implications were not clear for the Exodus generation, the blessings of liberation marked a period of newness. The Passover experience was marked as a new beginning in the lives of Gods covenant people. The month of Abib (Exod 13:4; 23:15) is now the new beginning for this liberated people. Their liberation is now an official historical maker that can be attested to by their calendar year. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary “Abib, means ear-month, owing to the
fact, that grain was then in the ear” (Nichol, 1978a, p. 548). Although the timing is synonymous with agricultural cycles, this newness was much more than an agricultural marker, it marked a new identity for these former slaves. The agricultural parallel may have been a starting point for teaching former slaves about the activity of God. Obviously, any new beginning would be a significant event for former slaves. This event marked something greater than liberation from slavery. This new beginning for the liberated slaves was pointing them to the Messianic hope. The Messianic hope in their context centered on the usage of the lamb. The lamb was to be of a certain age (Exod 12:5) The lamb was to be killed at a specific time, (Exod 12:6). The lamb was to be prepared a certain way and eaten (Exod 12:9). The blood was to be placed on the doorpost (Exod 12:7). All these instructions were being done in the camp, at the same time, by a people unsure of the outcome. This drama-like ritual bonded the people in their preparation for deliverance. It provided solidarity through their corporate salvation experience. They were all doing the same thing at the same time, with the same hope. Even before liberation is realized we see a Christological center illuminating from their preparatory activity.

The new beginning that Passover ushers in is linked to its Christological center. For the believer, Christ gives new beginning (2 Cor 5:17). Christ is our Passover (1 Cor 5:7). Christ blood liberates us from the bondage and penalty of sin (I John 1:7, Heb 9:22). The Passover lamb was to be killed “at twilight” (Exod 12:6 NASB) “literally between two evenings.” This phrase has been explained in two ways. “Some regard the first evening as commencing when the sun begins visibly to decline from the zenith i.e. about two or three o’clock; and the second as following sunset” (Spence-Jones, 1909, p. 259).
In summary, this new beginning was linked to a Christological center. Every act of preparation revolved around the lamb, its blood, its preparation and its consumption. All the elements of preparation provided unifying activity for the people. Although the first audience did not fully comprehend its Messianic center, it is clear to pastors, and theologians. Therefore, the retelling of this story was paramount in the Jewish narrative (Exod 12:27).

**The Christological Center Passover**

The Christological center of Passover is revealed in metaphor and symbolism. The references to the Lamb, and its role in redemption point to the centerpiece of deliverance. One of the thinkers who developed this idea of Christology and its relationship to Pastoral Theology is Purves (2004). In his work, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, he notes the following about the relationship between Christology and Pastoral Theology. He draws on the work of Athanasius “in which Jesus Christ is understood to be both the Word and act of God addressing us and the word and act of humankind addressing God” (Purves, 2004, p. 1). He also draws on the work of Calvin by stating, “By the work of the Holy Spirit we are joined to Christ’s mission from and to the Father, thereby to share in his ministry.” The church then is called to join with Christ in His activity of redemption and liberation as evidenced in the Passover experience. Purves contends that this foundation “stands over and against more recent perspectives in pastoral theology that begin with the human experience on its own terms” (p. 151). Purves’ development of pastoral theology contrast with the earlier work of Hiltner (1958) whose groundbreaking work viewed pastoral theology as shepherding. Purves takes issue with Hiltner's shepherding lens and views it as too restricted and more task-oriented than
Christ-centered. This Christology is foundational to practical theology; it is also paramount within the context of Caribbean congregational life and experience.

As earlier stated, the Passover is indeed Christ-centered. The experience of the people during Passover, while important is secondary to the work of Christ. The work of Christ, as Purves contends, sets the foundation for Pastoral Theology. Furthermore, this Christological center has unifying elements for congregations. Noted theologian Bonheoffer (1954) states:

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. (Chapter 1, para. 9)

In summary, this Christological framework of the Passover sets a credible foundation for practical theology. It reveals the work of Christ in redeeming his people from bondage. It further shows God’s care and concern for suffering, and reveals His ability to keep his covenant (Exod 2:24). The Christological center of the Passover has unifying elements that are displayed through the instruction given to the people of God. With Christ-centered congregational life the people of God can truly be united.

**New Testament Transition**

It is clear from the gospels that relational unity was one of the central, core struggles for the disciples in their formative years (Mark 9:34). The New Testament is full of accounts ranging from debate over who would be the greatest among them (Mark 9:34), to a request made to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus (Matt 20:21). Relational unity was so paramount in the mind of Jesus that the entire 17th chapter of John’s gospel records the prayer of Jesus where He prayed that the disciples would be “one as He and
His Father are one” (John 17:21). The desire of Jesus for the church was that the relational unity exhibited between Him and the Father, be revealed in His followers (John 17:23). This theological relationship between the Father, the Son and the people carries over into the Lord’s Supper. It is at this supper, where the church strives for the ideal relationship that Jesus prayed for. This relationship between the Father, the Son and the people would serve as a witness to the world, regarding the mission of Jesus Christ. When this unity is not actualized in the life of the church, the mission of Jesus, which is mirrored in the mission of the church, is impeded.

There is considerable tension between God’s ideal and the reality of relationships within the church. The content of the prayer in John 17 must not overshadow the context in which the prayer was mentioned. This prayer was prayed shortly before Jesus was betrayed and arrested (John 18:1). Moreover, the institution of the Lord’s Supper is set against the backdrop of betrayal (Mark 14:20, 21). Not only does one witness the plot of betrayal unfolding during this supper, but we also see denial immediately after (Mark 14:71, 72). Porter (1989) speaks to this reality:

Jesus, at the Last Supper, names the conflicts in the room…He also names the whole conflictual system of his day by moving from the head of the table to the foot of the table and washing everyone’s feet (John 13:13-16). Finally, he notes that Simon Peter and the rest of the disciples will desert him. The naming is important… The naming also helps us understand the significance of the bread and wine. In the naming we begin to see our need. We experience our hunger. We feel our thirst. We know we need God. We need to be reconciled and to be a reconciler. (p. 12)

From the onset it is clear that while the aims and principles of the Communion Service are indeed high and holy, the human participant is often weak, unstable and unpredictable. This tension between the real and the ideal should serve as a caution for those seeking instantaneous results. Therefore, one may conclude that efforts toward
healthier relationships may not immediately bring forth the desired effect. The communion service at its best does have limitations, due to its contact with fallen humanity, however we should always strive for the biblical ideal. Porter (1989) continues,

I have come to believe that if we can engage our conflicts at the Table in the context of Holy Communion, we will be present with Jesus and Holy Communion will become the most powerful, healing ritual known to human kind. (p. 12)

The context of the prayer and the context of the institution of the Lord’s Supper reveal a breakdown in relationships between Jesus and his disciples. This theology of unity also reveals that Jesus relied on prayer to unify his disciples. The Lord’s Supper and its liturgical implementation should also include moments for intentional prayers for unity. In this prayer moment, the church is involved in the mission of Christ to move his church toward a unified relationship.

**Foot Washing**

In the context of the Seventh-day Adventist church, the foot washing service is viewed as an ordinance. According to Nichol (1978b) “He (Jesus) was instituting an ordinance to be observed by His followers to the end of time” (p. 1029). Nichol points out a threefold purpose for this ordinance.

1. It symbolized cleansing from sin.
2. It symbolizes a renewed consecration to service.
3. It typifies the spirit of Christian fellowship.

Not all scholars view foot washing as an ordinance. Witherington (2007) notes that foot washing “can symbolize the cleansing necessary before partaking of the Lord’s Supper, but it is not part of that meal itself or its symbols” (p. 83). Interestingly, the same
author records his experience at another church participating in the foot-washing service. He states,

I had never had this experience before. I wanted to protest the same way Peter had done…. And then I remember John 13 and realized that the story had taken on flesh before my eyes. I had become part of that story. (Witherington, 2007, p. 84)

He continues to expound on the benefits and spiritual interchange of this experience. In my view the author seems almost compelled to move toward another position of foot washing based on his experience.

John’s recorded statements of Jesus in John 13:15-17 are of significance to thematic elements of resolution and congregational unity. The text reads:

For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (John 13:15-17)

The following principles are echoed from the above text. In verse 12 we see Jesus call the disciples to follow His example. This example is further clarified in verse 15 when Jesus states that they should do as He did. Furthermore, the promise of a blessing or happiness is guaranteed if they follow His example (John 13:17). Interestingly, the example of humility, service, and reconciliation is being modeled by Jesus in the very atmosphere of betrayal (John 13:18-21). Further instruction is given in verse 34 and 35 when Jesus calls the disciples to love one another as He has loved them. This agape love is both modeled and commanded by Jesus.

What theological implications can one draw from this model and command? Could it be that Jesus is providing a theological practice for all faith communities? I would suggest that the work of Jesus in offering the foot washing was more than exemplary. It also adds to an understanding of pastoral theology and Pastoral care. My
position is that the foot washing reveals a model of priestly pastoral care. The service motif, the leading through ritual, the repetition of the event, coalesce in a priestly model of service.

This priestly model may add a lens through which pastoral theology can be viewed. Contrasted with Hiltner's view of shepherding, this view does not only lead people to places of spiritual food, but through this lens the pastor partakes of the meal with the people. Contrasted with Black Practical Theology with its emphasis on the prophetic (Andrews, 2002), this priestly mode of pastoral care may start where preaching ends.

In summary, foot washing along with the other ritualized elements of the Lord’s Supper provides a priestly pastoral care model for practical theology and black practical theology.

**Corinth: A Case Study**

What does a conflicted church look like in an immediate biblical context? The church at Corinth provides a case study of conflict and the potential for resolution. Paul expresses pastoral care and affirms the church, for holding on to the teachings (1 Cor 11:1). Paul begins this section by pointing out that there are divisions among the people (1 Cor 11:18). The people in Corinth are still coming together for “church” yet there is still division among them. This division has not yet caused congregational split, yet their coming together is an offense because their hearts are not right with God (Mal 1:10).

The issues of conflict in this context are numerous. The divisions in Corinth were addressed in general terms earlier in Paul’s writing (1 Cor 3:1-3). Some of the divisions in Corinth had to do with loyalties to certain leaders (1 Cor 1:10-17) and were in strong
contrast to the condition of the early church (Acts 2:42-47). Who did Paul hear this news from? He may have heard the news from Chloe’s household (1 Cor 1:11). The disputes in Corinth have escalated beyond mere disagreements to lawsuits (1 Cor 6:6) among believers.

The Corinthian church has now allowed conflict to interfere with its communion service. Paul taught this ceremonial rite of the early church during his teaching ministry (1 Cor 11:23). Paul recounts from his experience that he personally learned from Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:23).

**Corinthian Contexts**

The household gatherings at Corinth provide the context for Paul’s address to the Corinthians. According to Witherington (2007), “Paul is concerned with at least two social facets of the problem, namely, the disorderliness and inequality of the proceedings. Neither of these characteristics were at all unusual at Greco-Roman banquets followed by drinking parties” (p. 49). The author continues to point out that the church may have been mirroring the social customs of Greco-Roman banquets. He continues by noting,

> It was the normal practice to rank one's guests in terms of social status, with those of higher status eating with the host in the dining room and others eating elsewhere and getting poorer food. The only exception to this rule was during the Saturnalia, when normal social values were turned upside down for a day and slaves and poor people were treated well. Lucian describes the Saturnalia, contrasting it with the normal practice of a Greco-Roman banquet. (Witherington, 2007, p. 36)

This infusion of Greco-Roman culture may explain the issues that were present in Corinth. Biblical texts suggest that the Lord’s supper or Love Feast (Jude 12), were celebrated with great frequency. The tradition of the early church was to celebrate the Lord’s Supper at the end of Love Feasts. Paul observes that the division in the church of
Corinth is a necessary evil (1 Cor 11:19). On one hand those who are causing strife in the church are separated from the true followers of Christ, while on the other hand those persons instigating the divisions may be recognized for who they really are. One may also suggest that this reference to (δει γαρ και αἱρεσεις ἐν ὑμῖν) may allude to the parable of Jesus concerning the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:30).

Paul uses the word αἱρεσεις, which translated could mean heresies or strong divergent opinions. This term does not indicate a split among the people, but there seemed to be great tension among the people when they assembled for the communion service; Witherington adds the dimension of “sociological division.” This tension is further agitated by the fact that they keep coming together.

In summary, Paul is upset that the church is mirroring the customs of Greco-Roman society. The segregation at mealtime, according to status and privilege, seems to be a major contextual factor in Paul’s council regarding the Lord’s Supper.

**A Remedy for Corinth**

First, he tells them that they should eat together. I would suggest that the overall goal of Paul was to keep the church unified, hence the directive to eat together (1 Cor 11:33). The table, as noted by Dunn (1998), belongs (emphasis added) to the Lord, and he is the host of the meal. Secondly, Paul tells the congregation that if someone is hungry they should eat at home before attending the feast. He seeks to keep them from over indulgence of appetite (1 Cor 11:34); since that must have been a precursor for their predicament. He concludes by telling them he will give further instruction upon his arrival. What can we draw from Paul’s counsel to Corinth? Witherington (2007) notes,
Paul does not try to rule out such sumptuous banquets; his point is that pagan rules of protocol do not apply when one meets at the Lord's table. The better-off Christians are showing no respect for the have-nots and humiliating them and thus showing no respect for the ekklēsia of God, which is supposed to be a united body. (p. 54)

**Congregational Implications**

Do these same principles apply and if so, how do they apply to relational unity? The context of eating together is one practical step toward fostering greater unity in the local church. This eating together may incorporate the Lord’s Supper, or may add an agape feast preceding or to the proceedings. Whatever the case, the mealtime seems to be a platform for unity in the church. The meal also harkens back to the corporate experience of Passover.

The spiritual implications however must be understood by the local church for its impact to be actualized. Observation of the text in 1 Corinthians 11 also provides the fact that the division was not a doctrinal one. The divisions were based on class and status. In the cases of some local congregations, the issues of separation may be outside the realm of doctrine, but may revolve around similar issues.

Paul did state that these divisions in Corinth caused some of them to be weak and sick and even fall asleep. Could it be that Paul’s truth for his time is still relevant for ours? Could be that a significant number of churches are indeed asleep due to church disunity?

