The Student Missionary Experience and its Impact on Young Adults

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THE STUDENT MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE
AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUNG ADULTS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Troy E. Fitzgerald
February 2005
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ABSTRACT

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Troy Fitzgerald

Chair: Shirley Freed
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University
School of Education

Title: THE STUDENT MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUNG ADULTS

Name of researcher: Troy Fitzgerald

Name and degree of faculty chair: Shirley Freed, Ph.D.

Date completed: February 2005

Problem

While reputed to be valuable, the Student Missionary (SM) experience has not been studied to ascertain how a year of service impacts the college students who serve. Furthermore, there are no studies that show what aspects of the SM experience make a year of service transformational. Most of what is known about a year of service is anecdotal and begs for systematic study of the SM experience.

Method

This is primarily a qualitative study where former SMs from four Adventist colleges and universities were interviewed. The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP) was administered to SMs as an additional source of data. The CSPP shows the
participants’ dominant modes of spiritual development and their participation in the spiritual disciplines. Qualitative data were collected from a total of 113 participants, and 201 (50%) former SMs returned the CSPP.

Results

The results from the qualitative data showed that the SM experience deepened their relationship with God, pushed them to depend on God, expanded their worldview, enhanced their commitment to service, and prompted them to mature as leaders. The SM experience was a holistic learning experience where SMs perceived personal and spiritual growth occurred. The results from the CSPP showed SMs scored significantly higher in all four modes on Kolb’s learning cycle.

The findings also showed four aspects of the SM experience that made the experience transformational: high expectations, enduring through adversity, collaborating with others, and participating in the spiritual disciplines. Results from the CSPP also showed that SMs participated significantly more than non-SMs in 8 of the 10 spiritual disciplines.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a year of service transformed young adults personally and spiritually. The SM experience is recommended for college students as an opportunity to serve others and grow in various areas of life. Further study is recommended for similar types of service ministries such as summer camp staff, short-term missions, and local community service events. Finally, further study is recommended on what motivates
young people to serve others. Various opportunities for experiential learning are recommended to be integrated in the curriculum of churches.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

In Deut 6:5-7b, God presents the Magna Carta for religious education to His people: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children" (NIV). This command is descriptive of the holistic, personal, and practical experience God hopes for His people. The children of Israel were called to integrate their religion into every aspect of life.

The idea that one's religious experience permeates every part of life is the target of Seventh-day Adventist education. Ellen White (1903) stated in the book Education that

true education means more than the perusal of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come. (p. 13)

The stated goal of Seventh-day Adventist education is clear—the joy of service, but what strategies and methods are used to accomplish such a goal? Given the challenges of a rapidly changing world, how does the Seventh-day Adventist church adapt so that it realizes its goal of education?
A 10-year study (Dudley, 2000) from the Institute of Church Ministries at Andrews University has determined that “it seems reasonable to believe that at least 40% to 50% of Seventh-day Adventist teenagers in North America are essentially leaving the church by their middle 20s” (p. 35). The Valuegenesis research (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992) sought to “determine what factors in Adventist homes, schools, and churches nurture the values and faith that we cherish in our young people” (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992, p. 13). While the research revealed many hopeful realities about Adventist youth, “Valuegenesis has also revealed great perplexities, concerns, and unique challenges. The research has indicated that even with these positive conclusions, the church could still be on the brink of losing a whole generation” (pp. 269-270). The recommendations for changes in religious education focused on four content areas: grace, community, service, and worship (p. 271). It is possible that the content area of service might also be a methodological venue for growth in the other areas, especially in the area of service to others where “our religious education does not seem to make much of an impact” (p. 44). Valuegenesis reported, “Nearly half of the teenagers spent no time whatever on helping people who are poor, hungry, sick, or unable to care for themselves” (p. 45). Furthermore, “nearly two-thirds of our youth sample spent no time on promoting any kind of social equality, and over half spent no time on trying to make their own town or city a better place to live” (p. 45). The report suggests that “we need to provide opportunities for altruistic activities like giving to the poor, treating, and feeding the hungry” (p. 279).

In order to develop a strategy to effectively promote service activities one has to look at the current culture. Barry Gane (1996) describes five pillars that provide support
for young people as they mature into adults: family, moral certainty, authority, protective knowledge, and community (pp. 22-23). During the latter part of the 20th century the structures that supported adolescents through their development have seemingly crumbled. Gane notes that factors such as the increase of divorce, the impact of relativism on how people determine right from wrong, the distrust of authority, the bombardment of indiscriminate knowledge, and the shift from a sense of community to individualism have dramatically changed the way young people grow up. Gane asserts, “All these factors have produced a generation of young people who often act apathetic and self-centered” (p. 23). The attitudes, “apathetic” and “self-centered,” seem to be a direct contradiction of the attitudes of a person committed to Christian service. While this caricature may be true of Christian young people as well, today’s youth may not be as apathetic toward service or spiritual development as they are toward institutional structures and organized religious systems.

In an age of uncertainty and confusion about religion, a significant phenomenon has emerged. The Barna (1994) research reveals that the Salvation Army was the most popular faith group among young people today. Compared to the Catholic Church (30%) and other Protestant Churches (24%), 58% of Busters (born 1965-1983) surveyed ranked the Salvation Army with a “very favorable” report. It is clear that, while young people feel disengaged and disenfranchised from religious institutions, organizations that are service-oriented are very popular.

Amid the struggles facing churches that seek to be effective in their religious education, there is a strong interest on the part of young people to experience activities
that engage them in service. Is it possible to view service to others as a doorway to experiencing holistic spiritual growth?

The notion that mission service can deepen the commitment to religious values is seen in the rapid growth of the Mormon religion. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints showed 220% growth over the last two decades (Sheler, 2000). "Last year the church dispatched 58,600 missionaries—about three fourths of them 19- or 20-year-old males—across the United States and to 119 other countries" (p. 62). A young person speaking to the impact of their service on their commitment said, "When I started out on my mission, I really believed that the church was true. I came back knowing it was true" (p. 63). "The Mormon missionary program may well have 'more impact on Latter-day Saint commitment than it does on LDS conversion'" (p. 63).

Secular educational institutions recognize the possibilities of service as a way to accomplish educational goals. Service learning is a form of experiential education that integrates public service into the curriculum (Johnston, 2000). Academic institutions now consider service learning to be an integral part of the curriculum. Service learning "grew from about 9 percent in 1984 to about 56% in 1997" ("Growth in Service-Learning Participation," 2000). Richard Greenberg reports that "nearly half of all community colleges offer these courses" ("Growth in Service-Learning Participation," 2000, p. 18). Academic institutions from elementary school through college have considered service learning a valuable addition to their programs. Part of the overall effectiveness of service learning is the mutual benefit to the students, the community, and the teachers (Jacoby, 1996). Certainly, the secular institutions recognize the opportunities for learning through service-oriented activities.
Concurrent with growth of service learning in a secular world is the rise of short-term mission trips. The nature and purpose of short-term mission trips vary, but the expectation that the participants will be changed by the experience is widely held. The use of short-term missions as a way to develop faith in young adults is a primary factor in the decision of a Christian college to sponsor trips (Beers, 1999). Other studies attempt to show what elements of the experience affected a change in faith maturity (Wilson, 2000). Even though the time of service is short, interviews with students indicate long-term effects (Tuttle, 1998). The short-term mission trip has proven to be an effective model for training young people in Christian leadership (Martin, 1994). It is clear that secular institutions as well as religious organizations view service as an open door to learning. From a religious educational perspective, mission service may be the most effective way to foster the holistic spiritual growth of young people.

If service can be a powerful tool for spiritual development, then the student missionary experience could provide meaningful information for increasing the effectiveness of religious education among Adventist young people in the United States. The Student Missionary (SM) program is a viable educational ministry that is growing in popularity among young adults in Seventh-day Adventist colleges. Student Missionaries (SMs) who return from a year of service declare that the time of service has had a profound impact on their spiritual experience. Bailey Gillespie (1988) describes the way college students characterize their faith experience, noting, "Their faith is spoken of as having been strengthened, stabilized, or increased" (p. 14). While each term of service is unique, the positive effects of the students' service are visible to those who hear the stories and see the change in the SMs' attitudes, concerns, and commitments.
Testimonies such as, "I found God," "I felt like I was a part of something real," or even, "I've never felt closer to God than when I was serving," all demonstrate positive results. Parents, teachers, and pastors say of the youth who return from SM service, "My son is more focused," or, "She is more active in the church." Similar testimonies to service experiences are common in the growing trend of short-term missions. Logically, whatever is transformational about this experience could be useful in intentional curricula for religious education. Yet, while the Student Missions programs grow on Adventist campuses, there is no recent study to discover what is transformational about their year of service.

In most cases, the short-term mission experience is a time of service spanning anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks. The widespread growth of short-term missions is getting more attention due to significant changes in the lives of the young people who participate. While the short-term missionary experience (2 to 6 weeks) may be different from the student missionary experience (10 to 12 months), the phenomenon of service activity is rapidly growing in Christian churches throughout America. Wilson (2000) notes "a rapid increase of interest in volunteering one to 4 weeks of one's time for short-term missions" in the United Methodist Church (p. 41).

The student missionary experience is a common topic of discussion at Adventist colleges. Yet, on any given Adventist campus today, only 5% of attending students have been student missionaries. Recruiting departments from Adventist colleges report about 50% of the students graduating from Adventist academies will attend an Adventist college, while in some regions, less than half of the young people in a congregation are enrolled at an Adventist academy. Seemingly, the closer young people are in location to
Adventist colleges, the greater their chance of learning about the SM program. Still, the majority of young adults in the Adventist church never experience what appears to be a powerful component of religious education.

Two issues exist:

1. There are no recent studies regarding the student missionary experience on Adventist young adults. The most recent dissertation on the student missionary experience, a descriptive study by Donna Habenicht (1977), is the only one. Habenicht's purpose was to describe the personality, attitudes, and overseas experience of those Seventh-day Adventist college students who served as short-term volunteer missionaries (SMs) during the 1975-76 school year. Her study is descriptive of a group of students at a time when the SM phenomenon was building in popularity. Habenicht concluded that "student missionary service seems to have strengthened religious commitment and encouraged growth toward personal maturity for these young people" (p. 228). Twenty-five years later, the SM program has grown dramatically, yet there is much to discover about "why" and "how" student missionaries are significantly changed by their experience in service.

2. The pressing need for churches and schools is to have a better understanding of how service may be a way to shape the spiritual lives of young people.

The Problem

In a world where young people are increasingly disengaged from typical church activities, the student missionary experience appears to be an effective way to engage young adults to grow spiritually. While reputed to be valuable, the SM experience has not undergone a thorough examination on how service shapes the student's faith.
experience. Most of what is known of the experience is anecdotal and begs for systematic analysis of critical components needed to revitalize the objectives of Adventist education.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to document the impact of the student missionary experience on young adults; and second, to identify the components of the student missionary experience that are transformational.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the impact of the "Student Missionary Experience" on young adults?
2. What aspects of the student missionary experience make it transformational?

**Theoretical Framework**

This study will focus on the work of David Kolb, a primary theorist in the area of experiential learning. Experiential learning is defined by Kolb as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (David A. Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Kolb derives his understanding of experiential learning from Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget (Hickcox, 1991). As Kolb seeks to synthesize the elements of other experiential models from well-known theorists, he observes that all the aforementioned models suggest that “learning is by its very nature a tension and conflict-filled process” (1984, p. 38). Kolb sought to shift the emphasis of the educational process from the teacher to the learner (David A. Kolb, 1984).

Kolb’s (1981, 1984) model of experiential learning maintains that effective learning has four learning modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract
conceptualization, and active experimentation. Furthermore, learning is a cycle (David A. Kolb, 1984) where information is grasped either through the senses (concrete experience) or through thinking (abstract conceptualization) and then processed through reflection (reflective observation) or action (active experimentation). The learning experience is made more effective when the learner completes the cycle through the different learning modes.

Kolb’s model of experiential learning has become an appropriate lens through which to view the SM experience because it accounts for the different ways in which people learn. SMs are comprised of unique individuals who may have a tendency to learn either through active experimentation or abstract conceptualization. Notwithstanding different approaches to learning, all learners need to process their experiences or theoretical concepts in order to learn from them. The SM experience is a year pregnant with learning opportunities that depict each stage of Kolb’s model. The converse is also true that connecting the attributes of the SM experience to experiential learning can enhance a better understanding of Kolb’s theoretical model.

Overview of the Literature

An overview of the literature is presented in lieu of a traditional literature review because the relevant literature for this research is integrated into the findings in chapters 4 and 5. These chapters contain a brief overview of the relevant literature and an explanation of why it is included in this research. This section contains a brief survey of: (a) SDA student missionary research and resources, (b) short-term missions, (c) service learning, (d) experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), (e) Spiritual Formation/Spiritual Disciplines, and (f) Young Adult Faith Development.
In reviewing the literature on the SM experience, the term “student missionary” is unique to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Furthermore, there appears to be only one study (Habenicht, 1977) that focuses on SMs. Habenicht conducted a descriptive study of “the personality, attitudes, and overseas experience of Seventh-day Adventist college students who served as short-term volunteer missionaries (student missionaries) during the 1975-7 school year” (Habenicht, 1977, p. 219). She concluded that students “represented a normal distribution” of personality traits, and their basic personality structure remained stable during their year of service (p. 227). SMs in Habenicht’s study demonstrated favorable attitudes toward missions, increased cultural awareness and appreciation, and a stronger religious commitment and personal growth. There are no other dissertations, to my knowledge, on student missionaries but Habenicht’s. While the research questions of this study differ from Habenicht’s, her research shares a common curiosity with mine about the impact of the SM experience.

Short-Term Missions

The short-term mission experience consists of a term of service lasting up to 3 months. The short-term mission experience has a reputation for affecting significant changes in those who participate. Several studies show how short-term experiences contribute to increasing future mission awareness (Cecil, 1981; D. G. Jones, 1993), motivate lay people in Christian discipleship (Purvis, 1993; Westfall, 1987), and develop Christian leadership skills (Emgard, 2000; Martin, 1994). The two criteria that limit the literature for this study are (a) the college-aged participants and (b) the area of reported impact, such as spiritual growth, faith maturity, and faith development.
Several studies connect short-term missions and college students (Beers, 1999; Ma, 1999; Tuttle, 1998). Stella Ma (1999) studied the perceptions of Christian college students about their spiritual formation and discovered that short-term missions were among the top 10 factors for spiritual growth. A study of the short-term mission experience on Christian college students demonstrated that “few significant differences were found on the Belief and Commitment Scale (BCS)” (Tuttle, 1998). The pre-test/post-test of the BCS showed differences only in the areas related to training and debriefing. However, the qualitative essays and the interviews reported significant changes in spiritual growth. This finding revealed methodological limitations that led researchers to recommend qualitative methods to possibly be the most valuable research related to spiritual growth (Tuttle, 1998). The same trend is seen in another similar study on college students who participated in short-term mission trips (Beers, 1999). The quantitative data indicated no significant changes whereas the qualitative data “provided additional insight into the students’ faith maturity process” (Beers, 1999, p. 157). After reading the literature on short-term missions it became clear that an emphasis on qualitative research methods for the study of SMs would more effectively capture a deeper understanding of service and its impact on young adults.

Other articles and books on the short-term mission experience were considered in this study of its similarities to the SM experience. However, given the significant difference in the duration of short-term missions (up to 3 months) as compared to the SM experience (10 to 12 months), the relevance of such literature is somewhat limited.
Service Learning

Since the growth of service learning in the 1980s there is an increase of literature available on the topic. The reason service learning has become a prominent part of the college curriculum is that many deem it to be an effective method for teaching. Significant changes occur in an individual’s life in response to their active service as an SM. The data from service learning may prove insightful due to the “active” nature of the learning process, as well as demonstrate the social and ethical effects of service. Several studies describe the impact of service learning as having a positive effect on increasing a sense of civic responsibility (Rauner, 1995) and ethical reasoning (Greene, 1996) and decreasing racial prejudice (Myers-Lipton, 1994). However, conflicting studies show that no effect was made on the moral or ethical aspect of college students (Cram, 1998; Leary, 1994). The differences may be due to the way the individual service learning programs conduct their programs (Jacoby, 1996; Wadsworth, 1997). In educational articles, service learning is widely discussed as an effective method for teaching and learning (Masucci & Renner, 2000; Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott, & Zlotkowski, 2000; Rowles & Swick, 2000; Terry, 2000).

Experiential Learning

Studies from the theoretical framework of the experiential learning theory by David Kolb (1984) demonstrate positive results of the learning experience. The results of a service learning program for accounting students show the application of experiential learning to be significant enough to shape future course development (Jensen, 1995). Another study (Kowalski, 1994) described a history class where students led family tours of a museum. While students varied as to their comfort level with the different learning
modes of Kolb's model, the researcher claims positive results. Several articles discuss the impact of experiential learning on students in reference to traditional methodologies (Bobbit, Inks, Kemp, & Mayo, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Hamer, 2000; Houston 2000).

**Spiritual Formation/Spiritual Disciplines**

The primary Christian source for understanding spiritual formation is obviously the Bible. In addition to Scripture, the literature on spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines in this study focused on the insights several thought leaders have contributed in the study of the spiritual life (J. Dettoni, 1993; Foster, 1988; Mulholland, 1993; Ortberg, 1997; Stranger, 1989; White, 1903; Willard, 1990). Furthermore, the studies that target spiritual formation of college students were included in this study (Ashbrook, 2003; Beers, 1999; Dogterom, 2003; Hornbacker, 2003; Jones, 2003; Ma, 1999; O'Connor, 2003; Reside, 2003; Tasker, 2002a; Thayer, 1996; Tuttle, 1998; Yusuf, 2003). More thorough examination of the literature is contained in the findings chapters.

**Young Adult Faith Development**

The purpose for including faith development in this study was to create a context for discussing the spiritual growth of college students. The college years are purported to be a turbulent season of change that significantly impacts their cognitive, emotional, and spiritual growth. Several theorists have been included in this study primarily for their contribution to specific aspects of young adult faith development (Fowler, 1984; Gillespie, 1988; Loder, 1989; S. D. Parks, 1986; Westerhoff, 1976). Further discussion of their theoretical insights is included in the findings chapters.
Other Literature Related to Emergent Themes

A survey of literature to the emergent themes of this study is also included but integrated into the findings in chapter 5. A survey of expectancy theory and its connection to the findings about how student missionary expectations impacted their experience is discussed. Relevant literature regarding the way crisis or adversity affects personal or spiritual growth is developed in a section on adversity and the student missionary experience. Various literatures on the efficacy of community and collaboration/fellowship in spiritual growth are considered in connection with the theme of SM growth through collaboration with others in the year of service. Finally, the theme of SM growth through active participation in the spiritual disciplines is examined against the backdrop of literature on spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines. Organizing the dissertation in this manner is an attempt to report the findings of this research while simultaneously discussing the literature so as to provide a coherent portrayal of the SM experience and possible theoretical explanations of the phenomenon.

Definitions of the Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study.

Student Missionary: A college student attending an Adventist College who spent 10 months to a year in mission service outside of the United States or in a church institution within the United States.

Religious Education: Tidwell and Tidwell (1996) define education as the “act or process of developing and cultivating mentally or morally. It is preparing one for a calling by systematic instruction” (p. 1). The process of learning in the church occurs through experiences, planned and unplanned. The planned experiences are easily
categorized as curriculum, while the unplanned experiences are traditionally called teachable moments (1996).

**Spiritual Formation:** “An intentional, multi-faceted process which promotes the transformation by which Christ is formed in us so we can become His continually maturing disciples” (J. Dettoni, 1993, p. 16).

**Spiritual Disciplines:** The spiritual disciplines are “those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth” (Whitney, 1991, p. 15). Willard (1990) characterizes spiritual disciplines as exercises for godliness, and these activities enable us to receive more fully God’s grace. Willard categorizes the disciplines in two groups: Disciplines of Abstinence and Disciplines of Engagement. Solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice make up the category of those exercises of abstinence. Study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission are the disciplines of engagement (Willard, 1990, p. 158). Richard Foster (1988) organizes the disciplines in a similar structure using three categories: The inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), the outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, service), and the corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, celebration). For the purposes of this study the spiritual disciplines are simply defined as the exercises and activities of the spiritual life that promote change and growth.

**Service Learning:** While there are many types of service learning opportunities, the core of service learning is combining course content with active service as a means of learning. “Service learning is a pedagogical process whereby students participate in course-relevant community service to enhance their learning experience” (Petkus, 2000).
**Short-Term Missions:** Given that short-term mission events have increased with tremendous popularity, the tendency to broaden the definition increases as well. Millham acknowledged the need to define the short-term mission trip more succinctly, having observed that “some define short-term missions as any service cross-culturally for two weeks to two years or more” (Millham, 1992, p. 17). Tuttle (1998) defined short-term missions with college students as those who serve abroad from 2 weeks to 3 months (p. 10). For the purpose of this research when short-term missions are referred to, it follows Tuttle’s definition of 2 weeks to 3 months.

**General Methods**

This study was conducted using primarily qualitative research methods. In order to understand the impact of the SM experience, the research methods used need to be congruent with the type of data that is sought. Qualitative research is better suited for the research questions inherent in this study. In addition to the qualitative design, this study also used the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP) as an additional source of data. The CSPP is based upon Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle which was introduced as the theoretical framework for this study.

**Outline of Chapters**

This study is structured in the following manner: Chapter 1 proposes the ramifications of the stated goals of Adventist education as it relates to current trends, culture, and church life. This chapter surveys those current trends as well as introduces the purpose and overview of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology used in this research. Included in this chapter is an introduction, a report about the self as a researcher, data collection, data
analysis, reliability, validity, and the degree to which the study can be generalized. Additionally, there is a section explaining the stylistic approach to writing up the data.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the SM experience including a survey of where the students went as well as the reasons why they went. This chapter explores the reality of SM life with a discussion of the various stated and unstated roles. Also, a description of the process of becoming a student missionary is included in this section.

Chapter 4 corresponds to the first research question through the analysis of the data with themes and findings from the relevant literature. This chapter describes the impact of the SM experience on college students. This chapter also examines how the experiential learning model relates to the SM experience.

Chapter 5 answers the second research question which addresses the components of the experience that are transformational. Four major themes emerge and are discussed in this chapter with the relevant literature integrated throughout the findings.

Chapter 6 is an overview of the study, results and conclusions, with recommendations for student missions departments, churches, and schools, and provides suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research uses primarily a qualitative case study design with data collected through personal interviews, focus groups, and a written survey. I chose this approach because the research questions I had about the student missionary experience could be more fully answered using qualitative research. “What is the impact of the student missionary experience on young adults?” is a question that lends itself best to a method designed to understand a year of service. Merriam (1998) defines the qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). According to Merriam, the case study has three essential characteristics: it is “particularistic, descriptive and heuristic” (p. 29). The SM experience is the “particular” focus of the study. The boundaries are set by the time, place, and activities experienced during the term of service. The study reveals “a rich, ‘thick’ description” (p. 29) of a year of service. Case study design for this study is heuristic in that what emerges from the study can enhance spiritual growth as well as shape the way churches provide learning opportunities for young people.

The method by which case studies “concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation”
(Shaw, 1978, p. 2) is another reason why a case study design is appropriate for studying the SM experience. Becker (1968) notes that the twofold purpose of a case study is, “to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study” and “to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process” (p. 233).

This study of the student missionary experience has these two concerns at the core of its purpose: (a) to document the impact of the student missionary experience on young adults, and (b) to identify the components of the student missionary experience that are transformational. Both of the components Becker cites as integral to case studies are aspects of this study of the SM experience.

**Self as Research Instrument**

In qualitative research, “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). The task of the researcher is to “see what is to be seen, given some frame of reference and some set of intentions. The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it” (Eisner, 1998, pp. 33-34).

“Having your finger on the pulse” is an aphorism that I believe applies to the process of doing qualitative research as long as the researcher does not mistake the beating rhythm in their own finger for the pulse they are listening for. In fact, awareness of the strength of your bias is a better safeguard for sound research than trying to eliminate the influence of your bias on the study. This study is based upon assumptions about service, experiential learning, and spiritual growth that run deep in my own life. As a youth pastor in a college church the most significant work I do is related to service and spiritual growth which beg for a careful explanation of my own worldview and basic assumptions about the student missionary experience. The following is a brief disclosure.
of three aspects of my current bias and assumptions about the student missionary experience.

My Experience as an SM

In 1987 I became a student missionary (Task Force Worker) serving as an assistant boys dean, at Georgia Cumberland Academy. I discovered so much about myself, God, and His plan for my future. Spending a year in service was an experience that prompted me to consider full-time ministry. In that year I preached my first sermon, taught high-school students, organized work schedules, disciplined thieves and escape artists, planned social events, coached athletic teams, prayed, studied, and counseled students. On one occasion I transported a student to the hospital to have his stomach pumped because of an overdose of aspirin. During the 8 minute drive to the hospital I remembered thinking, “What am I doing here?” I was awed by my present participation in something significant. Taking part in administrative committees broadened my perspective of communication and interaction with various personalities and leadership styles. The overall impact of being part of a community of fellow pastors, teachers, and staff profoundly shaped my view of service. That year prompted such a measure of growth in me that I have since believed the student missionary experience is one of the most effective ministries for young adults in the Seventh-day Adventist church. I never wondered why or how that year impacted me until I was moving from pastoral ministry to a teaching role. It was at this juncture that I began to consider the theories of learning more intensely.
Learning a New Paradigm of Ministry-Education

After completing all but 9 months of my seminary training I was asked to teach Bible at Great Lakes Adventist Academy. Desperately seeking a crash course in becoming a teacher, I began working on a graduate degree in religious education. I struggled with the shift from theological nomenclature to the language of teaching and learning. I soon became a convert to the discipline of education because of one salient truth: What seemed to be missing in my ministerial training were the basic elements of the pedagogical arts. Church-growth specialists were employing catch phrases such as "training and equipping" and "empowering and discipling," but these terms are not so much theological ideas as they are educational constructs. One of the ideas that captured my attention was the contribution that experiential learning can have on the way we function in church life. Foundational to experiential learning theory is the assumption that the responsibility of learning needs to shift from the teacher to the student. Since I was pastoring at a church at the time of my educational studies, I integrated everything I was learning from education into my leadership in the church. Instead of giving Bible studies to teenagers, I helped them seize moments where they gave a Bible study to someone else (concrete experience). Driving home from one such Bible study, the 16 year-old young man wondered out loud about what he had done, saying, "Did I just give a Bible study?" After the initial shock wore off, he mentioned what he thought went well (reflective observation) and what he believed might work better on the next study (abstract conceptualization). He prepared for the next Bible study and delivered a remarkable lesson with all the improvements he had articulated in our debriefing (active
experimentation). At that point I made a commitment to integrate experiential learning activities into other aspects of my ministry.

My Present Perspective of Church Life

In light of studies such as *Valuegenesis* (Dudley & Gillespie, 1992), *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* (Dudley, 2000), and even sociological research on the trends of youth culture (Barna, 1994), I am pressed to find churches, schools, and other faith-based organizations that have effectively responded to what seems to be a coming crisis in the Seventh-day Adventist church. I walk the causeways of academies where the pictures of high-school graduates wallpaper the hallways and wonder, “Where are they now? Does anyone really know what happened to Kevin or Susanne?” While the literature suggests that young adults need to go through this awkward season of change, it seems wise to consider more proactive opportunities for them to process their faith. Service could be a healthy way for young adults to grow through this period. From my perspective, the SM experience seemed to be one option of “doing it right.”

Learning about the learning process shaped my ministry significantly, yet I kept running into student missionaries returning from their year of service “on fire” and “ready to work” and seemingly matured in their faith. As I began to comment publicly on my observations that student missionaries demonstrated vibrant Christian qualities, others seemed to agree. I am not of the mind-set that the student missionary experience is a methodological savior to the growing inactivity of young adults in the church, yet two questions about the experience compel me to study it: (a) Does the experiential nature of the student missionary experience have anything to offer the church as a model
of learning? (b) Can the elements that transform young adults in their year of service transfer to other areas of church life?

I believed that the student missionary experience was a transforming venture but I was not certain why. I suspected that it had to do with the way they learned as much as what they discovered and now believe. As I observed former student missionaries leading out in church life I was compelled to wonder about the overall impact of the SM experience.

It is my personal conviction about service that peeks my curiosity for this research project. My appreciation for the SM experience mixed with an unquenchable curiosity about young adults in service enables me to immerse myself in the research as the research instrument. Bednarz (1985) explains how the researcher as the research instrument addresses the questions of a dependable design:

If the researcher's self is the prime instrument of inquiry, and the self-in-the-world is the best source of knowledge about the social world, and social reality is held to be an emergent property of interacting selves, and the meanings people live by are malleable as a basic feature of social life, then concern over reliability—in the post positivist sense—is fanciful. (p. 303)

Several considerations from qualitative research were integrated in this research process. Given that “human instruments are as fallible as any other research instrument” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20), certain abilities were suggested to equip the researcher for doing qualitative case studies. First, the “researcher must have an enormous tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 20). One of the features of this study was the potential that the data could provide such a broad range of information that themes would be difficult to identify. The SM experience is virtually an entire year of a student's life. The patient, continued examination of large amounts of data exemplifies a tolerance for ambiguity.
Second, "the researcher must be sensitive to the context and all the variables within it, including the physical setting, the people, the overt and covert agendas, and the nonverbal behavior" (p. 21). The data for this study were collected on campus while school was in session. Students were in the routine of school, yet they did not seem rushed or stressed about telling their stories in the interviews or participating in a focus group. Overall, the environment for the interviews was private enough for interviewees to speak freely. The interviews were videotaped in order to observe more carefully the body language in both the individual interviews as well as the focus groups.

Third, the researcher must be able to communicate. "A good communicator empathizes with respondents, establishes rapport, asks good questions, and listens intently" (p. 23). In this research I discovered that my previous experience as an SM enhanced the rapport with former SMs as we casually made introductions. The fact that I was interested in their story and conducting research about the SM experience seemed to create a cohesive exchange of information. Furthermore, the questions for the interviews and focus groups were carefully constructed and given to them in written form for them to refer to if needed. Ultimately, the interpersonal communication with college students was an essential part of this study and I felt I was able to connect with them in a natural, comfortable conversation.