**Ellen G. White on Relational Unity**

The writings of Ellen G. White provide solid biblical counsel on the subject at hand. Selected excerpts from her writings have been selected that buttress the relational unity theme, in conjunction with both the Lord’s Supper and the preparatory ordinance of
foot washing. Before launching into the Lord’s Supper and its preparatory service; we will examine some of Ellen White’s statements on the importance of unity in the church.

This is taken from White’s (1991), book *Counsels for the Church*:

Union brings strength; disunion, weakness. United with one another, working together in harmony for the salvation of men, we shall indeed be “laborers together with God.” Those who refuse to work in harmony greatly dishonor God. The enemy of souls delights to see them working at cross purposes with one another. Such ones need to cultivate brotherly love and tenderness of heart. If they could draw aside the curtain veiling the future and see the result of their disunion they would surely be led to repent. (p. 43)

The writings of Ellen White on this issue are very pointed and strong. The fracturing congregation is a weak congregation. Disunity is a sign of weakened spirituality and disconnect from God. The local congregation may be blinded by a misunderstanding of the practicality of unity in their congregation. Relational unity can be a great witness to the surrounding community and those who the church is seeking to reach with the gospel message. White (1991) states:

Harmony and union existing among men of varied dispositions is the strongest witness that can be borne that God has sent His Son into the world to save sinners. It is our privilege to bear this witness. But, in order to do this, we must place ourselves under Christ’s command. Our characters must be molded in harmony with His character, our wills must be surrendered to His will. Then we shall work together without a thought of collision. (p. 44)

**Ellen White and the Communion Service**

The preparation or foot washing service is paramount in the believer’s understanding of Christ’s humiliation and service. It also prepares the believer’s heart for the encounter of the cross, symbolized by the wine and bread. White (2005) states the following:

This ordinance is Christ’s appointed preparation for the sacramental service. While pride, variance, and strife for supremacy are cherished, the heart cannot enter into fellowship with Christ. We are not prepared to receive the communion of His body
and His blood. Therefore, it was that Jesus appointed the memorial of His humiliation to be first observed. (p. 650)

Communion with Christ cannot be achieved according to the aforementioned excerpt, if there is still strife, pride and variance. These fracturing characteristics are often noted in congregations that are experiencing conflict and turmoil. The foot washing service allows for reflection on personal sins and relational discord that may be present in the worshiper. It allows time for reconciliation and unity, before approaching the emblems that symbolize His broken body and spilled blood. This preparatory service is so vital in the understanding of White (2005) that she writes the following:

They are not to recall the differences between them and their brethren. The preparatory service has embraced all this. The self-examination, the confession of sin, the reconciling of differences, has all been done. (p. 659)

In Ellen White’s view, fractured relationships between church members should be taken care of before partaking of the bread and the wine. What she terms the “preparatory service” we term the foot washing service (John 13:15). What she terms as “reconciling of differences” echoes back to the instruction of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:23, 24. Again we see the primacy of relational unity and reconciliation above individual and corporate worship.

Does the communion service provide spiritual remedy for discord in congregations? White (2005) speaks of the reality of what could be, in the following statement: “Whenever this ordinance is rightly celebrated, the children of God are brought into a holy relationship, to help and bless each other” (p. 301). The principle of holy relationships is highlighted in her writings. One may conclude that a holy relationship is a healthy relationship and a unified relationship. The blessings of fellowship extend through this connection and permeate through the congregants. The
key to this quote is the term “rightly celebrated.” If this ordinance can be rightly celebrated than it can also be “wrongly celebrated.” Perhaps the wrong celebration has been outlined for us in the Paul’s letter to Corinth (1 Cor 11).

White comments (2005):

There can be no union between our souls and God except through Christ. The union and love between brother and brother must be cemented and rendered eternal by the love of Jesus. And nothing less than the death of Christ could make His love efficacious for us. It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith. (p. 660)

Since the communion service provides the congregants with an encounter of Jesus, it is the hope that the congregants can experience His unifying power. Ellen White is clear that our only hope of unity is by focusing our attention on Him. The focus must shift from the faults of others to the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Implications for the Afro-Caribbean Congregation

White (1996) points out, “Those who study the history of the Israelites should also consider the history of slaves in America” (p. 41). Even before the emergence of Black Theology, White understood the need to examine the Israelite narratives alongside the experience of former slaves.

Moreover, to fully appreciate the theological motifs and thematic elements discussed earlier in this chapter, it would be prudent for an expanded discussion on its relation to Black Theology, and Afro-Caribbean Theological understanding. Maynard-Reid (2000) takes issue with Black scholarship for its neglect of Caribbean experience within the study of Black Theology. He asserts the following charge:

African American theology neither considers the Caribbean Diasporan experience as an appropriate starting point for theological inquiry nor does it address the issues and
concerns of the Caribbean Diaspora despite this phenomenological entity being in existence in America for more than one hundred years. (p. 154)

Reid calls this neglect of black theology a “sin” in his critique of Black theologies omission of the Caribbean diaspora experience from black theological discourse. Reid’s strong condemnation for Black theology begs the question; who owns the sin? Is Reid targeting African-American scholars whose view and experience may be outside the contextualized issue that face Caribbean diaspora experience. Or is he stating his charge, to call Caribbean scholars to account for the lack of scholarly contributions. I would argue that Reid's observation while true, seeks to strike awareness for more contribution to the field of Black Theology from a Caribbean perspective. James Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology concedes his own partial view of theology and its narrow scope, which neglected as he put it “third world” and the contribution of women. Andrews (2002) in his work, Practical Theology for Black Churches, follows similar pathways blazed by Cone and does not offer critical insights into the contributions of the Caribbean experience. The question of inclusivity is well taken. The field of Caribbean study is a wide field, which may prove valuable for scholars. This may prove true even more specifically for Black Adventist pastors who now see an increase of immigrant growth in North America. According to Beckworth and Kidder (2010) “New membership in the NAD comes mainly from the African descent demographic. This group makes up approximately 30 percent of the NAD membership compared to its 12.8 percent share of the population” (p. 21). What Beckworth and Kidder failed to note was that the African descendants were coming primarily from Caribbean nations.

There is a gradual build of scholarship on the issue. Maynard-Reid (2000) provides insights into Caribbean worship through a comparative analysis with African-
American worship styles and Latin America. While broad in scope, the contribution is noteworthy as he details some of the challenges dealing with such a wide array of diaspora communities what bear the label Caribbean. Erskine’s (2014) Plantation Church seeks to add voice to the void by tracing the development of the black church in North America and the Caribbean. While this historical lens is both informative and noteworthy, Erskine's work lacks theological implications based on the historicity of his work. He notes that his work compares the origin and character of the black churches in the Caribbean and the United States. Andrews and Smith (2015) in their work Black Practical Theology have an entire section on the diaspora communities. As a reader, I was underwhelmed when the author addressed the African churches within North America and the role of the African-American Church in offering them greater hospitality. There was little if any insight into the Caribbean context.

With these observations in view, Reid-Salmon (2008) may have a point. I wish therefore to shift from Caribbean theology to a more specialized view of Black Adventist Caribbean. This field of study, on one hand, may be viewed by some as too narrow, while on the other, it may prove to answer some of the questions of inclusivity raised by Reid-Salmon. The work done by Beedoe (2016) has added a dimension of pastoral care and counseling within Caribbean congregations. This dimension adds to the growing foundation of study within Caribbean people perceptions. Beedoe’s work, which also included an African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E) congregation, provides a platform for discussion, among scholars with similar interest. Beedoe (2016) also writes from her own context as a pastor/counselor of Caribbean origin. This background in my view proved
advantageous. She had a step-up on the non-Caribbean scholar in understanding the culture.

From my perspective, as a non-Caribbean Black, I speak not as an authoritarian on culture, but as an observer and invitee into a Caribbean context. Maynard-Reid (2000) spoke of churches in North America that feel more “like home” than those in the Caribbean. The LSDAC in Ft. Lauderdale, may well be categorized by some as having a “back home” feel to it. As a non-Caribbean black, I had to learn more of the culture. I had to learn the Caribbean colloquialism such as “parson” (which means pastor) and learn the tune of Jamaican folk music, which would emanate from church socials.

My advantage as I see it, was that I had the ability to provide intercultural dialogue between the African-American Black experience with the African-Caribbean experience. I could compare their story to my story, their music to my music, their food, to my food, their Patois, to my Ebonics. This journey was not an overnight process, as I had to face my own insecurities about being the minority within the minority. Questions begin to emerge as to whether I would be fully accepted or viewed as an outsider. Well-meaning members would ask me when I first arrived, where I was from. Hoping to hear my origin akin to theirs. Gradually, I moved from insecure pastor to adopted son within the cultural context. Moreover, this comparative analysis proved the grand similarities between cultures. Furthermore, it spurred me to further delve into my role as pastor and practical theologian. What I gleaned from this role was this. I could view my pastorate through the wide lens of Black Theology, with its emphasis on liberation, justice, suffering and hope. However, the historical themes of Black theology did not solve the church conflict. The prophetic practice of preaching and ministry (italics added) was
limited in this context. There were periods were the motifs found within Black theology found expression. One example would be our true fast Sabbath where the sermon based on Isaiah 58 called for people to undo injustice and help relieve suffering. Immediately following the sermon, we would dispatch members into teams to relieve hunger in the surrounding community by passing out food bags, offering prayer and passing out literature.

While my prophetic role as pastor usually centered on preaching, there was another pastoral function that congregational conflict gave rise to. This role was centered more on priestly function, a mediator per se, between two congregations under one roof. One group was more rooted in tradition, reflection, and hymnody. While the other group was seeking more musical instruments, greater expression, wider musical genres. The prophetic role of preaching would not provide remedy for this tension. My theological role shifted from a prophetic role to a priestly role of mediation; leading congregants through the communion service, and moving the church toward healing relationships. As priestly theologian, I was able to bring my fragmented congregation into the presence of God at His invitation. We could eat at His table. We could pray together, ask for forgiveness, and for healing. Like the priest of the Old Testament, who had to offer up sacrifices for themselves, I too had to confess my own biases, judgments, and sins.

This process of discovery brought to mind the contribution of this counterbalance within Black Pastoral Theology. In my view this dualism within the pastorate speaks to a number of contextual issues. First, it contributes to the discussion of Black Theology that is inclusive of the Caribbean experience. This experience in my view is not limited to native born Caribbean's, but also to people who have been adopted into its social context,
through pastoral acts; visitation, listening to their story, and eating at their table.

Secondly, it contributes to scholars, pastors, theologians of non-Caribbean context whose ministry may bleed outside of their prescribe cultural context. Thirdly, and more pointedly, this priestly model of ministry, aligns with a Seventh-day Adventist perspective on the priestly, mediatory work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:11,12). All three points in their fullness cannot be fully teased out. This priestly theology in my view may find its origin in non-congruent context, but it may serve a wider audience seeking to counterbalance the prophetic role of ministry with a priestly role of ministry.

Summary

As more literature is generated from the field of scholarship in areas of congregational conflict and the potential remedy found within the communion service, it is critical that theoretical practices and solutions merge within their specified context. In the proceeding chapter I will examine the literature on conflict within churches, its benefits and its detriment. Further attention will be given to interdisciplinary dialogue generated through congregational studies. This literature will still be viewed through the lens of practical theology and contextualized within an Afro-Caribbean context.
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I will summarize literature from researchers, theologians and social scientists that provide greater understanding of congregational conflict. This interplay of disciplines seeks to probe the issues of conflict that arise within congregations, and point to possible solutions found within the communion service. The sections will probe congregational studies, examine the origins and effects of conflict, examine the impact of diversity and the role of liturgy. I will then focus specifically on the communion service and offer five factors that reveal its importance in healing conflicted congregations. I would suggest that these principles, supported and based on the current literature may be used cross-culturally, due to their foundational character. In closing, I will examine the limitations of communion and implications for pastors, church leaders and administrators.

Congregational Conflict

For decades, there has been considerable research done on conflict in religious organizations (Kniss, 1988). Some of the research focuses on conflict that is within the local congregation (Herman, 1984; Becker, 1999; Becker et al., 1993). While other research focused on conflict that is interdenominational (Kniss & Chaves, 1995; Steed, 1986). Regardless of the conflict type, whether it is local or denominational, at times the
results can become very detrimental (Chou, 2008; Starke & Dyck, 1996). Not all conflict ends in detriment. Sande (2004) points out the following:

Conflict always provides an opportunity to glorify God, that is, to bring him praise and honor by showing who he is, what he is like, and what he is doing. The best way to glorify God in the midst of conflict is to depend on and draw attention to his grace, that is, the undeserved love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom he gives to us through Jesus Christ. (p. 31)

The observation of Ken Sande sheds light on the positive outcome of conflict, when it is addressed properly and viewed through a Christ centered approach. However, when conflict is not addressed properly in the local church, the results could be decreased membership, lack of motivation, absence of meaningful relationships, splinter groups and even litigation. Greenwood (2005) states, “the inability to address conflict in a healthy manner curtails the energy and spiritual vitality of the congregation, undermines the mission, and threatens the viability of the church” (p. 2).

How does a pastor navigate a church that is conflicted? Some may suggest that leadership models from professional literature are better suited for pastoral leadership (Carter, 2009), while others view leadership as grounded solely within a theological framework (Beeley, 2009). Furthermore, what type of leadership is best suited for Caribbean congregations? One contributing voice in this specified field is Beedoe (2016). Beedoe worked with three focus groups from three various mega-church congregations. On issues of conflict, members stated that the pastor should have the needed conflict resolution skills and be able to use the Bible to address conflicts.

I would suggest that a pastor can lead a congregation through conflict using biblically based principles found within the Communion Service. The communion service in my view allows for a biblical platform that can potentially lead to
reconciliation. It also allows the pastor to give pastoral care to the congregation through a priestly model rather than a prophetic model. Finally, this service is rooted in the work of Jesus Christ, which is the foundation for all pastoral care.

Some however, may suggest a more restricted voice that focuses solely on theology. Purves (2004) in his work suggests:

Because pastoral work today is often only loosely attached, if at all, to the gospel-given understanding of the pastoring God, it tends to have a formal identity through a relationship with an auxiliary discipline. Thus pastoral care is commonly defined in terms of the psychological and contextual processes of caring rather than in terms of a disciplined theological understanding of the gospel. (Chapter 1, para. 6)

On one hand, I affirm the position of Purves in his attempt to reconstruct pastoral theology, and realign it with its gospel core. On the other hand, I think it would be detrimental for the theological community to ignore the practice and contribution of other disciplines. How then does a pastor determine what fields of study to integrate into pastoral care and ministry? I would assert that the pastor must begin with a biblical foundation for pastoral care. From this genesis, the pastor can evaluate what social science contribution will be helpful to congregational health, while staying true to biblical principles. One example of this need is found within the work of Beedoe (2016). Emerging from focus group dialogue was the expressed need for a pastoral care provider to have theological training along with training in other fields. Beedoe states, “this pastoral-care provider has a background in psychology was important to help in resolving simple-to-complex problems that interfere with spiritual growth of individuals and their church” (p. 42). While there may be differing voices from within the theological community, church members seem clear on the need for an integrated approach to congregational conflict.
Osmer (2008) contributes to the dialogue of integration by stating: “The use of theories from other fields like anthropology and psychology is an important part of practical theological interpretation. Such theories, however, can take congregational leaders only so far” (p. 144). The field of congregational studies is one example of this blended approach. In Becker’s (1999) work, case study research was used to probe various congregations in conflict. The work of Becker is not a theological work, however a pastor can read Becker and be informed from a sociological perspective on issue that may impact a local congregation. Furthermore, theological implications can be drawn from case studies, qualitative and quantitate research. Such implications will be summarized in the conclusion of this chapter.

In summary, the theological community needs clear defined parameters about theology and practice; to keep the lines from become blurred. Pastors and theologians may benefit from the research tools and theories found within social science disciplines. Osmer’s (2008) work provides a useful template for practical theologians that combine research principles with theological principles. Furthermore, these tools may assist the pastor with research, planning, development and understanding the ever-changing dynamic of the congregation. The field of congregational studies provides a rich source of information for pastors who seek the dialogue between social scientist and theologians.

**Emerging Fields of Congregational Studies**

The field of congregational studies proves beneficial to pastors, who seek to understand root causes and identifying markers of congregational attitudes, behaviors and belief systems. The foundational work of congregational studies for many finds root in the work done by Carrol, Dudley and McKinney (1986). They highlight four aspects of a
congregation: Program, Process, Context and Identity. Program is “organizational structures, plans and activities through which a congregation expresses its mission and ministry both to its own members and those outside membership” (p. 11). Simply put, the program refers to the external face of the church; what it portrays to the congregants and community. This process reflects “the how of members’ relationships with one another. Processes has to do with the underlying flow and dynamics of a congregation that knit it together in its common life and affect its moral and climate” (p. 11). Context refers to the “setting, local and global, in which a congregation finds itself and to which it responds” (p. 12). Identity is defined as a “persistent set of beliefs, values, patterns, symbols, stories and style that make a congregation distinctively itself” (p. 12).

These four markers assist researchers, pastors and leaders, in determining issues that impact the congregation. The context of the LSDAC reveals conflict originated in church process. This however was not regulated to one identifying marker, but also impacted their Identity, and their Program. Members had strained relationships that affected the overall morale of the church, its mission and its vitality. These demarcations enable pastors, lay leaders and even congregants to see their church through a more detailed and structured lens. What sets apart their work of research apart from the social scientist is there understanding of theology. A theological perspective pervades the writing. They reveal an understanding of theology, rituals, and liturgy.

These authors have set a solid foundation on which to examine congregational life. There is also more pointed research as to how conflict impacts the local congregation from social scientists. This research focuses on the psychological and physical impact of conflict within congregations. In work done by Ellison, Zhang, Krause, and Marcum
(2009) researchers discovered the relationship between negative integration within congregations and the negative psychological effects. The psychological impact for parishioners reveal a significant parallel between social science research and biblical teaching. One may conclude that Paul’s counsel to the church at Corinth is now being buttressed by research. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 (NASB),

> Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason, many among you are weak and sick, [emphasis added], and a number sleep.

Paul states that some of the members were physically ill due to their negligence with the Lord’s Supper. This congregation suffered physical effects and even death. There appears to be a strong correlation between disunity and ill health from research and from the biblical text.

In summary, the correlation between Scripture (1 Cor 11:27-30) and the community of researchers reveal the benefits of interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and the social sciences. This reflects the balanced approach of understanding practical theology connecting with other voices, rather than a singular voice and reflection. The weakness of the social science literature is the inability to address theological models based on Scripture that seek to resolve conflicting issues. This weakness reveals a need for research that not only informs church leaders concerning the complexities of congregational conflict, but it also shows the need for theological solutions for such ills. It is the intent of this research to give voice to this weakness revealed in the social sciences and give greater voice to the Caribbean context within the disciplines of practical theology.
Conflict Origin and Effects

From a Theological perspective, the issue of conflict for Seventh-day Adventist theologians, and others, finds root in the biblical worldview of controversy between God and Satan (Rev 12:7-9). This foundational understanding for theologians sets a proper template for understanding the spiritual nature of conflict and its disastrous results. If indeed the conflict has a spiritual origin, it seems to reason that the remedy must also be of spiritual origin. This spirituality or theological understanding is foundational in understanding the lens through which the research is critiqued.

Research into conflict within congregation began to take shape during the 1980s. Some of the leading researchers on congregational dynamics are Jack Carroll, Carl Dudley, and Bill McKinney, (1986), and Nancy Ammerman and Penny Edgell (1999). While Christopher Ellison (2009); Becker (1993), Kniss (1988, 1995, 1996), and Chou (2008) provides a helpful summary of the many origins of church conflict:


While each account of conflict differs in scope, context and severity, this writing will be confined within the context of the local congregation. Nancy Herman (1984) studied a congregation that had a membership of over 250 members. A new minister arrived to serve the church in the mid 1970s. The membership of the congregation
dwindled to 40 members. The minister made significant changes that may have contributed to a decrease in membership. He attempted to modernize the church by abandoning their prayer book. He introduced new songs that they were not accustomed to. He was a young minister, which may have caused some to be distrustful of his leadership skills. Herman’s research used social network analysis as a way of showing how different groups in the church reacted to the conflict. Some groups acted as mediators, while some tended to avoid it altogether. The research not only shows the group dynamics involved in conflict; but more importantly, it reveals how a congregation can become depleted if relationships are not healthy.

While Herman and other sociologist report useful data and statistics, one weakness of social scientists is the absent of a theological understanding of conflict. Her use of analysis and research, while beneficial, do not in my view, fulfill the questions of theological practice. What theological motives may have caused a minister to make such drastic changes? What concepts or beliefs did the congregation have toward their liturgical practice? These questions and others may reveal the need for more dialogue between the various academic disciplines, and a more complete assessment of the congregation.

**Congregational Diversity**

With a clear mandate to spread the gospel to all nations (Rev 14:6-13; Matt 28:18-20), the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is becoming more diverse.

Beckworth and Kidder (2010) note the following:

New membership in the NAD comes mainly from the African descent demographic. This group makes up approximately 30 percent of the NAD membership compared to its 12.8 percent share of the population. (p. 21)
These cultural differences within the context of the LSDAC were Caribbean diversities. Members were from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Montserrat, and Haiti, to mention a few. This inter-Caribbean diversity set the stage for both celebration and conflict. The challenge for pastors and theologians is that scholarship on the Caribbean congregations in North America is very scant. This field of study, when compared to Black Theology or the Black Church in North America, fails to compare.

There are however voices in scholarship that are now emerging in the field and are worthy of consideration. The work of Davis (1990) provides a thorough understanding of Caribbean Emancipation Theology. Davis provides solid insights into the theological thinking of Caribbean peoples. The weakness for the North American context, is that his work seems rooted more so in the Caribbean experience within the Caribbean. This context has challenged many leading thinkers due to the complexities that arise from the cultural milieu of the Caribbean itself. Other thinkers, such as Maynard-Reid (2000), provide more insights into the worship expression of Caribbean people, by analyzing worship perspectives of Caribbean congregations within North America. Maynard-Reid, in my view, gives a more focused lens into the reality that the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces within North America. Maynard-Reid, I would argue though fails to capture the theological implications for pastors seeking to develop practical theological models. Reid-Salmon (2014) provides a well-written work that is both historically based, theologically informed, and seeks to include voices from Black Theology. Reid-Salmon states, “I focus primarily on the Caribbean diaspora in the American context but incorporate aspects of the Caribbean British diaspora” (p. 28). As previously noted in chapter 2, Reid-Salmon takes issue with the neglect of the Caribbean
experience from with view of Black Theology community. While this may hold true, there are more critical voices on the study of Caribbean theology within North America.

One such contribution is the work by Beedoe (2016) whose work focuses on pastoral care and counseling. Beedoe’s contributions to the field are noteworthy due to the theological perspectives given. There is a perspective that may contribute to the field of practical theology, Caribbean theology and black theology. I would argue that as an African-American, I may provide a view of Caribbean theology from a Black Theology vantage point. My point is this. My locus of interaction, dialogue, and ministry are from the pre-view of outsider, or I should say invitee. I was able through observation, study and relationships to enter into the Caribbean experience within North America, as Pastor while analyzing it from a Black-American perspective. This perspective I would argue may shed light on perspectives others have overlooked. In summary, diversity proves to be a challenge for leading thinkers within and without the theological community. There is no one size fits all approach, but rather a variant of style and approaches based on the immediate context. Within the context of the LSDAC the communion service my provide remedy for congregational conflict.

**Rediscovery of the Communion Service**

One of the key features of the congregations within the Seventh-day Adventist church is the corporate experience of the communion service. The communion service provides a theological foundation for healthier relationships within the congregation. It provides liturgical practice that incorporates the entire person; it is a multi-sensory event. The smell of bread and wine, the taste of bread and wine, the sermon emphasis, the open
table, the foot washing, all provide a cemented practice of theological truth. A meal infused with theological meaning and theological practice is very powerful.

Numerous theologians highlight the importance of these events. Barclay (1967) notes, “One of the simplest and possibly oldest acts of fellowship in the world, is that of eating together” (p. 56). To share a common meal, especially if the act of sharing the meal also involves the sharing of a common memory, is one of the basic expressions of human fellowship. The sharing of a meal is one of the marks of a committed friendship. In the East, a treaty or a covenant was usually ratified over a meal.

Smith (1999) seeks to rediscover the communion service to break down barriers of oppression. Smith links her rediscovery with Black Liberation Theology. Smith makes the following statement: “A new approach to the Eucharist would allow a rediscovery of this emphasis in the Scriptures and allow them to speak directly to the Black Community” (pp. 62, 63). The liberation emphasis of Smith runs parallel with the work of Davis (1990) who details the Caribbean emphasis on Emancipation. While speaking from within the community as a leading voice, Davis may have tapped into the very heart of the implications of the communion service. This emancipation for Davis and Liberation for Smith seek to bring freedom to the congregation.

As Purves (2004) notes in his writing, practitioners of theology participate in the work of Christ. This participation when viewed theologically leads to freedom from conflict. The themes of liberation or emancipation appear through the Passover experience and the New Testament communion service. I am seeking to bring to the surface these themes posited by the Scripture and relevant to the community in which I serve. Pastors may also benefit from this rediscovery as it can be applied within the specified context.
The Communion Service as Potential Remedy

To create healthier relationships within congregations there may be a need a re-discovery and application of the Lord’s Supper. The communion service can be a starting point for reconciliation and the celebrated end of healthy reconciliation. For the sake of brevity, I will outline five significant factors that support my position.

Congregational Communication

The first factor is that of congregational communication. The congregants have the opportunity during the communion service to speak the same language, participate in similar ritual and experience corporate worship. The Communion service provides a unique opportunity for common understanding that transcends cultural difference. This service when applied at the local church level transcends cultural differences and word meanings that my dilute the process of reconciliation.

One of the texts frequently used is 1 Corinthians 11:24 which states, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” This text, along with others, is often used ritualistically during the communion service within the local church. The common ritual of foot washing, sharing and breaking bread and many more can be used to move a congregation towards healthier relationships. The leader can utilize these shared meanings and rituals, to direct or redirect a dysfunctional congregation towards the process of healthy unity. Researchers note:

The creation of a shared language that is based on feelings as well as facts is a powerful driver of change [emphasis added]. This shared language provides a sense of unity and resonance, and the resulting momentum helps people to move from talk to action. They feel inspired and empowered, willing to work together to address their collective concerns. (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013, p. 199)
During this moment, the congregants are provided an opportunity to speak the language of renewal and reconciliation. In a church that is ever changing in diversity, it is important to allow the common language of a shared liturgy to bring about unity and peace within congregations.

**Intentional Congregational Leadership**

Not only can a congregation speak the same language, but church leaders are provided an opportunity to be intentional in their approach. Barton (2009) points out the necessity of being able to lead from our own “transforming center.” She states that a competent church leader who is self-aware can lead a congregation into healthier relationships, only if the pastor is willing to be moved into healthier relationships as well.

While some leaders may be quick to lead a conflicted congregation through the process of reconciliation; it is always best to listen to and understand the people. A leader must understand the various dynamics of his/her specific congregation. There may be issues the pastor is made aware of through listening to the senior citizens or the young people. Specific areas of discord may be addressed privately but also corporately. Bruggeman (1993) notes the following: “In the church, what a gift we can give others by genuinely listening to what the congregation and its disparate voices are saying.”

Bruggeman continues to outline some of the challenges leaders face as more pastors appear to visit their congregants less. Moreover, the information gleaned through personal visitation can never be underestimated. Writing to Christian leaders one author notes:

Leaders enjoy ready access to a resource that can help them build openness as an organizational value. It’s not Google, and it’s not Peter Drucker, and it certainly isn’t
me. It is the simple exercise of listening their way through the organization. (Robinson, 2009, p. 43)

The leadership style of the pastor may vary and the context may sharpen both leader and congregation. One myth surrounding the leadership culture is that all leaders must be extroverted and charismatic. In Cain’s (2012) writing the author notes the contributions and gifts of the introverted leader. She highlights the historical movement of the leadership community from its celebration of character to its celebration of charisma. My observation is that the author does not downplay the extroverted leader, but she brings to the forefront the qualities and contributions of the introverted leader.

A congregation in conflict provides opportunities for both the charismatic extrovert and the reflective introvert. It gives both leadership styles grounds for intentional planning, praying and leading a congregation to greater unity. It further illustrates a priestly model of pastoral leadership compared with a prophetic model of leadership. If the pastor is intentional in his/her approach toward the process of healthier congregational relationships, the outcome may prove positive.