In summary, the basic assumptions that shape the way I view the world have been affected by my experience as an SM. In my attempt to integrate the discipline of teaching into pastoral ministry I developed a deep appreciation for experiential learning. As a result I have become intentional about integrating service into the life of the church not only because I believe it is good, but because I also believe it is an effective tool for
growth. Naturally, I have a bias to service, but my awareness and admission of such potentially enhance a qualitative study rather than hinder it. This study grows out of a personal commitment to understand the SM experience in such a way that it provides rich insight for learning and church life.

Data Collection

Data collected in this study answered two basic research questions: (a) What is the impact of the SM experience on young adults? (b) What aspects of the SM experience are transformational? Multiple sources of data were used to help answer the research questions. I conducted 47 individual interviews, four focus groups, 38 questionnaires, and administered the CSPP to 400 former SMs. This section describes the subjects, the sampling process, the various types of data, and how they were collected.

The Subjects

Four Adventist colleges were chosen for this research because of their consistent Student Missionary program, and the number of SMs available on these campuses would be ample for acquiring subjects. The subjects were student missionaries who had returned from a year of service in 1999 and 2000 and were attending college at Andrews University (AU), Pacific Union College (PUC), Southern Adventist University (SAU), or Walla Walla College (WWC) in 2000-2001. While I was on each campus I collected the contact information for former SMs 5 and 10 years removed from service. SMs who served in 1990 and 1995 were included in this study to enhance richness of the data by providing a broader, more reflective perspective of the SM experience.
Purposive Sampling

To answer the research questions of this study, individual interviews were conducted with SMs regarding their year of mission service. A purposive sample was the most appropriate sampling device for this study because, as Eisner observes, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). In order to answer the research questions of this study I needed to focus on potential subjects who would provide data that could convey what occurred in their year of service and the relationship between the SM experience and the spiritual growth of young adults (Eisner, 1998). Patton continues this rationale arguing,

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (Patton, 1990, p. 169, emphasis in original)

SMs in this study were chosen to convey a rich representation of the SM experience. To accomplish this, students were specifically chosen to participate in light of the data they might provide.

The sample was selected from a population of student missionaries who had returned from a year of service during 1999 or 2000 and were attending college at AU, PUC, SAU, and WWC in 2000-2001. Among Seventh-day Adventist institutions, these four colleges have consistently sent SMs to a wide variety of geographic locations. The SMs were chosen to be interviewed in collaboration with the Student Missions Director, and/or the Student Missions Administrative Assistant of each school. Preliminary conversations with the survey of students were conducted and the students were chosen based on a wide range of perceived experiences (positive, mediocre, negative). Forty-
seven individual interviews were conducted on the four campuses (14 interviews at AU; 13 interviews at PUC; 9 interviews at SAU; 11 interviews at WWC) and videotaped to aid with analysis.

Data Collection Process

The process of data collection consisted of gathering data through individual interviews, focus groups, a questionnaire, the CSPP, and field notes. This section describes the way the data was collected.

Individual Interviews

The interviews were conducted individually to accommodate the schedules of busy college students and to create a comfortable, conversational format for data collection. The interviewees remained anonymous in that only their responses were documented; their names are not recorded in the dissertation (see the interview protocol in Appendix A).

Focus Group Interviews

Using the same criteria for sampling as the individual interviews, one focus group of five to eight students was conducted on each of the four campuses participating in this study (7 participants in a focus group at AU; 6 participants in a focus group at PUC; 5 participants in a focus group at SAU; 7 participants in a focus group at WWC). Focus groups were included in this research design for these reasons:

1. Focus groups tend to create an atmosphere of openness. Krueger (1994) explains, "The permissive group environment gives individuals license to divulge emotions that often do not emerge in other forms of questioning" (p. 11).
2. The focus group is another vehicle that builds on the sense of community that SMs experienced while serving. Templeton (1994) describes it as a "small, temporary community formed for the collaborative enterprise of discovery" (p. 4).

3. The focus group is efficient. "It is a quick effective way to stimulate new ideas and simultaneously build interest and commitment to the change" (Bader & Rossi, 1999, p. 2).

4. Focus groups are effective. They “enable their participants to elaborate, revealing the nature and origins of thinking on a particular issue” (p. 2).

Ultimately, the value of focus groups is based on the freedom participants have to interact with each other and to develop the themes and clarify the content, which increases the value of the experience over a simple interview.

The focus groups responded to the same questions as the individual interviewees. As I led the discussion, the participants described their experience through unhurried description, telling stories and commenting on the other members’ insights. Field notes were written while reviewing the videotaped focus groups. This process was repeated at each of the four colleges. The focus group data were transcribed and included in the data of this research.

**Questionnaire**

An open-ended questionnaire (same questions as used in interviews) was sent to the SMs from AU, PUC, SAU, and WWC who were 5 years removed (served in 1994-1995) and 10 years removed (served in 1989-1990) from their year of service. The rationale for this was twofold:
1. SMs who are 5 years removed are likely to be out of college and engaged in a career. Bailey Gillespie (1988) describes the tasks required in this stage of young adulthood as a period of "reordered faith." He states: "Choosing an occupation or career, planning for entering a field of study, earning a living, establishing a family, learning about membership in the church community, or examining role models in the community are all tasks to be mastered" (p. 180). The SMs 5 years removed may also have a clearer sense of identity (p. 180) and a perspective on their SM experience shaped by a time filled with pivotal opportunities and choices.

2. The SMs 10 years removed were chosen for the same reasons as the 5-year group, but have possibly undergone the task of starting a family, as well as other critical life experiences. Gillespie notes that this stage in life is "rich in practical expression, meaning, personal application, and grows to become more reflective as middle adulthood begins" (Gillespie, 1988, p. 190). SMs who were 5 and 10 years removed had the potential to provide a more reflective perspective, having moved on in careers and possibly having a family.

Student Missions is traditionally a ministry of the chaplain’s office on SDA college campuses. The office of Student Missions has a list of students who participated in mission service. These names were matched with the alumni office records for current addresses. The subjects were sent a questionnaire with questions identical to the individual and focus group interviews. The completed and returned questionnaire data were transcribed and included in the data of this research.

Seventeen questionnaires were completed and returned out of 42 (40%) mailed to the SMs 5 years removed from service. Twenty-one out of 50 surveys (42%) were
returned from SMs 10 years removed from service. It is difficult to know how many
surveys failed to reach former SMs due to a change of address. The data from the
transcribed questionnaires were included in their respective sections entitled “5 years
removed” and “10 years removed” in the same way that the data from focus groups and
1-to 2-year SMs were organized in my data files.

The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP)

To broaden the sources of data, the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile
(CSPP), by Jane Thayer (1996), was administered to better understand how SMs
participate in the spiritual disciplines. The instrument is based on Kolb’s experiential
learning theory, which aids as a theoretical reference point for aspects of this study. The
CSPP is designed to show what learning modes (David A. Kolb, 1984) people favor and
which spiritual disciplines they predominately participate in. The CSPP was administered
to all the SMs on the four Adventist College campuses (AU, PUC, SAU, WWC) and the
CSPP results of the SMs were compared to Adventist college students from Southwestern
Adventist University and Oakwood College (data collected by Jane Thayer in 1996).

The CSPP was administered to 400 SMs who had recently returned from a year of
service within 2 years. The students were invited by phone to appear at a designated
place on campus to fill out the survey, or the surveys were delivered to students’ dorm
rooms and there completed and returned to the Student Missions Office of the college.
The participants received the CSPP with an explanation of the research project (see
Appendices B and C). Out of 400 surveys, 201 were returned (50%). The surveys were
scored by the Center for Statistical Services at Andrews University. The subjects
indicated only their age and gender on the CSPP so that their identity would remain anonymous. I analyzed the results.

Field Notes

I wrote field notes at the completion of the individual interviews and focus groups at each college. Upon reviewing the interview videos, brief notes were made to begin identifying the salient insights about the SM experience. The initial insights and comments about the research are contained in a section of the data files entitled “field notes” which are located in the hard copy pages of the transcribed interviews. The field notes were documented after the interview, focusing on major insights or elements to review later in order to enhance the interpersonal communication between the interviewer and the interviewees.

In summary, different methods of data collection were used in this research to capture the experience of a year of service and the impact it had on the young adults who served. The questions that were posed in the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires were designed to better understand the broad picture of the SM experience as well as to capture the details and nuances of a year of service. Ultimately, the data that were collected sufficiently addressed the research question of this study, as shown in Table 1.
Table 1

Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Years From Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the impact of the Student Missionary experience on young adults?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian Spiritual Participation Profile</td>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>1 to 2, 5 to 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What aspects of the Student Missionary experience are transformational?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Christian Spiritual Participation Profile</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>1 to 2, 5 to 10</td>
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</table>

Data Analysis

The process of analysis began with the collection of data, as suggested by Merriam (pp. 161-162), not only because it is “the right way” but because it is the only way I could manage the large amount of data. Given the voluminous amount of data contained in the interviews, I began the process of analyzing the data by reflectively watching the video interviews and through repeated reading of the transcribed version of data. The nature of the data varied for structural reasons, while the analysis of the data occurred in several different exercises. I studied the data reflecting on the interviews individually. The data were again studied question by question. As themes would repeat, word searches were conducted throughout the rest of the data for similar responses.

The process of analysis continued as the themes developed. The analysis of the data occurred concurrently with the examination of the relevant literature. This approach is suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) as a way to enhance analysis. In this research
the outcome proved to be true that reading the literature concurrent with the analysis should provide "stimulation rather than being a substitute for thinking" (p. 162). The data of this research underwent thorough analysis through ruminating on one interview at a time, noting potential themes as well as focused reading, scanning, color-coding, highlighting, and charting the themes that emerged in the data.

As a result of repeatedly examining the transcriptions, significant themes emerged from the data. This section includes a description of the data analysis of: (a) the individual interviews, (b) the focus groups, (c) the 5- and 10-year questionnaire, and (d) the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP).

Interviews

Each interview was transcribed and analyzed individually. Significant qualities of the SM experience, ranging from informational insights to personal disclosures of their experience, were highlighted and noted. The ultimate goal was to capture the SM experience as "an intense, holistic description and analysis of a single instance" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27), one person at a time, each story being allowed to speak for itself, reflecting sound qualitative methods (Merriam, 1998). At the end of each interview, a short summary or list of key words was written in the margin as a way of coding significant ideas and potential themes. As words, phrases, emotions, and issues began to repeat, I noted them as categories or preliminary themes. Using content analysis for discovering "themes and recurring patterns of meaning" (Merriam, 1998, p. 160) was an appropriate technique for this study. While this technique is inductive in principle, it has a quantitative element to it which centers on the "frequency and the variety" of the data (p. 160). I coded themes using different colors to correspond to certain ideas through the
individual interviews as well as the focus groups. I chose to focus on the data that occurred most frequently and thus named the themes of this research.

Another stage of analysis was to examine the interviews question by question and consider how all the interviewees responded to a particular question. For example, if students seemed to be reporting that their prayer life increased as an SM, I would examine all of the responses to those survey questions that addressed similar topics, such as, “Describe your daily activities?” This method enabled me to consider the individual experiences and then consider how other SMs responded to that question. As themes began to emerge from the interviews, they were listed in a chart to show the prominence of the themes being conveyed (Appendices D and E include a chart of the major themes of this research).

Focus Groups

The four focus groups were analyzed individually, then compared to each other to find emergent themes. The same process of noting the significant statements in the margin or at the end of the interview was conducted on the data of all four focus groups. Given that the focus groups and individual interviews answered the same questions, much of the same data emerged when it was compared to the individual interviews. The themes from the focus groups were color-coded identically to the interviews and included in the theme charts referred to in the individual interviews.

Five- and 10-Year Questionnaires

The 5- and 10-years-removed SM questionnaires were organized into two sections according to when they served. The questionnaires were transcribed individually and

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included in the data for analysis. It should be noted that the individual interview and focus group data were transcribed and the analysis begun before the data from the 5- and 10-year source were returned. Even though many of the themes had already been identified, the 5- and 10-year data provided corroboration when the same themes occurred in the different groups (1-2 year, 5 year, 10 year). New insights were also gained by comparing the data of the different groups and are reported in the findings chapters.

CSPP

The SM data from the CSPP were analyzed and compared with a control group of Adventist college students from Southwestern Adventist University and Oakwood College. The control group data were collected by Jane Thayer in 1996. The results of this comparison are given in chapters 4 and 5.

Thus, the process of data analysis consisted of a patient, arduous examination of the experiences of SMs. The qualitative data were analyzed through a systematic process of coding and building content categories that emerged by repetition. The themes that grew out of the individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires provided a rich stream of answers for the research questions in this study. Furthermore, the analysis of the quantitative data from the CSPP complemented the research by providing data that had a theoretical base in experiential learning.

Reliability

Reliability in research has to do with the question, "If the study is repeated will it yield the same results?" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). In the case of qualitative research this
would be difficult because, "reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results" (p. 205). To conduct a study of the SM experience under this assumption would be problematic since the students' experiences potentially change from day to day. Wolcott (1994) argues that "understanding" is the goal that the qualitative researcher seeks (pp. 366-367). In the case of this study, the goal of the research design was be to obtain data that would enable me to understand the SM experience and identify the components that create such an impact.

Qualitative research seeks to "describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss how in traditional research the instrument is modified for effectiveness. The same is true for the "instrument" in qualitative research. "Just as the researcher refines instruments and uses statistical techniques to ensure reliability, so too the human instrument can become more reliable through training and practice" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest "dependability" or "consistency" as ideas to legitimize the results of a study rather than binding the research to the notion that it is only reliable if it is repeatable. In the case of this study, the belief that the research is "reliable" will result if the reader senses a ring of consistency between the data that have been collected and the findings conveyed by the researcher.

**Validity**

"Every researcher wants to contribute results that are believable and trustworthy" (Merriam, 1998, p. 218). In order for this study to be trustworthy, the research design must convey an internal strength where the findings of the data would resonate with the
reality. When SMs describe the impact of their experience and the same themes are echoed by other SMs throughout the data, then it makes that particular theme more believable.

The question of believable or trustworthy research is related to the assumptions of the researcher in choosing the method of research. "Recognizing that neither pristine objectivity nor pure subjectivity is possible . . . we can ask what it is about text that is likely to make it believable" (Eisner, 1998, p. 53). The primary strategies used in this study are: triangulation of collection methods, triangulation of data sources, and member checks (Merriam, 1998). This section describes the aforementioned strategies and how they are integral to this study.

**Triangulation of Collection Methods**

Using individual interviews and focus groups together created internal validity in the types of data. The questionnaire that was sent to former SMs 5 and 10 years removed proved to be another way to triangulate methods used to gather data in this study. The CSPP served this study by adding to data collection yet another method to support the individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaire. Finally, the field notes taken during the data collection process combined with the aforementioned methods enhanced the process of triangulation.

**Triangulation of Data Sources**

In addition to using different methods to triangulate the data, I studied the data from three different types of students who had been SMs. The first type of students included in this research is those who had returned within 1 to 2 years of their mission
service. The second and third types of students were those who were 5 and 10 years removed from their service. Triangulation of these three data sources was designed to enhance the possibility of trustworthy findings. The number of participants \((n=113)\) adds to the believability of the research. As a result of this ongoing process, the triangulation of the data proved to focus the themes of the data into trustworthy, believable findings.

**Member Checks**

Given that I live and work in close proximity to college students who were student missionaries, I was able to “try out ideas and themes on subjects” (Merriam, 1998, p. 163) by inviting them to give me feedback on the analysis as it matured. Soon-to-be student missionaries as well as returned SMs were consulted to read the data and discuss and report what they had learned about the SM experience from others (a form of member checks).

Three features, according to Eisner (1998), that increase the trustworthiness of research are “coherence, consensus and instrumental utility” (p. 53). Coherence refers to the “tightness of the argument” (p. 53). Does the argument have logical, consistent construction that seems appropriate? Consensus relates to the way the evidence agrees with the experience of the researcher. This correlates to the function of triangulation or “structural corroboration” which allows the obvious to emerge (p. 55). Instrumental utility is about the value of the study. Is the study useful?

Does the argument have logical, consistent construction that seems appropriate? The SM experience is a well-defined event that can be examined and distilled in a clear, orderly way. What tightens the argument of this study is the progression of the study. The research follows a path to understanding what an SM is and does (in chapter 3), to
the impact that service has on them (in chapter 4). The fact that chapter 5 seeks to capture those parts of the experience that are transformational seems to be the most logical step forward from understanding the experience. Integrating the findings from similar or related research is another stylistic method for qualitative research that enables the research to hold together tightly. The study is about the SM experience, therefore the SM’s voice is the prominent voice throughout the study complemented by other research, theory, and other relevant data.

Consensus refers to the congruence between the researcher’s perceptions and the evidence in the data. Several aspects of this study conveyed a vivid parallel between what the SM reported and what I have concluded. First, the style in which the research is written blends together both the SMs’ words and my thoughts to characterize the essence of the SM experience as well as the transformational parts of a year of service. One example of consensus is to enable the researcher to observe, analyze, and organize the SM experience while allowing SMs to portray their experience with their own words. Another way consensus occurred in this study was in the way themes were formulated. As the various sources of data and the different methods of data were analyzed, the themes that were identified tended to be consistent with each other. A further example of consensus is the fact that SMs—those who had just returned as well as those who were 5 and 10 years removed—corroborated the way they had to depend on God more fully in service.

Instrumental utility has to do with the question, “Is the study useful?” One of the ways a study can be deemed useful is when it adds deeper insight into a phenomenon. Current research on the SM experience is limited in the SDA church to one study.
conducted more than 25 years ago. Clearly, there is a need for new findings in this area. There are many colleges and churches asking the question, "What does service do for young people?" as reflected in chapter 4. Another way this study is deemed useful is to see if there are similar questions about service on other college campuses or church organizations. Again, in chapters 4 and 5 there is significant conversation and research taking place in churches and colleges about the role of service in transforming young people. The other aspect of this research that confirms its value is the nature of the findings.

The second research question sought to understand what components of the experience are transformational. While the study was designed to understand the SM experience, it also sought to discover what new insights might make churches and schools more effective in their ministry to young adults. In light of this, I think it can be said: This study reveals new insights about the phenomenon of a year of service, recognizes similar discussions in literature, and produces findings that may shape future ministries—thus it is useful.

**Generalizability**

Generalizability refers to "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). Elliot Eisner (1998) notes, "What generalizes is what one learns, and for our purposes these can be regarded as (1) skills, (2) images, and (3) ideas" (p. 199). One of the initial purposes of this study was to learn what aspects of the SM experience might be transferable to other contexts. What components of the experience are transformational? Where and how can the salient
wisdom of a year of service be used elsewhere for the purpose of becoming more effective in ministry?

Skills

As a result of participating in Christian service, SMs developed an ability to interact with God and others through the exercises of the spiritual life. Spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, worship, and evangelism became areas of skill that SMs developed and that readers of this research can better understand and apply to other scenarios. An example of this is in the way SMs portrayed that service to others was something that can be done anywhere, not simply overseas. The core elements of serving others became a skill so deftly practiced that they were able to apply what was learned to other scenarios. Also, the skills they developed as SMs seem to have remained with them after their year of service. Another skill that emerged from this study has to do with the way SMs endured through adversity. In chapter 5, the theme of adversity portrayed SMs practicing the life skill of negotiating faithfully through trials and conflict. The SM experience produced a rich array of skills that are applicable to other aspects of life.

Images

Images convey truths beyond the confines of the words that embody them. The stories reported in this study that portray some of the scenes of the SM experience also have power to teach. When stories of SM experiences are included in the findings it is because the story often communicates the essence of the argument in a way simple reporting might understate. Metaphors are another example of the way images express
the ideas discovered in research. In this study the inclusion of stories and metaphors (interview questions 6 & 7) was intentionally sought for the purpose of collecting data in the form of images. The results contributed deep insights into the SM experience that would not have occurred if those methods were not implemented.

Ideas

Again, if research is to be useful, the generalizations need to be expressed in ideas that can be transferred to other scenarios. The second research question sought to know what elements of the SM experience are transferable. One example of an idea that can transfer to other contexts is the theme of high expectations. It became clear in this study that SMs who served abroad were expected to perform at levels that were not the norm for them at home. First-year college students were expected to teach second-grade classrooms or become pastors or deans virtually by appointment. What was discovered in this study was that students elevated their efforts beyond the status quo to try to meet the expectations. Expecting young people to be and do more is an idea that can transfer to many others areas of life.

If Kolb’s experiential learning model were to be applied to the process of qualitative research, it would require that learning be extended by thinking or practicing the idea discovered. The skills, images, and ideas of this research are an integral part of holding this study together in a logical, visual, and relevant manner that allows the findings to be transferred to another context.
Writing Style

I have chosen to write this dissertation integrating the comments of student missionaries with my own observations as part of the text. I discovered the effectiveness of this approach when experimenting with initial themes that emerged in the research. Organizing their words and responses together with my understanding of their portrayals created a unique blend of insight that made reporting the data more interesting. This approach enabled me to create a confluent description of their experience in a format that reads accurately, but not awkwardly. Other than some longer sentences or short paragraphs where I quoted SMs, their responses were written without quotation marks or italics (see appendix F for a table showing an example of the process). A basis for this approach can be seen in Zeller and Farmer's (1999) argument that "qualitative researchers [need] to develop their own style guidelines—ones more fitting to qualitative assumptions about knowledge, ones more reflective of action practices of qualitative researchers" (p. 1).

Summary

The methodology of this study is grounded on the assumption that the best way to understand the SM experience is to listen to it. Qualitative research is designed to examine a phenomenon, like the SM experience, in such a way that one can see and hear the story in order to understand it. This study examined the SM experience through a systematic process using a variety of data collection methods and data sources which increase the possibility that the findings are trustworthy.
CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDENT MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTIONS OF STUDENTS ABOUT THE YEAR OF SERVICE

Introduction

This chapter describes the SM experience beginning with the protocols for becoming a SM, followed by a description of where the SMs in this study served, along with their job descriptions. Included in this section are the reasons students chose to leave school and serve for a year. The chapter concludes with a summary of the description of the student missionary life.

Protocol for Becoming a Student Missionary

The process of becoming a student missionary might vary some from college to college, but this description is a synthesis of the general process from the four schools in this study:

1. Students look at the call book (now online) to view the options for domestic or international service. The different locations have brief job descriptions and requirements providing students with enough detail to make a decision.

2. Students go through an interview with the Student Missions Director who makes a general assessment of the student’s readiness and discusses the available opportunities.
3. Students proceed to fill out the appropriate paperwork. For overseas missions there is an online application process with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC). Documents include: an application, health certificate, beneficiary and release of liability form, a declaration form, a resume, three references, a health authorization, and a copy of their passport. If the student is seeking to serve domestically, the arrangements tend to be made directly between the college and the institution where the student will be placed. Other documents include fundraising letters, a prayer partner form, a financial agreement, college scholarship and experiential forms, as well as the necessary data for the college phone directory for the coming year.

4. Before the students leave for their year of service they attend a required class in multicultural issues and ministry.

5. Students also attend a retreat prior to going in preparation for the year of service.

6. Upon their return, SMs participate in a re-entry retreat at the beginning of the school year with all of the other SMs who served around the world. This retreat is a time of reflection and debriefing about their service as well as sharing and celebrating what God has done through the experience.

Clearly, the process that SMs undergo before they begin serving in any given location, whether domestic or international, tends to have enough rigor to encourage high levels of commitment yet have an infrastructure that assists the students effectively. Especially in the area of training prior to service and debriefing upon their return, the SMs in this study were generally well prepared. There will always be anxiety when entering the unknown, and several SMs at re-entry retreats expressed a lack of training in
specific areas of their roles, but when asked what type of training would have provided effective preparation, several admitted that the best training was the immersion into the job. Recommendations for training are included in chapter 6 with the recommendations for college SM departments.

Where They Served

Students in this study served around the world in a variety of different settings, circumstances, and roles. This section describes the places where SMs in this study were located as well as their specified and implied roles. See Table 2.

Students served at English Language Schools, Christian elementary schools, churches and church-planting projects, hospitals and health clinics, Conferences and Missions, dormitories and radio stations, as well as summer camps and agricultural centers. As shown in Table 2 it is notable that the island schools in the Central Pacific receive a large number of SMs to teach in their schools. SMs are essential to the survival of these institutions. (Typically, the Central Pacific region would be categorized as part of Asia geographically, but given the unique concentration of Adventist schools in the islands, this region was given its own category.)

SMs in Asia work predominantly for English Language Schools but also for church planting and evangelism. SMs who work in Central America might serve as pastors, teachers, medical workers, and engineers. The same is true for Africa in that the needs are so great that any number of services could be utilized in that region. Typically, SMs going to Africa would be assisting career missionaries or serving in their schools.
### Table 2

**Location and Role of Student Missionaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of SMs</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Job/Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Africa:</strong></td>
<td>Maintenance Engineer, Teacher, Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tanzania; Kenya; Burkina Faso; West Africa; Rwanda</td>
<td>Dean, Health Care Assistant, Utility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Australia:</strong></td>
<td>Youth Pastor, Chaplain, Assistant Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shepparton; Sydney; Melbourne; Wudunga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><strong>Asia:</strong></td>
<td>Church Planting/Evangelism, Teacher,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; Taiwan; Tokyo, Hiroshima, Japan; Tokyo; Hong Kong; Malaysia; South Korea; Thailand; India</td>
<td>Engineering/Building, School Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>South America:</strong></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Central America:</strong></td>
<td>Teacher/Engineer, Electrical Engineer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Costa Rica; Ecuador; El Salvador; Nicaragua</td>
<td>Medical Assistant, Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Europe:</strong></td>
<td>Teacher, Assistant Dean, Utility, Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Czech Republic; England; Romania; Scotland</td>
<td>Health Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td><strong>Central Pacific:</strong></td>
<td>Teacher, Principal, Nurse, Utility, Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marshall Islands; Micronesia; Papau New Guinea; Philippines; Saipan</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><strong>USA:</strong></td>
<td>Youth Ministry, Assistant Dean, Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washington; Wisconsin; Idaho; Colorado; New York; Utah; California; Virginia; Georgia; Montana; Idaho</td>
<td>Chaplain, Youth Pastor, Bible Worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Australia tends to place SMs in their local churches to serve as youth pastors and chaplains. In any given year the needs and the regions where SMs go can shift significantly, but their roles and the key attributes of their service are reasonably consistent.
Seventeen participants in this study served as pastors, deans, associate chaplains, and youth directors domestically in the United States. In one way, the SMs who served domestically may not have undergone significant culture shock as international SMs, but a year of domestic service can still have significant challenges. When SMs travel to another culture, the locals may be hospitable or intrigued by foreigners thus creating an openness or interest in each other that may not occur with an SM serving domestically. SMs who served in a familiar culture might have advantages with communication, but might have to work harder to win the confidence and respect of the people they are serving. Certainly, both domestic and international students will have different obstacles to overcome in their year of service, but the nature of those challenges seems to be equally intense.

**Roles**

In this section I describe two kinds of roles inherent in the SM experience: assigned roles and implied roles. While students who are considering a call to the mission field may have clear and accurate descriptions of the roles they are considering, other responsibilities may not be mentioned in the formal job description.

**Assigned Roles**

The “job descriptions” or “roles” are available on the GC website for potential SMs to view in their consideration of spending a year in volunteer service *(Hexaidgo.net)* (see Appendix G). The roles/job descriptions are created by the employing institution with such data as a brief description of the job, qualities looked for in a volunteer, and duration of the service.
The students in this research were asked about their daily activities, schedules, and job descriptions. One SM responded, “There’s no such thing as an average day.” While SMs experienced a variety of work activities, most of them described a routine schedule without much difficulty. If an SM was teaching at an English Language School it was common to have several hours in the middle of the day free but then return to work for evening classes. Some SMs had a structured schedule (i.e., 3rd-grade teacher) whereas a youth pastor in Melbourne might have more flexibility as far as a schedule is concerned. Others, such as associate deans or medical assistants, were “on call” for emergencies at any hour as shown in Table 3.

Implied Roles

SMs, in addition to their assigned roles during the week, were expected to provide leadership to other ministries such as vespers programming, branch Sabbath Schools, worships services, Pathfinders, and Sabbath afternoon outreach. Participation in these areas was not necessarily in the “job description” but was an implied role, or there were functions that local people hoped SMs would continue or create. Giving Bible studies is an example of an implied role that SMs reported. These were often self-imposed duties but affected their influence and service while they were there. It is one aspect of the experience that is unlisted in the call book or job description but considered by SMs to be important to their ability to serve. It is not uncommon for SMs to be surprised by additional jobs once they arrive, nor is it uncommon for extra duties to gradually accumulate.

Ultimately, the SMs rarely complained about the rigor but accepted it as part of their service. Combined with the way they integrated the specified duties with the
implied roles, it is notable that SMs included all the aspects of life together as part of their service. This holistic approach to their service is indicative of some of the connections they made between faith and experience, between beliefs, actions, and who they thought they were.

**Reasons for Going as a Student Missionary**

SMs identified six major reasons for choosing to go as a Student Missionary. More than half of the SMs in this study reported multiple reasons for serving for a year. Their reasons for going revealed not only their motivations but what they expected would happen to them personally as a result of serving abroad. The reasons SMs gave as to “why they became a student missionary” include: (a) career uncertainty; (b) a break from the routine; (c) a desire to experience faith through service; (d) feeling a sense of calling; (e) to deepen their relationship with God; and (f) preparation for service since childhood. While SMs reported a variety of reasons influencing their choice to go, the themes stated above are relevant to the manner in which young adults develop a personal faith.