Congregational Unity

The third factor is that of congregational unity. From a theological standpoint, this call to unity is evidenced in the biblical text in John 17. Christ prays for unity among his disciples in a present context and while referring to the future church. Paul continues to highlight this unity a marker of a mature faith (Eph 4:13). There is a large volume of literature by Catholic and Anglican scholars referencing the call to unity among various the denominational spectrums (Fink, 2008; Lubich, 2003; Wolf, 2009). This call to unity is not a new phenomenon within the theological dialogue. Fuller (1970, p. 225) states, “It
is possible to express this underlying unity in certain tentative ways, by occasional acts of communion in other churches with which there is a sufficiency of common faith.”

This call for unity in the minds of some scholars is not a call to abandon doctrinal position or liturgical practice. In their view, it is based on a similar understanding of the importance of the sacraments and the unity of the church. Their view however, contradicts with my first stated principle of communication. How can congregants unify if they do not share the similar meaning of liturgy? While I do not ascribe to this ecumenical view; it is evident that the call to unity is weaved into the biblical text. The communion service has been examined as a conduit for this unity, more so among Catholic scholars than Protestant scholars, but the context is oftentimes couched in ecumenicalism.

My project seeks to fill the gap from Protestant theologians and scholars. There also appears to be a gap in the literature that focuses primarily on the impact of the communion service within the local congregation. Most of the articles examine the Communion service through a much broader lens.

**Congregational Stories**

The fourth factor focuses on anecdotal evidence of how the communion service was used to reconcile parties that were once cleaved. Writing from the Methodist view, Bentley (2011) offers anecdotal evidence to show that the Lord’s Supper can bring about reconciliation. The local church context lies within the political turmoil of the Apartheid System of South Africa. His article “explores the understanding of the role of Holy Communion as practiced by the Methodist tradition attempting to bring people together who have been separated by the violence of abuse, segregation and even of prejudice”
(Bentley, 2011, p.11). He continues, “People who had fundamental differences in their political views still found themselves kneeling side by side at the Table in Church” (p. 12).

Bentley reveals how the fracturing relationships resulting from apartheid are being healed through the communion service. This historical precedent in my view underscores the importance of intentional leadership, shared meaning, and congregational unity.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America and beyond has had challenges in race relations. During the Apartheid era of South African one writer notes the following: “a Methodist pastor warned me that if Adventists don't speak up and say where they stand they can easily become targets, denominational officials in South Africa black, white or colored are not proclaiming the statement by the president of the world church, at the denomination's international General Conference in 1985, deploiring "all forms of racism," including the political policy of apartheid with its enforced segregation and legalized discrimination” (Branson, 1987, p. 27).

While there have been recent attempts to heal past wounds; like the formal apologies offered by like Don Livesay, President of the Lake Union Conference on June 20, 2015, (Wright, 2015). There has been to my knowledge no true semblance of this transaction. Could it be that the Seventh-day Adventist church is taking a page from the Methodist example in South Africa? Maybe some of the racial injustices of the past can truly be healed through the communion service. One can only imagine what could result from the statement of apology issued by Don Livesay, if reinforced by a joint communion service of top leaders. This would, in my estimation, not only help spur the healing
process, but also send a message to congregants who have unresolved issues of conflict that need to be addressed.

Cross and Gschwend (1992) highlight examples of congregations’ unity in England. This unity was sought even though the congregants shared differences in liturgy and practice. This may prove to be an attempt at ecumenicalism in the view of some. However, I wish to extract from their story the power of the communion table to bring about unity. Cross and Gschwend make the following comment:

When Christians from different traditions join together to form a single congregation, clearly there will be areas of practice in relation to communion on which they will differ. Some of these are less significant than others, and more easily resolved in negotiation, although what to one person is a trivial matter may be an issue of deep importance, if not of principle, to another. (p. 49)

Cross and Gschwend note the difference in belief on what type of wine would be served. One group served non-alcoholic wine and another served alcoholic wine. Each group was to participate while keeping to their doctrinal positions.

The underlying intention of the leadership and the commitment of the congregations during this process are of great significance. The leadership had a united effort to bring parties together even though the group was by no means doctrinally homogenous. The congregants showed a willingness to come together and work toward unity. This event showed trust between leader and congregation.

What about congregations that share similar doctrinal position and liturgical practice? Can they work toward healthier relationships using the communion service as their platform? I contend that the leadership community and local church leaders have wrongly assumed that homogenous congregations within similar doctrinal frameworks have no need to re-examine the communion service. My research intends to fill the gap
on local contextualized research and push the community to re-examine the role of communion within the local church.

**Theological Practice**

The fifth reason is based on theological practice or praxis. One challenge for the faith community may be its failed attempt to integrate the abstract principles with actual real life circumstances. According to Purves (2004):

There is, however, no knowledge of a God other than the knowledge of a God who acts in such a way that we can know him; therefore, as we will explore at length, all theology is inherently practical theology, and all church practice is properly understood as sharing in God’s practice. (Chapter 1, para. 3)

The overarching theme of sharing in Christ presence is significant for the church. Communion rightly practiced is sharing in Gods practice. There is no other service that highlights this more. The acts of Jesus at the NT transition allow the church to participate in Gods practice. While Purves moves us towards the ideal for practical theology; there is however considerable tension in the reality of church life. While the aims of practical theology are indeed high and lofty, the congregational experience may be quite different.

Leaders, researchers, and pastors seek to make the connection between the ideal and the real. In the book, *Implications of Brain Research for the Church*, Allen Nauss goes to great lengths to expose the reader to the nuances of brain research and its interplay with Christian theology. Nauss (2013) comments,

There is such a thing as *church language* about God, and it is necessary for Christians…It gives us a distinct advantage in that abstract concepts that can organize large amounts of data and make it possible to discuss them in a shorthand way. (p. 94).

Nauss makes an important contribution by summarizing a true definition and purpose of church language. The word Communion itself conjures for many believers deep
theological meaning and understanding. The challenge is for the meaning to intersect and impact real life experience. Nauss (2013) points out the following:

Much church preaching and teaching happens with such abstract words and remains head-knowledge. The emotion which accompanies all learning can then be boredom or dislike. Memorizing scripture translations, catechism vocabulary, and hymn verses can be connected when the individual has matured enough to be able to connect abstract words to real life [emphasis added] and discovers the need for a connection to direct experience. (p. 95)

The key word in the above statement is maturity. The biblical text urges the Christian community toward full maturity and unity (Eph 4:13). The statement above also calls for the Christian leaders to guide the congregation to a place of intersection between theology and practice. The experiential need that Nauss is calling for could be linked to the Communion Service. No other service in my view incorporates in a real sense, abstract theological concepts with concretized movements and memories.

I would also assert that the Lord’s Supper may also serve not only as remedial, but also as preventative. Could it be that a rediscovery of the communion service and its increased practice may result in decreased congregational conflict and healthier congregational relationships? This emerging theme of frequency evolved from my review, and may prove to be a future area of targeted research. While I strongly affirm that the communion service as can provide remedial effect for strained relationships I would suggest that it also has limitations. I do not believe communion can be used as a one size fits all approach.

**Limitations of Communion**

I believe that communion does have limitations. Fink (2008) and other theologians (Radcliffe, 2007; Wolf, 2009) suggest that the Lord’s Supper is a “summons
to unity.” While I agree with Finks’ position on the grand theme of the Lord’s Supper in congregational context; I disagree with him on his move toward ecumenicalism. Fink asserts that theological division is not truly a source of division. He maintains that this doctrinal separation is a necessary element of unity. Fink references the twelve disciples, and their diversity to support his position. He softens the term division, by replacing it with diversity [emphasis added]; thereby concluding that the Lord’s Supper is not a call to doctrinal oneness, but rather a call to unity in diversity.

While I agree with Fink on the grand theme that the Lord’s Supper as a call to unity, I do not see this view as credible due to the strong doctrinal positions that affect the Lord’s Supper and its call to unity. If the very meaning of the Lord’s Supper and its emblems are a point of contention, how can distanced parties find shared word meaning? The congregational level for unity may be more realistic due to the shared word meaning and doctrinal unity.

Secondly, the communion service has limitations based on the type of conflict, which exists in the church. Issues such as gun violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, or the damage of property call for the immediate intervention of local authorities. I do not wish to make claims that lie outside the context of this writing or place people in danger.

Lastly, the communion service can be limited when the leader and congregants under estimate the value of the service itself. It seems that this final limitation may be the very principle that has been lost sight of in the local congregation. I believe that familiarity with liturgy and services can sometimes lead to a devaluing of the gift. I hope that my contribution can curb some of the familiarity that may lead to this mindset.

Implications for Pastors, Church Leaders
Pastors and leaders within local congregations may benefit from further training/education in practical resources that will decrease conflict and increase relational health. While there is merit to the model of further training, pastors may receive their greatest training through real life experience. I am not suggesting that pastors are thrown into conflicted congregations. However, it may prove beneficial for them to receive more practical exposure to the dynamics of congregational oversight. It may be through an intentional internship program where they can be mentored with the aid of a more experience pastoral leader.

There is research that shows that most pastoral leaders are shaped by real life experience,

The results indicated that, consistent with past research on business leaders, the preponderance of developmental experiences occurred in-the-trenches (32%), during times of significant transition (27%), or in personal relationships (23%), indicating that pastors develop as they are doing their work and leading on the edge of their comfort zones. (McKenna, Yost, & Boyd, 2007, p. 179)

McKenna et al.’s contribution reveals that the highest percentages that helped influence pastoral leadership where real life failures, learning from others. They state the following:

Like with business leaders, education and training represents an important element in the pastoral leader’s development, but the importance of ongoing development in on-the-job experiences, during transitions, and in relationships tends to be underestimated. (p. 187)

Some may suggest that pastors receive more training in areas of resolution and relationship dynamics. I would suggest an approach that combines both educational training and significant time spent during a pastoral internship. While this may be helpful for young pastors, some may conclude that this approach overlooks more experienced
pastors who may have had experiences that have not proved beneficial for the congregation or their pastoral leadership. Further continuing educational training in areas of relationship dynamics, congregational conflict, practical resolution techniques, relational dynamics that shape congregational life, may prove beneficial. Further research may prove necessary as leaders face constant change within the church congregation.

Another reason why further training is needed can be found in anecdotal evidence found in the following article written by a pastor:

A decade ago, while serving as a pastor in a conflicted congregation, I came to a sobering realization. The church council decided to seek outside assistance, and asked me to generate a list of consultants willing to be interviewed. As I called around, I learned that many consultants refuse to engage church conflict. I’ll work anywhere but the church-church conflict is the worst” was the refrain. I was stunned, saddened and ashamed that the church carried such a tarnished reputation. (Greenwood, 2005, p. 3)

Greenwood’s real life encounters with conflict reveal the trepidation that some may feel when dealing with conflict. It shows in my opinion the need to equip pastors and local leaders with the tools necessary to lead a congregation toward greater relational health. The reality of this narrative is this: the pastor may have the remedy for his congregation’s conflict with a re-discovery of the communion service. This potential remedy may alleviate the time and resources spent on seeking assistance outside the congregation.

**Conclusion**

The current literature referencing the communion services is broad. The challenge of targeted and contextual research may provide trials for investigation, as well as potential areas of research. The emerging field of Caribbean theology and Caribbean congrega-
tions is scant when compared with literature from African-American scholars. It is my hope to add a different perspective on the Caribbean congregation within North America. It is also my desire to spur further dialogue among Seventh-day Adventist clergy and theologians as to the potential that lies in the rediscovery and application of the Lord’s Supper.

The communion service provides a common communication mode, a template for congregational unity, an opportunity for intentional leadership, a time of shared communication and a mode for theological praxis. The findings from this chapter will provide further dialogue among pastors and leaders. It may also spur future research in other areas of congregational dynamics and the common service.

One such area may be that the Lord’s Supper may also serve not only as remedial, but also as preventative method. The frequency of the common service may be contrasted and compared across denominational lines and its impact on congregational relationships. A true rediscovery of the communion service and its systematic implementation may result in decreased congregational conflict and healthier congregational relationships.

Congregations will continue to have discord and conflict due to the human make up of the church. One of the church’s greatest treasures for the community of faith was instituted before Jesus Christ was crucified. I hope that its rediscovery will help bring healing and reconciliation to many congregations. The implications from the literature and from the biblical foundation prepare the way for the research process.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH NARRATIVE FOR RELATIONAL HEALTH

THROUGH THE COMMUNION SERVICE

Introduction to Research Design

The research design for this qualitative study relied primarily on focus group discussion, feedback and evaluation. This qualitative approach was designed to analyze the congregational deficits as it relates to relational health, explore historical attempts toward resolution practices, or lack thereof and to discuss the communion service as potential remedy.

This project used methods based on qualitative research. “Qualitative research produces culturally specific and contextually rich data for the design, evaluation, and ongoing health of institutions like churches” (Sensing, 2011, p. 58). Qualitative research is best suited for the issues that the LSDAC faced, and may prove beneficial to other churches facing similar issues. Sensing continues by noting that the method best suited for context should be based on the problem statement and purpose statements (Sensing, p. 50). One of the issues of the LSDAC was the need for more congregational engagement in mission and leadership. The focus groups provided opportunities for members to be engaged in the direction of their church. One author notes that focus groups provide “a commitment to involving the people in the setting being studied as co-inquires, at least to some important extent, though the degree and nature of involvement vary widely”
(Patton, 2002, p. 185). The assessment of Patton correlated strongly with the context of the LSDAC.

**Research Narrative**

This research process took place during two separate time periods. The first assessment took place with first establishing a focus group. Church members were made aware of the project through announcements in the bulletin and during pastoral remarks during the main worship service. A sign-up sheet was placed in the lobby for members to sign up for the focus group. During the first process, I served as the facilitator within the focus group. The focus group completed a questionnaire composed by the pastor to generate discussion and dialogue. After the focus group members completed the questionnaire, I entered dialogue concerning congregational conflict and the proposed intervention of a revised communion service. After the communion service was implemented the focus group reassembled to discuss the communion service and its impact on them and the congregation. After further reflection, I had gained insight into research process and wanted to remove any evidence of pastoral manipulation within the research process; therefore after some time a second research process was implemented.

This second assessment took place with a local elder leading the focus group. This second group was filled with new participants, with the exception, of one member who served twice. Pastoral intervention was minimal and used primarily to answer questions for clarity. Notes taken, were read, reread, and screened for common themes. I also looked for areas of slippage within the notes. These areas of slippage usually revolved around historical episodes of conflict, as people shared variant versions of the same story. Based on the answers given from the group, I gained greater insights into their
perceptions of conflict and their hope for resolution through the communion service. This, I believe, was due to my removal from the group. I only inserted myself to probe the group toward more specificity or answer questions the elder could not answer. Once again, the ideas generated (which will be shared further in this chapter) were implemented during the communion service. One should note that there was considerable time lapse of approximately 18 months between the first focus group and the second focus group. During this time-period, there was an increase in participation from the younger members of the church. This was reflective in the composition of the second focus group, which consisted of a broader cross-section of the church. This chapter will share evaluations, outcomes and share areas of future research.

**Focus Group Dynamics**

The focus group discussion was very lively and the members were very enthused that they had a part in shaping the liturgy and flow of the communion service. Sensing (2011) makes the following contribution “through group interaction, data and insights are generated that are related to a particular theme imposed by the researcher and enriched by the groups interactive discussion” (p. 120). The themes that emerged from the focus group (discussed further in this chapter) were the result of their own insights and personal convictions. The grand theme of relational health and its potential remedy found within the communion service was the foundational theme for consideration.

At times, some of the discussions would grow rather tense as sensitive and delicate areas of congregation interaction were discussed. At times members would grow upset as they discussed the history of the church and some of the issues that up to that point in time were still unresolved. At other times the group would burst out in laughter
as items of lesser importance were discussed. There seemed to be a good balance from my observation in both group’s overall interaction and candid discussion. This group dynamic proved the joy of fellowship that members experienced during the discussion period. It also revealed their solidarity in working toward resolution, and gave me the hope for a united church.

**The Communion Service Before Implementation**

To truly grasp the changes made, it would be beneficial to understand the communion service before any implementation took place. The communion service was reflective of a traditional conservative Seventh-day Adventist church in North America. Typically, the communion service is held on a quarterly basis within our local context. At the Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church, we would have communion service near the beginning of every quarter. On occasion, we did move it to the end of the quarter in our annual calendar. The date for communion would be announced a few weeks in advance. This announcement was rather general and broad as I did not go into detail as to the process of preparation.

The church service on communion day was abbreviated by a short message, which precluded the ordinance of humility. The ladies would depart first and go into the fellowship hall. The men would depart last and go into one of the larger rooms upstairs. There was no space made available for couples.

Afterwards the members would re-convene and participate in the Lord’s Supper. The sanctuary choir historically was the only choir that would sing on communion. This choir was composed mostly of older members of the congregation. The songs chosen were fitting in theme, but the musical genre did not reflect diversity, or the various gener-
ations of the congregation. The congregational music during the serving of the emblems was composed of hymns led by a chorister. I observed that this provided a rather uneven flow during the serving of bread and wine, as the chorister would have to announce both the title of the song and the hymn number.

The attire for the men (elders, deacons, pastor) was black suit and white shirt and white tie, and black shoes. The deaconess (or female deacons) wore all white attire. This formal setting and dress provided a sense of reverence for this congregation. After congregants were served, we would end the service with a rousing song that spoke of heaven or the second coming of Jesus. A collection was taken at the close of service for the poor fund in the church. After the service, most members would go home. This typical service in my observation was not engaging the members toward the goal of relational health.

**Information Gathering Stage: Informal Conversations**

To move the congregation toward implementation, I had to gain information and trust. The first phase of the information gathering stage took place through informal conversations with church members regarding the need for greater relational health in the church. These conversations between congregant and pastor took place in the fall of 2011 and continued for several months. These interactions allowed for transparency regarding some of the issues that caused conflict within the local congregation. These conversations were usually couched within informal settings. Members would open their homes for visitation, hold side conversations after board meetings, or talk long after a church dinner. I observed that members would share more during informal conversations, rather than formal sessions. This honed my pastoral care skills as both listener and leader. Fur-
thermore, these conversations revealed an overwhelming desire that many members had for greater relational health, and unity within the congregation. The second phase of conversations took place with former pastors of Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church. These conversations reaffirmed the need for some form of intentional intervention.

The third phase of information gathering took place by talking with my local conference administration. They highlighted some of the historical instances of significant conflict. This conflict had caused serious damage to the congregation resulting in depleted membership and distrust of local church leaders.

**Gaining Leadership Support**

The next step involved talking with the church’s elders. I shared with the elders the project proposal, the research process and the goals of the project. This meeting with the church elders provided candid conversation as to the need for greater relational health. The meeting also fostered a sense of shared responsibility in leading a congregation toward healthier relationships. The dialogue stressed the need to support the efforts and initiatives that would be generated by the focus group.

The final phase of generating support involved discussing with the church board the goals of the project. I also shared with them, in a general sense, the steps that were to be taken to lead toward sustained remedy. The church board was unanimous in their support of the project.

**Congregational Introduction**

The next step was to introduce the project to the local church. This took place during the main worship service over a few consecutive weeks. To establish a biblical
framework for the congregation, a four-part preaching series commenced. This preaching series precluded the establishment of the focus groups. It was my intent that the focus group would have a broader theological understanding of the communion service as potential remedy. This preaching series was entitled “Bind Us Together.” In summary, this preaching series was based on the foundational aspects of the Passover experience in Exodus 12, the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Gospel narratives, and the significance of the emblematic broken bread and unfermented wine. This series unlike any previous series was all in preparation for communion service. This intentional preaching moments value was evidenced when similar themes emerged from focus group dialogue. There was also a positive congregational response indicated in a rise in attendance during the preaching series.

Sermon 1: Passover Protection

The first sermon traced the roots of the communion service back to the institution of the Passover in Exodus 12. In brief the sermon highlighted the significant corporate events that pointed to their redemption and liberation from bondage. Themes such as judgment, atonement and shared liberation, were shared with the congregation.

This sermon had two main goals. The goal of this first preaching moment was for the congregation to gain a sense of the corporate nature of the Passover experience. The participatory elements of the Passover, such as eating the same meal, applying the blood of the same animal type to the doorpost, dressing in similar fashion were also highlighted (Exod 12:11). The sermon emphasized the protection element and the liberation element of the Passover and its effects on the corporate solidarity of the people (Exod 12:13), (1 Cor 5:7, 8).
Sermon 2: The Smelly Side of Salvation

The second preaching moment focused on the institution of the Lord’s Supper. The sermon focused on the preparatory work of foot washing, (John 13:3-5) termed the “Ordinance of Humility” in the Seventh-day Adventist context. The maturation process of the disciples or lack thereof was examined in the gospels. I emphasized the disunity and fractured relationships that existed within their relationships even though they were following Jesus (Mark 9:33-35; 10:35-37).

The sermon pointed out that we can draw three lessons from this process of foot washing. The first was cleansing from sin, (John 13:8-10) the second a call to service, (John 13:14) and the last point, was a lesson in humility (John 13:16, 17). These three principles summarized the teaching points of this second preaching moment.

Sermon 3: Broken Bread for Broken People

The third preaching moment focused primarily on the spiritual significance of sharing unleavened bread. This third phase sought to emphasize three main principles. The first was of urgency to leave behind the practices of the past. The sinful practices that the Passover generation faced were to be eliminated from the ranks of God’s chosen people (Exod 12:39). The second area of emphasis was the emphasis of covenant. This meal was a not only a meal of symbolism but also one of covenant. The people of God were a people chosen by God, and by partaking of this unleavened bread they were in fact participating in renewing their covenant relationship with Him (Exod 12:15, 16). The third principle emphasized was that of Christian Community. Community was fostered by a shared liberation by God and a shared participation in the unleavened bread. The
sermon climaxed with emphasis of our broken condition due to sin and the broken body of Jesus as our individual and corporate remedy (Mark 2:17; 14:22).

**Sermon 4: Under the Influence**

The last part of the preaching moment rehearsed in summary the preceding principles and focused on the blood of Jesus, symbolized by the unfermented wine. This preaching moment focused on three areas. The first emphasis was that the blood provides cleansing from sin (Matt 26:26, 7). The second principle was that the blood provides a means of atonement (Lev 17:11). The third principle was that the blood provides liberation from penalty (Rev 1:5). The focus of this sermon was to highlight the shared realities that the blood of Jesus provides for a covenant people; thereby influencing how they relate to God and how they relate to one another. In summary, this preaching series provided the theological foundation and spiritual visionary platform from which to launch the project.

**Thematic Preaching Elements**

The preaching series proved significant in the following. First, the preaching series was targeted toward specific issues the congregation faced. Secondly, I realized that the preaching moment, while preparatory for the communion service implementation, was limited. The preaching moment, was more akin to a prophetic pastoral role. What was needed to carry the project through in a pastoral sense was a priestly role that sought to mediate the differences within the congregation and lead them toward biblically prescribed unity. Lastly, the preaching moment sought to engender support from a wide spectrum of the church.
Moreover, these preaching moments before the communion service can be expanded and overflow into a quarterly, or annual theme. For example, one may preach on the topic of thirst for an extended time-period. Christ does invite us to drink. One may examine the role of soul thirst (Isa 55:1-3) and the quenching Christological themes that emanate from the Lords table. Christ invites us to eat bread. One may examine the hunger of the soul, the invitation of Christ, (1 Cor 11:24) and the blessing for those who desire righteousness (Matt 5:6). Christ satiates the soul hunger and thirst (John 6:35). The invitation to sup or fellowship with Christ at the table further illumines Christ invitation in Revelation 3:19 where the church is invited to fellowship with Christ in a meal type setting.

These Christological themes in stated in brief can be expanded and expounded to address conflicted congregants. These rich preaching themes seek to remedy conflicted congregations from a Theological framework. It also provides the pastor with a prophetic platform from for a priestly ministry practice. The messages and their meanings are further concretized in the mind of the members by the priestly care and direction of the pastor.

Establishing Focus Group 1

The fifth phase of the project focused on gathering supportive voices and ideas from the focus group. Announcements were placed in the bulletin, detailing the meeting place of the focus group and the meeting time. This need was also emphasized and voiced during the main worship service during pastoral remarks. The focus group was formed from 10 church members who signed the focus group sign-up sheet that was in the church foyer. This convenience sample consisted of members, 70% of them were in leadership
positions in the church. The weakness of this sample was the median age was approximately 55 years of age. This weakness may simply be a sign of disengagement from the younger population of the church. The group met a total of four times before implementing the ideas garnered through dialogue and discussion. Each meeting time was approximately one hour.

**Composition of Focus Group**

The composition of the focus group consisted of members who volunteered for the process. The goal was to assemble a cross section of the congregation that represented different age groups, ethnic background and membership timeline. We also discouraged participation from more than one family members. I did not want to have a family or defined group of the church dominate the discussion process. We met in the mother’s room of the church ever Wednesday for 90 minutes before prayer meeting, for four weeks. While the group did have diversity in ethnic background, and membership timeline, the age group variances were not ideal.

Our first meeting dealt with meeting times, duration of meetings, and I reviewed with them the purpose of the gatherings. They were encouraged to think about the concepts discussed during the “Bind Us Together” preaching series and think about the implications for the local church.

At the second meeting a questionnaire composed of open ended and closed ended questions was passed out. The questionnaire (See Appendix A) was used to generate discussion among the focus group. The first area was to glean from the group how long they had been members. The average membership length was 12 years. On one hand, the average age was a positive marker that provided a thoughtful historical lens, on the other
hand, it was a negative indicator of the overall engagement from younger members. The questionnaire asked the group about what they enjoyed most about being a member of the Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist church. The overall theme was that they enjoyed fellowship within the congregation. The next question asked them to rate their level of satisfaction with the current state of relationships in the church on a scale from 1-10. This ordinal response question sought to discover the quality of relationships within the local church. Overall satisfaction with relationships was graded slightly above average for the group. When asked if they have witnessed or experienced conflict at Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist church all but one stated yes. The group was probed about the current communion service. They concluded that it was indeed a solemn service; descriptive words such as holiness, consecration, and reverence were noted.

One question asked what “Biblical themes do you see in the Old Testament Passover Service”? Participants’ remarks were redemption, grace, oneness and the implications of the lamb and shed blood. Another question asked the same for New Testament themes. One noted “communion with God and one another.”

The questionnaire then asked, “What could be done in your opinion to increase the relational unity within the local church?” One member noted the need for more preparation, while another noted that there should be an “attempt to get to the root causes for conflict and work from there.”

The final question for discussion was “how could we implement a process to foster greater unity within the context of the communion service?” One participant noted to “preach more about the price that Jesus paid…and what he has done for us.”
At times the group would get off task and bring in other problems that existed within the church from Sabbath School attendance, to focusing on the maladies of the youth. However, I tried to keep the group focused on the main issue at hand. These questionnaires were used as springboards for discussion and helped the group stay on the subject being discussed.

**Four Principles of Implementation for Relational Health**

**Spiritual Preparation**

The Focus Group considered the need for greater preparation for communion. This was to be addressed by preparatory preaching the Sabbaths before the communion service. In addition, the weekly Prayer Meetings preceding the Communion Sabbath would focus on healing broken relationships within the local congregation and encouraging the members to take the initiative to heal fractured relationships. This would be done by focused prayer, corporate singing, and a short sermon spotlight on relational unity. This focused approach sought to raise the spirituality of the congregation in a meaningful way. The focus group underscored the need for divine intervention to bring about healing; they pointed to the limitations that humans have in this process and pointed to the power of God to heal and reconcile. This portion of the pre-communion service also underscored the importance of the preaching moment and its impact on the congregation.

**Reverent Participation**

For many in the focus group the spiritual significance of the foot washing ceremony had been diluted by common talk and lack of spiritual focus. The women in the
focus group also observed that some women would only wash their friend’s feet. This presented a problem that could only be remedied by the grace of God and intentionally from those leading out. To compensate for this lack of reverence and cliquish environment, the group suggested the need for spiritual music to fill the room and to engage the participants in corporate singing. This could be done by either having a song leader selected to lead various songs, or to have the person singing from the sanctuary and the music could be heard over the PA system. The latter suggestion seemed more feasible for our context. This allowed for more members to be involved in the process of participation. It revealed that the work of reconciliation was not the work of the pastor alone.