**Career Uncertainty**

One of the issues young adults face in college is the pressure to settle into a career that they believe reflects their talents and interests. This study reports the perceptions of SMs as they tried to steer through such an uncertain season of their life. Compounding the pressure of making “a” decision for a career is the urgency to make the “right” decision. This became one of the main reasons for taking a year out of college to serve. “I didn’t have any real direction in college” reported one student, while another revealed how troubling it was to be uncertain, saying, “I didn’t know what my major was and I
Table 3

*Samples of an Average Day*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SM Position</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Mine was the typical school day—7:30 worship, getting ready, and classes started at 8. And then we went straight through until 3:15 or so, and then basically just stayed there in the classroom working until 5 or 6 in the evening doing, grading, bulletin boards, and cleaning, and then have dinner and usually the rest of the evening was spent in the teachers’ workroom preparing for the next day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl’s Assistant</td>
<td>Fix suppers for boarding school kids. Held weekly Bible study in girl’s room, washed, dried, and folded all kids’ laundry four days a week. Made monthly nametags for their doors and planned weekend activities for kids; supervised study hall in evenings during week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>The clinic was the first half of my day, patient prep and taking x-rays, just doing other various blood tests or that kind of thing. In the afternoons, we usually did visitations in homes or sometimes get groups in the community together and did a branch Sabbath school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Clinic</td>
<td>The average day for me started a 6 o’clock, I’d get up and have a devotional in the morning, and then I’d do some prep stuff and classroom stuff that I hadn’t finished the day before, and then we had worship at 8-8:30, and then I’d just teach until 3:00. From 3-4:00 I’d stay in the classroom and help students and then from 4-5 I’d grade and then, usually supper from 5-6:00, then from 6-9:00 was free time, or preparing for the next day. Basically there wasn’t much free time, so I usually went to bed at 9, or else I wouldn’t have the patience to deal with my students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>There was no such thing as an average day. I blocked off until about 10 o’clock in the morning as my time. I would use that for study time and other things and from 10 o’clock until sometimes as late as midnight to 1 o’clock in the morning, I was just going constantly. I had Pathfinders. I did a lot of visiting of a number of small groups. The youth group in the church worked with the older members of the church. Every Thursday I’d spend four hours with them. Just always going visiting—giving Bible studies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was kind of scared about that.” Students noted that their lack of direction did not emerge from a lack of trying. Some studied nursing, then interior design, finally in frustration one reported, “I hated everything and I just told my mom, ‘I’m leaving, bye.’ Out of this urgency to discover their place in a professional track, students clearly hoped the experience of serving would provide “a nice time to figure everything out.” Another student reported that they chose to serve for a year “just to get some perspective and find out really if that is what I wanted to do.” Other students hoped to possibly “get some focus” or simply “realign” their focus.

While some might have reported that they had “no clue” what they wanted to do, others had notions about a specific career that they wanted to test. “I was thinking about doing teaching but I wasn’t sure so I wanted to try that out,” claimed a student. The “trial by fire” approach to sifting out their career conundrums became a theme throughout their reporting. One student admitted, “I was pre-med at one point and I was struggling. I wasn’t sure.” Another medical student said, “I wanted to know whether this [pre-med] was actually what I wanted to do.” Some considered the SM experience as a way to “test” and “see” if they could handle the career choice they had already made. The desire for clarity caused many to stop the “traditional” educational process because a year of service was reputed to authenticate or expose any career uncertainties.

Clearly, the assumption existed in the minds of some students that a year of service would clarify some of the confusion they had about whether they were well-suited for the career they had chosen. One student described the way in which he would “know” with certainty about a career in ministry saying, “I wanted to spend a year submerging myself in that and trying to figure out if I really wanted to be a religion
major.” The idea of “submerging” indicates an assumption that the best way to know is
to simply do. While many adults in the workplace today are aware of the potential
flexibility or uncertainty about “lifelong careers,” in the minds of college students there is
a sense that this decision about a career is “for life.” One student revealed her
expectations about her SM experience, saying, “I was hoping that teaching elementary
school for a year would kind of help me decide what I wanted to do for the rest of my
life.” Whether students anticipate that their year of service will be a time they can
discover their calling as a professional or simply clarify or test their untried abilities in
that particular field, the SM experience is expected to be a time to discover and know
their place in the career world.

Break From the Routine

Another reason students chose to leave for a year of service was because they
were “burnt out,” “sick of school,” and simply “tired of normal life.” Statements like “I
just wanted to take a year off” or “take a break from my studies” reflect a type of
educational exhaustion students perceive as unproductive or obstructing their educational
goals. Frankly, the chance to simply “do something new” is a common reason to step
away from college for a year of service.

One of the realities a college student faces is their oncoming launch out of formal
education, propelling them into careers, families, and other personal endeavors which are
solely their own. In a way, their brief hiatus or break from school to mission service is
perceived as a necessary reprieve for the purpose of gaining a sense of sanity. This
theme is related to the career uncertainty in that the urgency of the future prompts them to
stop and make sure they are prepared for it. It differs from career uncertainty in that
some students simply felt like they were on a conveyor belt to graduation without having any time to assess the significant life change they have been preparing for. The desire to “get out of school” and “take some time off” may grow out of a whole cadre of frustrations, but it is clear that entering into the SM program is both a way to “get away from school” and “just do something different.”

Expression of Faith Through Service

While some of the reasons that prompted students to leave for a year of service were not overtly altruistic, many cited the opportunity for expressing their faith in service to Christ as a significant reason for going. Motivated by a core value to share the gospel, students reported that they became a SM because they “wanted to really learn how to be able to witness” to people of a different worldview. Students confirmed an earnest desire to witness by stating plainly, “I had a burden for sharing the gospel with people who had never heard it before.” Consequently, the desire to “tell people about Jesus” is linked to the idea that their service to God should be the kind of service that matters. Common statements such as “I wanted to do something practical for God” and “I wanted to have some tangible service” indicate a growing need among young adults to contribute in ways that are meaningful. Many of the students simply want to “make a difference.”

The desire to “be serving Him in a concrete way” indicates a longing for a kind of experience not yet obtained in the college setting. Consequently, it is not surprising to find students frustrated with their education and desiring a new experience for a year. The SMs view their year of service as a way to test their theoretical ideas and to integrate them in tangible ways. When a college student reports, “I was feeling the need for
ministry” or “I wanted to see how God could use me in other people’s lives,” the longing for significance emerges as an important reason for going as a SM.

Sense of Calling

Many SMs chose to serve for a year because they perceived a calling from God. Some students boldly challenged God to demonstrate His leading saying, “If you want me to be a student missionary, God, you have to make everything work.” In spite of complicated circumstances and competing opportunities, one student admitted, “I need to get God to say, ‘I want you to go,’ before committing to a year of service.” In some cases, students reported miraculous interventions as reasons that moved them to make a decision to serve. One student reported an example of dramatic guidance saying, “I prayed and asked the Lord to give me some direction and [the Lord] did some really miraculous things as far as signs are concerned.” Another said: “I think God led me into it because after a while things just kept working out, and finally I just couldn’t get the idea out of my head.” Still another example: “I think God really wanted me to go and He opened the doors.”

A quieter, more thoughtful guidance moved other students to commit to a year of service abroad. Some students described their calling with more reflective language saying, “I realized that God wanted me to be there” or “I knew without a shadow of a doubt that that’s what God wanted me to do.” Others “felt impressed” that “God was calling” them to go and serve. SMs often qualified their statements describing God’s guidance, saying, “I truly felt like that was where God wanted me” or “I actually, really felt like God was telling me that I needed to go.” Another conveyed this confidence
saying, "I really felt that the Lord was saying, 'I can use you right now, and I have a plan for you.'"

It should be noted that some students reported a sense of calling without having a "voice come down and say everything" to motivate them to go. Students simply knew that God wanted them to serve. The way the students describe the process of God communicating with them depicts an air of confidence about how their service was part of God's plan. It may be true that when students sense they are called by God to serve, it becomes a pivotal moment in their spiritual life.

Deepening of Their Relationship With God

If the young adult years are a time of searching and forming their own experience with faith, then it is not surprising to discover that deepening their relationship with God is one of the reasons students chose to serve for a year. Students stated their expectations that a year of service abroad would be a "growing experience for my relationship with God." Some students "knew" the experience would bring them closer to God while others "hoped" the year would deepen their relationship with God. Students commonly heard from former SMs what a difference a year of service made and respond by saying, "I wanted that life-changing experience." One student reported, "I didn't think my life was going in the right direction so I wanted to take a year and get closer to God."

Another student was looking specifically for a watershed experience that would liberate her from self-reliance to utter dependence on God: "I kind of wanted to just put myself in God's hands completely and see what would happen... doing something that I had no idea how it would turn out... I wanted to have to rely on Him."
For the college student, such initiatives are not surprising; moreover, they are a healthy and a necessary part of faith development. One student stated that she went away for a year of service because she “wanted to learn a new idea of what God was like.” Evidently, some college students feel a disconnect between what they have already learned and what they expect to discover in a year of service. In addition to wrestling with previous misconceptions of God, some students left for a year of service simply “to see if God was real” to them.

Preparation for Service Since Childhood

The Student Missionary program has been in existence for over 25 years, and many of the students have been encouraged by their parents to serve since they were children. Whether their posturing is deliberate or indirect, some SMs grew up with the notion that they will one day serve as SMs. Thinking back to the source of why they chose to go, students report, “It was something I always wanted to do” or “I have always wanted to be a student missionary ever since I was a kid.” Students credited parents with the desire to serve as missionaries saying, “My parents always read me books and I remember sitting in Sabbath School and my mom doing the felts of a jungle.” One student whose parents were SMs mimicked mom and dad as though the promptings were repeated frequently, saying, “While I was growing up I heard, ‘You need to spend a year abroad, you really need that experience.’”

In addition to parental influence, the role of mission stories influenced SMs from an early age. One student claims, “Ever since I was little I wanted to be a missionary. ...I loved listening to mission stories.” Another student referenced her brother’s experience as a motivating factor for her, stating, “My older brother was a student
missionary . . . and I remembered how good of an experience he had and I was thinking, ‘I would like to have something like that.’” Whether the decision to go as an SM was made as children, or it was made later in their childhood, many of those who go report that they never had any question as to whether they would go or not. Becoming a SM was something they anticipated from childhood.

Several minor themes emerged as students reported their reasons for entering into service. For example, one reason occasionally cited was a desire to experience another culture or worldview. Another minor reason for going was fueled by the energy of a short-term mission trip in high school that led them to consider a 1-year term of service. Some others cited their friends as motivation.

It is important to note that the SMs were motivated to go for a variety of reasons. Why they went becomes helpful in understanding their expectations, which can have a significant impact on their experience as student missionaries. While some indicated spiritual reasons for leaving for a year, exhaustion, confusion, and frustration had as much to do with their entry into the student missionary experience, if not more. This is important because those who volunteer to serve can be reputed as being “the good kids.” Such a candidate for service could not avoid growth with such a predisposition toward service. In fact, the students in this study struggled with the same issues that the larger spectrum of young adults face. Many of them never mentioned spiritual growth or calling from God as a reason for going, possibly indicating they were not predisposed to spiritual growth.
Summary

SMs in this research served in many different roles and from different places around the world. The process by which one becomes an SM can be filled with a significant list of things to do before one goes. Typically, a lot of paperwork and preparation go into a year of service abroad. By the time SMs venture to another place to serve they have already invested time, money, and energy in the preparations alone. As they served around the world they entered into ministry roles that were challenging, but rewarding. While the SMs in this research rarely complained about being overworked or mistreated, they described a lifestyle that was full with responsibilities. In many cases, the implied roles such as Pathfinders or Branch Sabbath School became as much a part of the expectations others had for them that they perceived the extra responsibilities as simply part of the experience.

It became clear in this study that many of the students entered into service not because they were seeking a specific spiritual benefit, but more than anything else, were seeking clarity about major career decisions in the future. There seemed to be an assumption that mission service would help them sort out the questions SMs had about choosing their careers. Some were just dying to get out of school and enter into a different experience than the lock-step march of academic pursuit. Others had a quest for service or a desire to discover God in a new way. Even for those who wanted to practice speaking another language or simply see the world, SMs knew why they chose to go and those reasons became important insights in creating a context for their growth.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: THE IMPACT OF A YEAR OF SERVICE

Introduction

The first research question in this study sought to understand the impact of the SM experience on young adults. This chapter is organized into three major sections: (a) a survey of the literature related to service, (b) a general description of how SMs perceived that their service shaped specific areas of their life, (c) and evidence of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory exhibited in the SM experience. In this third section I report the results of the CSPP and the comparison between the SMs and the control group.

Related Literature

This section includes the related sources that provide a background for examining the impact of the SM experience. The literary sources contained in this section are short-term missions, service learning, and experiential learning

Short-term Missions

While the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the SM experience on young adults, a survey of “short-term missions” research adds to a greater understanding of the impact of any mission experience. The phrase “short-term” needs to
be clarified in this study because, according to Milham (1992), “some define short-term missions as any service cross-culturally for two weeks to two years or more” (p. 17). However, virtually all the research on short-term missions for college students is conducted with students who serve abroad from 2 weeks to 3 months (Tuttle, 1998, p. 10) in contrast to the SMs in this study who served for 10 months to a year. SMs have been considered “short-term” when compared to full-term missionaries who serve for at least 6-year terms.

Another feature that distinguishes SMs from short-term missionaries is that SMs do not necessarily serve in large groups. In some cases there are 10 to 15 other SMs serving at the same place, but most of the students serve in much smaller groups or by themselves. Many short-term mission trips have large groups of 20 to 60 people involved. Yet, the comparison between SMs and short-term missions is crucial because of the similar impact that service has on the spiritual development of the participants.

One important question critics of short-term missions have raised has to do with the idea that short-term missions are effective only for the participants and not necessarily the ones being served. Tuttle notes this at the outset of her research, inquiring, “Are summer missionaries really able to make a difference while serving such a short-time on the field?” (Tuttle, 1998, p. 6). While there may be legitimate benefits of a 2-week mission trip, the suggestion from some is that most of the difference is made in the lives of the participants. Even though the reputation of short-term mission trips is that they enhance growth in the participants, the expense of the trips is being questioned as to whether the high costs are worth the perceived impact (Rich, 1996). Tuttle agrees with this and adds concerns in the areas of “developing partnerships with long term
missionaries and providing quality training and debriefing programs for participants” (Barnes, 1992; Borthwick, 1996; Tuttle, 1993, Yackley, 1994). In light of new models designed to enhance the effectiveness of the short-term mission trips, there are some who have sought to develop resources that emphasize the biblical and theological principles of mission service (Beukes, 1999; Nah, 2000).

In sum, the nature of a short-term mission trip is different from the SM experience. As the short-term mission experience has evolved, some of the aspects of the experience are being questioned for the purpose of increasing the impact on both those who are served and especially those who serve. Clearly, the dramatic increase of short-term missions has caused researchers to consider the impact of short-term missions on the personal and spiritual growth of its participants.

The Impact of Short-term Missions

Because of the spiritual and emotional growth that occurs through short-term mission service, a number of studies have emerged examining its impact on participants (Blanchard, 1990; Edman, 2003). Short-term missions have become vehicles for the development of personal and spiritual well-being (Manitsas, 2000). Wilson (2000) studied the impact of the short-term mission experiences on faith maturity and, while the study did not show a dramatic change in faith maturity, some change was quantified among those who tend to learn through concrete experiences. It may be that changes in faith maturity would be difficult to quantify over such a short period of time. Nonetheless, the assumption that short-term service has some impact underpins most of the research on short-term missions.
Using the short-term mission experience as a training method for youth in Christian leadership results in the positive development of Christian leaders who are able to build the Kingdom of God. (Jee, 2002; Martin, 1994) Evidently, participating in short-term mission service has become an effective approach to fostering spiritual well-being and Christian leadership skills. Anderson describes the impact of service in his study of short-term missions in the University Presbyterian Church (R. S. Anderson, 1987), noting that

these experiences are not meant to be ends in themselves, nor goals toward which we move as a church. Rather they are means to an end. They become a tool to facilitate individual discipleship, Christian community, and servant ministry in the world. (p. 141)

Other churches have used short-term missions to motivate (Fung, 1999), mobilize (J.-D. Kim, 2002), and renew the church members’ relationships with God and their commitment to God’s work (Hardy, 2001). The Southern Baptists engaged in a thrust to increase lay involvement in mission activity through short-term mission trips in an effort to foster church growth and a commitment to missions (Purvis, 1993). The study showed an increase in mission involvement and monetary donation to missions as well as a witnessing of Christ to the world. Kwan tightened the focus on the impact of short-term experiences, studying solely the intercessory prayer practices of its members (Kwan, 2002). Short-term mission trips have been shown to influence participants to greater commitment to worldwide and domestic missions (D. Kim, 2001). From a broad perspective of its overall impact on participants, to analyzing the specific areas of the spiritual life that have been impacted, it is clear that the short-term mission trip is considered a valuable tool for spiritual growth.

Even though the short-term mission trip is different from an SM who serves for about a year, there seems to be an awakening of mission work as a methodology for training, renewal, and spiritual discovery. While many of the references above are limited to local churches, four studies focus primarily on the impact of short-term missions on college students and use both qualitative and quantitative methods.

**Short-term Missions and College Students**

Randal Wisbey (1990) posed the question in his research, “Can short-term mission experiences prove to be an effective means of awakening college students to the needs of the world, while allowing them to put their faith into action?” (p. 37). The study included college students in a series of four mission trips to Honduras where pre- and post-event surveys were administered to the participants. Wisbey’s survey was sent to students who were 1 to 4 years removed from their service. Of the 88 surveys sent out, 93% were returned. Students in Wisbey’s study strongly agreed that short-term mission projects opened one’s eyes to the needs of the world and provided opportunities for them to put their faith into action (p. 63). Fifty-seven percent of students also indicated that they were more likely to return to the field for 9-12 months. As for spiritual growth,
while Wisbey does not specify the nuances of spiritual growth in this study, 72% of the
students indicated that their short-term experience was helpful in the development of their
spiritual life.

Kathryn Tuttle (1998) studied the effects of summer mission experiences on
Christian college students who attend college within the Council for Christian Colleges
and Universities. The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of short-term
mission service on college students’ spiritual growth and faith maturity (Tuttle, 1998, p.
183). Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, Tuttle studied students at four
Christian colleges who participated in a summer mission service program. One of the
most significant results from this study came from the qualitative interviews that focused
on the aspect of spiritual growth. When students were asked “what aspects of their
college experience most impacted them spiritually, 18 out of 20, or 90%, mentioned their
short-term missions experience” (p. 275). Ultimately their mission experience “ranked
among the top five elements that promoted spiritual growth during their college
experience” (p. 275).

Stella Ma (1999) studied the perceptions of college students about their spiritual
formation while attending a Christian college. This study considered the entire college
experience in contrast to focusing on one element of the educational opportunities
available. Twenty-three colleges participated in this study (20 are members of the
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and 3 are Lutheran Universities).
Findings showed that one of the top 10 factors that students perceived as most influential
on their spiritual growth was short-term missions. Furthermore, agreeing with Tuttle’s
research (1998) in the effectiveness of reflection and further application, Ma states that
"short-term missions were effective in spiritual growth when there were efforts to reflect and learn from the experience after the trip" (Tuttle, 1998, p. 173).

Stephen Beers sought to examine the relationship between the faith development of Christian college students and their involvement in the Study Abroad Mission (SAM) program (Beers, 1999, p. 13). Also in agreement were Tuttle’s findings:

The qualitative analysis showed (self-reported) growth in six of the eight core dimensions of faith. With increased sensitivity to cultural diversity, increased experiences of a sense of well-being, and an increase in the connection with a community of believers as the major aspects of their development. (1998, p. 157)

Mel Lemke studied the impact of service on STORM Co participants. STORM Co “is an adventure based short-term mission initiative for teens and young adults that has been operating within the South Pacific region by Seventh-day Adventist youth groups since 1993” (Lemke, 2004, p. 120). The goal of STORM Co initiatives is to “serve without expectation, to build a friendship with the community as a whole and to encourage Christians who are already there” (p. 120). The study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods that resulted in findings that showed the STORM Co experience impacted students by promoting personal and spiritual growth, worship, and the building of community, as well as a personal encounter with God and commitment to a life of service (Lemke, 2004). The founder of STORM Co, Jerry Unser, reflects on the process of coming to an understanding of why short-term mission efforts such as STORM Co have an impact on young adults:

Those of us who led trips in the beginning really did not know why it worked; we just knew it did; so we kept going. We now realise that the success of STORM Co is not in the ‘program,’ or the technology, or the skills of the team. It is in the attitude; that radical attitude of Jesus which seeks to first understand a need, and then to unselfishly give in order to meet the need. (Unser, 2000, p. 150)
Wayne French (2003) studied the impact of memory events on the spiritual growth of young people and included STORM Co projects as a significant memory event which fosters spiritual and personal growth. French claims that “integrating service into Memory Events is necessary in order for adolescents to experience the gift of giving” (p. 1).

To find a dissertation on the “Student Missionary Experience” on Seventh-day Adventist college students one has to go back almost 30 years for the only study. Donna Habenicht (1977) first examined the student missionary experience in 1975-76 when the SM program was in its early stage of development. Her research described the personality, attitudes, and overseas experience of a group of 150 students who served as student missionaries. She concluded that the students had experienced growth toward personal maturity, and their personal religious experience had been strengthened while serving as SMs. Her study focused on students who went overseas whereas student missionaries (or Task Force Workers) in this dissertation can be deployed overseas or domestically for mission service.

In surveying the research of short-term mission trips it seems clear that organizations, churches and schools are increasingly engaging in mission service events. The participants experience a renewed awareness and commitment to missions as well as a perceived growth in their relationship to God and others. The short-term mission experience, for many institutions, is a methodology for the enrichment of the participants as well as a response to the needs of the world.
Service Learning

Service, as a way to learn and grow, is not only an attribute of churches and religious organizations. Educational institutions from elementary school through the university are implementing programs that are constructed based on students learning through service.

The Basis for Service Learning

Secular colleges and universities have responded to developmental needs of young adults by offering academic opportunities in an experiential format. Service learning is an unprecedented change to the learning process in college. Scholars note the popularity of the movement of service learning around the country (Drake Dones, 1999; Loewen, 1998; Rauner, 1995). This gain in popularity is occurring from middle school through graduate schools (Masucci & Renner, 2000). In high schools the number of students involved in service learning grew from 81,000 in 1984 to nearly 3 million in 1997 (Greenberg, 2000). Service learning is a pedagogy that fosters the development of skills and knowledge needed for participation in public life (Forman & Wilkinson, 1997, p. 278). Rosenberg (2000) characterizes service learning, stating that service learning combines community work with classroom instruction, emphasizing reflection as well as action. It empowers students by making them responsible in a real-world context, while giving them support, encouragement, information, and skills to be effective (as cited in Speck, 2001). Cushman defined service learning by asserting that “service learning courses unite in a single mission the traditionally separate duties of research, teaching, and service” (Cushman, 1999, p. 331).
Some believe in the need to reform the way that higher education prepares young people for life (Myers-Lipton, 1994). Some schools have held that service, in addition to research and teaching, is a prioritized goal of their educational process (McElhaney, 1998). Connecting the issues of student development and the goals for the institution is one of the reasons for integrating a service learning program (Jordan, 1994). It is a methodological response that acquiesces to the developmental needs of young adults and the broader objectives of colleges. In sum, the impact of engaging college students in service learning is based upon its perceived effectiveness methodologically and the character qualities that institutions hope to produce in their students.

The Impact of Service Learning

Studies have shown that students who participate in service learning have increased success academically (Berson, 1997). Students involved in a service learning experience connected to an English composition course report their writing skills had improved as a result of their involvement in service learning (Wurr, 2001). Wang (2002) discovered that a service learning component significantly improved the scores of high-school students' SAT scores.

Pribbenow (2002) studied the impact of service learning on faculty. This study purports that service learning among teachers enhanced their engagement in and commitment in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, service learning affected the way teachers sensed a connection to students. Overall, this study asserts that service learning created a meaningful change in the way teachers practice. McCollum (2003) examined the impact of service learning on students of color as they were engaged in a program where they functioned as tutors mentoring younger students. This study found
that community service impacted the participants in their understanding of learning styles, teaching, and educational equity. The participants discovered that as they were tutoring younger students, their service caused them to connect with their own educational experience thus energizing their commitment to those they were tutoring. The participants also reported a connection between their service learning experience and their consideration of future careers.

Dingman (2003) concluded that the effects on students who participated in service learning developed a better grasp of the course content while creating an awareness of community issues. Service learning participants demonstrated an enhanced ability to engage in critical thinking as well as developing the life skill of taking initiative. This study asserts that service learning impacted their attitudes and perceptions about diversity, service, and their role as a volunteer. Miller Blackburn (2002) found increased social consciousness and a continued motivation to serve in the community. Stewart (2003) noted that service learning decreased civic apathy and increased student integration into civic life.

Several studies showed how service learning impacts the self-esteem of the participants. Krug (1991) reported that certain experimental service learning programs had a positive impact on the self-esteem of various groups of high-school students compared to students who were not involved in service learning. Regmi (2004) suggests that ethnocultural-based community service had a transforming impact on participants by increasing their cultural identity, personal development, leadership skills, and self-esteem. Regmi affirms the idea that service learning experiences helped students understand themselves within the context of their ethnic and cultural identity.
In light of current trends of lower achievement, discipline problems, and the decline of adolescent involvement in the community, Harris (1995) concludes that service learning had a positive effect on the intellectual, social, and psychological development of the participants. Teenagers involved in service learning tend to become more aware of the needs of those around them as well as demonstrate a commitment to bettering their communities. Similar findings occurred in a study designed for social work students. While social work is a discipline rich with integrated learning opportunities, Knee Tolleson (1999) studied the impact of integrating students in service learning earlier in their educational process. The outcomes of his study affirmed the effectiveness of service learning to impact leadership development and develop stronger ties with citizens and local community organizations.

Conrad reports that the most powerful predictor of change in service learning is the opportunity to reflect on their service experience (Conrad, 1980). The need to process service learning through reflection is an attribute of experiential learning that is affirmed by others in research on service learning (R. W. Becker, 2001; Beitman, 2002; Fischer, 2003; Hierlmeier, 1998; Johnstada, 2002; Regmi, 2004; Siriwanij, 2002).

The impact of service learning on participants is a subject that many institutions have considered, either in the development of a service learning program, or in more effectively shaping existing programs. The basis for using service as a way to learn acquiesces with the idea that learning encompasses the whole person instead of the mere transfer of information.
Experiential Learning

Myers-Lipton cites David Kolb as foundational to service learning because of the experiential model which encourages people to move beyond theory and testing to direct experience and reflection (Myers-Lipton, 1994). Service learning has many theoretical sources for its existence, one of which is the field of experiential learning. While this section features primarily the work of David Kolb as the source for experiential learning, it should be noted that other theorists have been a source for Kolb in considering the whole concept of experiential learning. This section reviews the literature that shows the relationship between experiential learning and its impact on students.

The experiential learning model is used as a theoretical foundation in a wide array of disciplines: intercultural adjustment course (Decker, 1996), medicine (Davis, 1998), clinical supervision (Burgess, 1993), political science (Cherry, 1990), social work (Leben, 1985), and accounting (Jensen, 1995).

Nurses are challenged to work through all four phases of the learning cycle as they plan for patient care, problem solving, and critical thinking (Kelly, 1993). Kolb’s model was used to shape institutional planning for reentry students at public universities (Rollo, 1986). Furthermore, Kolb’s model is used to assist in job congruence for professional careers (Sims, 1981) as well as understanding the impact of internships on liberal arts with the expectations of their employers (Dougherty, 2000).

Various religious organizations have been influenced by Kolb’s experiential model, using it as a model for developing Christian educators (Blank, 1982; Richardson, 1990; Yang, 1999), training Christian leaders (Nugent, 1991), and training theology students (McLaughlin, 1990; Reistroffer, 1997).

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The need for a sound experiential model is conveyed in the way Kolb’s work is used in church renewal (Peek, 1990), in hospital visitation (Salmon, 1989), and in the way people are trained for urban ministry (Fuder, 1993). John Losey (2004) developed a youth ministry handbook using an adaptation of Kolb’s experiential learning model called “looping.” Since Kolb’s experiential learning model is referred to as foundational for experiential learning, it will be used as a lens to look at the impact a year of service has on young adults.

SM Perceptions of the Impact of a Year of Service

As the multiple sources of data were analyzed, three clusters of themes emerged to demonstrate how SMs were transformed. The clusters discussed in this section are: spiritual transformation, holistic impact, and connections to Kolb’s experiential learning cycle.

Spiritual Transformation

SMs perceived that their year of service impacted them in some very specific ways that they could articulate, as well as some holistic ways that were articulated in general terms. As SMs reported some of the more specific areas of spiritual impact in their lives, several sub-themes emerged from their statements: (a) The impact of a deepened relationship with God; (b) The impact of learning to depend on God; (c) The impact of expanding perspectives and shaping worldviews; (d) The impact of responding to the world’s needs through service; and (e) The impact of maturing as leaders.
The Impact of a Deepened Relationship With God

Students' year of service produced "revelations" about God that prompted a more intimate relationship with God. SMs described the result of such discoveries as deepening their love and respect for God. When students summarize their year of service by claiming that they "met Christ" or learned to focus on Christ in the mission field it conveys how their intimacy with God increased as a result of a year of service. Findings from the data assert that the year of service compelled students to grapple with spiritual themes simply because of the nature of their tasks. One student states:

Being a student missionary forces you to come to terms with yourself as in going to God or not. You can't stay on the middle. It's very hard to stay in the middle because you are doing things for other people all the time, you hardly have any other time to do what you want to do and if Christ gets a hold of you then the whole experience will be amazing, but if He doesn't take a hold of you then you're going to get actually more resentful and that's actually what happened with a lot of people.

It seems reasonable to assert that a comment such as "I learned a lot about God and who He is and why we serve Him" needs to be considered in the context of their experience. It is possible that students might experience a dramatic change in their relationship with God but have only simple clichés to use as labels for their experience. The language of their words often understates the significance of the event. For example, a statement such as "The love of God isn't the same as human beings" might seem like an obvious remark, but when SMs convey the details of the experience, their story provides tremendous meaning to what may seem like ordinary statements. In this case, the student worked with a series of evangelistic meetings and studied with a family that was being significantly changed by the gospel. The student witnessed God's power to liberate a man from addiction to alcohol and completely restore him to health. The above
student concluded: “It was the pivotal point of my life and I would never change it for the world.” The story behind the cliché, “The love of God isn’t the same as human beings” reveals a very powerful display of learning and spiritual growth through observing the transformation of others as a result of the gospel.