Corporate Celebrations

This third phase included having some type of corporate celebration. We planned to hold an Agape Feast following every communion service. This meal would serve as a celebration of a shared liberation and redemption for the congregation. It would also seek to seal lasting relationships within the congregation and assist members in forming new relationships. This agape feast would also give me the opportunity to serve the congregation. This church prides itself on serving the pastor first at every meal. I wanted to model the servant leadership that leads to relational health. This meal would also be used as an evaluation tool to observe how many members stayed after service.

Reflective Observations

The last phase was reflective observation, which followed the communion service the following week. The focus groups reconvened to discuss the implementation of all the
ideas and discussed what they felt, what they sensed, and what they witnessed in the congregation. The group shared a sincere desire that the church would experience transformation under the power of the Holy Spirit.

**The Communion Service: Phase 1**

The communion service was held on Sabbath during the divine worship service in January of 2013. The divine worship service was abbreviated slightly to make room for the ordinance of humility and the participation in the Lord’s Supper. The preaching moment was a thematic sermon based on the incarnational ministry of Christ in Philippians 2. The focus of the sermon was on descending to serve, rather than ascending to lord over people. The example of Christ was highlighted as He descended to serve rather than ascend to be served. The concluding theme was the end results of a community of servants uniting with Christ.

**Intentional Musical Themes**

In order to implement the musical themes, I worked closely with the choir director and ministers of music to ensure a thematic musical experience. The Lighthouse Mass Choir supplied the music for the day. The selection of the Mass Choir was intentional. The music coordinator met with the pastor to work on the thematic nuances of the musical selections. This choir consists of a cross-section of the membership and models the generational diversity reflective of the congregation. The selection of songs was also very intentional. Themes of unity, and love for God were expressed in song, which added another element to the overall themes of the day. The genre selected was also different from the Sanctuary Choir. This was also a new initiative that proved positive. It allowed
the congregation to reflect on the music that was being rendered. The mass choir also led the congregation in thematic hymns during the distribution and sang the theme song for the day “Make Us One” in Spanish, French-Creole and English. This was a deliberate attempt to draw the participant into the mindset of unity, highlighting the cultural differences and the unifying power of Christ.

The Ordinance of Humility

During the foot washing service the choristers sang songs that were then amplified in the foot washing rooms. This allowed for more singing during the foot washing service. Although the music was clear and distinct it was still a challenge for the participants to have full engagement. From what was observed, the majority of members kept a reverential posture, praying with each other and testifying one to another. This was difficult to truly analyze due to the great unknown of personal attitudes and motive.

The Lord’s Supper

After the ordinance of humility, we then gathered in the sanctuary for the distribution of unleavened bread and unfermented wine. The major addition to this portion of the service, was that of the Mass Choir. This choir led the congregation in hymns and some contemporary worship songs. This blended worship element sought to include the various generations within the church and encourage broad participation. Previously the church would only sing hymns and a lone chorister would lead the entire church.
Corporate Celebration Through Agape Feast

After the service was concluded we then transitioned into the fellowship hall for an Agape Feast. This relaxed atmosphere allowed for fellowship and conversation between members. The meal was not attended by every participant but roughly 40% of the congregation stayed by for this exchange. Members were presently surprised to see their pastor behind the serving table loading their plates with food.

Conclusions and Summary From Focus Group

The focus group members reported that they did sense an overall improvement in the service itself. They felt a greater sense of unity during the worship experience. The measuring of attitudes, feelings, spiritual connectedness was gathered through conversation and follow up from the focus group. The group reported that the various modifications were targeted toward more unity. While the process and implementation seemed to move the members toward a greater sense of community, there needed to be a greater sense of reconciliation and healing. It seems that the process may need to be re-evaluated based on the overall tenor of the focus group.

Focus Group: Phase 2

In summary, the modified changes provided for corporate preparation and a period for thoughtful interaction. The group interviews and dialogues, consensus from Phase 1 revealed more was needed to reconcile broken relationships within the congregation. As stated previously I attempted this process later without pastoral intervention within the focus group.
This time an elder led the focus group discussion and I only made myself available to answer questions or to clarify specific issues that arose. This focus group was composed of 10 members. The members were asked to meet over a period of three consecutive weeks to determine ways to provide the congregation with a communion service that was targeted toward relational health. The group met in one of the classrooms after church on Sabbath for up to 90 minutes. This allowed for more time if needed to discuss major issues.

**Focus Group Questions and Feedback:**

**Part 1 and 2**

During the initial session, the group was probed with questions provided by the pastor to generate discussion. These were open-ended questions that drove the focus group to address issues of conflict and the potential remedy found within the communion service. The local elder was very competent and capable and of leading the group and worked diligently to ensure dialogue and cooperation. The emerging themes from these sessions were: (a) generational tension, (b) power struggles, (c) jealousy, and (d) unresolved conflict. Below is a description of themes that emerged based on the notes taken by the elder.

They were asked, “to examine the areas of conflict within the congregation.” The focus group commented on three main areas of conflict within the congregation. The first area of conflict was generational. They pointed to considerable tension between generation groups within the church. This generation distance can be observed by the younger generations distance from certain traditions, and ethnic identities of the parents who are of Caribbean descent.
This observation within the group challenged my training and experience as pastor. My major point of motivation, and congregational solidarity was through the preaching moment. This generational divide pulled me into a different direction as mediator, peace maker. I have likened this role to a priestly function, as compared to a more prophetic function with emphasis on the preaching moment.

The second area the group noted was the issue of power struggles within the congregation. According to the group, power struggle existed between church leaders and local members. Members sought more engagement in the overall direction of the church. This power struggle in the minds of some seemed to be counteracted by the focus group dynamic itself. My observation revealed members who were not in leadership position, asking probing questions and providing deeply engaging reflection.

The third area of response was on jealousy. The members believed that jealousy was a motivating factor behind some of the conflict. I sensed this referred more so to classism that exists within the congregational matrix. One Caribbean scholar noted that classism exists and is yet difficult to surmise due to its complexities. Davis (1990) does expand his thought by linking classism to social contempt. This social contempt could be evidenced by the way one speaks. He posits that speaking “proper English” is associated with class and refinement. He emphasizes the need for Caribbean dialects to remain and they should not be devalued. As I questioned the theme of jealousy that emerged from the group, I reckon Davis’ statement with the current power brokers of the church. Most of the elders and leaders of prominence were indeed persons of economic stability, educational accomplishment, and social refinement. Although I was not able to pinpoint this observation, I lean towards Davis’ (1990) assessment.
When asked, “What has been the history of conflict?” the members noted the
issues of one pastor that was popular with the people, but not with some of the elders. In
the eyes of some, this pastor was “ousted” by the elders. This narrative has been
rehearsed from various members and always with a variant twist. It has served as one of
the defining moments of conflict in the history of the church.

Congregational narratives are important in understanding congregational health.
In the journal *Congregations*, Peers (2005) draws from narrative therapy to lead
congregations through painful narratives of the past. He notes that stories from the past
may differ based on who is telling the story, as was evidenced in the focus group
dynamic. What I gleaned for my context was this. Peers (2005) emphasizes the need to
create or visualize a new story for the congregation. I am very appreciative for this
insight. The focus group dealt with the pain of the past. Yes, there were different versions
of the story of pain. However, my encounter with the focus group revealed their optimism
about creating a new narrative for the church.

They were asked if they had “observed conflict within the leadership of the
church?” The answer was “yes.” This signified that leadership issues were apparent to the
members. The group was asked “where is conflict most prevalent?” The group stated that
it was among the leadership as well as the membership.

To get an idea on past attempts at resolution, they were asked, “How has conflict
been resolved or has it not been truly addressed” The group stated that conflict has not
been truly addressed. One member stated that the church has had a “band-aid” approach
to serious conflict. One member pointed out that only through true conversion and prayer
can this type of conflict be addressed and remedied. This statement pointed to the need of
a spiritual remedy to the issues of conflict. A simple conflict-resolution program would not be sufficient to remedy the deep internal issues associated with the conflict.

The question was asked, “Has there been any form of intentional resolution?” The members stated “No.” The local elder in charge reported to me that during the conversations there was at times “conflict in our group which was a sample of the church.” The moderator settled these minor points of conflict. Overall, it was reported that the focus group, while they did not always agree, desired a stronger relational health within the congregation.

**Focus Group Questions and Answers: Part 3 & 4**

The final two meetings led by the elder consisted of the following questions. These questions sought to move the group to discussion about solutions for the issues of conflict. The emerging themes from the discussion were: (a) Intentional Congregational Reconciliation, (b) More Emphasis on Preparation, (c) Creative Space for Reconciliation, (d) Sermon Focus on Reconciliation, (e) Added Prayer for Reconciling parties, and (f) Intentional Musical Themes. Below is an expanded description of thematic formation and dialogue.

The elder asked the group “What can we learn from the biblical narratives of reconciliation?” Group discussion on forgiveness led to dialogue concerning the narrative of Joseph and his brothers. They concluded that Joseph and his brothers are an example of true love and reconciliation and reveal the power of forgiveness. They concluded that the forgiveness of Joseph was rooted in his relationship with God. This led to discussion on Matthew 5:23, 24 where the issue of relationship is elevated above worship. The question was then asked, “What can we learn from the counsel given in Matthew 5:23,
24?” The consensus of the group was that the preparatory work before communion must be given a greater priority. They stressed that before individuals partake from the communion table there should be an effort toward reconciliation.

The facilitator asked, “Do you believe the communion service plays a role in reconciliation? If so how?” They responded by pointing to the ordinance of humility as practiced by our church. They pointed out that this ordinance should signify “humility and forgiveness.” They also gave some practical pointers to guard against making the service too casual. They suggested that the foot washing period should not be among friends only; but members should seek out those whom they may have had a problem with. The group seemed to linger on this point more than others and added that the Matthew 7:21 principle applies here as well.

The question was asked, “What themes should be, or could be emphasized during the communion services that are not emphasized now? The group made the following recommendations. First, the group continued to press for a greater emphasis on personal preparation a few weeks in advance of the communion service. Typically, it is placed on the church calendar and announced in the worship service. The focus group desired more pastoral emphasis and instruction as to the spiritual implications of true heart preparation and the process of reconciliation.

The follow-up question was more probing. It asked, “If you were to move the congregation toward healthier relationships, how could the communion service be shaped to do so?” The following recommendations were made:

1. Create time in the service for reconciliation, if time had not been made prior to coming to church. Give members space to make amends if they have not already done so.
2. Create time for meaningful personal mediation and reflection. Members realized the need for personal reflection and the need for the power of the Holy Spirit to bring to the minds of people issues they may have overlooked.

3. The sermon for the day should focus on the priority of relationships (one example would be Matthew 5:23, 24). After the sermon is given allow time for reflection.

4. Have a season of prayer and encourage members who are at odds or who may have had relational strain to pray together. This prayer moment would be targeted toward healing relational strain between members.

5. Have thematic music and emphasize familial themes leading up to prayer service. Although the music had improved the group sought greater intentionality in planning the music through the entire service.

In summary, the group believed that communion could be intentional on moving the congregation toward healthier relationships. It was stated that this alone was not the only factor in resolving conflict; however, it was believed that we should create space for people to reconcile.

**Implementation: Part 2**

After hearing from the group and asking questions we then prepared for the communion service with the recommendations. Congregants were encouraged a few weeks in advance to spend time in prayer and meditation. They were encouraged to reach out to fellow members where there may have been relational friction.

The sermon for that Sabbath was entitled “Practicing the Playbook.” The text was 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19. In summary, the sermon focused on God’s initiative toward a rebellious planet. I focused on His overall desire of restoring a fracture relationship with
His creation. The sermon then shifted and we focused on the need for the church to mirror the activity of Jesus. We too should be agents of reconciliation. I stressed that this activity can begin today, in the church.

After the sermonic moment, the appeal for the congregation was turned into a call to prayer. The prayer moment challenged the church members to move from the comfort zone of praying with their friends. This prayer moment sought to move the church members to pray with individuals who they may have had a strained relationship.

The prayer service ushered the members into a more reverential posture and prepared the people for the ordinance of humility. After the foot washing service the church members reassembled to partake of the Lord’s Supper. During the serving of the emblems (bread and grape juice) a mixture of hymns and contemporary were rendered by the praise team.

**Focus Group 2: Evaluation**

The following week after the communion service was held. The focus group reconvened after time was given to synthesize their thoughts, and catalogue their observations. They were asked five questions and they were also allowed to share their observations and write them down for this project. When asked “Do you believe that the changes made in the communion service have the potential to lead the church toward greater relational health?” The majority responded by circling “strongly agree.” They were asked “Did the focus group process bring to light issues of conflict that were not address previously” The group responded with Agree and Strongly Agree. When asked “Do you believe that the experience you had today helped you in your Christian experience and relationship with fellow believers?” The group responded with Agree and
Strongly Agree. When asked “Would you recommend the changes made in this service to other churches that may have similar issues of relational conflict?” The group responded with Agree and Strongly Agree. When asked if they “observed leadership from the Pastor in moving the congregation toward healthier relationships through the communion service?” The group responses were Strongly Agree and Agree.

After completing the survey form a few respondents wrote the following of their experience. One member stated, “I believe that information from this research project should be shared with pastors and elders of other Seventh-day Adventist Churches. The research will be beneficial to leaders and all members.” Another member stated, “The communion service was very refreshing, misty-eyed and emotional. The format used, did enhance the reconciliation process.”

The focus group feedback was encouraging to me as I read the reports. Having witnessed the visible emotions that were evidenced through the communion service I believe that this service made a significant contribution to the overall relational health of the church.

**Comparing Phase 1 and Phase 2**

The first group generated ideas that focused more on issues of external formulation and liturgy. Ideas such as the Mass Choir and the Agape Feast were implemented to move the congregation into a sense of greater unity and healthier relationships.

Although the second group did make liturgical adjustments, the focus was more pointed toward spiritual disciplines. For example, the group focused more on the need for individual prayer. They also focused attention on the need for significant personal reflection. This group’s focused more on the individual need for heart change. These
ideas, such as the moments for quiet meditation, the appeal for reconciliatory prayer and the sermonic topic, were targeted approaches to heart change.

Both group sets emphasized the need for notice in advance for the communion service and practical religious instruction on preparing one’s heart for the communion moment. Both group sets emphasized the importance of the foot-washing service and its role in heart preparation. Both groups desired to experience an atmosphere that was reflective of its true intent. Both groups desired to move the church toward healthier relationships.

**Conclusion**

The results of this qualitative study were based primarily on the dialogue and discussions that were gleaned through the focus group dynamic. The communion service and relational health were discussed by two separate focus groups on two separate occasions. These focus groups were empowered by the church board, supported by the local elders and were influenced by the theological foundation of the communion service. The information gleaned proved valuable. According to one author, focus groups can be a deep reservoir of information about behavior and the motivations that are foundational to behaviors (Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998). The recommendations from both groups were initiated and their experiences were analyzed. This qualitative research proved to be a positive experience, as the overall feedback from congregants was positive. The details and results will be shared in the proceeding chapter.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide an overview of my observations of the LSDAC and the factors that contributed to the church process of growth in relational health. The process of research was accomplished through qualitative research. I will also share challenges that surfaced during my project implementation. These challenges may exist in similar faith groups, or similar Seventh-day Adventist Churches. This chapter will also provide a research template for churches that may have similar issues of conflict within the congregation. Areas of future research will be examined in this chapter, as well as authors of influence that shaped my journey of study, project implementation and growth. Finally, I will share a reflective summary on the research process and its impact on the church and its leaders.

Practical Theology Research Foundations

In the field of practical theology there are numerous types of research practices. Beedoe (2016) worked primarily through focus group interaction to understand Caribbean perceptions of pastoral care. Practical theologians such as Andrews and Smith (2015), and Purves (2004), provide theological insights that undergird theological practice, but do not provide a research template that would fit the context of the LSDAC. Other voices not within the discipline of practical theology provide contributions that
help shape the direction of research. Becker (1999) used case studies in understanding the dynamics of conflict. This was done primarily through interviews, questionnaires, and scouring church documents. Becker provided comparative analysis of various congregations in conflict. Sociologists leading the field of congregational studies; Kniss (1998) Ammerman (1998), and Chou (2008) provide quantitative research that probes various aspects of congregational life. These in of themselves are valuable and contribute to the wide field of understanding congregations, and the application of theological practice. I had to ask the question, “What methods would be best suited for the issues at LSDAC?” As Sensing (2011) noted the problem drives the research process. I chose the template provided by Osmer (2004) due to the issues that faced the congregation. Osmer provides four tasks that provide pastors, church leaders, and researchers, an approach that is grounded within research theories, while staying true to theological concepts. These various tasks were chosen for this research process and were used as a skeletal type framework.

**A Template for Practical Theological Research**

As previously stated, the template that mostly mirrored my research was written by Richard Osmer in his book, *Practical Theology, An Introduction*. He provides the reader with an over view of practical theology and masterfully blends research process with theological principles. Moreover, Osmer, breaks down the research process into four main categories. They are as follows, (a) The Descriptive Empirical Tasks: Priestly Listening, (b) The Interpretive Task: Sagely Wisdom, (c) The Normative Task: Prophetic Discernment, and (d) The Pragmatic Task: Servant Leadership. Osmer, describes each in the following manner:
The descriptive-empirical task. Gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts.

The interpretive task. Drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring.

The normative task. Using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from "good practice."

The pragmatic task. Determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation with the "talk back" emerging when they are enacted. (Osmer, 2004, p. 4)

The Empirical Task

I was intentional on learning about the congregation, its history, founding members, persons of influence, significant achievements, and challenges. From my initial installation I began a series of inquires which became more focused and detailed once the project began. I was fortunate to have a few of the founding members still present in the congregation. Their insights into the dynamics of the congregation were very vital in understanding the complexities of the congregation.

The church also had its key influential leaders. These persons were known for their leadership skill, and years of church membership. To move the church into healthier relationships, it was important for me to gain understanding, but also to engender trust. This process could not be done simply through surveys of questionnaires. I had to be close to the people. Robinson (2009) states, “As a rule, honesty and trust will rise with proximity” (p. 36).

Learning to listen to the leaders was key. These influential leaders had no difficulty in sharing their views, however contrary to each other or to myself. The outspoken character of the few was both an asset and a liability. On one hand, I could see
clearly where they stood on key issues that affected the congregation; while on the other hand when they were going in a direction that was contrary to mission, their voice could inflict great damage.

Upon my arrival, the church members shared with great excitement of hope to return to the pinnacle of church growth. They shared with me how the church was filled with young people. They reflected on the past missteps and hope to avoid the pitfalls that caused the exodus of many of its members. Osmer (2009) makes the following statement that I believe best encapsulates the process

In seminary, students learn how to interpret many different kinds of texts. They learn the skills of exegesis and interpretation of biblical texts. They study classic texts and ancient liturgies of the Christian tradition and explore their meaning for today. Practical theology invites such students to interpret the texts of contemporary lives and practices. (p. 32)

Simply stated, the pastor needs to exegete the congregants to truly understand their composition. This exegetical process not only revolves around information gathering, but also encompasses the emotional weight that congregants bring into their stories. I resonate with Goleman et al. (2013) when they state, “listening and taking other people’s perspectives, allows leaders to tune in to the emotional channels between people that create resonance” (p. 32). The congregants of the LSDAC were a people of passion and strong emotion. Their stories were not simply dry monologues of church history. Their stories were packed with emotion that at times, revealed their own vulnerability, or even regrets from the pasts. Just as a historian is gentle, handling ancient copies of sacred text, so a pastor must be gentle when handling the stories of congregants. This required from me more sensitivity, so members would feel ministered to, as opposed to being interrogated. Therefore, I would add to Osmer’s tasks that one must be cautious in this
stage to not only seek information from people but to seek people. To understand where they are in the overall historical dynamic of the congregation.

The Interpretive Task

The focus was on the understating the dynamics of congregational conflict. Although the central issues revolved primarily around worship. The research community has probed various congregations and their studies have proven very helpful. I consulted previous pastors, local conference leadership, current members, and former members. I also researched various studies on congregations to glean a clearer understanding on the challenges that congregations face (Kniss, 1998, 1995, 1995; Chou, 2008; Becker, 1999). Various scholarly journals were accessed dealing with congregational dynamics, communion, unity and conflict (Robinson, 2003; Starke & Dyck, 1993; Cohen, 2001). Many resources were scoured to better understand conflict on a broad scale and congregational conflict on a more targeted scale.

I examined the biblical text that dealt with resolving conflicts in the New Testament and discovered the principles for resolution embedded within the communion service. The challenge was to integrate the Biblical principles discovered, into the life and ministry of the local congregation.

Penny Edgell Becker's contributions to the field of congregational studies proved to be very valuable. In her work, Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life, she provides the reader with five congregational models: (a) House of Worship, (b) Family Congregations, (c) Community Congregations, (d) Leader Congregations, and (e) Mixed Congregations. She provides solid research and anecdotal evidence to point out the various characteristics of each model. She identifies how they
deal with conflict and the factors that contribute to conflict in each model. From this resource, I could identify the model that fit the LSDAC. The LSDAC was truly a mixed model based on her description.

The research of Ellison, Krause, Shepherd, and Chaves (2009) helped generate my interest in studying congregations. This research analyzed the anticipated support members hope to gain from the congregation. Another research article by Ellison, Zhang, Krause, and Marcum (2009) gave me a window into the field of congregational studies in general and spoke to some of the issues that faced the LSDAC. Furthermore, it shed new light on the relationship between a conflicted congregation and physical well-being.

With the in-depth research noted above I still had more questions than I had answers. I discovered that conflict had many branches, produced its own fruit, and had a deep-rooted system. There were deeper areas of personal issues that I did not have access to. Even members, who were very close, only let me so far into their personal inventory of thought, motive, and action. This is nothing new, but it challenged my research process, as I questioned if I was really getting to the core of personal motivations. This interpretive task did help generate discussion, spark meaningful dialogue, and lead toward positive outcomes. However, the best research practices cannot penetrate the depth of human behavior. This prompted me to have a greater appreciation for the role and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit could true healing take place.

The Normative Task

Theological concepts that were applied proved to be both challenging and rewarding. The Communion Service journal literature seemed to be concentrated on so
many other areas, beside the local congregation. A wide breadth of literature is generated by Catholic (Downy, 2013; Englebrect, 1997; Gros, 2002) and Anglican scholars (Thomas, 2003; Wolf 2009) on the communion service, but there are very limited contributions from Seventh-day Adventist or even mainline Protestant churches (Bentley, 2011). There was a breadth of literature seeking to use the Lord’s Supper as a point of ecumenical unity (Cross, 1992; Fuller, 1970; Fink, 2008). Most of the literature was on the various modes of theology rather than practical theology. This proved challenging as the contributions from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective seemed missing. I could correlate biblical themes, such as liberation, emancipation, solidarity, forgiveness, and reconciliation from selected biblical text. The narratives of the Passover experience, the institution of the Lord’s Supper, and the examination of the Corinthian church provided biblical themes that were used during the research process. These narratives provided a biblical foundation for the preaching series delivered before the communion service. The primacy of the Word realigned the process and reinforced the direction and aims of the focus group.

I also realized the limitation of the preaching series and in preaching itself. What did emerge from within my context, was a priestly model of practical ministry. This priestly model of practical ministry was based on (a) the limitation of preaching within a conflicted Caribbean congregation, (b) the activity of pastoral care giver and mediator through the pastoral experience and research process. (c) The mediatory work of Christ (Heb 9:11-15) as an underdeveloped theology of pastoral care and practical theology. Lastly, this emerging pastoral model may add to the discussion surrounding the ever-growing field of pastoral care and Caribbean theology.
The Pragmatic Task

The focus groups were established to understand the problems that the congregation faced. The differing phases were discussed previously in this chapter. These focus groups also probed the communion service as potential remedy and made recommendations to this end. The provided their own prescription for the local church under the guidance of the pastor. The composition of the focus group proved challenging on the first attempt. I asked members to sign up for the process; hoping that a diverse cross section of the church would be represented.

Focus Group: Phase 1

The focus group mixture was not ideal. The sign-up process generated a list of members but the generational spread was not what I had hoped for. The church was attracting younger married couples and I had hoped to have a representative from this demographic. However, it was not the case. Looking back, I asked members to participate in the process of resolution and asked for volunteers to sign up for focus groups. The method of focus group composition that was used in Phase 1 could have been changed to generate a more diverse focus group. I should have spent more time in small conversations with the younger generation members to gain greater support and inclusion.

Focus Group: Phase 2

During the establishment of the second focus group, I worked with a wider cross-section of the church. The volunteers who comprised the second focus group were more representative of the church’s composition in age, country of origin, and gender. The
elder in charge was very good at engaging the members in discussion. I came along at the
close of each meeting to probe the group for specificity on certain issues. I would
recommend for future researchers (pastors, church leaders) that they remove themselves
from the focus groups process as much as possible to remove any hint of influence. I
sensed that members were not as free in my presence to discuss sensitive issues. The
members in Phase 1 might have said what they thought I wanted them to hear, while the
members in Phase 2 spoke more directly.

Conclusions From Research Process

The feedback (See Appendix D) from the focus group pre-implementation revealed
that 90% of participants were not satisfied with the current relational health of the
congregation. Pre-implementation showed that 90% of the members had experienced
conflict at LSDAC. After phase 1 interviews with focus group members suggested that
while the theme of unity was emphasized, more emphasis should be placed on healing
personal relationships, through intentional acts of prayer, and fellowship.

The feedback from Focus Group 2 suggested the need for greater preparation,
time for reflection during service, seasons of prayer for reconciliation, intentional musical
themes, and pointed sermonic topic and appeal. After the implementation of phase 2 the
results are as follows. Seventy percent (70%) of focus group participants, strongly agreed
that the communion service in its new form could move the church toward relational
health. Among focus group participants 60% strongly agreed that the communion service
in its new form helped them personally in their relationship with fellow members.
Feedback from the focus group revealed that 60% believed that the experience during
communion service helped them personally in their Christian experience. The report
showed 60% of focus group participants believed that the current model of communion could assist churches similar in context that face issues of conflict. The report revealed that 90% of the focus group observed intentional pastoral leadership moving the congregation toward healthier relationships. The focus group report revealed that 60% of participants would recommend the changes made at LSDAC to churches similar in context that face issues of conflict. Other congregational elements emerged that were not predicted at onset of the project. They include the following:

Membership Engagement

The focus group discussion within both phases generated an excitement about the possibilities of moving the church toward relational healing and peace. Members were engaged in a process, previously reserved for the church elders, or for the minister alone. This process reaffirmed the work done in the book, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, where the author highlights in one chapter the benefits of small groups. He notes, “A successful face-to-face group is more than just collectively intelligent. It makes everyone work harder, think smarter, and reach better conclusions than they would have on their own” (Surowiecki, 2004, p. 179). This dynamic was witnessed and reported in the focus group process. Members prodded each other for a higher alternative and a practical biblically based solution. The members shared candidly in both phases the problems of the past in relation to conflict. The report from phase 1 and phase 2 required an honest look at the historical episodes and faults of members and church leaders. Although the areas discussed were sensitive to some; the engagement process was a growth area.
A Blended Worship Experience

Prior to implementation the communion service seemed very rote and mechanical. The elders held large sheets of paper up front with the order of service and their role to play. The tone was very somber with parse moments of celebration. The dominance of one style was reflected in music selections. The format of the service was obviously a reflection of the leadership of the church. The focus group discussion produced a more balanced approach to the worship experience in communion. They suggested a more blended approach that was more inclusive of the various tastes of the congregants. The engagement factor of the focus group members allowed not only for their buy in, but also their support of the changes. I was able to work with key leaders in the church to create a more balanced worship experience during the communion service that was reflected of the generational diversity.

Renewed Interest in Prayer Meeting

The prayer meeting attendance before the process was very low on the average. The attendance during church service would be about 200 to 250 people during a Sabbath service. Prayer meeting may have an attendance of 20-30 people. One of the focus group principles was to be more intentional on preaching about relationships and the importance of communion in advance of the service. A preaching series was designed to implement a preparatory climate in the church. For approximately four weeks prior to communion I was able to lead a preaching series every Wednesday night. The attendance rose greatly during these preaching series and the membership seemed to be more engaged in the process of reconciliation and preparation. This trend did not last indefinitely, but attendance would spike before the communion service. In hindsight, further enhancement
would have been for a follow-up preaching series on moving forward in health. An intentional worship experience that would serve to seal the commitments and decisions made during the moments of communion.