Not only did students perceive that their relationship grew through personal knowledge of God, but students sensed they were guided by a personal God. Students recognized that “God is all-knowing with a purpose and specific plan for them.” According to one SM, “God uses many people, situations, and He is at work in them all.” SMs recognized that while God may be at work in their life as a guiding agency for good, there are simple conditions that have to do with “His will” that enable God to bless people. One student reported, “I realized that God could take care of me if I let myself be embraced by His will.” Even the miraculous is conditioned upon “following His will.” SMs expressed ultimate trust in God’s plan for them even if they did not understand or agree with the way things were going: “God’s plan—though it seems like a tragedy to me—is the best.”

SMs perceived their year of service as time when their relationship with God seemed integrated into their daily life. Students describe God as being “involved” or “real” in “tangible” ways. Essentially, what students are describing is a greater degree of intimacy with God. While some students reported that growth in their relationship to God was one of the reasons they chose to serve, some clearly did not have an abiding relationship with God before they served. One student reflects on learning how to build a daily relationship with God, which was something that he had never had before. Another SM states, “For the first time in my life, my relationship with God became more about
what I believed and less about what I had always been told. I was asked some difficult questions and had to search out the answers myself.” As a result, God became more “real” to him. Furthermore, one student characterized the SM experience with a statement of ownership saying, “This was where I believe I came into my own, spiritually.”

**The Impact of Learning to Depend on God**

Another aspect of the spiritual impact is the way in which students learned to trust God more fully. A common experience for SMs is to be immersed into a new world which seems very chaotic. Uncertainty is a major part of every day. One SM admits that “even though His ways don’t seem right they turn out to be the best.” Trusting in God no matter how big or small the problem emerged as a significant impact on SMs’ spiritual life. The way students learned to trust God in all the areas of their daily life often grew out of an awareness of their own weaknesses and shortcomings. For some, learning to trust in God in the daily routine was foreign but the experience developed a confidence that they could do anything with God’s help. Not only is there a newfound confidence in their abilities, there is a confidence that God is in control and He has a plan for their life in spite of the trials. One SM puts it this way:

> Even when I can’t see it, God has a plan for where my life is going. . . . I felt very blind while I was there. Why am I here? What am I doing? Where am I going after this? And it wasn’t until the very end that I could kind of see how well things fit together.

Depending on God became a major theme for SMs as they assumed roles for which they were not trained, in unfamiliar cultures. While some SMs remained in the United States, others worked around the world. Even though some were located in a
familiar culture, working as a dean or a pastor placed them in a foreign experience, which can have a similar effect. The students in this study experienced a renewed dependence on God for support that they did not exercise as part of their college education. Students report needing God, “for all things.” If Christian college students were asked if they needed God they would probably respond positively to that question. Yet, SMs qualify their responses, emphasizing that their dependence on God is an experiential reality. “I needed God more through all my daily activities,” claims an SM who struggled in the classroom. Another shared a similar testimony stating, “I learned that I had to rely upon Him every single time.” One SM admitted an initial attempt at self-reliance but ultimately confessed, “There is nothing I can do on my own. I tried but it didn’t work. God was the only way I was able to make it through.”

The main reason for this renewed dependence on God is explained by the absence of normal supports that enable people to get through the day. As one SM stated, “You’re totally out of your comfort zone” and “you don’t have your friends around for support” so you “rely on God for every single day just to get along with other people” and meet the challenges you daily face. Each day seemed to be filled with many opportunities “to trust less of myself and more on God.”

Prayer became a major vehicle for SMs to lean fully on God for support. SMs claimed that unless they started the day with prayer, they could not teach. Some learned to pray to God and depend on those prayers to get through the day. When SMs report, “I had to be in constant dialogue with God for guidance throughout everyday” it conveys an element of dire need and total dependence. One student admits trying to handle the stress of teaching alone and it was not working, so in desperation the student finally prayed,
“God, I just can’t do this. I need you to help.” Others were driven to lean on God because there was no one else to talk to. While their isolation was in some ways problematic, they describe clinging to God for support and finding God faithful.

As SMs met daily challenges they discovered that their own resources were insufficient. Many discovered that they needed God for guidance, strength, wisdom, and perspective to manage throughout the year. This renewed reliance on God deepened their relationship to God and caused them to cling more fully to God throughout their service. Beers concluded that the experiential nature of short-term mission trips develops students’ sense of trust in God “because they had to trust him” (Beers, 1999, p. 127).

Granted, students were not forced beyond their will to trust God, but the circumstances of the experience were such that students in his research were compelled to indicate that the most significant lesson God taught them was to “trust God for everything” (p. 127).

The Impact of Expanding Perspective and Shaping Worldviews

When students summarize their year of service by saying it was “life changing” this does not necessarily mean there were overtly spiritual changes. While there were a few instances where little or no spiritual impact could be mentioned, most of the SMs indicated a participation in spiritual activities. There were some SMs who reported that the impact of their SM experience had more of an eye-opening effect than a predominantly spiritual outcome. SMs conveyed the most significant change had to do with their worldview and the way they perceived their purpose in life. Their expanded reference point for seeing the world also shaped the way they structured their life as well as the way they treated other people.
When SMs returned from service they experienced a phenomenon called “re-entry.” In many ways, re-entry is as difficult an experience as entering into a new culture because the SM is returning to a familiar culture but as a seemingly different person. Different experiences shape values that often run counter to the culture they are returning to; hence there is confusion, depression, frustration, alienation. SMs who immediately return may not be able to articulate their assessment of their own worldview as well as someone who had been home for several years. In this study those who referred to “worldview” adjustments were mostly SMs who were 5 and 10 years removed from service.

SMs state that their worldview had broadened or changed beyond borders of their “U.S.” reference point. Without using the stated “worldview” language per se, some students conveyed a change in the way they “look at life.” SMs developed this further by describing their new outlook on life as being well rounded or more complete. Much of the impetus behind their expanded worldview resulted from living in another culture with another language which they perceived had positively changed their lives. This experience shaped the way students continue to be open to and appreciative of other cultures. One student claimed that the experience of serving in another culture “was an enriching experience in all areas of my life.”

One of the key differences between having a philosophy of life and having a worldview is that a philosophy does not necessarily have to impact everyday life. A worldview, however, is how your deepest ideas about the world are actually lived out through your life. James Sire defines a worldview accordingly: “A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which
we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of the world" (Sire, 1988, p. 17).

SMs not only describe the way their ideological reference points are reordered but also describe the way those changes affect their life today. Students report a shift in priorities, citing, "It organized the things that I think are important and reorganized the things that I think are not important." Another SM adds, "It helped me to see the things I need to see and to be blind to the things I don’t need in my life.” When SMs summarize their year of service stating that it made them see their purpose in life or refocused their goals or simply caused them to change their perspective in a positive way, the language may seem like it leans on the side of being theoretical. Their statements indicate that they are applying their new ideas into new behaviors. For some it was a movement to understand people on a deeper level. Their new worldview led them to be more patient with people whom they did not understand as well as put them in touch with others in a more personal way. One student described with openness, “I think it sent me searching more instead of being satisfied.”

The Impact of Responding to the World’s Needs Through Service

Wisbey (1990) discovered that time spent in service to others is perceived to increase the awareness and openness of participants to meet the needs of the world. While all the SMs described a lifestyle of service in the descriptions of their schedules and daily activities, several described the profound impact it had on their life.

The SM experience so deeply affected some that they viewed service not as a chore but as an honor that God gives people. After a year of service students’ eyes were
opened to the world and all of its needs. One student who was 5 years removed from service said, “I felt so fulfilled and within God’s will while there that I am thinking about going to start an orphanage in Romania and finding a way to run it full-time, instead of continuing on as a mechanical engineer.”

When asked to summarize the impact of their year of service, one student simply replied, “After Brazil there was South Africa, then Madagascar, then Seychelles, then Tanzania; finally marriage to a Tanzanian and plans for a future in Africa.” This particular student made the connection to how serving as a SM tends to get “in the blood” in a way that continued to produce further opportunities.

SMs are immersed in a service context; consequently, they become so fixed on helping others that the value of service grows in them like a muscle. Reflecting on the way a year of service caused spiritual growth, one student said that her “heart continually longed for things beyond the temporary satisfactions of our world.” Such a statement denotes a spiritual hunger to serve others as well as a shift in personal values. Richard Foster (1988) cautioned believers that even service to others may not be an indication of spiritual growth but a needy, self-righteous exercise. While it may be true that students might serve from ulterior motives that may be destructive, it is hard to see that tendency in students who claim, “I can never really be satisfied with my life living it just for myself anymore. It’s just not enough. I don’t feel complete when I am doing that. I have to be doing something for someone else or serving the Lord in some way.”

**The Impact of Maturing as Leaders**

Students also maintain that becoming competent in ministry to others had a significant impact on them. Their year as an SM fostered a sense of confidence saying, “I
can go and do” many things for God and the church. This boldness comes not from arrogance but from the experiences accrued “in the trenches” while doing God’s work. Coupled with the stated confidence in their abilities is the awareness that the year has made them spiritually mature as well. Even though the tasks may not be easy, being an SM helped one student realize she could go out of her comfort zone and not only survive, but thrive. One student, surprised by this revelation, learned that being an SM gave her confidence to give impromptu leadership when it was needed, in any capacity. As churches today long for young people to comprehend the concept of ownership, some SMs return spiritually changed, having a working definition of ownership after a year of service. One SM summarized it well saying, “We all have talents or abilities that can help in the mission. So frequently we say, ‘What can I do?’ There is always something we can do!”

Such a proactive point of view seems to encapsulate mature leadership qualities as a result of their experience as student missionaries. As referred to earlier, short-term missions are used for the purpose of developing leadership in participants (Fung, 1999; Hardy, 2001; Jee, 2002; J.-D. Kim, 2002; Manitsas, 2000; Martin, 1994; Purvis, 1993). Consequently, SMs serving for a year might have even more opportunities of leadership development.

Holistic Impact of the SM Experience

While the overwhelming responses from SMs were positive about their experience, the nature of their language portrays the degree to which they had been impacted as well as how they were impacted by a year of service. The significant impact of their experience is evident by the way they perceive their experience as holistic.
Holistic Perceptions

SMs is this study reported difficulty in responding to the question, “Share with me some of the experiences/events that you would say were life-changing for you?” In the individual interviews with SMs who had recently returned from service, 19 out of 47 initially felt unable to answer this question. I say initially, because all but 3 continued to share stories that were pivotal in their year to them. What seemed most difficult for them was focusing on one event or experience. SMs conveyed the importance of viewing the significance of their experience as a total event. Referring to their year of service as a whole they were then able to give examples of moments in their year of service that were powerful memories.

The responses from SMs indicate ambivalence about considering one given point in the experience as pivotal, but more as part of a whole. One student chided, “My whole life I don’t think I had a drastic turning point” but then commenced to convey a story about a funeral procession he witnessed that made an impact on him.

One of the reasons SMs may wish to characterize the impact of a year of service with more holistic language is because, for most of them, their year of service was the culmination of many routine events as opposed to one big event. As I spoke to returned SMs at a re-entry retreat I recorded in the field notes of the data this comment:

After discussing the year of service with students it is clear to me that some are frustrated by any attempt to refine their experience down to one moment, event, or aspect of their service as being pivotal. It seems as though their life of service was a normal part of their day and the suggestion that one sensational event might stand out above what they did, day in and day out, is somewhat offensive to them.

It is not that SMs were incapable of sharing specific stories that had an impact on them, because many of the SMs who initially used a more “holistic” language eventually were
able to share aspects of the year that were significant. One student asserted, “As far as specific things that just changed my life forever, I can’t really think of anything specific.”

But as the interview continued she concluded:

The biggest thing for me was just the time factor and being away from all your social support and family. . . . I really made the time to study my Bible and pray more than I ever had before. I think that, in itself, just the “every night” and “every morning thing” changed my life in the overall experience, my whole life. It wasn’t like an event, well, that was a life-changing event.”

Again, another student added, “I can’t think of any moments,” but maintain “my year there did change my life and I can’t narrow it down to any big event.” This may seem like a contradiction, but in fact two things seem to be happening:

1. Students are not interested in naming single events as life changing because they understand the holistic nature of experience. Maybe it has to do with the fact that one story of their SM experience is connected inseparably to other stories. So, for some, highlighting one story might cheapen something that they intuitively know to be part of a greater whole.

2. Students might be trying to process the experience for the first time and the interview itself is a moment of reflection. For many SMs, the interview process was the first time anyone had asked them to reflect on and share their experience since their return. One of the awkward realities of re-entry is that while their life changes so much in a year of service, the pace of life and the process of the academic routine seem to remain the same when they return. It may be that re-entry causes many SMs to shelve their experience due to the press of school before they have a chance to process it.
Using Comparative Superlatives

As SMs attempted to describe the impact their year of service had on them some used superlatives emphasizing the degree they perceived impact in their life. Again, they refer to their experience from the perspective of the "whole year" as opposed to specific areas of their life that had been impacted.

For some SMs the year of service stands out as the greatest and best thing that they had ever done. Some SMs describe their experience as the most significant thing they did, while others refer to their experience as the most significant experience that happened to them. The perception emerged that their year of service was monumental compared to other experiences in their life. It may be argued that statements that are seemingly exaggerated can be thought of as shortsighted or juvenile. One SM balanced the apparent juvenile enthusiasm with this statement: "I know that I am going to continue changing throughout my life and have things that changed me before, but this probably is the biggest thing that made the most changes in myself. I am not done."

In some cases SMs qualified their superlative statements by describing their year as the most significant period of spiritual growth ever experienced in their life. The entire year was perceived to be pivotal in that they learned things they never learned before, which caused them to change in ways like never before. Students claim their year of service was "the most spiritually influential time of their life." Clearly, students struggled with trying to encapsulate one year into one sentence. It was not uncommon for students to summarize the value of their experience and simply say, "It just totally changed my life." One of the ways students tried to communicate the significance of that
year of service was to describe it as something they would “not trade for anything, not for the world, not for anything.”

It is noteworthy that 25% of SMs who had been 10 years removed from their year of service used the superlative language whereas 8% of those who returned from service within 1-2 years used similar language to describe their year as a SM. Only 6% of the SMs who were 5 years removed from service used superlative language to summarize their year of service. One explanation might be that in light of more time, reflection, and experience (marriage, careers, children), the older SMs were able to place more value on their year of service.

It is important to note that even though only 15% of SMs described their year of service as “the greatest” or “most life-changing experience” it does not mean the others did not have similar experiences; the majority of SMs were more specific with the way their year of service impacted them. Instead of short remarks like, “It was the best year of my life,” they focused on how their relationship with God was enhanced or they discovered the power of serving others.

In summary, the impact of a year of service can by examined by observing the perceptions SMs reported about the specific areas of impact in their lives as well as the more holistic approach to the impact their year of service had on them. From both viewpoints, clearly their lives were changed—spiritual, emotionally, and personally.

The SM Experience Through the Lens of Kolb’s Model

Connecting Kolb’s learning cycle to the SM experience may give us an explanation of why the impact was so real. It is possible that the impact was so strong because all the components were present. This section develops the relationship between
SM experience and the four modes of experiential learning (Kolb) in two different ways: (a) Quantitatively with the analysis of the CSPP data, and (b) through the voices of the SMs.

The results of the CSPP show that SMs scored significantly higher than the control group in all four of Kolb's Experiential Learning modes. The results are shown in Table 4. The mean scores show that concrete experience (CE) was the highest mode of learning both with the SMs and the control group. Reflective observation (RO) was the next highest, followed by abstract conceptualization (AC). Finally, active experimentation (AE) had the lowest incidence in both groups. The significant difference between the SMs and the control group suggests that SMs were experiencing a greater level of learning. In the next section I connect Kolb's four modalities to the SM experience.

Table 4

*The SM Experience Applied to the Four Modes of Experiential Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes</th>
<th>Student Missionaries$^a$</th>
<th>Control Group$^b$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n=201$</td>
<td>$n=206$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Experience</td>
<td>4.17 .499</td>
<td>4.04 .580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Observation</td>
<td>3.86 .567</td>
<td>3.66 .754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract Conceptualization</td>
<td>3.67 .603</td>
<td>3.23 .834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Experimentation</td>
<td>3.05 .718</td>
<td>2.76 1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F = 5.912, df = 1, p = .015
F = 9.111, df = 1, p = .003
F = .475, df = 1, p = .000
F = 10.935, df = 1, p = .001

$^a n = 201$. $^b n = 206$. 

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Student Missionaries Learned Through Concrete Experiences

According to David Kolb, learners need to be able to “involve themselves fully, openly and without bias in new experiences” (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). Students who enter mission service because they are trying to clarify career choices demonstrate an openness to let their year of service be a tool to guide them in their choices. The assumption that active participation in mission service will enable them to better make a career choice is inherent in their perceptions. Somehow, by participating in a year of service, they expected to be able to emerge from that year with the tools to better decide their career. The expectation is subtle, but 50 students (45%) indicated that one of the reasons for service was to figure out their career questions.

The concrete experience mode also can be observed in students who desire to break away from the educational routine by serving abroad for a year. The urgency to go and do something other than school typifies the way concrete experiences become an entry point into the experiential learning cycle. The compulsion to “do something different” or “new” is a viable example of the concrete experience mode. The impetus for engaging in concrete experiences may not be something students are consciously aware of, but they nonetheless expect a year of active service to provide “something,” whether it be clarity or simply a reprieve by taking a year out of school.

The desire to serve others in a “tangible, real, practical” way is another example of students valuing the concrete experiential aspect of service. While they are prompted by such ideas as “sharing the gospel” and “telling people about Jesus” they felt a need to personally experience “making a difference” and “doing something” that matters.
Another example of concrete experiences being a mode that is emphasized in a year of service is the way SMs expected their active participation to enhance their relationship with God. Again, the assumption that service (concrete experiences) would cause students to deepen both their understanding of God and their personal relationship with God is evident in their perceptions.

Students' characterization of service as pushing and stretching them to reach beyond their own perceived abilities is another example of learning through concrete experiences. High expectations placed on student missionaries compelled them to teach, serve, plan, and work harder further, building their confidence and refining their competence. Students admitted their surprise about the discovery of hidden talents, skills, and character qualities that emerged as a result of their service. Furthermore, the idea that these new qualities were discovered as a result of becoming immersed in an activity continues to support the efficacy of concrete experiences in the lives of SMs.

Overall, the entire year of service is an immersion in the learning mode of concrete experience. The SM experience is essentially a "learning by doing" approach.

Student Missionaries Learned Through Reflective Observation

Only when students are able to process their experiences through reflective observation do they extend their learning. It was noted in the field of service learning and short-term missions that growth occurred in students as they reflected on their interpersonal relationships and things they learned from each other as well as culture and conflict resolution (Conrad, 1980; Ma, 1999; Myers-Lipton, 1994; Tuttle, 1998). Kolb (1984) agrees, stating, "They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives" (p. 30). SMs cite various activities that are opportune for the
reflective process, such as quiet walks, journaling, free time, and thinking and preparing for their tasks. Although being interviewed about their experience was not necessarily part of the “student missionary experience” as such, answering the questions may have fostered more reflective learning.

Students in this research reported on how their philosophical reference points shifted as a result of their service. When students refer to a change in worldview or perspective on life, it is the product of reflective observation. As a result of involvement in mission service they perceived the world differently and reordered their values and commitment based upon new ideas. But the critical activity in shaping the new ideas grew out of thinking about their experiences.

Students processed their experience through interaction with co-workers, roommates, and local community members in an effort to sort through the issues and challenges they faced. The reflective process is conveyed as well in the conversations and regular, but informal, debriefing that occurred at the end of the day with fellow SMs. Whether they debriefed with their supervisors or those who were simply willing to listen, SMs found moments to think and talk about what was happening around them and to them. Additionally, the ability to talk on the phone and write email served as a significant forum for reflection.

Students Learned Through Abstract Conceptualization

Learners need to be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories. Students who entered the SM program to “test out” whether they should enter a certain career were operating under a theoretical assumption, whether they were aware of it or not, that the SM experience is a refining process that would
enable them to choose a career. Students perceived, from a conceptual perspective, that service would either “give them time” to answer these questions or would provide opportunities to experiment with specific skills which would assist them in their career choice. Several SMs indicated that their experience caused them to make a change in their career choice.

When students describe the impact of their year of service there is an aspect of the experience that engenders theories about how they relate to God. Whether it be a new perspective on the character of God or a renewed belief that God is trustworthy, SMs moved from reflecting about their experiences to forming new beliefs about God. Another aspect of this mode being revealed in their walk with God is the generalization SMs make about trusting God in uncertain times. SMs indicated learning to lean more fully on God by doing it, and emerging from the experience with a firm conviction that God would sustain and guide them. Students made these comments describing, not only their experience, but asserting their beliefs as truths (AC).

Abstract conceptualization occurred especially in the moments where students sought strength or guidance from Scripture. Whether their search was motivated by a devotional urge or an earnest desire to know or understand, they listened to the Bible as their teacher. It should be noted that many students were expected to teach Bible and therefore were compelled to become more acquainted with the themes of Scripture. Some students discovered either a new perspective from their study or were simply enabled to own the message of God’s Word personally as a result of their study. Others who gave Bible studies reported additional learning in their struggle to teach others what they had discovered. Moreover, there were SMs who opened the Bible hoping to be
taught, guided, or strengthened by what they would read. Thayer (1996) observed that the role of the Bible "sits in 'authority' in all modes" (p. 71). However, the discipline of Bible study is an activity of what Thayer calls "the Vision mode" or abstract conceptualization (p. 73). As SMs opened the Scriptures to study and seek answers, they engaged in a specific aspect (AC) of experiential learning.

Students Learned Through Active Experimentation

When SMs learned through concrete experiences, they would need to process their discoveries through reflective observation to make sense out of the events. As students form ideas and concepts in their mind, the way they process those theories is to test them in real life experiments. A student, through trial and error, may develop an idea about the best way to give a Bible study or handle a personal conflict. The learning experience is enhanced when that theory can be tested. This mode in Kolb’s Experiential model is described as active experimentation. Kolb (1984) maintains that "learners need to be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems" (p. 30).

When SMs reported on the factors that motivated them to be a SM, some expressed a desire to put their faith to the test or engage in service to acquire a tangible experience. While SMs did not articulate specific theories as such, the idea of trying out their faith in action describes learning through active experimentation. Another preconceived notion SMs held had to do with serving others. Admittedly, this was one area of Adventist young people in the Valuegenesis research that showed youth believing service is important but rarely experiencing it. Some students in this study did not choose to serve for a year for purely altruistic reasons. Some wanted a cultural experience that would broaden their worldview. Some wanted to travel and practice speaking another
language. What constitutes their motivation as an example of active experimentation is that they are acting on general theories in order to verify them. Moreover, as SMs enter into service, many are experimenting with the assumption that service is an important component to the Christian life.

While the experimentation is evident in their prior motivation, the discipline of service itself is a primary example of learning through active experimentation (Thayer, 1996, p. 73). SMs described visiting prisons, doing outreach, singing in hospitals, and meeting the needs of others as significant activities of spiritual and personal growth. In service to others, SMs focused on the needs of others as opposed to themselves. By engaging in service they connected their personal stories to such concepts as, compassion, grace, and patience which extended the learning process. One SM tells the story of lancing a boil in the middle of the night to ease the desperate suffering of a villager. Her experience enhances the meaning of service by connecting her experience to the concept of caring for those who are suffering. Ultimately, many young adults have the conviction that service to others is an important quality, but SMs experimented in service as a major part of their lifestyle, which affirmed their initial beliefs that it was integral.

The Completed Learning Cycle

Experiential learning at its most basic level is based on the assumption that “knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it” (David A. Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Table 5 captures some of the activities of the SM experience and connects the modes of Kolb’s Learning Cycle.
Table 5

*Activities of SM Experience That Support Different Aspects of the Learning Cycle*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete Experience</th>
<th>Reflective Observation</th>
<th>Abstract Conceptualization</th>
<th>Active Experimentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serving</td>
<td>Journaling</td>
<td>Prior information from mission stories</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>Prior multi-cultural training classes</td>
<td>Visiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting</td>
<td>Conversations with other SMs</td>
<td>Prior retreats, readings and discussions with other SMs</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praying</td>
<td>Debriefing with other SMs</td>
<td>Teacher preparation</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>Prayer groups</td>
<td>Future commitments to Service</td>
<td>Overcoming personal conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worshipping</td>
<td>Emails back home</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiating the best methods for sharing the gospel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The SM experience can be viewed from the different modes of Kolb's model conveying a holistic learning experience. SMs enter in a year of service where these activities are constant parts of their life, but unless the parts are processed through reflection and experimentation, effective learning is unlikely to occur. Kolb (1984) maintains, “The simple perception of experience is not sufficient for learning; something must be done with it” (p. 42). However, “when both the concrete and abstract modes are used in an experience, and when the learner reflects and acts on that experience, the potential to completely engage in the learning process is expanded” (David A. Kolb,
1984). Thayer (1996) develops this point in her connection to the biblical idea of knowledge which includes both “hearing” and “doing.”

**Summary**

In summary, the literature agrees that service is an exercise where personal and spiritual growth can occur. Short-term mission trips and service learning programs support the idea that participating in service can be a life-changing experience. The data of this research showed three clusters of themes that describe how SMs were transformed by a year of service.

The first cluster of themes described the specific ways in which SMs experienced spiritual transformation. SMs emphasized: a deeper relationship with God, a complete dependence on God, an expanded worldview, a greater insight into the needs of others through service, and a maturing as leaders as a result of their SM experience.

The second cluster of themes described the holistic impact the SM experience had on them. SMs reported that the experience, as a whole, made an impact on their life. SMs used superlatives to capture the way they perceived that their year in service impacted them. From their perspective, the SM experience was beyond comparison to any other experience, claiming it to be the best, greatest, or most influential event of their life.

The third cluster of themes related to the way the SM experience connected to and could be explained by modes of Kolb’s Experiential Model. Ultimately, the SM experience was a life-changing year, personally and spiritually. Moreover, the efficacy of experiential learning emerged as a viable method for transformation.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: ELEMENTS OF THE SM EXPERIENCE THAT ARE TRANSFORMATIONAL

Introduction

The second research question in this study has to do with what makes the year of service transformational. SMs report significant change occurred during their year of service, which enhanced their faith experience as well as their own personal growth. What about the SM experience has the power to change students in a positive way? This chapter describes four aspects of the SM experience that make it life-changing. While the SM experience varied significantly, the themes reported in this chapter grow out of repeated statements and experiences that seem to encapsulate the aspects of the SM experience that make it transformational. Four major themes that emerged from this study are:

1. SMs grew through the challenge of extraordinary expectations.
2. SMs experienced change by persevering through adversity.
3. SMs developed by working in collaboration with others.
4. SMs experienced transformation by the practice of the spiritual disciplines.

To create a context for the findings, I first discuss the literature on faith development.
Faith Development and College Students

A survey of faith development as it relates to college students provides a theoretical context to better understand the SM experience. Since the participants in this study are college students, it is imperative to know what relevant theorists believe to be the important issues facing young adults.

Wilson (2000) refers to a story in the Gospel of John where a man is questioned, "How then were your eyes opened?" (p. 26). Such inquiry is similar to the reality that there are points in human experience where one's eyes are opened, where people mature, understand, and respond to the world around them differently because of an eye-opening experience. As people move from one stage of development to another their perceptions change about themselves, the world, and God. The SM experience is lived in the context of a time of great emotional and spiritual upheaval combined with tremendous opportunities. In order to grasp the significance of the SM experience it is essential to discuss the salient aspects of young adult development with the focus on discovering "how might their eyes have been opened?"

While there are many theorists who have contributed to the body of literature in faith development, I chose to focus on four particular scholars because their portrayal of young adult development has the greatest potential to help us understand the SM experience. James Fowler's structural approach to development addresses identifiable stages where a contextual skeleton of human development is conveyed. Sharon Parks emphasizes a transition period in Fowler's model that pertains directly to college students and develops the need for meaning-making during this stage. John Westerhoff's insights into the young adult portray the search for causes worthy of their energy. Finally, Bailey
Gillespie provides a practical expression of faith development from a perspective of someone who is familiar not only with college students, but student missionaries. The following sections survey their contribution to faith development and to an understanding of the SM experience.

James Fowler

James Fowler is foremost in the field of faith development. Fowler's work on the stages of faith development provides a basic structural context to better understand college student development. Fowler's theory of faith development is important in this study for two reasons:

1. Fowler understands faith development from the perspective of developmental theory which focuses on the process of development. Given that the participants in this study represent a similar phase in their development (the college years), the structural skeleton of Fowler's work is helpful, if not essential, in describing the way they change and grow.

2. Fowler perceives faith to be a unity of knowing, doing, and feeling; a qualitative trust that is basic to all human behavior; the core of the personality (Fowler, 1981, p. 86). Fowler's definition of faith is viewed as an active, dynamic process of relating to others and the world around us.

Fowler maintains that there are six major stages in the faith development of humans. The first stage is a time of Intuitive-Projective Faith where children are organizing what they experience into new categories using the development of their speech and other forms of communication (p. 123). During this stage "the child's
understanding of how things work and what they mean is dominated by relatively inexperienced perceptions and by the feelings these perceptions arouse” (p. 123).

The second stage is termed *Mythical-Literal Faith.* Fowler observes this stage as a time in which “the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community” (p. 149). While the thinking in this stage is concrete and linear, young people perceive the world through a narrative lens and formulate concepts and meanings through the venue of a story. The great clash emerges when their literal world is encroached upon by the emergence of abstract thoughts and the stories that have encapsulated meaning for them reveal contradictions, which need to be dealt with.

The third stage is the time of *Synthetic-Conventional Faith.* During this stage the world of adolescents expands well beyond the parameters of family. This is a time to try and make sense out of the information that bombards young people. Fowler states that at this stage, “faith must synthesize values and information; it must provide a basis for identity and outlook” (p. 172). At this point, adolescents may not be aware of the way they cluster general categories of values and beliefs, but what they are ultimately doing is forming the rudimentary features of their identity, which will continue to be more clearly defined in the coming stages.