Changing Attitudes About Servant Leadership

The communion service ended with an agape feast where the leadership would serve the people. I led out in this initiative, which was counter-cultural in this church. Typically, they take great pride in serving the pastor first, and making sure the plate is amply supplied. Members were surprised to see the pastor and leaders serving food after communion. This was to teach the object lesson that Christ taught during the foot washing service. I did not want the members to conclude that any pastor was above the communion service and did not need to practice service.

Cultural Inclusivity

The dominant makeup of the members of LSDAC was of Jamaican heritage. The church also had members from other parts of the Caribbean and Haiti. The worship experience at communion sought to include the various cultural groups of the local church. This was accomplished with the creation of a Mass Choir, which would sing at every communion service. Working with the music leaders to ensure that the music was blended along generational lines and cultural tastes. The choir would also sing in English, Spanish, and French to represent the diversity of the congregation. This had a profound effect on the membership, some of whom felt isolated due to cultural differences.

Another element could have been added to enhance this process on the weeks following communion. An intentional service where members could share how communion has
helped them grow in their relationships. This process would have allowed members of the congregation from different cultural regions to express their growth during the process. It may have engendered greater momentum in the sustained success of these communion changes.

A Priestly Model of Practical Theology

There is a noted gap of literature that focuses on the Caribbean experience within North America. Proponents of Black theology have confessed to this gap (Cone, 1997). Furthermore, the current contributions from others such as Maynard-Reid (2000), Reid-Salmon (2014) and Beedoe (2015) are beginning to add literature to this growing field. While Beedoe examines pastoral care for the Caribbean context, my research provides a priestly model for practical ministry. This priestly model ministry begins where the preaching/prophet model ends. The communion service implementation was the result of a mediatory style of leadership based on the theology of reconciliation and unity. This leadership model may find resonance with pastors or church leaders who are facing conflicted congregations.

Limitations Realized

The focus group understood the limitations of our best intentions. The communion service was studied over in its biblical context. The groups met and discussed their history and they shared candidly a desire to move forward. Even though by some the changes marked a significant shift in the attitudes of the church; we realized that this service cannot correct every relational strain. On one hand the limitations of the project give space for the power of transformation through the preached Word and the
power of prayer; while on the other hand it shows the weakness of our best intentions. The limitations may in fact point us to our continued need of Christ grace as we partake of the sacred emblems and hope for our ultimate liberation. Secondly, the limits were realized upon my re-assignment to another church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a structure where by ministers may be reassigned every four to six years. After the conclusion of this project implementation I was asked to serve another congregation. Therefore, the long-term effect of these changes, and their implementation could not be effected.

**Research Cautions**

Guarding against idealist expectations: During the research process, I realized the challenge of merging theological concepts with practical life experience. This challenge was realized during discussion with various congregants, some of who saw no need to change or alter anything in the local church. I realized that not everyone would be appreciative of the process and would not be supportive the process. My expectation that people understood the project in its fullness was also idealistic. I realized the need to repeat to members the purpose of the project and its intention. At times, I overestimated my communication skills and assumed that people were aware of the direction in which I was leading them. My communication enhanced during this process as I had to move the congregation a little slower than I had originally anticipated.

Stretching the congregation too far: In my initial quest to move the church into healthier relationships I desired to move the congregation into a more contemporary style of worship, in hope that the research process and focus group would “catch up” with my intention. This proved to be challenging for numerous reasons. I had a leadership that was
compromised of traditionalist who viewed new or foreign worship ideas with skepticism.

There was however, a willingness on the part of some members to move in that direction. The temptation was just to move in the direction without commitment and buy in from leadership. Had I succeeded in moving the congregation too far, I would have met with a great deal of resistance during my project implementation and may have continued the culture of conflict in the church.

**Recommendations for Future Research, Pastors, Educators, Administrators**

During this project, I was exposed for the first time to a large body of research that focused on conflict, congregational life, relationship dynamics, sacramental theology, practical theology and much more. There were gaps that I noticed as I read through the literature to find suitable resources for my project. I will name a few areas of possible study, with a brief description to follow: (a) Frequency of Communion and its Impact on the Congregation. (b) Longitudinal Study of Congregational Conflict in the Local Church. (c) Generational Attitudes Among Seventh-day Adventists Toward Communion. (d) Generational Attitudes Among Seventh-day Adventists Toward Communion. (e) Communion as Evangelism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The first area of research would focus on the concept that we currently practice in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Typically, most churches practice communion four times in the year. There are other churches that practice communion with greater frequency, albeit they only distribute bread and wine and forgo the foot washing. This implementation however, must include a high-Christological experience. If the Christological elements are neglected, the church may devolve the communion service into routine and tradition. The injunction clearly states, “as oft as you do this, do it in
remembrance of Me” [emphasis added] (1 Cor 11:25). To my knowledge, the issue of frequency has not biblical specificity. Our current practice within the Seventh-day Adventist Church is simply a practice that we abide by. Would there be a decrease in church conflict if Communion was practiced with increased frequency? Can communion be viewed as not only a prescriptive agent for congregational conflict, but also as an inhibitor for congregational conflict?

Secondly, could churches experience long-term unresolved conflict within the congregation? If so, how could these conflicts be addressed and remedied. This research practice could examine local churches within conferences that have documented cases of serious church conflict. It may be pastor/church leadership conflict or member/member conflict. Moreover, the conflict can be contained to a family unit of power group in the local church. This study may offend the congregants and a delicate approach would have to be taken to generate substantial findings.

Thirdly, are their various understandings of communion based on generation? I wonder if there are generational differences that could be probed within a congregation to discover how to meet each generation. For example, the Mosaic generation may prefer a more relaxed setting for communion. The Mosaic groups has been defined as Gen Xers and the Gen Ys, and may prefer communion in small groups at people’s homes to create greater intimacy and fellowship. The Boomers may prefer the traditional style reflected within Seventh-day Adventist Churches. These attitudes could be studied and the congregation along with its leadership could hold communion sites based on the preference of its contributing generations.
The missional charge of the church is “Go ye therefore into all the world” (Matt 28:13). Could there be a moment in the communion experience where community guest and friends could participate? While we practice an open communion for various members of faith groups, I am suggesting a larger reach. The congregants could host a unity event after every communion for the community. This event would seek to create relationships with the “unified” congregation to increase its contact with the community. Examples could be a community agape feast, a quarterly unity-day, with emphasis on community engagement and evangelism.

Finally, I believe the basic principles from this project can be applied in various cultural context but not in a generalized way. After the pastor has had a thorough understanding of the congregation, the principles may be applied with cultural sensitivity. To rush the process prematurely may lead toward unintended negative or insignificant results. Moreover, each context would have different issues to address. Therefore, the research questions would differ and lead to different results.

**Reflections and Summary**

The research process and project implementation process was a journey of self-discovery, personal growth, and professional development. One of the leadership competencies according to *Primal Leadership* by Goleman et al. (2013), is to have a strong sense of self-awareness. This project heightened that reality for me as a pastor. I was more in tune with my own motives and misconceptions. I realized that my motives in ministry could not be self-service, but based on the servanthood of Jesus Christ. I realized the importance of learning about another culture, before critiquing it.
I was made more aware of my strengths. My ministry of visitation revealed that some members do not attend church because of past hurts. I was also made aware of my weaknesses as a leader. My need to be more relatable, to address conflict when it first arises, and to have greater faith that resolution is possible. I was able grow as a theologian, understanding the interplay between faith and practice. As a researcher, I learned how to work with focus groups and process their information. As a servant leader, I learned not only how to lead in front of the people, but also alongside the people.

As an African-American Seventh-day Adventist pastor/theologian, this process led to more reflection on a priestly ministry model. For years, my emphasis in ministry was on the preaching element, as is noted in Black theology. This process, however balanced my approach in pastoral care and practical theology. It led to a discovery of a mediatory type of role that sought to bring together the rich heritage of culture and tradition alongside the expressive and more emotive worship experience.

Not only did I grow as a pastor, and in my identity as a Christian; but the church also grew in both quality and quantity. During my tenure as pastor there was a new blended style of worship with more inclusivity, a greater engagement from membership in church problems, a rise in attendance and new baptisms.

This project did not cure every church ill, but it moved the congregation in a direction toward wholeness and healing. I truly sense that the project provided an open space for the power of God to permeate the congregational life and overall spirituality of the church. It is my sincere hope that pastors, church leaders, administrators and lay leaders can re-examine the role of the communion service as a spiritual encounter to move congregations toward greater unity.
Focus Group Questionnaire
Focus Group 1
Relational Health through the Communion Service

1. How long have you been a member of the Lighthouse SDA Church
2. What is your favorite aspect of membership within this church
3. On a scale of 1-10 please rate your satisfaction with the relationships that exist within the church. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Very Poor Very Good
4. Have you witnessed or experienced conflict at Lighthouse SDA Church?
5. What has been your experience at the communion service at Lighthouse?
6. How has the communion service impacted your spiritual life?
7. What Biblical themes do you see in the OT Passover Service?
8. What Biblical themes do you see in the NT institution of the Communion Service?
9. What could be done during communion to increase relational unity at LSDAC?
10. How could we foster greater unity using the communion service?
APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
Focus Group 1 - satisfaction with relational health within the LSDAC congregation.
Pre-Implementation of Communion Service
Focus Group 1 Participants who have experienced conflict with members at LSDA Church.
Pre-Implementation
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP 2 - POST-IMPLEMENTATION

LIKERT SCALE
Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church

Relational Health through the Communion Service

Exit Interview

Thank you for your participation in this qualitative research project. The church will benefit because of the time and energy you committed to your church. Please complete this survey after the communion service has been implemented.

1) Do you believe that the changes made in the communion service have the potential to lead the church toward greater relational health?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2) Did the focus group process bring to light issues of conflict that were not addressed previously?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3) Do you believe that the experience you had today has helped you in your Christian experience and relationship with fellow believers?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4) Would you recommend the changes made in this service to other churches that may have similar issues of relational conflict?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
5) Did you observe leadership from the Pastor in moving the congregation toward healthier relationships through the communion service?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If you would like to add any notes of observation please share below

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Comments –

“I believe this information from this research project should be shared with pastors and elders of other SDA churches. The research will be beneficial to leadership and all members” - Church Member - FG 2

“Communion service was great today. Individuals prayed together and were able to start the process of reconciliation. The only thing I would add is that individuals should pray together after they washed each other’s feet” - Church Member - FG 2

“The communion service was very refreshing, misty eye, and emotional. The format used did enhance the reconciliation process.” - Elder FG 2
APPENDIX D

Percentages of Focus Group 2

Exit Interview
Focus Group 2 participants who believed that the changes made in the communion service have the potential to lead the church toward greater relational health.
Focus Group 2 Participants who believed that the experience of the New Communion Service helped them personally in their relationship with fellow believers.
Focus Group 2 Participants that believed the experience of the New Communion Service helped them personally in their Christian experience.
Focus Group 2 participants that observed intentional Pastoral leadership in moving the congregation toward healthier relationships through the communion service.

- Strongly Agree: 90%
- Agree: 10%
- Disagree: 0%
- Strongly Disagree: 0%
Focus Group 2 participants who would recommend the changes in the LSDAC communion service to other churches similar in context that face issues of conflict.
REFERENCE LIST


Wortmann, S. L., & Schrader, S. L. (2007). Older members, church home, and congregational change: "We worked and worshipped in this home for years and now you say we're not important…." *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging, 19*(2), 21-42.


Martin Curtis Powell

2603 SW 85th Ave.
Miramar, FL 33025
curtis.powell@secsda.org
954-805-4399

PASTORAL OBJECTIVE

To provide competent Christian leadership to Seventh-day Adventist congregations equipping them to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ, while serving the community with compassion and grace.

PASTORAL EXPERIENCE

Feb. 2015 - Present - Pastor, Bethany Seventh-day Adventist Church, Miami, Fl

- Lead Pastor of Multi-Generational Church
- Led in Spiritual Growth, Project Management, Bible Study, Counseling, and Youth Ministries.
- Established Ministry Assessments tools for leadership competence and transition
- Directed Evangelistic Series resulting in over 50 souls being baptized
- Featured Speaker on T.V. ministry “It Matters” and Radio Program “Spiritual Downloads”
- Expanded Media Footprint, Oversaw Redeveloped Website
- Conducted Leadership Development Seminars
- Provided Grief Support and Recovery
May 2010 - Jan 2015 - Pastor, Lighthouse Seventh-day Adventist Church, Fort Lauderdale, Fl

- Led congregation to improved Relational Health through the Communion Service
- Established Small Group Ministry
- Broadened Outreach Ministries to include larger geographical area
- Eliminated the Church Mortgage/Oversaw Renovations of entire campus
- Directed and Preached in Several Evangelistic Campaigns Resulting in over 75 souls being baptized

Aug. 2005 - 2010 - Pastor, First Coast International/Berea Seventh-day Adventist Church District

- Led congregations to expand their community outreach
- Purchased church property for future growth and expansion
- Established Evangelistic Mentoring project for youth
- Conducted Evangelism Series/Revelation Seminars

Aug. 2002-2004 - Assistant Pastor, New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church, Berrien Springs, MI.

- Assisted with the coordination of worship activities and preaching calendar
- Prepared baptismal candidates for baptism
- Worked with staff to create ministry opportunities for students


Pastor, Southernmost Seventh-day Adventist Church, Key West, FL

- Established vibrant Youth Ministry
- Restored Physical Plant
- Conducted Evangelism Series
- Served as volunteer Chaplain at Detention Facility
- Featured Speaker on two morning Radio Programs
EDUCATION

• Oakwood College - B.A. - Ministerial Theology, Minor - Psychology - 1997
• Andrews University - Master of Divinity - 2004
• Andrews University - Doctor of Ministry - Graduation Date - May, 2017
• Concentration: Leadership with emphasis on Relational Health

COMMITTEES AND BOARDS

• Currently serve on the Southeastern Conference Executive Committee
• Currently serve on the Southeastern Conference Lay Advisory Committee
• Currently serve as Board Member of Miami Union Academy

FAMILY

• Married to the former Nicole P. Whitfield of Gary, IN.
• She currently works as a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner.
• Proud father of two sons - Braedon Emmanuel and Corben Elijah

SKILLS

• Certified Pre-Martial Counselor through Pre-Pare Enrich Certified
• Leading Congregations through Conflict
• Leadership Training and Development for Local Congregations