The fourth stage of faith is the *Individuative-Reflective Faith.* As adolescents become young adults, their beliefs, values, and their sense of identity become more refined to the point where they must commit actively to their faith. Fowler describes a short list of unavoidable tensions:

Individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership; subjectivity and the power of one’s strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity
and the requirement of critical reflection; self-fulfillment or self-actualizations as a primary concern versus service to and being for others; the question of being committed to the relative versus struggle with the possibility of an absolute. (p. 182)

The complexity of this stage is amplified by the skills that young adults have to view themselves and the world around them. As seen in the SM experience, young adults can perceive God as being very personal as well as the embodiment of truths they have come to embrace.

The fifth stage is the period of Conjunctive Faith. During this stage the individual begins to recognize how the unrecognized aspects of their past have shaped who they have become today. Fowler notes that during this stage “there must be an opening to the voices of one’s ‘deeper self’” (p. 198). As a result of a deeper understanding of the self, those in this stage are poised for a new integration of beliefs and actions. Fowler puts it this way: “Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience” (p. 198).

The sixth stage, Universalizing Faith, is a stage that Fowler claims is rarely seen. Fowler describes people in this way:

The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. (p. 200)

Essentially, these are the people recognized by others as being liberators, martyrs, and renown agents of remarkable change in the world. Ultimately, Fowler’s structural model of faith development culminates in a person who is, as Fowler deems, the “fully functioning human being” (p. 201).
Anderson (2002) notes that “Fowler’s conclusions most likely places the majority of traditional college students in stages two and three during their college years” (p. 77). This period is characterized by Fowler as a time where “a variety of experiences make it necessary for persons to objectify, examine, and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith” (Fowler, 1984, p. 62). Fowler continues to note that one of the important tasks for young adults in this stage is a “critical choosing of one’s beliefs, values and commitments, which come to be taken as a systemic unity” (p. 62).

The task for young adults in this stage is to “act from a new quality of self authorization” (p. 62). This is reference to “the emergence of the ‘executive ego,’ where young adults operate from the reference point of their own identity” (p. 62). Young adults in this stage move from the unexamined beliefs and commitments, to a sense of conviction and ownership of their beliefs and actions.

Fowler’s description of the stage of Individuative-Reflective Faith can be observed in the SM experience when students describe their deepened relationship to God and in their expanded worldview. While college students are going to find a way to own their beliefs whether they serve as a student missionary or not, it appears that a year of service enhances the opportunities for what Fowler calls “the emergence of an executive ego” in the life of a young adult (p. 62). Fowler’s perspective creates a theoretical backdrop that marks the process of growth from one stage to another and identifies the need for college students to possess a mature faith by their own choosing.

Sharon Parks

Sharon Parks has become one of the leading scholars in the area of faith development of young adults. She artfully and cogently connects the world of

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developmental psychology with theology and asserts the challenge that “today’s young adults must make meaning in the midst of an intensifying personal and global complexity and awareness of an expanding universe” (Parks, 1986, p. xvii). Parks perceives the journey for mature faith to be a return to the place where learning and faith and the life are integrated in an endeavor called “meaning-making.”

Meaning-making is “the activity of seeking pattern, order, form, and significance” (p. 14). This view of faith, much like Fowler, is broad in its scope—looking at the human struggle for meaning that is beyond the conventional religious definitions of faith. Parks asserts a more comprehensive view of faith, which embodies the collegiate quest to challenge, test, and discover what they believe for themselves.

Maturity, or the movement from adolescence to adulthood, has become harder to discern in today’s culture. Parks maintains that there is a “growing awareness that the process of human growth and maturity is not tied closely either to chronological age or to biological maturation” (p. 6). What finally marks the threshold of maturity for Parks is the achievement of identity (p. 75). As young adults negotiate through the tumultuous season from adolescence to adulthood, a self-awareness emerges. The tumultuous season on the way to maturity is a key feature of faith development that Parks adds to developmental theory.

“Fowler’s theory of faith development has described a movement from “Synthetic-Conventional” faith (stage 3) to “Individuative-Reflective” faith (stage 4) and the place in between as “transitional” (Parks, 1986, p. 73). Sharon Parks adds a stage within Fowler’s stages (3-4) and describes the time in which students move from stage three to stage four as a period of “probing commitment” and a “fragile self dependence”
One of the concepts Parks contributes to this study is how young adults need to connect their faith to action. Parks explains, "This means that because faith must be embodied, religious people must reveal the power of their story and vision in the forms of their common everyday life" (p. 204). Clearly this desire imbues SMs who long to have a “practical experience” that is “tangible” and “real” and part of “everyday life.” When Parks targets this pivotal period “in between” she seems to be describing many of the students in this study. Their struggle for meaning is evident in their reasons for going, in their discoveries about themselves and the world around them, and in their sense of purpose.

John Westerhoff

John Westerhoff developed a model that describes the process of development through four styles of faith. The first style is Experienced Faith. Experienced Faith occurs during the preschool and early childhood years where children act and react in response to those around them. Westerhoff observes, “The child explores and tests, imagines and creates, observes and copies, experiences and reacts” (Westerhoff, 1976, p. 91). This continued interplay between actions and reactions influences the child and everyone around. Westerhoff maintains that “their acts provide a mirror and a test for those [with] whom they interact” (p. 91).

The second style of faith is Affiliated Faith. Westerhoff (1976) asserts that “during this period persons seek to act with others in an accepting community with a clear sense of identity” (p. 94). This style emerges from the childhood years through the early adolescent years where they are exposed to a larger community for which they develop a sense of belonging. Another aspect of this stage is the need to foster the
affections of the Christian life. Young people need to feel their faith and have
experiences that emphasize “awe, wonder, and mystery, as well as chances to sing, dance,
paint and act” (p. 95). Young people in this stage also develop a sense of authority
during this period. What Westerhoff means by authority is “a community’s affirmation of
a story and a way of life that judges and inspires its actions” (p. 95). "Ultimately, as
young people develop in this stage, learning the community’s story is essential” (p. 95).

The third style referred to is Searching Faith. In the late adolescent years, one of
the characteristics of young adult development is a time where they enter into and
experience the “action of doubt and critical judgment” (Westerhoff, 1976, p. 96).
Sometimes this is a painful experience and sometimes a joyful one, but the journey of
Searching Faith requires young people to evaluate the world around them, especially the
community they are a part of. Another characteristic of this stage is experimentation.
Westerhoff states, “Searching Faith requires that we explore alternatives to our earlier
understandings and ways, for people need to test their own tradition by learning about
others. It is only then that they are able to reach convictions which are truly their own”
(p. 97). A third characteristic of this stage is the way young adults need to commit their
lives to persons and causes. Young adults during this time can “appear fickle, giving
their lives to one ideology after another, sometimes in rapid succession and on occasion
in contradiction” (p. 97). Consequently, during this stage, faith communities need to
affirm and patiently embrace young adults in their struggle through this process.

The fourth stage for Westerhoff is when individuals experience what is described
as Owned Faith. As a result of wrestling with the issues that characterized Searching
Faith, individuals emerge with a new determination to put their beliefs into action.
Westerhoff states that "this movement from experienced and affiliative faith through searching faith to owned faith is what historically has been called conversion" (Westerhoff, 1976, p. 98). Whether the process of conversion is sensational or subtle, the change in thinking results in a new direction for their behavior.

The styles of faith are equated to the analogy of rings on tree. As a tree grows from year to year it leaves a ring, marking a season of growth. There are several elements to this analogy that Westerhoff explains. "First, a tree with one ring is as much a tree as a tree with four rings" (Westerhoff, 1976, p. 90). Each style of faith cannot be perceived as better or more complete than another; each person in the community fulfills his or her faith potential. The second element of this analogy is that "a tree grows if the proper environment is provided, and if such an environment is lacking, the tree become arrested in its expansion until the proper environment exists" (p. 90). This suggests that expansion is not a function of age but of the types of experiences obtained in that season. A third element in this analogy is that "a tree acquires one ring at a time in a slow gradual manner" (p. 90). The fact that one may not see the transformation taking place but will see the evidence of a ring as a result of growth over time is important. The fourth element has to do with the way a tree does not eliminate its ring in each season of growth. Each ring is represented in the tree in the same way the seasons of human growth are not absorbed by new growth. Westerhoff explains, "As we expand in faith we do not leave one style of faith behind to acquire a new style but, on the contrary, each new style is added to the previous ones" (pp. 90-91).
Bailey Gillespie

Gillespie describes the process of faith development by organizing the journey with seven faith situations. While Gillespie does not claim to model a “formal stage theory” he characterizes the faith situations in a way that churches can shape the way they enriched the religious experience of people. The first situation is borrowed faith. This season of life typically comprises the early years of childhood where parents are the reference point of faith for children. The faith experience of the child is largely dependent on what parents and other significant persons lend to the child.

The second faith situation Gillespie describes as reflected faith. This is a time when children begin to sense that they are individuals and belong to different communities of faith. Family, church, and school mirror faith for children by teaching and involving them in the community of believers.

Personalized faith is the third faith situation where Gillespie (1988) describes the era of early adolescence. As children develop into teens they are observed as “searching, questioning, committing, and examining” their life with the tools of reason that are emerging (p. 80). According to Gillespie, during this period, “faith here begins to become a verb” (p. 80). Early adolescence is a time where identity formation begins with the onset of abstract thinking.

The fourth faith situation is established faith, which describes the general period of later youth. During this part of life, young people have developed their abstract thinking to the point where they settle into their own convictions with confidence. Established faith is a season focused on knowing what one believes. It is a time where youth can articulate their faith in their own personal way.
Gillespie describes the fifth situation as a time of reordered faith where they reinterpret their established faith. As the onset of careers, marriage, and family, and their role in the world presents difficult decisions, young adults must now restructure their faith experience to be relevant to the new issues that face them. Young adults are faced with the task of determining what is meaningful and how meaningful their beliefs are.

The sixth faith situation is reflective faith. During the time of middle adulthood a person “reduces life to the basics: God and future, integrity, and hopefulness due to the press of time” (p. 82). As adults reflect on the big picture, they simplify in order to savor what matters most in their life.

The seventh faith situation Gillespie concludes with a resolute faith—a season where faith which is confidently known reaches beyond the here and now toward a future hope. Throughout life’s journey many events and experiences stirred questions and reactions, but adults in this stage can make sense out of the past and peacefully trust in God’s plan for the future.

Because Gillespie does not try to calculate a specific age for the situations he describes, it is assumed that the college students in this study would represent the latter part of established faith and more so the season of reordered faith. As other theorists have referred to the “testing” period, Gillespie agrees and echoes similar themes for the young adult. “If the theory won’t fly, if the philosophy won’t work, it may not be true” (Gillespie, 1988, p. 177) is the unspoken mantra of young adults as observed by Gillespie. There is in this stage of life a deliberate focus on practical action that authenticates what is worthwhile and meaningful.
Summary

In summary, the selected theorists in faith development portray similar issues that pervade the season of young adulthood. It is a time of reality testing where young adults try out their faith to see if it actually works. In an attempt to connect the idealism to reality service, John C. Dalton cites the work of Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996), reporting that “caring for others helps them recognize and experience the connection between intellectual and moral beliefs and the reality of acting on those values in a real life moral situation” (Dalton, 2001, p. 22). Roger Dudley summarized it well when he observed that “all of these scenarios have in common that religious or moral maturity proceeds from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the general, from self-centeredness to concern for others, from a narrow to a broad point of view” (Dudley, 1999, p.7).

Against the backdrop of what scholars say is true about the young adult disposition, the SM experience provides ample data that resonates vividly with the field of faith development. SMs testify of the “content” of their new knowledge. SMs reflect on coming to know who they are and what they hope for their future. They convey both an idealistic confidence in their abilities as well as firsthand experiences with humility.

Finding #1: The Challenge of Extraordinary Expectations

The power of high expectations is evidenced in both the nature of the SM job descriptions and in the serendipitous experiences of service. In spite of their own apparent insufficiency they found they could be and do more than they had previously expected.
Expectations Inherent in Their Job Description

SMs are by mere appointment launched into the service workforce as teachers, pastors, and various other leadership roles. Their positions of leadership are not earned but granted. In America, one must complete a college degree and demonstrate competency or obtain certain skills in order to be considered “ready.” Students in their second or third year of college are appointed to teach in classrooms with very little training and are expected to “be a teacher.” Expectations vault SMs into the professional world where the only choice they have is to function like a teacher. Simply by their job description SMs are expected to give Bible studies and organize evangelistic events. They are called upon to assist medical procedures and maintain order and discipline in dormitories. The range of responsibilities varies but the common element in all of their roles is that they are called upon to do things they may never have done before.

The reality is that SMs are expected to produce good results. It is unacceptable that children would not learn to read or write or a church would close or a medical clinic fail to meet the needs of those who were sick. The dormitories where SMs function as deans are expected to function safely and with all the discipline, order and positive atmosphere as an institution run by graduated professionals. No SM is told, “It’s okay if you can’t function successfully, this is a learning experience for you.” Schools are dependent on students doing the work of teachers and deans with competence and skill.

SMs state that they achieved results obtained skills, and had experiences beyond what they anticipated. The act of putting them in a different environment enabled students to discover talents that they did not think they had. This ability to do things they could never imagine doing back home was attributed to God’s support in their life, the
idea that they learned and did more than they thought they were capable of. This experience developed a new conviction that being a missionary is about being willing to do what God wants them to do and God will enable them with the ability. When it came to handling pressure, one SM responded, “I had no idea that I was anywhere decent at that.” This discovery often presented itself early in their year of service as this student explains:

I had hell moments: ok you have now been there for two weeks, your pastor leaves on you and says you’re taking Sabbath school, and you’re like “great” I don’t even know anybody’s names and he’s like yeah and I’m going to be gone for three weeks so you’re taking Sabbath school all on your own for the next three weeks and you’ve only been here for two weeks. I’ve never taught Sabbath school in my life before.

As a result of such expectations, students responded by summoning the resources and the will to follow through to do their job well. This experience has often been described by SMs as a time of being pushed or stretched.

Expectations Pushed and Stretched SMs

As SMs tried to describe the way challenges affected their experience they made reference to being stretched and pushed to their limits. Their year of service yielded opportunities that pushed them out of their comfort zone. They were forced to find ways to succeed. SMs reported that their limits were much farther, stronger, and deeper than they would have expected. One SM connected this development to the analogy of a rubber band. A rubber band may have tears in it, but you do not notice any of the real qualities or the inadequacies of the rubber band until it is stretched out and pulled to its limit. As their strengths and weaknesses were exposed, SMs were able to react or respond to their challenges.
SMs admit having no experience in teaching yet the year serving as teachers enabled them to see how far they could push themselves. While students did not necessarily want to be pushed in a particular way, they found that by God’s help they were able to do more than they thought they could. Massaro (1996) characterizes this dynamic as one of the primary advantages of short-term mission service:

Let’s face it: when we take people out of their comfort zones and place them in settings where they have to depend on God and others for daily living, how can they not be benefactors: They experience God’s grace in new and fresh ways. (p. 151)

Some students claimed they learned they could be leaders when pushed in that direction. One SM reflected:

It is interesting to find out what you are capable of, too, because here my friends are all leaders and I tend to be the follower. There, my roommate was a little less assertive than I was, and then suddenly I was in charge of everything. I had to instigate everything that went on with the community and us. It was interesting to see how my personality was able to change to accommodate that.

Learning more about their own spiritual strength, SMs discovered a greater capacity to love. It is the belief of some SMs that in the mission field they are pushed to do more, while at home it is too easy to go through the motions of church life. Even in their relationships with other people SMs were surprised by the way they had to practice patience in dealing with others. After reflecting on their experience one SM captured the role that high expectations played in their life saying:

When you are involved, when you are giving to His cause, when you are making this investment and being held accountable, when you have hundreds of kids looking up to you every day or people your own age . . ., I found that really intimidating. You have to dig deeper in your relationship with Christ.
Expectations Caused SMs to Overcome Their Timidity

In some cases students needed to be pushed to overcome their own shyness and fear. It became clear to some that they did not have to be an extrovert to have an impact on others. Even though they were scared, they were able to do things by stepping out in faith that they would never have thought possible. One SM stated:

I tend to be very shy and I don’t like to be the center of attention. I don’t like to be up front. I am kind of like a behind-the-scenes type of person. I had to be up front constantly. We had mission weeks and for every day we would have a play. I always had to do the lead part in the play. I spent time praying “Dear Lord you know I don’t want to do this...” He wanted to say that even though you are nervous and don’t want to do it, people are going to get a blessing from this.... The most important thing I learned about myself is, even if I feel incapable, God is capable and He can use me.

There were times when SMs were called upon to pull together a program, preach a sermon, or organize a church service. Some students were surprised by the way they could “interact with more people than they thought they could” stating, “I could be more social and extraverted than I expected.” Learning to work with people and become more assertive were experiences that SMs perceived to occur during their year of service. Amid differing personalities, students learned to be more independent and adventuresome and as a result grew to become “more sure of themselves” as a result of their SM experience. What SMs learned by stepping up to the challenge was that they could develop competency in areas that they had not anticipated.

Expectations Impacted SMs’ Competency

Clearly there was a “can do” spirit in some that caused them to reject the tendency to underestimate themselves. Their year of service evoked a range of abilities from “interacting with people who don’t have the same ideas or values” to building and fixing things that “just needed to be done.” One SM captured the whole power of expecting....
more by saying, “You’re put in an adult role and you just see how you respond to it—if you step up to it or not.” Stepping up to the challenge builds a sense of confidence in SMs because they were expected to do it. Somehow they found ways to meet the expectations of their job. A student who had been 10 years removed from service recounted:

First, it gave me much more self-confidence, realizing that I was totally responsible for 8 children’s learning and safety during the day. I was trusted and counted on and people believed in me. Second, I learned that I could make decisions. Third, I learned to be resourceful in solving problems. Fourth, I learned to ask for help. Fifth, I learned that I could be a leader if need be and that it wasn’t so scary to be involved.

Even a student who admitted being lazy and a procrastinator stated:

I found out when I am doing the work for my students that I could get stuff done. That I could be there on time and I could work a lot longer than when I was studying and doing it for myself. It made it a lot easier knowing that someone was depending on me to get somewhere.

This study showed that in the same way that students were made aware of their weaknesses through service, they also became aware of their gifts and abilities through service. If one of the reasons students served for a year was to clarify their career path, then the experience also exposed what talents and gifts could be employed. Students perceived growth in the way they developed the ability to “build a door or a sink from scratch” or simply be able to “do anything in a pinch.” “I learned that I can do a lot of things that I didn’t think I could normally do,” reports one SM. These handyman qualities might have existed in them before becoming SMs but they seemed surprised by their abilities saying, “I didn’t think I could do it until I was the only one to do it and it needed to be done.” Another student confessed, “I learned what I had in myself doing jobs that I never thought I would be capable of.”
Students perceived their personal abilities were challenged and were pleasantly surprised by the growth they incurred. From their perspective, the SM experience helped them discover “how far they could push themselves.” When SMs refer to being “a survivor” or being “tougher” than they thought they were, it portrays a healthy response to traumatic events or challenging scenarios. SMs perceive themselves to be able to overcome. An SM stated, “I always wondered how tough I was or how independent I was or how well I could do on my own, and I think I did pretty well.” Others cited specific areas such as “having more patience than I thought” or the discovery that “pressure management was my strongest point—I had no idea I was good at that.”

SMs described a certain toughness mixed with a sense of confidence that they could do more than they imagined. Whether it was through handling conflict with surprising wisdom or being the only one available to organize a funeral for a family that needed guidance the SM experience challenged young adults to function in roles beyond their perceived abilities. In the absence of a way out or other people to defer to, SMs engaged all their energies to succeed. Sometimes the awareness of their lack of personal resources drove them to their knees to seek help from God to fulfill their duties. Ultimately they found that God is able to do “all things” through them when their strength and ability seemed inadequate. Students became aware of their teaching and ministry gifts and more confident in their leadership potential. Introverts found themselves amazed at how they could be extroverted if needed. Some students were surprised by their resourcefulness and encouraged by their ability to endure difficult situations.
As SMs discovered they could function competently, some changed their mind about the concept of leadership which shaped the way they perceived themselves as leaders. One student discovered that she “could impact other people’s lives without being an extremely outgoing person.” Another reported, “I learned I could be a leader,” which may have grown out of a discovery of some hidden qualities or a shift in the way they perceived the role of a leader. Some report confidently that “everyone has a way of doing mission service” and skills such as, “being trustworthy,” “making decisions,” “being resourceful” and knowing how to “ask for help” are core elements to leadership as it appeared in the mission field. Even students who did not perceive themselves to be leaders still functioned in the role in their year of service either by default or changing scenarios in their workplace.

In summary, one of the aspects that caused significant change in SMs was that experiences pressed them to call upon resources that they may not have been aware of. Whether it be through new skills developed in their struggle to solve problems or simply new-found perceptions about the way they can contribute as leaders, the expectations prompted them to grow. Taking a cue to “play with metaphors” from Bogdan and Bilken (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 163), I liken the issue of expectations to the functional difference between a thermometer and a thermostat. A thermometer simply registers the temperature of its own environment but a thermostat sets the standard for the desired temperature, then employs every resource available to make the desired temperature a reality. Only in rare cases did SMs function like thermometers where they acquiesced to their environment. In most of the stories in this dissertation students functioned like
thermostats. They were expected to be and do things that might have been beyond the immediate range of their perceived abilities.

The idea that expectations can affect the way students respond is a part of educational discussions today. Bruce Wilkinson (1992) describes this as the law of expectation. One of the components of effective teaching transpires when teachers have high expectations of students (Burke, 2002; Madden, 1997; Williams, 2003). Prior knowledge of learning disabilities significantly affected the way teachers approached their students in that their attempts to teach were more limited because of their perceptions. The desired outcome was to enable teachers to be aware of the power of their prior knowledge and enhance their ability to have more confidence in the students who might be classified as difficult learners (Stevens, 1998). Another study showed that when students perceived their professors in college as “demanding” they were more motivated to learn (Mullen, 2003). Clearly, the idea that raising the bar higher motivates people to try harder than they might have with meager expectations is evident in the SM experience.

Finding #2: Growth Through Adversity

Another theme of the SM experience is how students grew through adversity during their year of service. Jerry Bridges (2004) writes, “A major part of spiritual growth is learning to trust God in such times of adversity” (p. 141). Of the 114 SMs who were interviewed, 65 reported enduring trials and challenges that they felt shaped their experience. This finding is organized in three sections: (a) metaphors used to symbolize their year of service; (b) the adversity theme in other sections of the interviews, and (c) a
brief connection to the biblical knowledge on the role of adversity in fostering spiritual growth.

The Portrayal of Adversity in Metaphors

Metaphors are a powerful way to capture the essence of personal experience. As a precursor to the student missionary metaphors, a brief explanation of the purpose of metaphorical inquiry is included in this section. Joyce, Weil, and Showers (1992) assert that the purpose of a metaphor is to establish a relationship of likeness, the comparison of one object or idea with another object or idea by using one in place of the other. Through these substitutions the creative process occurs, connecting the familiar with the unfamiliar or creating a new idea from familiar ideas. (p. 220)

The exercise of using metaphors for SMs was chosen because of the way metaphoric activity “draws from the students' knowledge, helping them connect ideas from familiar content to those from new content, or view familiar content from a new perspective” (pp. 220-221). Metaphors have the capacity to capture embedded qualities of an experience that might be beyond the effectiveness of a simple open-ended question. John Simpson examined how individuals use metaphors to describe overcoming personal crisis and experience personal transformation through the process. Metaphors can be a powerful medium of communication. These metaphors not only enabled the participants to better understand the world around them but became tools to intuitively guide them in the future (Simpson, 1991).

This question was asked of all respondents: “If you were to characterize your SM experience with a metaphor/symbol, like a car, animal or a type of weather, what symbol would you use to describe your experience?” Originally, the question asked, “What metaphor or symbol would you use to characterize your SM experience with?” This was

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met with blank stares and such questions as, “What do you mean?” I would have to explain using an example or two (plant and/or animal). After hearing an example, the interviewees were able to proceed with their own example. This preliminary testing revealed that some students are unfamiliar with the exercise of creating metaphors. Typically, the researcher might eliminate the question after this kind of response, but once the participants understood the concept, they were able to respond. During the interviews it seemed helpful to many to prompt the concept of metaphorical thinking by saying, “Like a car, animal or a type of weather.” Sixty-five out of 114 responded with a metaphor that portrayed adverse situations in it.

**Weather Metaphors**

Weather proved to be an appropriate way to symbolize the SM experience due to the changing nature of both. The drama of trials and personal conflict, mixed with cultural problems, caused SMs to describe their year with raw honesty, exposing the hard realities of being away from the security of home. The balance of easy and hard times was reflected as SMs spoke of sunny and warm times as well as rain. Cloudy days turned to rain but eventually the sun pierced through, denoting both the bad times countering the positive. The contrast between rain and sunshine portrays both the peaceful elements of service as well as the painful ones. To some, the SM year was like spring: a time with sunshiny new beginnings mixed with bad weather days. This fostered spiritual revival in their lives. While the balance of good and bad is reflected in their metaphors, the uncertainty of trials and problems emerged as well. One student compared rapid change to California weather, stating:
You don’t know what it is going to hit you with. There are good times, there are bad times, it could just switch like that. One day last year, it snowed, rained and the sun came out all in one hour. That can happen as a Student Missionary.

As SMs related their experience to weather, most of them chose more violent climate descriptions to characterize their year of service. It is important to note that these descriptions do not necessarily depict a negative experience but an honest look at a life of service with all of its problems in view. The storms they spoke of were spectacular but scary because, much like the unexpectedness of a thunderstorm, you never know when lightening or thunder will strike. The days would begin with promise as they woke up refreshed from the night but then monsoon-like problems pounded them regularly. Politics and personal issues put them on edge, at times creating a stormy tension. Some describe the intensity of the problems increasing and just when they thought it would subside, more trauma would hit them, much like a storm. Sometimes the adversity was so severe they did not think they would “survive” but found later that no matter how challenging their work became, there was always a reprieve and the bad situations turned out well in the end.

One of the most striking metaphors used by an SM stated:

Typhoon. I came back from the experience a lot more uncertain about life. When I left, I knew what was going on with life. When I came back I had a lot of disillusion, a lot of uncertainties, but I wasn’t scared.

Some students reported the brutal intensity of their year without the peaceful, positive pictures of good weather. For some, hurricane-like experiences pummeled them and their only hope was to “find the eye of the storm and let God guide you the way He wanted to.” Another SM admitted that while no situation ever ended in disaster, the experience was necessary for them to grow. Others spoke of painful trials fostering hope
and growth during their time of service. The rough times, as illustrated through the metaphor of turbulence, challenged students to question and re-evaluate their own belief system.

Another SM used the symbol of a cloud, which is “sometimes beautiful, sometimes threatening, often functional... even though it dumps loads of rain, which can be uncomfortable, and inconvenient, it nurtures living things and helps them grow stronger.” Even when one SM shared how one of her students had died, they emerged from the sadness saying, “I went through some cold, dreary, and even stormy days, but I could always count on a refreshing shower of God’s Holy Spirit and the warm rays of His love to chase away the darkness of discouragement.”

In a way, the SM experience brought adversity much like the wind, as one student reports, “It was a time in my life that was like a windy season. It comes with much change, yet refreshing! Soon it’s gone, leaving behind changes in the landscape of my life. The scenery is different—the scenery is better!”

Growing through adversity developed a maturity that did not cause them to avoid or ignore hard times, but rather face them with confidence. While the violent storm metaphors described the problems they faced, most of the “bad weather” examples finished with positive peaceful endings marking joy and growth. One SM mused:

It was like a big rainstorm with a beautiful rainbow afterwards. There were so many hard times that I thought I wouldn’t make it through the year. There were so many ups and downs and I shed a lot of tears, but as I look back I see that all of the challenges left a beautiful rainbow of memories in my life. I grew as a person and definitely grew closer to God, and that made it all worth it in the end.
Some unique weather metaphors told slightly different stories about their year of service. One SM likened his year of service to a San Joaquin valley fog that burns off in the afternoon:

My first half of the year there I was totally blind. I didn’t know what I was doing. They gave me no direction. I was finding my way through a culture that appeared the same; spoke English, but was totally, totally different. So, for the first six months you’re figuring them out. And then, while I was gone for Christmas break, I figured everything out, and I went back and you just knew what you needed to do and you just got down to business.

Another student used the metaphor of a heavy, long winter snow:

Everything I knew before was covered and swallowed up in this whole new experience. Like trying to walk around in the snow, walking was something we normally do, only with this different environment and it was harder. We were dealing with things that we never had to deal with before. And we felt like it was never going to be over. We didn’t see along the way the new things that we had learned, the good things that were happening. It was just kind of monotonous. But then the snow melts, the grass starts getting greener, flowers start coming out, and it wouldn’t have happened if the snow hadn’t come.

Car Metaphors

While the weather metaphors seemed to graphically capture the adversity factor of the SM experience, other symbols also contained elements of significant trials as well. The symbol of a 1976 Toyota Corolla characterized the year of service. One student stated, “It wasn’t pretty, but it kept going.” Explaining further the meaning behind the metaphor the student said, “I knew the car was going to start when I got in. I knew when it rained that the seats were going to get wet, but I knew the car would still start.” Such were the tendencies in the car metaphors. There was a curiosity of whether the car would break down or make it through the rough terrain. One student spoke of how even though the car would break down, it could always be fixed and hence learned “that with God’s help you can overcome any personal challenges that you may come across.” It seems that
those who chose cars tended to emphasize the adversity as in the case of one SM who experienced the unimaginable by being evacuated due to the war in Rwanda. Her SM experience was like

a lemon-Mercedes; beautiful to look at—runs great, until a day after the warranty expires—and then you lose everything. The war turned my perfect experience into a nightmare. I left behind all my possessions and an innocent belief in God.

While experiences like this are not common, it should be noted that SMs were not protected from adversity during their year of service.

**Plant Metaphors**

Some of the SMs focused on the growth that occurred during the year by using a type of plant to symbolize their year of service. Students thought of themselves as seeds in the ground, dormant for a while, until finally the evidence of growth was discovered. Students captured the need to be flexible in adversity by describing their year as a coconut tree in the wind: “Sometimes you think it is going to fall over, but they pop back up.” Even though the vegetation metaphors tend to emphasize growth, it does so in the context of trouble. One SM symbolized their year of service with a pomegranate fruit “that has a whole lot of little tiny things that are sour little seeds and just everyone has a bit of sour, but it is so good. It was wonderful but it was hard.”

**Roller Coaster Metaphors**

Another metaphor that emerged several times was the experience of being on a roller coaster ride. Again, this metaphor was not necessarily chosen because roller coasters are fun, but because of the ups and downs of the SM experience. Experiences both good and bad made the year both scary and worthwhile. Even though some thought,
as many do on roller coasters, that they were going to die, they would return again in spite of the adversity. One student reported how good days were like the roller coaster going up but the bad days were like the ride crashing down. This theme emerged with another SM who agreed with others in this study stating, “Some days you would just be like, you didn’t know how you made it through another day, and you were just ready to give up and go home. And the next day it could be the most wonderful day.”

Metaphors of Being Out at Sea

Somewhat related to the roller coaster metaphor was the experience of being out on the sea. Again, the ups and downs illustrate how the year of service can one day be “cool and refreshing” and another day “smash you into the rocks.” The way the ocean tides come and go challenged SMs to “stick it out and stay with it.” The notion that survival is all you can hope for does not portray the whole picture of SM life but it certainly captures the power of adversity to cause people to cling to God. One student claimed a deeper confidence in God’s power to sustain them through trials was like an anchor that holds through a storm.

Animal Metaphors

Another metaphor SMs used to describe their year of service was an animal. The growth from being in a cocoon to a butterfly encompasses the entire year for one SM. The role of adversity emerged in the symbol of a kangaroo, noting the growth that occurs as you travel through the ups and downs. One student reported their experience to be characterized by a puffer fish recalling how they kept their frustrations inside until they would just blow up. This tendency had to do with enduring trials in an isolated environment with no one to talk to about their problems. Another student related the
frustration of feeling alone when he did not fit into the new culture. In most cases, the adversity resulted in growth. In some cases, the adversity, coupled with isolation and lack of support, only added to their frustration.

Other Notable Metaphors

Only a few students likened their year of service to a hike or a climb. They mentioned the hard work of the steep climb and the inability to see their goal at times. Another student used a tunnel to convey his year of service:

A tunnel because when I first got there I was all excited at the beginning of the tunnel, but if you go through a really long tunnel for a long time and it gets really dark inside you don’t think you are ever going to get to the other end, but then when you finally get to the other end you realize that it has been really fun going all along and all of a sudden you realize that you have to leave and go back to where you came from and you don’t want to leave.

The darkness and the uncertainty mentioned mark points at which this student struggled, but those struggles also constitute a valuable process. These metaphors depict a year filled with a myriad of experiences, both easy and hard, good and bad. The impact that adverse experiences had on them generally deepened their confidence in God to sustain them as well as define and shape their growth as individuals. While the trials were painful, only 1 or 2 out of 114 said that they regretted the journey and claimed they would not do it again if they had the chance.

Adversity in Other Stories and Summary Statements

Beyond the metaphors used in the surveys, the theme of adversity came through various stories and summary statements respondents shared. Thinking of all the different things they went through in that year it became true for some that in spite of doing good, problems persist. SMs assert they had a lot of trials and personality conflicts with co-
workers or students. While many of these adverse events did not drive them into depression, the conflicts had a way of making them feel completely lost. One SM believed that what he learned from his adversity was how to be alone. The predominant conclusion of SMs in this study echoed the sentiments of one SM who asserts, “I accept trials better because I know that during them is when I’m closest to God and learn the most of Him.” Some might say that SMs grew spiritually in spite of the harsh realities they face, whereas the students in this study tend to attribute their growth to the fact that their experience included adversity.

Some of the shock of adversity may have to do with the expectations students have of their experience. In chapter 3 SMs conveyed some of their expectations in the reasons they chose to go. While they knew the experience would help them discover their career or provide a break for them to sort out their questions, not one of them chose to go to the mission field solely for the purpose of being tried.

Pat Gustin aptly characterizes the realities of cross-cultural ministry discussing the experience from four vantage points:

1. It will not be home. “Home is a place that is familiar, where we feel comfortable, accepted, understood, tolerated, loved, and supported. It’s where we belong. Instead, in a new place we initially feel like a stranger” (Cited in Baumgartner, 1999, p. 99).

2. It will not be a haven. Much to the dismay of many who go to run away from life or escape the responsibilities of school, the SM experience has many similar realities waiting for them. “The reality is that we will discover the same challenges in the mission field that we hoped to leave behind” (p. 100).
3. It is not heaven. One assumption that potential SMs might have is that going to serve for a year will automatically make them better people. Gustin states, “Flying over salt water (or driving to another country) won’t bring us closer to God. We won’t automatically want to get up at 4 a.m. to pray and read our Bibles.” In the same way that a relationship with God exists here in the states so it does overseas (p. 100).

4. It is not hell. The excitement will wear off and many will wonder why they are serving. While this may not feel enjoyable, Gustin reminds the future SMs that this experience is not hell by any means, but the hard reality of service (p. 100).

It is true that SMs endured various trials ranging from personal conflicts with co-workers to the trauma of genocide ravaging the villages and cities of Rwanda. Even though SMs found adversity to be a regular part of their lives, they learned to lean on the support that was available, namely God. Their dependence on God fostered a transformation where they seem to emerge as different people. The students did not seem to regret the trials of their experience; in fact, many attributed a deeper relationship with God to the way adversity drove them to God’s presence.

Biblical Background on the Role of Adversity in Spiritual Growth

The Bible refers to trials as a factor in fostering growth when the apostle James writes:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (Jas 1:2-5, NIV)

This theme appears again in the book of Romans where Paul writes:

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope
does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom 5:3-5, NIV)

Clearly the presence of adversity has a way of providing an opportunity for real transformation. The opportunity is, for the most part, unavoidable. In an interview, Joyce Rupp compared the role of suffering in the spiritual journey to the process of changing of seasons.

I began to see that suffering is a part of that life cycle, part of what I call the transformation cycle. Just as the earth goes through the autumn, the winter, and the springtime, so too we have to go through autumn, winter, spring before our summertime. ("The Art of Cultivating Spiritual Growth," 2000, p.26)

She challenges people to see adversity as a teacher which can transform the individual in unexpected ways.

Rick Ezell (2001) makes the observation about the nature of adversity, noting how the word is translated in the Chinese language: “Where the English language would use the single word crisis, the Chinese language uses not one but two characters to form the word. The first character means danger; the second means opportunity” (p. 9).

The ability to see difficulties as opportunities in the context of cross-cultural learning was one of the factors that enhanced the growth of graduate students in nursing (De Luca, 1996). The flexible nature of the learning environment enabled students to approach the difficult parts of their learning as an opportunity for growth and learning instead of potential failure. Fitch (1998) developed this theme by drawing from a rich heritage of devotional literature that supports the idea that spiritual growth occurs through suffering. Albeit, much of the growth has to do with the way people endure suffering, but learning to suffer well helped people mature in character, strength, and understanding. Gottlieb (2000) considered the life of King David as a venue to
understand the way he grew from consciously encountering the opposite tensions in his life. This study demonstrates a healthy, beloved king who exemplified a model of "struggle and growth" as opposed to a model that seeks perfection within.

Fowler captures the power of crisis as an important part of faith development, stating, "We do not make the transition from one stage to another without disruption, pain, confusion, and a sense of loss. All growth involves pain" (Fowler, as cited in Dykstra & Parks, 1986, p. 40). Beers (1999) affirms the value of adversity in his study of college students serving in a short-term mission experience noting, "These stressors are related to the building of critical relationships and the service to humanity. This tension which developed from various parts of the trip is important to the overall development of the student and the faith development process" (p. 126).

Sharon Parks (1986) portrayed the experience of change in young adults by borrowing the metaphors of a shipwreck, gladness, and amazement. Of the suggested events that might cause the "shipwreck" among them was the discovery that an intellectual construct is inadequate. "These experiences may suddenly rip apart our fabric of life, or they may more slowly but surely dissolve the memories that have served as the home of the soul" (p. 24). Parks develops the metaphor further by describing the shipwreck as something that is "survived," but when it happens, "when we do wash up on a new shore—there is gladness, the gladness of relief and restoration" (p. 24). Evidence of this transitional moment in young adult faith can be seen in the metaphors they used to characterize their experience.
Finding #3: Working in Collaboration With Others

This section contains the findings of the theme of collaboration outlined as follows: (a) SMs collaborate with each other for support; (b) SMs collaborate through reflection and debriefing; (c) SMs collaborate with supervisors; (d) SMs collaborate with community members; (e) SMs struggled when isolated; (f) SMs grew through interpersonal challenges; and (g) Summary of the transformational impact of collaboration.

SMs Collaborate for Support

When SMs convey their sources for support, the majority of them focus mainly on the way other SMs provided strength for them during their year of service. One SM stated keenly the contrast between fear and joy of the first few weeks of service where she began working alone but within a month another SM came and made a big difference:

I was terrified that I was going to have no one to talk to and I felt absolutely alone for about a week and then Jennifer came and I hardly even remember the “getting to know each other” stage because we were immediately best friends and she and I would talk hours a day. We would share our e-mails with each other and I learned about her family and she about mine.

Another SM recalled the trauma of being alone compared to having a comrade to work with, saying, “I had a roommate . . . for six months. She was awesome. We got along great and it was really hard when she left. Then my new roommate came and we also got along.”

As seen in the statements above, the need for interaction and friendship was felt keenly by SMs who experienced a separation from others for part of the year. Others also indicated an appreciation for collaboration. Even though some SMs were stationed
at a significant distance away, the need for connection with each other caused them to go
to great lengths to get together:

My first three months, basically, the only person I really had to share with was
one of the other student missionaries who was about an hour away. He would
come down, sometimes just once a week. Sometimes he would come twice a
week because he knew that I really needed it. He’d come down and spend the
night, and we’d have a day to talk or whatever.

How did being with other SMs create an infrastructure of strength for each other?
At a very basic level, the presence of other students who could identify with them
provided a sense of stability. Just being there with each other built a closeness that many
of them consider necessary to their survival. One SM described the common occurrence
of conversations late at night:

Just talking to my roommate at night . . . we would close our door at nine o’clock,
and we would be like, “ok, we’ll go to bed.” And then we’d be in bed with lights
out and talk about all the things that had happened.

If there were problems throughout the day the SMs who were stationed together
could return to their rooms and talk about their problems, knowing the others would be
there to listen and give support. Out of this stability a sense of closeness was woven into
the hearts and lives of SMs as they talked, worked, and stayed together. Working with
others was helpful for SMs not only because they could empathize and understand each
other’s problems, but also because they became unified to a common purpose. One SM
asserted:

Besides God there were other SMs that were out there with me and they were
great guys. I did a lot of traveling with them to the different missionaries’
families, and the different people that were trying to accomplish the same goals
that I was trying to accomplish. We had the connection of being foreigners in a
foreign country and trying to do this work for the Lord. It was great we all
supported each other.
SMs Collaborate for Debriefing

Not only did serving together with other SMs create a system for basic support, it also provided a forum for transferring thoughts and ideas about service and their daily experience. The notion of having someone available to talk with was perceived to be crucial to their ability to endure under stress. SMs valued having a partner to bounce ideas off and talk out the nuances of life as a volunteer. There were cultural differences, ethical conundrums, and personality issues that weighed heavily on students. The ability to convey these issues with someone who understood them and knew where they were coming from became a vital part of their experience. An example of the need of collaboration is demonstrated by one cluster of SMs who developed a small group to meet the needs of those who felt alone in their service:

And we ended up organizing a group that got together once a week and we’d have dinner and just talk—air all our problems out, because we could moan and complain to each other about how we were being treated. And it would kind of get us out and we could start again. And so that was good.

In such cases, SMs were able to re-engage in their work because of the interaction. SMs reported that interaction with other college students impacted the way they were able to carry out their jobs effectively as well as experience their own spiritual renewal in the process. This is reflected in the testimony of one SM:

And I think that was a big part of the success. We could have done it alone, but going together, I think, gave us more of an edge on ministry. It was kind of like the disciples. It worked really well to have two of us there, to encourage each other, to keep each other accountable, to study together, to pray together. It made, I think, a huge difference. We saw other people going alone, that people were expecting things of them that is really hard to do without someone who can encourage you, support you, and keep you accountable. They had a really hard time facing those things without someone there to do that.
In addition to being able to just talk about things, their own peers had a positive influence on each other as they observed others having a meaningful devotional life or simply by the way they treated the people they were serving. Their togetherness sparked spiritual renewal as they would pray through their problems and encourage each other on a regular basis.

SMs Collaborated With Supervisors

Student missionaries perceived that positive interaction with their supervisors significantly enabled them to grow and serve in their different scenarios. Teachers, deans, administrators, pastors, and principals were named as helpful, supportive people SMs could talk to for support. Students acknowledged that they felt blessed to have many people around whom they could turn to for help with a problem. Responding to the question, “Who did you go to when you needed support or to share an idea?” many of the participants in this study indicated that they felt comfortable going to their immediate supervisors to talk.

Talking with others about their work was important to SMs and so they would often seek moments of collaboration with their supervisors for guidance. As SMs brought their ideas to those they worked for, they found support and affirmation. SMs recall reaching out to fellow teachers, faculty, and staff for a listening ear and a helping hand and found these individuals to be supportive. One student qualifies the degree this support was helpful, saying, “The other teachers were simply lifesavers. We could not have survived without the strength shared among us.” Another student made reference to the value of working with three different pastors in his year of service, “I kind of got a little bit of all three areas: the pastor, the friendship and the mentor part.”
Collaboration With Community Members

In addition to the support systems within their workplace, SMs cited families in their communities as a significant venue for debriefing and encouragement. Whether it was a family they lived with or a family that was a 6-hour -drive away, SMs indicate that they grew to appreciate the interaction with families. Worshipping, praying, studying the Bible, and sharing together with other families were experiences that made it hard for some to leave. One student indicated that being able to interact with several families met different needs:

One lady, we used to sing a lot together, and that was a fun break. Another fun person, she lived in another town a little bit away, and I would go there on some weekends just to get a break, and go out and play around in the woods and have fun. Another woman there became a really close, dear friend and I would go over to her place and talk and it was really nice.

The experiences of a home away from home were moments where SMs found comfort in the people. It is evident in the Student Missionary Experience that students are pressed into an awareness of their own insufficiency. They seem to learn how much people need interaction and affirmation from others simply to function, not to mention to become more effective. It may be that it is not until they leave home that they realize the rest, security, and help that home offers. It may also be why some college students sought out families that reminded them of their parents in age and experience because they felt that they could identify and better understand the SMs. Even when SMs had conflicts with each other they found a family to go to as this student admits:

I just really found comfort in the island people. I would go to them and I would talk to them and I would just be with them, and hang out and sit there and cook their food with them. It was just wonderful. And we would come home and go to bed, and it was, like, just relaxing.
Beers (1999) reported that 30% of the students in his study experienced the joy of being a part of a team and providing support for one another (p. 125). Also, about 17% of them reported frustrations with relationships with others, which only affirmed how important team interaction and support is to learning in short-term missions. Tuttle (2000) observed that 79% of students (Azusa) involved in a summer mission experience reported “good” or “excellent” debriefing whereas only 48% of the students (Biola) reported “good” or “excellent” debriefing. From this she infers, “It may be possible that the lack of quality training and debriefing actually interfered with potential benefits for Biola students” (Tuttle, 1998, p. 264). Reflecting and debriefing with others played a prominent role in their growth as SMs. While it is evident that a major part of growth for SMs resulted from sharing and working closely with others, those who worked in more isolated settings experienced how difficult it was to work without that support. While the reality of their isolation was disturbing, it emphasized the importance of collaboration by conveying how challenging it was to work with the absence of collaborating with others.

SMs Struggled in Isolation

In contrast to the support systems experienced by the majority of SMs in this study, some students did not have human resources for collaboration that others enjoyed. As SMs conveyed the stories of their experience a theme began to emerge with those who were placed in service alone, that is, without the partnership or camaraderie of at least one other student missionary. Some students who reported feelings of isolation were placed in the field alone for either part of the year or up to the entire year. When students assert that they had no one to talk to they are not necessarily portraying being isolated by location as they are describing the lack of resources they perceived were available to
them for collaboration and community. Some could actually pick up a phone and call their parents, but phone calls hardly met the needs for interaction and support that the SMs needed. One student reports about serving on an island with his brother, sharing one stipend for both of them to live on. According to the research in this study, circumstances like this are rare and considered to be the exception. Even still, the isolation at times was very difficult as he states:

I think we could have dealt with the hunger, but the loneliness was the hardest part. It was only my brother and I. We are the best of friends but it was very hard not to have anybody to talk to except for our kids basically. We had two neighbors. One of them spoke very broken English so we could talk to him and hang out with him. He was our age and then there was another, he was an older man and we could talk to him, but as far as communicating ideas and our feelings, it was just Greg and I. You know, that’s where it got lonely.

In some circumstances, there were people around them but they still felt alone due to the complex issues the families were going through at the time. In some cases, students arrived to work under circumstances that have very little hope for effective service. One student conveyed a tragic working environment this way:

I didn’t have a roommate, and the people, though they were nice people to work with, as soon as I got off the airplane they told me all of the terrible things that had happened to all of the other SMs, and all of the mistakes they had made. So immediately I shut down any emotions or feelings that I might express. So, the whole time I was always smiling even if I was sad, and never told them if I was lonely.

Another SM who was assigned to assist a family that was going through some internal turmoil reported:

I was with a family that had struggles of their own. I didn’t really get along with them. I couldn’t turn to them for support. I was the only Student Missionary right there. My family was kind of going through a lot of trouble. I didn’t have anybody to really turn to for support.
In these scenarios the only redeeming quality of their experience seems to be the way they were forced to cling to God in their loneliness. The same student above concluded about her experience, “I discovered that God can truly be everything to you and that was the most incredible experience for me. I needed to experience that for the rest of my life.” While this student portrayed a mature response to her experience as an SM, one has to imagine that there are more positive ways to learn that lesson. When the only person to communicate your feelings and ideas to is God, the experience might be faith building, but it is more likely to be considered traumatic than anything else. Reports such as “My only support was God” or “it was just between God and me” are not the product of the intended purpose of the SM program. The reality is that some students become isolated with very little support; it either breaks their spirit or brings them closer to God, and sometimes both.

One student, because of the language barrier, would seek out Mormons on the street to talk to because they were the only ones who could speak English. Again, these scenarios are rare but they are real for some who venture out as student missionaries.

This study portrays the effectiveness of people working with other people. Collaboration in work is not only an expressed need of SMs, it is congruent with the example set by Christ in sending out His disciples. In Mark 6:7 the evidence of this collaborative principle is posited, “Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits” (NIV). Later in the ministry of Jesus the expanded group of disciples is also sent out to serve in the same way: “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go” (Luke 10:1-2 NIV). It seems that Jesus understood how
fellow workers need to work in partnership in order to be most effective. Clearly in this research the students who worked with others reported positively about their collaboration with others whereas those who were alone tended to describe that part of their experience as traumatic.

Interpersonal Growth Through Collaboration

SMs had no control over who their co-workers would be once they chose a destination for service. From the supervisors responsible for them to the people they served, there were many opportunities for learning about getting along with other people. In learning to work with others, SMs reported learning a lot about themselves. Several SMs indicated problems with supervisors. One student reported, “The head dean and I did not see eye to eye on a lot of things.” Yet in spite of the frustration the SM conceded, “I had to learn to get along and try to maintain a workable relationship as it wasn’t easy to just leave.” Another SM was “not connecting on the right wave-length with their superiors,” but contends, “Wherever you go there are going to be people that you are not going to connect with, and you are going to have to learn to make-do and learn to see the good things in those people, and move forward from there.” SMs discovered that part of the journey for them was realizing how much personalities can conflict and learning to work with the different personalities, even it was difficult.

For some SMs, when they discovered that they could not change the people they were in conflict with, they made attempts to accept the imperfect situation and try to change what they could about themselves. One SM learned “to love a lot of people who were not very loveable.” Clearly, “to live and work closely with others towards a common goal is not always easy” and “even though you make every attempt to
communicate with people that doesn’t mean that it is going to happen.” It should be noted that most of the SMs in this study had strong support systems where interpersonal conflicts could be worked out with the help of roommates and other friends. While most of the students had a support system, some felt alone and isolated and any interpersonal problems with others were either worked out or absorbed.

The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile was administered to student missionaries and a control group of Adventist college students. The CSPP charts participation in 10 spiritual disciplines. The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score ($M=3.26$) in the discipline of fellowship than the control group ($M=2.96$) $F(1,406)=10.772$, $p=.001$ as shown in Table 6. The results indicate that SMs participate in the discipline of fellowship more than non-SMs. The CSPP results on the discipline of fellowship adds to the findings from the qualitative interviews that describe SMs supporting each other and collaborating together in service.

Table 6

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<td>Student Missionaries</td>
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<td>Control Group</td>
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Fellowship as a Christian practice is related to what SMs described in their year of service in the relationships with other workers, supervisors, and community members.
The word for fellowship in the New Testament is "koinonia," which means "communion, fellowship, sharing in common, communication" (Vine, Unger, & White, 1985). One of the elements that describes the effectiveness of the New Testament church parallels the collaborative element of the SM experience:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 NIV)

SMs in this research reported their connectedness and partnership in service as being a significant factor in the overall impact of their experience. In a similar way, the New Testament church met together to eat and share and commune with each because of their partnership in the church. For a few SMs in this research, this aspect of the collaborative experience was not afforded to them, but for the majority of students the community and interaction with other workers strengthened them for their tasks.

**Finding #4: Transformed by the Spiritual Disciplines**

This research suggests that one of the catalysts for growth in the mission experience related to the practice of spiritual disciplines. Respondents clearly identified activities such as Bible study, prayer, service, and other spiritual disciplines as beneficial for spiritual growth.

In this section, the findings related to the spiritual disciplines are presented in the following way: (a) a theoretical perspective of spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines; (b) a report of the CSPP findings on SMs and the spiritual disciplines; (c) a
report of the spiritual disciplines in the SM experience; and (d) and a conclusion to the transformational aspect of the spiritual disciplines in the SM experience and a summary of the findings in this chapter.

A Theoretical Perspective of Spiritual Formation and the Spiritual Disciplines

Often the idea of spiritual formation is aligned with the spiritual disciplines. In fact, sometimes the terms are used interchangeably. For the purposes of this study, however, it is helpful to consider distinctions that have been offered by theologians and religious educators between the two ideas.

**Spiritual Formation**

Frank Stranger (1989) suggests that spiritual formation is a process, a journey towards wholeness (p. 16). He states, “When we talk about spiritual formation we are speaking of the lived-out process of keeping spiritually transcendent in one’s experience and life” (p. 14). This implies a continual connection between a person and God throughout the routine of life. Other scholars (Bridges, 2004; Mulholland, 1993; Richards, 1987; Williard, 1990) support Stranger’s belief that spiritual formation is the process of Christ’s character and person as it is reproduced in people (Stranger, 1989, pp. 16-17). Steele (1990) echoes this view of spiritual formation but focuses on the process of growth, noting that “our formation is a result of both God’s initiative and our responsibility” (p. 10). John Dettoni (1994) offers this definition: “Spiritual formation is an intentional, multi-faceted process which promotes the transformation by which Christ is formed in us so that we can become His continually maturing disciples” (p. 16).
Stella Ma (1999) notes the biblical relationship between faith and works as a source in defining spiritual formation: “True spiritual formation is a combination of inward faith and outward behavior, ‘For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also’ (James 2:26)” (p. 31). While there are many different ways to define or describe the process of spiritual formation, the common element is growth. Words that tend to be used synonymously with spiritual formation are these: growth, change, transform, mature, and develop. Carol Tasker (2002) characterized spiritual formation as

the process of learning to live as it was always meant to be—with God at the center of our lives, so that who we are with ourselves and with others and the world depends on who we are with God." (p. 19)

Tasker describes a holistic unity between the inward life and the outward life as being inseparable to a relationship with God. David Grubbs (p. 23) agrees:

Spiritual formation is not seeking new ways to discover God, nor working harder to make God more real to us. Rather, it is living in such a way as not to resist God’s gracious initiatives. Put very simply it is paying loving attention to all that we know, with all of our selves that we can, using all the resources we can gather.

In sum, spiritual formation has to do with the process of how individuals change. In contrast, spiritual disciplines are the activities that make a person available to God so that His Spirit might do the work of transformation.

**Spiritual Disciplines**

Donald Whitney (1991) refers to spiritual disciplines as “those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth” (p. 15). Willard (1990) adds that spiritual disciplines are exercises for godliness. Through these activities we are able to receive God’s grace more fully. Willard trumpets the value of practicing the disciplines:
"Full participation in the life of God’s Kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through the appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit” (p. 26).

Willard (1990) divides the disciplines into two categories: (a) disciplines of abstinence, and (b) disciplines of engagement. Solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice comprise the exercises of abstinence. Study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission make up the disciplines of engagement (p. 158).

Richard Foster organizes the disciplines similarly by using three categories: (a) the inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), (b) the outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, service), and (c) the corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, celebration) (Foster, 1988).

Christian Spiritual Disciplines and College Students

The Valuegenesis study of Seventh-day Adventist youth (Rice & Gillespie, 1992) suggests that the practice of spiritual disciplines is an important predictor of a mature faith. Moreover, the disciplines are factors in the spiritual growth of college students (K. R. Anderson, 2002; Bennett, 1994; Cureton, 1989; Ma, 1999; Thompson, 1993; Wick, 1998). Tasker (2002) explored the impact of a spiritual formation course on pastors in training. She reports that the “spiritual lives seem to benefit from help with the forming of daily habits and practices through the spiritual disciplines” (p. 341). Tasker goes on to suggest that the phrase “spiritual disciplines” might more accurately be called “relationship enhancers” and the phrase “spiritual formation” should be changed to
"spiritual journey." By changing the nomenclature, Tasker believes the perceptions that students have of these ideas might be improved.

At Oakland City University, Barber (1999) studied the changes in the spiritual lives of students who participated in a spiritual formation curriculum. He concluded that a spiritual formation curriculum had a positive influence on the students’ spiritual practices and on their attitudes toward the significance of participating in the spiritual disciplines. Exploring the student perceptions of their spiritual growth within the Christian college experience, Ma (1999) reported that one of the 10 most influential factors was practicing the personal spiritual disciplines.

Obviously the benefits of practicing the spiritual disciplines are not limited to young adults. The disciplines have been shown to facilitate emotional healing (Schneider, 1982) in people of varied ages. Furthermore, the disciplines have been linked to positive leadership development for discipleship programs in local churches (Sharber, 1981; Simmons, 2002).

The literature on the spiritual disciplines extends beyond the scope of this project. Thus, the research cited in this study has been confined to the work that connects the disciplines with practices that enable young adults to mature in their faith. What appears to be incontrovertible is that spiritual growth does occur in young adults through the exercise of spiritual disciplines. As student missionaries journeyed around the world for a year of service, they were compelled to engage in these exercises.

Spiritual Disciplines in the CSPP Findings

The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile provides data that show four spiritual development modes (growing through a relationship with God, growing through a
relationship with others, growing through a relationship with the Word, and growing through critical reflection) and charts participation in 10 spiritual disciplines: prayer, repentance, worship, Bible reading, meditation, prophetic critiquing, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship. The 6-point Likert scale (Appendix B) was administered to former SMs on Adventist campuses and compared to a control group of Adventist college students.

The results of the CSPP indicate that SMs scored significantly higher in 8 of the 10 disciplines, as shown in Table 7. The 8 disciplines in which SMs showed significantly higher mean scores were: Bible reading, prayer, evangelism, service, prophetic critiquing, fellowship, stewardship, and meditation. While SMs had higher mean scores in the disciplines of worship and repentance, they were not found to be significant. These two disciplines will be discussed in the next section as the qualitative data showed worship and repentance to be disciplines SMs participated in.

**Bible Reading**

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score \( (M=3.50) \) in the discipline of Bible reading than the control group \( (M=3.24) \) \( F(1,406)=9.773, p=.002 \). This score shows that SMs participate in Bible reading or Bible study more frequently than do non-SMs. The findings from the interviews further develop the ways SMs participated in the discipline of Bible reading.

**Prayer**

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score \( (M=4.33) \) in the discipline of prayer than the control group \( (M=4.19) \) \( F(1,406)=7.115, p=.008 \). This result indicates that SMs participated in the activity of prayer more often than non-SMs in this study. The
qualitative findings from the interviews further develop the ways SMs participated in the discipline of prayer.

Table 7

*CSPP Results: Participation in the Spiritual Disciplines of SMs Compared to Non-SMs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Student Missionaries</th>
<th>Control Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophetic</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiquing</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.624</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\( ^a n = 201. ^b n = 206.\)*

Evangelism

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score (\(M=2.90\)) in the discipline of evangelism than the control group (\(M=2.62\)) \(F(1,406)=6.769, p=.010\). The next section reports the reflections and stories of SMs who described the practice of evangelism in their SM experience. This finding shows that SMs participated in evangelism more frequently than non-SMs. The qualitative findings from the interviews further develop the ways that SMs actively engaged in evangelism.
Service

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score ($M=3.34$) in the discipline of service than the control group ($M=2.89$) $F(1,406)=24.487$, $p=.000$. This finding portrays SMs engaged in service more often than non-SMs in this study. It is not surprising that SMs scored higher in the discipline of service because the SM experience is primarily about outreach. The next section will describe the many scenarios where SMs engaged in the discipline of service.

Prophetic Critiquing

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score ($M=4.18$) in the discipline of prophetic critiquing than the control group ($M=3.94$) $F(1,406)=13.842$, $p=.000$. According to this finding, SMs participate in the ethical and moral assessment of their environment based on their biblical worldview more than the non-SMs in this study. The results from the interviews report the stories and reflections of SMs as they conveyed an active participation in the practice of prophetic critiquing.

Fellowship

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score ($M=3.26$) in the discipline of fellowship than the control group ($M=2.96$) $F(1,406)=10.772$, $p=.001$. The results from the CSPP indicate that SMs participate in the discipline of fellowship more than non-SMs in this study. The discipline of fellowship was more fully discussed in the previous heading on collaboration and the SM experience. The affinity, team-work, support, and sharing that emboldened SMs in their service are descriptive of the discipline of Christian
fellowship. Because it was discussed already in chapter 4, it is only mentioned briefly in this section.

**Stewardship**

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score ($M=3.62$) in the discipline of stewardship than the control group ($M=3.22$) $F(1,406)=21.704$, $p=.000$. This result indicates that SMs practiced the wise management of the gifts God gives more than non-SMs in this study. While the results of the CSPP showed a significant difference between SMs and non-SMs relating to stewardship, this theme did not emerge in the interviews. Some inferences to stewardship were made in chapter 4 where students discussed aspects of stewardship as they conveyed their perceptions about meeting the needs of the world. SMs refer to service as a "gift from God" and describe the way it "opened their eyes to the needs of the world." While SMs were describing the impact of service, their statements can also be viewed from the perspective of stewardship. However, since stewardship did not naturally emerge in the context of the interviews as a prominent theme, it is not included in the qualitative findings.

**Meditation**

The CSPP showed SMs scoring a higher mean score ($M=3.49$) in the discipline of meditation than the control group ($M=2.97$) $F(1,406)=42.817$, $p=.000$. According to the results of the CSPP, SMs engaged in the discipline of meditation more than the non-SMs in this study. However, this was not evidenced in the qualitative data, possibly due to semantic reasons. It could be that young adults may not use the term "meditation," whereas theologians might be more comfortable with it. It might be that "prayer" and meditation could be so closely related to each in the experience of an SM that a clear
distinction could not be made without further probing. While Thayer (1996) includes meditation and prayer as disciplines in the mode of reflective observation (p. 73), it will be assumed that when SMs describe prayer they could also mean a more contemplative or imaginative reflection. In fact, Thayer recognized the potential ambiguity in some of the terminology of the CSPP and recommended that “refinement in the wording of a few items might improve clarity” (p. 201).

**Worship and Repentance**

The CSPP scores for the disciplines of worship and repentance were not significant between the SMs and the non-SMs in this study. However, worship and repentance emerged in the qualitative data and will be discussed under the next heading.

Although SMs scored higher in the spiritual disciplines, this does not mean that SMs are “more spiritual” or “closer to God” than those who are not SMs. The instrument measures their participation in the spiritual disciplines. One might speculate that students who served for a year are exposed to more opportunities to practice the disciplines than are students in school. For example, a student working as a teacher or Bible worker is engaged in ministry full-time as compared to a college student who is primarily engaged in study. To speculate further, students on SDA campuses have many opportunities for service to participate in all the disciplines through the religious programming of the college. Yet, what SMs do in the way of daily ministry avails them to opportunities to be transformed by God’s power through their service experience. The findings from the CSPP show that SMs tend to be more engaged in activities that promote and support the spiritual life. Furthermore, the reflections and stories SMs shared about their experience conveyed a rich description of their engagement in the spiritual disciplines.
The Spiritual Disciplines in the SM Experience

The spiritual disciplines that emerged from the interviews were: (a) Bible study, (b) prayer, (c) evangelism, (d) worship, (e) service, (f) repentance, (g) prophetic critiquing, and (h) fellowship. The spiritual disciplines of stewardship and meditation did not emerge in the qualitative data and will not be discussed in this section.

Two realities compelled SMs to participate in the disciplines. First, the nature of their jobs provided opportunities to preach, teach, organize, and implement activities of spiritual life. Essentially, their roles as leaders postured them to engage in spiritual disciplines in order to fulfill their jobs. For example, in order to teach a Bible class, one has to prepare by studying the Bible. Other SMs were expected to implement vespers, worship services, branch Sabbath schools, or other outreach projects. Their position postured them for opportunities to engage in the spiritual disciplines. The second factor that compelled SMs into the disciplines was a sense of personal need. Students referred to deepening their experience with God through the disciplines out of personal necessity and curiosity.

Bible Study

Classic and contemporary theologians alike convey the study of Scripture as a priority in the disciplined life. Dallas Willard (1990) asserts of Bible study, “In the spiritual discipline of study we engage ourselves, above all, with the written and spoken Word of God” (p. 176). He then amplifies that thought:

In study we also strive to see the Word of God at work in the lives of others, in the church, in history, and in nature. We not only read and hear and inquire, but we meditate on what comes before us; that is, we withdraw into silence where we prayerfully and steadily focus upon it. In this way its meaning for us can emerge and form us as God works in the depths of our heart, mind, and soul. (p. 177)
Ellen White (1903) states,

Let the student take one verse, and concentrate the mind on ascertaining the thought that God has put into that verse for him, and then dwell upon the thought until it becomes his own. One passage thus studied until its significance is clear, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view, and no positive instruction gained. (p. 189)

Foster (1988) states, “The discipline of study is the primary vehicle to bring us to ‘think’ about these things” (p. 62). Bridges (2004) agrees with Foster: “So whether we think in terms of spiritual growth or spiritual transformation (two terms which actually mean the same thing), we see that the Word of God is the primary instrument that the Holy Spirit uses in our lives” (pp. 61-62). Referring to Bible study, Ortberg (1997) states, “An indispensable practice is to have our minds re-formed by immersing them in Scripture” (p. 178). Ortberg connects the transformed life with Bible study by this assertion:

So the Bible is to help us learn how to live in the kingdom of God here and now. It teaches us how to morph. It is indispensable for this task. I have never known someone leading a spiritually transformed life who had not been deeply saturated in Scripture. (p. 181)

Essential to the idea that Bible study is a critical piece of the transformed life is the importance of integrating God’s Word into the lived experience. Foster (1988) comments on the dynamics of reading, interpreting, and applying the Bible to daily life.

He also underscores the importance of experience to understanding God’s Word.

Experience is the only way we can interpret and relate to what we read. We read a book on tragedy with different eyes when we have walked through the valley of the shadow ourselves. Experience that has been understood and reflected upon informs and enlightens our study. (p. 68)

This experiential component of Bible study is important to Foster as he challenges people to “come to the Scripture to be changed, not to amass information” (p. 69).
Student missionaries reported that they experienced a renewal occurring in their own lives through teaching from the Bible. One student connected the experience of teaching Bible with the discovery of knowing how much God meant to them. To this SM, God was a Father, Physician, Savior, and Friend. Even in settings where students were considered “Christian,” SMs discovered a lack of Bible knowledge among the students, which caused them to wrestle with the best ways to teach it. Often SMs who taught English used the Bible as reading material while others taught Bible classes which covered a wide variety of biblical topics.

As SMs became involved in mission service, other opportunities arose to practice the discipline of Bible study. In addition to their scheduled duties students reported giving Bible studies as part of their experience. The frequency of their engagements ranged from occasional Bible study to participating in several studies a week. Leading or giving a Bible study became a normal part of life for some while others spoke of it as a new or unusual experience. One student reflected on how leading out in a Bible study for the first time was a pleasant surprise. They found people willing to study the Bible with them. Some would study in the dorm rooms, while others met in homes. Other SMs reported how people would gather at their home or apartment to study the Bible with them. Small group Bible studies were common forums for SMs to practice the discipline of studying God’s Word.

Not only did many SMs read texts and disseminate information, but some wrestled with how to share their faith with non-believers. One student described how much he loved trying to find the best way to break God’s Word down into the simplest
terms. Out of this struggle conviction grew that God’s Word is meant to be studied and internalized.

My research shows that the specifics of Bible study and a devotional life varied among the SMs. Whether they had “devotions” in the morning or the evening, many would have them daily. Often a room full of SMs would have moments of study and reflection together before starting with the tasks of the day. If the morning was hectic, some students did a few things required for the day and then retreated for time in God’s Word. Studying the Bible was not always done out of a sense of duty. For some, “devotions were not a nice thing, but an absolute necessity.” One might ask, “Why is an SM compelled to study during their year of service more than when they are at home?” One SM noted that the social and family support is no longer available so more than ever they would make the time to study out of their own personal need. Several SMs claimed that blocking out time to study offered spiritual strength for the day. Clearly the practice of Bible study was a factor in their spiritual growth.

One of the ways in which Bible study changed student missionaries had to do with students taking ownership of their own faith and their own beliefs. The experience where their relationship with God became more about what they believed and less about what they had been told is evidence of a significant spiritual transformation. One student said, “I was asked difficult questions and I had to search out the answers for myself.” Another SM reported that the questions people asked him were a motivator to study the Bible more. The stage where young adults come into their own spiritually is usually evidenced by their ability to connect knowledge and daily life.
Studying the Bible was not just some cognitive exercise but an attempt to integrate God's Word into daily life. One student found in the example of Christ a source of patience. Other students read the Bible and discovered that something clicked and the themes of Scripture finally made sense to them. As one student taught a Bible class on the doctrines he reflected on being familiar with all the information but had this epiphany while studying: "I really believe this!"

Ultimately, students in this study experienced a broad sphere of interaction with Scripture that left many of them with a greater awareness and appreciation for how the Bible can shape one's life.

Prayer

The spiritual discipline of prayer emerged in the interviews and surveys as a significant transformational component of the SM experience. Richard Foster (1988) offers this assessment of prayer and transformation: "To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us" (p. 33). For SMs in their year of service prayer became a central component of transformation. Many SMs reported that their prayer life became a necessity; others called it a safe haven from the stress of the day.

Some might wonder how prayer has power to change people. Foster answers:

Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father. Meditation introduces us to the inner life, fasting is an accompanying means, study transforms our minds, but it is the discipline of prayer that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing. (p. 33)

Others have echoed similar sentiments. Ortberg (1997) claims, "Prayer, perhaps more than any other activity, is the concrete expression of the fact that we are invited into a relationship with God" (p. 106). Bounds (1990) adds, "When we study the many-
sidedness of prayer, we are surprised at the number of things with which it is connected. There is no phase of human life which it does not affect, and it has to do with everything affecting human salvation” (p. 118). Bridges (2004) extends prayer’s role as a watershed moment where utter dependence on God is on one side and self-sufficiency is on the other:

Prayer is the tangible expression of our dependence. We may assent to the fact that we are dependent on Christ, but if our prayer life is meager or perfunctory, we thereby deny it. We are in effect saying we can handle most of our spiritual life with our own self-discipline and our perceived innate goodness. (p. 86)

In this study, the discipline of prayer was reported to be widely practiced by SMs. Whether this was due to ample time available for spiritual activities or the environment just provided an atmosphere for conversation with God, SMs took time to pray. Waking up to talk to God is a theme that continually emerged in the reflections of SMs. Many SMs became involved in weekly prayer meetings as well as other small-group prayer sessions in dorm rooms.

Often the purpose of their prayers grew out of their imminent longing for God to get them through hard times. The SMs in this study agreed that God was sustaining and guiding them in response to the prayers they were praying. Some would walk in the woods and talk to God about their feelings during seasons when they felt abandoned, scared, and helpless. These moments in prayer fostered a personal strength and a confidence that God would hear and respond. And while several SMs discovered that God does not always answer the way we would want Him to, they still found prayer to be an exercise that enabled them to grow spiritually.

The idea that prayer significantly enhances one’s spiritual life was observed by an SM who endured an outbreak of boils during her year of service. Other stories included
moments where SMs prayed for troubled pregnancies, broken keys, people dying of leprosy, and feelings of inadequacy for mission work. Students encountered moments where they perceived people were possessed by demons and could only think to pray in those moments. For example, one student told of praying for an 8-year-old boy who was growling and acting like an animal. All this SM could think of doing was to pray.

The power of prayer exhibited in the midst of spiritual conflict was described as a life-changing event. Beyond some of the more traumatic moments were the stories that presented the power of prayer to change both the students’ lives as well as the SMs’ perceptions about the students. One SM recalled the thrill of one her students asking, “Teacher, can you teach me to pray like you pray? I want to learn to pray.” This experience was considered a breakthrough because, up to that point, the students had not responded to praying in class.

Prayer is a powerful, personal experience that includes everything from having a reflective conversation with God as a friend to venturing into spiritual warfare. As SMs reflected on their experiences it became clear that prayer was a necessary experience for their peace of mind and an impetus for spiritual growth.

**Evangelism**

While the word “evangelism” has undergone a change in the many methods of its application, essentially the spiritual discipline is about announcing or proclaiming the good news about Christ to others. The Greek word means to proclaim glad tidings or good news (Vine et al., 1985). The idea of communicating the gospel to others was another prominent feature of SM experience.
Some students played a role in evangelism by teaching at cooking schools or stop-smoking clinics; others were involved in doing visitation and handing out literature door to door. Some SMs were involved in evangelism by conducting evangelistic meetings, teaching a witnessing class, planting churches, and giving Bible studies. In fact, some SMs conveyed that one of their reasons for going as an SM was to become involved in the activity of evangelism. Learning how to witness to others and share Christ with people was a part of their purpose for serving.

As SMs shared their stories of leading people to Christ, there seemed to be a hint of wonder and surprise surrounding the experience. One student told the memorable experience of bringing a Buddhist student to church to hear the gospel for the first time. Another student spoke of leading out in an evangelistic series where 14 people were baptized. Other SMs expressed surprise that they could lead a Bible study and that others showed up, participated, and grew closer to God. Another SM witnessed to a family over the course of the year, invited them to church, and then rejoiced as they were baptized. During an evangelistic effort in the Philippines one student felt lucky to be a part of an event where 500 people were baptized. Another SM told of participating in an evangelistic meeting that succeeded in converting several people whom he had worked with by giving Bible studies. What is notable in the stories and statements of SMs who worked in evangelism, either personally or publicly, was the passion they conveyed when others would say, “I want to give my life to Christ.” The urgency for sharing Christ with lost people was evident when SMs would say, “I just really wanted to share Jesus Christ with them so they would be free from bondage and fear.” One SM described the “best experience of my life” as the time she witnessed how the gospel can change someone.
As a result of actively participating in the discipline of evangelism, SMs left with a commitment and a passion to share God’s message to people.

Worship

Willard (1990) maintains that “in worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols” (p. 177). Foster (1988) comments on why worship is a discipline by stating, “One reason worship should be considered a Spiritual Discipline is because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us” (p. 166). Because worship is a multi-faceted experience, the essential nature of worship is “not something to be confined to formal worship services, but [it] is a lifestyle” (Foster, 1988, p. 166).

As SMs served abroad their involvement in the spiritual discipline of worship was common. In speaking of worship, SMs described a wide range of experiences. Students often refer to “worships” as the preliminary devotional talk, prayer, or exercise before beginning a meeting. Other students also refer to worship in the same vein as Sabbath school, church, prayer meetings, and vespers. Many of the SMs described a full week of worship opportunities while other SMs described a variety of worship activities mostly on the weekend. Many were involved in planning, organizing, and leading out in those events for the community they served. It is noteworthy that students rarely described the personal experience of worship. While there are different levels of effectiveness in these “worship experiences” the fact that SMs were exposed to worship opportunities is reflected in their statements.
Leading out or planning these worship experiences was more common for SMs than simply participating in them. Many reported being in charge of vespers or Sabbath school, meaning they had to plan and organize the event. Planning Sabbath school, church, and afternoon activities such as AY (Adventist Youth) seemed to be a common task for a student missionary. In some cases the entire worship service on Sabbath was dependent on SMs planning and presenting opportunities for people to connect to God through music, teaching/preaching, and prayers. Based on this research, SMs did not readily convey their personal experiences in worship but the data suggests they focused most of their attention on planning programs for others.

Service

SMs entered into the program fully aware that service would be required of them in some form. Service can have varying degrees of impact on those who serve and those who are served. In this study the SMs shared stories of their service that demonstrated a cadre of colorful examples of Christian goodness to others in need. Willard (1990) simplifies the discipline of Christian service by saying, “In service we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world” (p. 182). The selfless nature of service prompts people to be preoccupied with the needs of others which acquiesces with Foster’s (1988) comment about how service impacts the servant:

Of all the classical Spiritual Disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility. When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirit. (p. 130)
Foster (1988) further suggests that service is often about the “small things,” such as
“guarding the reputation of others, being served, common courtesy, listening, bearing the
burdens of each other, sharing the word of life with one another” (pp. 135-139). While
SMs may enter the mission field with great hopes to do extraordinary things, they often
discover that service might be more about the little things we do for others.

The SM experience is essentially designed to offer students an opportunity to
practice the spiritual discipline of service. The heart of service is meeting the needs of
others. Student missionaries capture the salient truth about service when they assert that
it begins with taking our minds off ourselves and focusing on others. While the notion of
doing good things for others does not necessarily grow out of a Christian worldview, the
impetus for service for SMs is clearly in response to a Christian virtue.

Another term that SMs (as well as others) often use for service is “outreach.” In
some cases, SMs functioned primarily as “outreach workers” where the focus of their
work was to organize projects of kindness and help communities in need. Students
indicated that one of the reasons they went as an SM was to continue an earlier
experience of service. The desire to actively serve is in fact a way to worship God,
according to one student who intimated his preference to helping others as opposed to
sitting in a pew listening to a sermon.

Due to the nature of their jobs, the SMs who worked vsdth medical clinics and
other health-care facilities discovered that opportunities for service came to them.
Students reflected on how patients would knock on their door in the middle of the night
to find relief. In addition to lancing boils in the middle of the night or dispensing malaria
medicine, SMs were empowered to help diagnose and treat illness as well as train the
locals with medical health principles. While there are typically only a few medical
positions available to SMs compared to teachers, the students who serve as nurses and
health-care assistants experienced compassionate service that made a positive impact.

Student missionaries who held other jobs also found ways to participate in
service. Student missionaries would go to hospitals with their class of students to visit
and sing to the patients. Other SMs would go to local prisons and sing, preach, and pray.
Others might visit around the towns and villages telling stories, doing Bibles studies in
homes, and conducting worship services where none would be offered otherwise.

In this study there were students whose role was to fix, build, repair, and restore
things that were broken. In one scenario, what was broken was a plane that was used to
spot poachers in a game park and transport literature all over Africa. Whether the task
was building a water system for a village or doing routine maintenance in a church, SMs
worked on the huge projects as well as the odd jobs. Around an orphanage there were
many things to work on, but in all of the duties one SM remained focused on showing the
orphans the love of God through service. In the midst of building new schools and
planting trees he still managed to direct Pathfinder clubs and assist with Sabbath school
classes. Another student recounted that going deep into the bush to fix and sharpen the
machetes, tools, traps, and hoes was the most rewarding experience of the year.

Service ministries profoundly shaped the lives of SMs. Students characterized
their life purpose as serving others because of their experience during that year. Meeting
the needs of others gave SMs a sense of joy and purpose that continues to compel them to
serve today. While SMs gain a reward of joy from their service they still maintain that
their service is not about them but meeting the needs of others. Service became a
discipline that affected their way of thinking in that they connected acts of service to the biblical command to “love your neighbor.” One SM summarized the essence of selfless service as “lovingly giving yourself everyday to the same children who gave you the gift of lice.”

Repentance

The spiritual discipline of repentance grows out of the biblical concept of one of the core components of the experience of salvation. To repent is to become aware of one’s need for God and actively seek Him. Youngblood (1986) defines repentance as a turning away from sin, disobedience, or rebellion and a turning back to God. In a more general sense, repentance means a change of mind or a feeling of remorse or regret for past conduct. True repentance is a "godly sorrow" for sin, an act of turning around and going in the opposite direction. This type of repentance leads to a fundamental change in a person's relationship to God. (pp. 1077-1078)

The Greek word metanoeo means "to perceive afterwards" which captures many moments reported by SMs where they changed their mind and returned to God for renewal (Vine et al., 1985).

Repentance suggests an abiding trust in God’s power to save and support. Student missionaries discovered the need to combat self-sufficiency and faithfully rely on God. As students described this experience of repentance they usually emphasized their own shortcomings—causing one to ask if the SM experience was a help or a hindrance to faith development. When Beers (1999) reported that college students did not appear to perceive their faith as increasing from the beginning of their service to after, he was surprised. In response to this finding he suggests:

As collegians reflect on their faith development that has taken place over the last 2-3 years, they may see themselves struggling with new thoughts and ideas, and,
therefore, erroneously believe that their faith is weaker than it has been. Students in crisis may equate their faith as a weaker faith. (p. 123)

In this light, it is no surprise that SMs who sensed so keenly their need of God would be less likely to focus on the growth toward God. Because the discipline of repentance values the tendency to be aware of one's need, what might seem like a weakness becomes an exercise that fosters spiritual growth through honest admission.

Students described their year of service as a "humble experience that exposed their need." Students shared the way trials, conflict, and the difficulty of their tasks revealed character flaws that they had to address if they were going to survive the year. Throughout the study college students reported how their SM experience exposed flaws that prompted students to admit "I didn't like who I was" and "I was messed up emotionally."

When SMs described their experience as one that "really exposed me to my weaknesses" they supported the idea that some of the greatest lessons grow out of trials. Students reported, "All the things that you don't realize about yourself start coming out and it was sort of horrifying to know certain parts of ourselves are hidden." Other students agree, citing specific challenges such as conflict resolution, childish behavior, pride, and "doctors who brought out every single bad characteristic inside." Moreover, students reported a whole spectrum of negative qualities ranging from "a lot of idiosyncrasies" to more holistic confessions such as, "I just realized how far away from God I am, and there I was trying to get closer. But you just see how many defects you have in your character." It is important to note that their experience did not lead to despair but to a place of learning. The students responded to their character flaws
determined to “deal with them.” One particular student embraced the weakness stating, “It was good because then I had to depend on God.”

Some students were surprised by the way their negative qualities surfaced. Statements such as “I’m not as smart as I think I am” and “I’m not as nice as I thought I was” or “I’m not as tough as I thought I was” were common.

Such statements spark the question: How would a student at a Christian College be aware of their dark side in the context of their education? In what forum of their education is a student really challenged to address these issues? Student missionaries tended to value the experience of discovering areas needing growth. The authenticity they demonstrated corresponds with the data on why they went in the first place. As previously reported, SMs went to discover the truth about themselves (career) and God (deepen their spiritual experience) and to engage in something meaningful. As SMs came face to face with their humanness, they typically looked for solutions.

Student missionaries were often repentant about their impatience with the people they were serving. Student teachers were pushed to their limits and for many it did not take long to learn “how little patience I had.” A common theme from students serving in foreign countries was that locals did not relate to time in the same way as Americans. Hence, a teacher’s need for order and schedule might be pressed to the point of frustration. That being true, students discovered opportunities to develop the quality of patience in their year of service.

Some SMs came face to face with problems that arise from having a particular temperament or personality type. While some SMs may have been aware of their own assertive nature during their year of service they admitted to coming “face to face with
their dark side.” The dark side emerged when they had to work with people who “differed in values and morals.” Those who struggled with “perfectionism” found the mission field a very imperfect place. Students became aware that in the college setting “you control your own destiny” but in the mission field “things are out of your control.” This became problematic for some who consider themselves “a control freak.” While having a firm grip on one’s own agenda may not be considered a flaw, some found that their tendencies led to feelings of cruelty and self-righteousness.

Prophetic Critiquing

The spiritual discipline of prophetic critiquing has to do with a person’s response to the world based upon biblical reference points. It is not only the ability to discern right from wrong, good from bad, but also to negotiate through the gray areas of ethics and morality. Student missionaries faced the unique challenge of going to another culture and encountering scenarios that pressed their moral bearings with such force that they had to respond.

One SM targeted academic achievement as a primary goal of his classroom but after thoughtful reflection on the Sermon on the Mount, he shifted his entire approach to teaching to match a new conviction. He said, “I cared more about their performance and their grades than I cared about them.” He reorganized his methodology to fit this new paradigm of teaching. Moving to another culture will often upend the thinking process of young adults, leaving them to put the pieces of their beliefs and practices back in some meaningful order.
Noticing the contrast of how people in other countries viewed Christians as ignorant or uneducated shocked some SMs. Instead of arguing, the students responded by befriending them. In some cases the antagonists became friends and even believers.

Another moment of critical reflection came as a result of witnessing locals casting a “demon” out of a person. There were specific steps, songs, and parts to the ritual that caused the SM to seriously question the whole event. A similar incident happened when an SM awakened in the middle of the night to the sound of drums. She was told that it was a spirit worship ritual happening on the other side of the river. The fact that she knew all of these animists deeply concerned her—not for her safety, but for their salvation. She said,

It hit me. I needed to pay more attention to what I was doing. People are dying and they don’t know who Jesus is, and we need that drum roll constantly to wake us out of this stupor of apathy.

Being proactive in ethical conundrums can be complicated for SMs. For instance, one SM was asked by an administrator to inflate enrollment numbers in order to increase government support. The SM refused to comply, citing biblical and ethical principles. Another SM asserted, “Our cultures are so different and their level of honesty is entirely different than ours.” The dissonance between principals and practices caused awkwardness and uncertainty for many SMs. Sometimes it took time to reflect and evaluate in order to come to the place where they might speak out. Some were pushed forcefully to compromise personal principles—as was the case for one SM who was encouraged to live promiscuously by the host family because in that culture it was considered positive. The SM recounts the experience:
I refused and stood for my own principles. I tried to introduce this family to God and they refused God and me. It taught me that I have the responsibility to share God but it is beyond me if the person embraces God. I did my part.

Another SM had his supervisor demonstrate an unprofessional approach to their working relationship by admitting to being a workaholic and not to expect him to be a friend. This encounter opened the eyes of the student as to how human Christian leaders can be. In spite of an offensive introduction, the SM reported a surprisingly balanced critique of the situation stating, “God taught me lessons through him and I think that one of the main reasons why God put me there was because I needed to learn to work with somebody that was not like me.”

Student missionaries witnessed a variety of issues that stirred questions about ethical behavior. They noticed conflict between cultures and were exposed to how self-centered Americans were perceived to be. Cultural experiences caused some SMs to feel like they should respond more patiently to the overseas culture yet were far less forgiving of their home culture. Commenting on their re-entry into the States after serving for a year overseas, one student saw a TV commercial for an expensive piece of lawn equipment. This was his reaction:

I was outraged that we Americans were so flippant with our money and that our priorities were so screwed up! Over there in the jungle they had hardly anything, but they were so happy and open to the love of Jesus—over here in the U.S. we aren’t so lucky. Our hearts are closed and it takes so much for us to trust Jesus—unlike those in the villages.

Some SMs were disturbed by the disciplinary practices of native teachers. When one SM noticed students coming to class with three pairs of pants on, she knew something was wrong. Inquiring about the abundance of clothing, students informed the
SM that the principal would be coming. When the principal entered the room, he beat five boys in her classroom with a stick. She states:

I got so angry that I stood up and I started yelling in his face, and I told him he couldn’t do that. I was trying to be nice, but I couldn’t be nice because I was so angry and I was finally letting it out. It happens so much over there, and then finally he just wouldn’t talk to me, for months after that he wouldn’t talk to me, because he was the principal of the school and I had stood up to him. I am a lot younger than he is, but it was nice to know that I could finally do what I had been taught to do, even if it was disrespectful. I did what needed to be done.

Another SM learned to never send a discipline problem to the administrator again when her students were whipped with a stick. In this story it is important to note that this approach to discipline is characteristic of how parents discipline their children, but the response was to find a way to avoid such scenarios by dealing with the discipline in a different way.

Other SMs wrestled with the disparity between nations with regard to medical care. One student witnessed a funeral and discovered that two babies died because of the cold temperatures at night. She said, “He was taking them to bury them and it’s just sad how much death goes on there because there’s not much technology there.”

During their year of service, SMs were confronted with the fragile nature of life. An SM reported the horror of finding out one her students was stabbed by her husband because she was taking Bible studies and going to church. How does one respond to such a problem? Guilt? Anger? Frustration? This is the journey that young adults embark upon in sorting out their beliefs and standing up for their ideals. As SMs engaged in opportunities to practice the discipline of prophetic critiquing they were made more certain about their convictions as they took a stand for them.
Fellowship

Fellowship was a discipline that the CSPP results showed SMs to be higher in than the control group but is not discussed in this section on spiritual disciplines. The reason for this is that Fellowship is so deeply embedded in the theme of collaboration that it was discussed previously as a primary finding and will not be included in this portion of the chapter.

This study affirms that the practice of spiritual disciplines was a significant part of the SM experience. Students immersed themselves in Scripture, some as teachers, others as seekers. SMs discovered that their prayer life improved significantly during their year of service and their experience in prayer caused many to depend more fully on God. SMs found ways to engage in the work of evangelism, causing some to burn with a deep sense of calling to continue to proclaim the gospel to others.

The practice of the disciplined life in many cases was not scheduled or intended. In fact, in some cases the exercises of the spiritual life were serendipitous or simply part of their role. Nonetheless, the impact was overwhelmingly positive.

Summary

The findings in this chapter addressed the research question, What elements of the SM experience are transformational? The first finding conveyed the way high expectations caused SMs to invoke every resource they could to accomplish what they were expected to do. Not once did an SM report that they strove to achieve the minimum requirement. In fact, SMs were quick to point out what they might do differently—portraying an earnest desire for excellence. Student missionaries discovered that adversity has a way of challenging people to persevere and cling to God. Journeying
through the hard times proved to be a significant time of spiritual growth for many. As students collaborated with each other and others in the community, they found wisdom and strength in the ancient proverb that "two are better than one." Finally, this chapter concluded with the finding that the year of service is filled with opportunities to engage in the exercises of the spiritual life. The result of practicing the spiritual disciplines evoked a spiritual awakening in many and was a source of growth for others.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

One of the assumptions of this study was that service might be an effective vehicle to spiritually transform young adults. While service is a fundamental part of the Christian life, it can also be considered a method by which young adults can learn experientially and grow spiritually. The Student Missionaries (SMs) in this study served the Adventist church abroad for 10 months to a year working as teachers, pastors, medical assistants, associate deans, utility and repair service providers, Bible workers, PE coaches, chaplains, and more. The participants in this study spanned the globe offering a year of service to their church, and the impact of that year of service is the subject of this dissertation.

While there are varying degrees by which students perceived that their service changed them, all the students indicated some form of growth and, more important, the vast majority of them conveyed significant spiritual transformation as a result of their SM experience. The more removed students were from their year of service, the more certain they were about the impact that it had on them.

This study sought to understand the phenomenon of the SM experience as well as identify the aspects that make it transformational. The conclusions and recommendations in this section attempt to summarize this study and possibly peak the curiosity of others
who might wish to continue with similar research. This chapter includes a summary of the theoretical relationship between the SM experience and Kolb’s Experiential Learning model, the purpose of the study, research methods used in this study, the findings as they answer the two research questions of this study, a discussion of the findings, recommendations for churches, colleges, and students, and recommendations for further study.

**Student Missionaries and Experiential Learning (Kolb)**

Kolb’s (1981, 1984) experiential model proposes that effective learning occurs across four learning modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Furthermore, learning is a cycle (David A. Kolb, 1984) where information is grasped either through the senses (concrete experience) or through thinking (abstract conceptualization) and then processed through reflection (reflective observation) or action (active experimentation). The learning experience is made more effective when the learner completes the cycle through the different learning modes. Ultimately, this model speaks to both the cognitive and affective learning domains as information is processed through both reflective and active modes.

Kolb’s model of experiential learning provided a theoretical framework to better understand the impact of the SM experience on young adults. The idea that learning experientially will teach you more than you could ever know sitting in a classroom was echoed by SMs who maintained that what they discovered in a year of service was something you could not learn in books. One SM stated, “It wasn’t theory—it was down-to-earth practical knowledge. It was how to deal with people and how not to deal with
people and be successful.” For some, the SM experience was a place to test out their theories in a wilderness experience, much like Moses prior to becoming the leader of the Israelites. Such statements postulate a premise that a year of service will afford a learning experience that may never occur in conventional educational settings. The value of learning experientially was not lost on SMs in this study. SMs link actively serving others to spiritual growth. One student stated that being involved is what always strengthens your relationship with Christ. The SM experience, for some, was a time when God became more real, more tangible, and they openly professed that their relationship with God became more about their own beliefs than what they had been told. Coming to know what they believed was a product of the journey of a year of service. The outcome changed not only their perspectives about God, but the way they taught, the way they served, and the way they would venture out of their comfort zones.

SMs conveyed one of the basic tenets of Kolb’s learning cycle when they portrayed their year of service as a circle of learning. One student reflected on the process of putting together a church service and how that was a tremendous time of learning. Another student picked up on some of the parts of the experiential learning process by equating their experience to a pickup truck, stating: “You go around picking things up and learning new things. You don’t necessarily throw away your old culture but you keep adding new ideas about God, culture, language, and everything.” While SMs are probably not all versed in educational nomenclature, their reporting implicitly portrayed some of the characterizations of experiential learning. Figure 1 portrays how the SMs’ statements about their experience connect with the different parts of the process of Kolb’s learning cycle.
College students in this study seem to be very much aware that there is a transformational element when it comes to learning through service. Noting the
unconventional approach to learning during a year of service one SM stated, “God always has His way of teaching you what He wants you to learn.” Real-life change occurs during the hands-on interaction with others as well as daily challenges where you can put into practice your trust in God. Some students spoke of their service as engaging in “real ministry” where they could do something practical. In summary, young adults in this study perceived their year as an SM to be an opportunity to produce concrete, visible results that they could see and, in doing so, would provide a tangible gift of service to God. Their reward was the joy of service (White, 1903) and a year of stories that remain an integral part of who they are.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the SM experience in order to answer two basic questions: (a) What is the impact of the SM experience on young adults who serve for a year? and (b) What aspects of the SM experience make the year of service transformational? Another way of stating these questions is, “What did service do for college students who served for a year and what can we learn from their experience that can enhance spiritual experience today?”

**Methods**

In order to answer the research questions about the SM experience, I used primarily the qualitative methods of individual interviews, focus groups, and a questionnaire to collect data. The participants were former student missionaries who had recently returned from a year of service (within 2 years). Forty-seven individual interviews were conducted on four Seventh-day Adventist college campuses (14 at Andrews University, 13 at Pacific Union College, 9 at Southern Adventist University,
and 11 at Walla Walla College). One focus group was conducted on each of the four campuses consisting of five to seven students in each group. A total of 25 students participated in focus groups. A questionnaire was sent to former SMs 5 and 10 years removed from their year of service consisting of the same questions that were used in the individual interviews and the focus groups. Seventeen questionnaires were completed and returned (40%) from the SMs 5 years removed from service. Twenty-one (42%) questionnaires were returned from former SMs who were 10 years removed from service.

In addition to the qualitative case study design, this study also used the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP) as an additional source of data. The CSPP is based upon Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle, which was introduced as the theoretical framework for this study. The CSPP is designed to show an individual’s participation in the Christian spiritual disciplines. The CSPP was administered to 400 former SMs on the four college campuses and 201 were returned to me. The data were scored by the Center for Statistical Services at Andrews University and then analyzed.

**Findings**

In a time when the church is struggling to find the best methods to inspire spiritual growth in young adults as well as deepen their commitment to its mission, the SM experience offers many insights that may significantly shape the future of church life for the coming generations. The data emerging from this study make a strong argument for the holistic power of a year of service to transform young adults. The findings and conclusions are organized by the research questions.
Findings Emerging From the First Research Question

The first research question in this study asked about the impact of the SM experience on young adults. In this study, three clusters of themes were reported that show the impact of the SM experience: spiritual transformation, holistic impact, and connections to Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. From these three clusters, seven primary findings emerged from the data that demonstrate how the SM experience impacted young adults.

The first finding was that SMs perceived that their relationship with God deepened as a result of their service abroad. SMs discovered through a year of service different aspects of God's character through their devotional life, their interactions with others, and through their work of service. One of the important attributes of this finding has to do with the fact that "they" discovered God. As one student stated, "My relationship with God became more about what I believe than what I was told." As students interacted with God in the mission field they became owners of their relationship with God.

The second finding was that a year of service teaches young adults to depend on God in ways that might not have occurred if they had not served. Learning to rely on God emerged as a prominent theme, which stirred up an interesting reality that young adults encounter in the SDA church. Many students reflected on how self-reliant their lives were "back home" compared to their year of service. Serving as SMs pushed them out of the comfort of their culture, their familiar routines, and the religious programming that was provided for them. The removal of those supports caused them to cling to God for strength as they served in their respective fields of ministry.
The third finding was that a year of service expanded their worldview and had power to shape their perspective on life. Any cross-cultural trip might expose students to another culture, but living and working in another region can pry apart the cultural and social structures that are formed in their familiar culture. SMs exposure was not simply an enrichment of other cultures, it was an expansion of the way they think and respond to people. It caused them to re-orient their priorities and reform the way they perceive the world around them.

The fourth finding was that a year of service enhanced the way young adults respond to the needs of the world around them. Service to others prompted a deeper value of the selfless quality inherent in Christ’s call to meet the needs of the world. Students were not only invigorated and inspired by the power of service, but their convictions about how to live now were shaped by their year of service.

The fifth finding highlights how the SM experience prompted young adults to mature as leaders. The year of service strengthened their confidence as they were able to create, develop, and complete tasks in their sphere of service. Another aspect of maturing as leaders was the discovery of the different leadership styles, skills, and temperaments that they encountered as SMs. One of the primary tasks of development for college students is to develop a sense of competency in various areas of life. The SM experience offered tremendous opportunities for students to grow and mature through service.

The sixth finding was that the SM experience is perceived as a life-changing experience from a holistic perspective. This study argues that the SM experience is perceived to be one of the most pivotal life experiences by the young adults who served
for a year. While many of the students who had recently returned from service expressed that their experience was life-changing, students who were 10 years removed from their service used superlative language to describe the impact their service had on them.

The seventh finding affirms the effectiveness of experiential learning as seen in the SM experience. Clearly, Kolb’s model of experiential learning became a theoretical framework that the SM experience coherently captures. The four modes of learning (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation) were identified throughout the activities and experiences of the year of service.

Findings Emerging From the Second Research Question

The second research question asked about which aspects of the SM experience make the year of service transformational. The data from this research conclude that four aspects of the SM experience are transformational: (a) SMs were challenged by increased expectations; (b) SMs grew as they persevered through adversity; (c) SMs effectively collaborated with others in service; and (d) SMs were transformed by the active participation in the spiritual disciplines.

Challenging young adults to function with extraordinary expectations is one aspect of the SM experience that moved SMs to deep levels of transformation. Because of tremendous expectations placed on SMs to function effectively, students developed in ways they may not have without such lofty goals. Educators have discovered that increased expectations can motivate people beyond their perceived capacity to perform (Wilkinson, 1992).
Another aspect of the SM experience was the way young adults persevered through adversity and trials. So much about themselves, others, and God and His faithfulness was discovered in the trials and conflicts of a year of service. SMs significantly matured and grew spiritually as they persevered through adversity.

Collaborating with others in service proved to be another aspect of the SM experience that was transformational. This study also found that collaboration among SMs and other support systems significantly enhanced their experience. Another finding from this research shows that even though some students learned to more fully rely upon God in their isolation, it is clear that SMs function more effectively when they worked in close collaboration with others.

The final aspect that made the SM experience transformational emerged in the way SMs actively participated in the Christian spiritual disciplines during their year of service. The results from the CSPP indicate the SMs were higher than non-SMs in their participation in all 10 spiritual disciplines and significantly higher in 8 of them. This data affirmed the SMs' report of their engagement in the exercises of the spiritual life. These practices or spiritual disciplines (Bible study, prayer, worship, service, fellowship, repentance, meditation, evangelism, stewardship, prophetic critiquing) were vehicles for growth in their relationship with God.

**Discussion of the Findings**

SMs served others in full-time ministry for a year and experienced a year that significantly shaped and transformed their life. By no means were they perfect. In fact, something about full-time service exposed weaknesses in their character that they might be more likely to confess as being a poor example of being patient, kind, or selfless. But
it is that honest, earnest humility that emerged from my study of these students that drives this point home: Service is a portrayal of how the concept of grace is seamlessly connected to an act of love: Teaching a second-grader to pray on the Island of Palau. Sharpening the farming tools of villagers in the remote regions of Chile. Having a Bible study with a searching student in the dorm at a boarding school. Opening the medical clinic in the middle of the night to lance a boil. Building a water system for a third-world community. Visiting the prisoners on Sabbath afternoon. Patiently putting up with troubled students in science class. Service to others is the consummate example of the inseparable relationship of theory and practice. An act of service is love embodied by action no matter how simple or menial the act may be. I am constrained to say that service must become a new type of textbook, teacher, and chalkboard for learning in a community of faith.

Kolb's model of experiential learning can assist the community of faith to grasp the importance of integrating theory into practice through service. In chapter 4 Kolb's model is described as having four modes of learning (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation). Reflective observation and abstract conceptualization are exercises that are mainly theoretical, whereas active experimentation and concrete experience are predominantly functions that are practiced. A community of faith might have a tendency to focus on the theoretical aspects of faith, thus emphasizing listening to a preacher or maintaining doctrinal conformity. But if a community would venture into a service that actively processes their theories in tangible ways, it would create a more effective learning experience.
The example of the SM experience can model an intentional approach to integrating theory and practice. For example, one SM reports working as a teacher all day and going back to her apartment where fellow SMs would debrief and share their stories and struggles of the day. The time of sharing became a stronghold of listening, praying, and encouraging each other. This portrays how concrete experiences can be processed through reflection thus enabling them to approach the next challenge with new insight and strength. In contrast to this scenario, SMs who were isolated and had no one to collaborate with or process their experiences became discouraged and withdrawn because they were alone. In some cases, the only form some had was email or phone calls, which became a lifeline for them. As SMs were able to talk about their problems and victories in service they connected their practice to theory through reflection. Kolb’s model is couched in language that may seem complicated to some, but the central truth about experiential learning is that it is the most natural way to learn.

What experiential learning brings to churches and schools is a seamless bridge from theory to practice or from practice to theory. I say “seamless” because practice is never truly detached from theory as much as it might be dormant from a lack of vision or integration. These two operations in the truest sense, cannot be separated, but in a functional way they tend to be compartmentalized. The SMs in this study described their service as a time to practice “real life ministry” and to “do something practical for God.” SMs were compelled to “hands on” ministry because it made sense and needed to be done. Young people are taught such concepts as kindness, compassion, forgiveness, sharing, giving, and helping. Ideas such as justice, fairness, and equality ring out of pulpits and are thematically presented in classrooms but can be disconnected from “real
life" experiences in the community of faith. I am convinced that learning through service can integrate these concepts into a lived experience that so thoroughly imbues Christian values beyond what can be learned in a classroom or by sitting in the pew.

Another point of discussion this study prompted is the importance of expecting more from young adults. High expectations caused SMs to function as professionals without having the experience or the qualifications that would be required of someone in the states. A sophomore in college is not qualified to teach seventh-grade math in the states without a degree and proper certification. Yet, in a year of mission service students function with the title and the responsibility of a teacher or pastor, etc. The expectations stretched across the spectrum of ministries from doing Bible studies to assisting with the birth of a child. Assistant deans functioned with the authority and responsibility of maintaining order and stability in dorms filled with high-school students. The impact of trusting SMs with tremendous responsibility is that they rose to higher levels because it was their job.

Jesus told His disciples, "If you believe in me you will do the things that I do. You will do even greater things than these when the Holy Spirit comes" (John 14:12). How this statement must have troubled the disciples. But they were sent out and returned claiming, "even the demons submitted to us" (Luke 10:17). The SM experience models an approach that comes from the textbook of the Master Teacher and is needed in the community of faith. The church needs to expect more from young people. It is true that pastors are equipped to give Bible studies, but why cannot young people do the same? To suggest that younger generations of believers are incapable of doing the things professionally trained ministers do is simply wrongheaded. It undermines the core truth
in the doctrine of spiritual gifts and the very essence of the dynamic work of the Holy
Spirit in the lives of believers. Service, on the other hand, exposes the believer to a
unique opportunity for unlimited, ongoing learning led by the Spirit.

In order for significant renewal and regeneration to occur, current leaders must
accept that young adults can do greater things than what is presently happening. Even
more than accepting the reality that young people can exceed our current place in the
world, but they must expect it. This is not to suggest a mindless release of the reigns of
leadership but openness to their creative promise and a mutual respect for the way God
will inhabit their ideas and work in ways that He has not done before. When SMs report,
“I had no idea I could give a sermon” or “I never dreamed that I could be an assertive
leader,” it behooves the church to wonder, “What else might they be excellent at that we
(or they) aren’t even aware of?” The source of this idea comes from the truth that God
has enabled individuals by His Spirit to be channels of grace to the world. Each person
being different will manifest the gift of grace differently, but always with equal
sponsorship from heaven.

Through dealing with adversity during their year of service, SMs were prompted
them to become more dependent on God to sustain them. It would seem irrational to
contend that seeking out trouble is an effective way to experience transformation,
because adversity strikes whether a learning experience is desired or not. The findings
from this study indicate that SMs grew through trying times by clinging to God in prayer,
faithfully working through problems, and simply weathering the storm. Students learned
that life is fragile and clinging to God in difficult moments fostered an even deeper
extension of their relationship with God. As students report “I know that whatever I face
in life God with carry me through,” they testify to the depth that real change occurred in their life.

When students describe learning to depend “completely” on God for “everything” they do “all the time,” it is a discovery that is typically learned in the heat of adversity. These themes were reported in different sections of this study but are connected to each other. What made this finding so interesting was the distinction that some made about how their SM experience exposed how self-reliant they were at home in contrast to the way they relied upon Him during their year of service. There are very few textbooks or curricular devices that can teach the lesson of learning to rely on God through hardship. Even more daunting would be to try and learn such a lesson in a comfortable, familiar environment. One student commented on how being an SM showed him how desperately self-sufficient he was at home but as a second-grade teacher he surrendered to God’s leading in every little thing he did.

The holistic quality of learning through service seizes all experiences in life, whether good or bad, as opportunities to grow. James affirms this principle saying, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete” (Jas 1:1-4). It is also interesting to note that patience was a major character quality that SMs felt was lacking.

Another compelling finding that calls for discussion has to do with the way students grew through collaboration. The ability to effectively work with others is a life skill profoundly needed in the church. SMs worked together with other SMs, other local workers, and with members of their community, which challenged them at times but
comforted them at other times. Some claim that people rarely leave the church because of doctrinal or ideological reasons but leave because of personal issues with other people. To say “I learned to work with people who had a different personality type than me” conveys a maturity that is commendable.

It is difficult to refer to the spiritual disciplines without an initial resistance to the “discipline” part of the phrase. The connection the disciplines have to spiritual growth is key, but the oppressive connotation that it comes with smacks of righteousness by works. Tasker (2002) recognized that the term “disciplines” carries baggage that misdirects or inhibits those who seek to engage in the spiritual disciplines. She suggested using the term “relationship enhancers” to describe the spiritual disciplines. Padrick (2004) captured the purpose of the disciplines stating, “Disciplines are not about trying to get God’s attention but about training ourselves to pay attention to Him” (p. 51). When SMs arduously searched Scripture in order to better answer questions that students were asking, it was more about being effective than about being saved. SMs described their participation in the spiritual life, not as a task or an item on a list to check off, but as an integrated part of their journey in service. To discover that their relationship with God is not dependent on whether they had “devotions” that morning as much as they live a life of devotion throughout the day is a powerful discovery for a young adult. Overall, the SM experience provided an opportunity for students to engage in spiritual disciplines as a way of life.

Related to the discussion of the spiritual disciplines were discoveries that emerged in the CSPP findings. While the instrument complemented this study, I was disturbed by the findings that indicated that in disciplines such as prayer, prophetic critiquing, and
repentance, SMs participated "occasionally" in contrast to other disciplines such as evangelism, fellowship, and service, which they engaged in "rarely." One reason for this might be that certain disciplines can freely take place in the mind (prayer, repentance, and prophetic critiquing) while others require planning and action (fellowship, service, and evangelism). It may be true that all the disciplines are essential to balanced growth, but some disciplines tend to be more available for practice than others.

While serving is a fundamental component of the Christian mission, it may be one of the most effective teaching tools of our time. If the goal of education is to prepare people for service here on earth as well as in the world to come, then one of the most comprehensive methods may be service. Service, as a teaching tool, may seem somewhat simplistic but consider how effective the current methodologies of churches and schools are in accomplishing the work of spiritual transformation. What makes service such a transformative experience has to do with the holistic nature of the learning process. Experiential learning is holistic and, therefore, life changing. Consider what Dettoni (1993) claimed about service: "Service projects are not expressional activities conceived of apart from the whole teaching-learning situation. They are the most profitable teaching-learning situations imaginable" (as cited in Lemke, 2004, p. 104). Simply stated, serving others is learning a complete learning experience.

If this research has shown me anything it is the compelling power of service. If churches and schools want to attract and integrate young adults into their communities, they need to be about service. In all the activities and endeavors of church life, the command to bring cups of cool water to those who are thirsty still stands as the primary work of the church. Young adults long to ally themselves with ministry that matters.
Their whole world is about discovering what is worthwhile and meaningful. A church that serves its community with no strings attached, desiring only the good of its constituents, would surely attract young adults. But what would this look like? A church or school would need to truly internalize and integrate a holistic approach to its mission and practice. Simplify if need be. But when young people can see the connection between what is believed to what is lived they are drawn to an authentic, holistic community. This is why churches and schools must embed service in the curriculum of their community of faith.

**Recommendations**

For College Students

Since it is so evident that college students experience such life-changing growth as an SM, I recommend taking a year out of school to serve abroad. It was noted in this study that 5 and 10 years after a year of service former SMs believed their year of service to be a pivotal point in personal and spiritual growth.

In light of this study, it is clear that people are rarely motivated to serve by one primary reason. If there is a genuine desire to work on behalf of others then students should have a conversation with the SM Director of a local Adventist College. As was reported in this study, students may have multiple reasons to spend a year away from their formal academic pursuits, but if there is a willingness to work hard and serve then the SM experience is a worthwhile endeavor.

For students who are considering a year of service, I recommend availing yourself to as much preliminary resources and training as are available. There are many aspects of mission service that are unanticipated, but being ready to experience this uncertainty is
advantageous. Some SM programs have accountability or prayer partners, mentors, or coaches who agree to be available for support. I also recommend serving with other SMs whenever possible because of the way this study discovered that isolation hinders personal growth. My final recommendation for students would be prayerfully count the cost of a year of service.

For Colleges

One of the aspects of this study showed that the immersion into a full-time service role caused students to grow because of the tremendous expectations that were placed on them. While this was shown to be a positive dynamic in learning, students' intentional preparation for a year of service might enhance their experience. I recommend that colleges implement sufficient training for potential SMs before they leave and re-entry retreats and small-group communities for necessary debriefing. Annual adjustment and development of procedures for preparation, training, communication, and re-entry and debriefing checkpoints are highly recommended. The world is changing more rapidly than ever, and adjusting our procedures to ensure that colleges are providing the most adequate support will always be needed.

If colleges were to offer academic credit for a year of service it could, not only increase the number of students who go, but increase the value of experiential learning as an effective way to learn. Clearly the research indicates that experiential learning is not only valid, but effective. Offering credit for their learning experience in service might foster a culture of openness to the tenets of experiential learning on campus as well. Furthermore, the students might establish a more fluid integration of school and learning to spiritual growth and service.
The tremendous workload of preparing students to serve around the world and maintaining adequate contact and support for them before, during, and after their year of service is a daunting task. I recommend that Colleges should hire a Student Missions Director as a full-time position that is not shared with other responsibilities. In some cases, SM Directors serve the chaplain’s office as an administrative assistant. While there is a direct relationship to the spiritual life on campus and service abroad, the need to have a single-minded approach to the program is recommended.

As this study showed, the spiritual disciplines are an integral part of a life-changing year of service. Although many of the students in this study were compelled to participate in spiritual activities out of desperation or job description, an introduction in the practice and benefits of the disciplines might better equip students in their preparation for service. Colleges could include some initial training in the orientation retreats.

I also recommend that colleges enlist local churches, academies, and elementary schools to provide additional support and care of SMs while they are abroad. It was reported in this study that students chose to spend a year in service because they were exposed to mission stories and people they knew who had served. To engage a future generation of SMs by including them in effort can expand the awareness of the SM program as well as broaden their ownership of mission service.

For Churches

For local churches to initiate and aggressively pursue ways to assist the colleges and the North American Division would greatly enhance the influence of the SM program. The organizational entities already are stretched to do the work to train, prepare, and place students in the mission field. I recommend that churches pursue creative ways to help such as, sending sermon tapes from church, care packages, pictures,
communications, and supplies for teachers. This kind of support continues to build
ownership of missions in local churches and fosters a missionary spirit in the children
growing up in them. Enlisting this kind of emotional support from local churches will
compliment the current support that colleges offer.

There will always be ways to improve the value of service as part of the local
church experience. Such support for SMs can energize churches in mission service as
well as youth and young adult ministry. I recommend that churches foster a spirit of
mission service in their church curriculum through storytelling and interviewing former
SMs. As churches promote and invest in their young people to serve, the shape of the
entire church changes for the future. Furthermore, I recommend deliberate engagement
in community service locally and overseas through short-term mission trips. Service can
move from being an event to a way of life as churches pepper their communities with
kindness and what Jesus would call, “cups of cool water.” The outcome of such an
approach may significantly change the spirit and effectiveness of a local church.

North American Division (NAD)

If 50% of Adventist young people are going to public university or no university
at all, then I recommend implementing a more aggressive strategy to engage young adults
on public campuses to volunteer for a year of service abroad. As I understand it, the
NAD is currently engaged in seeking ways to engage more students from public
campuses to participate in the student missionary experience. I would recommend a
continual, concerted effort to involve students on public campuses in mission service.
Former SMs

First of all, on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist church I want to thank all former SMs and Task Force Workers for spending themselves in service to others for a year. Their sacrifice and the gifts of grace that they gave, whether simple and rudimentary or dynamic and sensational, were not only noted in heaven but were appreciated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I recommend former SMs continue to reflect and share their experiences that other generations of mission-minded youth will extend the work they started, and even create new work.

For Further Study

The connection between the SM experience and continued support for church life, leadership, and missions might provide the church with a broader sense of what long-term impact the SM experience has on its participants. It was discovered in this study that the SMs that were 10 years removed from service had more time to reflect on the impact of their experience and could describe that impact forcefully. Further study on the key component of critical reflection in service could provide insight into ways to integrate debriefing and reflection to other aspects of church and school life. Also, further study on former SMs since the start of the program would provide a broad range insight into the importance of critical reflection in spiritual growth.

Furthermore, a study focusing on the connection between the SM experience and denominational employment might provide interesting demographic information about the role of the SM program in recruiting denominational workers. Many of the SM in this study served as teachers in their year abroad. Further study that tracked the impact of SM service on the impact of choosing to become (or not to become) a denominational worker could enhance the way churches and organizations recruited employees.
One of the dynamics of this study was a focus on the impact of service on those who serve. Clearly, this study, as well as others, show service to powerfully shape young adults who serve. A study should be conducted from various selected SM institutions around the world to examine the impact of SM service from the perspective of the recipients of the SM program. Schools, churches, and organizations that regularly benefit from the SM program can offer insight and a better perspective of the effects of the SM program over the years. A study on the impact of SMs on those they serve might also give insight on the impact SMs directly have on the mission of the church. In essence, the SM program is not only about helping college students to grow up but to empower them to make a difference in the world.

Another area of study I recommend is how young people perceive different types of service impact their spiritual life. This study reported various service activities that enhanced the spiritual growth of college students. One might assess the types of service that occur domestically or locally that has a similar impact as serving overseas. One example would be to examine the perceptions of summer camp staff and discuss the aspects of camp ministry that have made the greatest difference in their life. Local college community service programs could be studied to consider the role of service in the spiritual growth of college students who do not leave for a year but find ways to serve locally.

A study needs to be conducted on what motivates SMs to venture out in service. This study discovered that there were many motivators, but how those reasons shape their experience in service would be helpful to the church and the colleges who send them. Churches could better understand what they could do to prompt their young people to
serve. Colleges could benefit by understanding how to engage potential SMs more intentionally.

Finally, This study showed that experiential learning is a powerful methodology for the spiritual and personal growth of young adults. Research that produces greater insight into experiential learning opportunities in the life of the church is needed. The sentiments of SMs in this study showed young adults to be eager to participate in “real-life ministry.” In light of the current desire of young adults to be more involved in service I recommend that study should be given to churches and schools that integrate experiential learning and service in their curriculum.
APPENDIX A

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP
Discussion Questions for Focus Groups

Protocol:
• Warm, friendly environment
• Start with an introduction of research and prayer

Information: (1) Share honestly and openly. (2) Paper, pen and questions for jotting down notes. (3) feel free to comment randomly as the discussion progresses.

(Everyone answers this in order)
1. Where did you go as a student missionary and what was your job/role?

(Everyone answers in reverse order)
2. Describe the activities you would participate in? On an average week?

(Volunteer: let them choose who goes first and in what order as they are ready)
3. Why did you go as a student missionary?

(Volunteer: let them choose who goes first and in what order as they are ready)
4. What did you learn about yourself during this year of service? (How did your missionary experience influence the way you make decisions today?) What did you learn about God?

(Everyone answers in order)
5. Who did you talk to when you had an idea or needed support or wanted some help?

(Volunteer: let them choose who goes first and in what order as they are ready)
6. Share with me some of the experiences/events that you would say were “life-changing” for you. (Call them “defining moments.” Events or experiences that had a significant impact on you.)

(Volunteer: let them choose who goes first and in what order as they are ready)
7. If you were to characterize your SM experience with the symbol of animal, car, or type of weather, what would you choose as a symbol and why?

(Volunteer: let them choose who goes first and in what order as they are ready)
8. In one sentence, describe the impact that being a student missionary had on you?

9. What would you do differently if you could go again?
# Christian Spiritual Participation Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>VR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>VF</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I pray, I am confident that God will answer my prayer.</td>
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<td>2. When I pray, I am certain that God is attentive and holy.</td>
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<td>3. In my prayers, I reveal my personal needs and thoughts.</td>
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<td>4. In my prayers, I actively seek to discover the will of God.</td>
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<td>5. In my prayers, I thank God for the salvation He has provided for me in Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td>6. When experiences in my life lead me to despair or depression, I turn to God in prayer for deliverance.</td>
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<td>7. Rejoicing is a part of my private prayers to God.</td>
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<td>8. When I confess and report of my sins, I experience the assurance of being forgiven by God.</td>
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<td>9. My worship is focused on the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.</td>
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<td>10. My participation in the Lord's Supper (Communion, Eucharist) draws me into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td>11. I attend a church worship service:</td>
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<td>12. When I attend church worship service, I express a desire to be delivered from its power.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. My worship is focused on the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.</td>
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<td>14. My participation in the Lord's Supper (Communion, Eucharist) draws me into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td>15. I reflect thoughtfully on passages I read in the Bible.</td>
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<td>16. I listen to music that praises God.</td>
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<td>17. I record in a journal my thoughts on my spiritual journey</td>
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<td>18. I daily forgive those who sin against me even when the damage or hurt they have caused is very great.</td>
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<td>19. When I examine my life, I recognize the great need for God's redemptive work for me.</td>
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<td>20. I evaluate my actions by principles found in the Bible.</td>
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<td>21. When I read or hear reports of terrible crimes that have been committed against people, I grieve over the evil in the world.</td>
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<td>22. When I hear about famines, floods, earthquakes and other disasters, I want to help the victims in some way.</td>
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<td>23. When I use or learn about the immoral ways so many people live, I long for God's will to be done.</td>
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<td>24. Even though evil seems to be so powerful and so pervasive, I feel confident that God will ultimately prove just.</td>
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<td>25. Even when a situation seems universally difficult or painful, I have confidence that through his providence, God can bring something good out of it.</td>
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<td>26. I use biblically based principles to govern ethical decisions.</td>
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<td>27. I read or study the Bible to learn the will of God.</td>
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<td>28. When I read or study the Bible, I attempt to learn the enduring principles being taught by the specific passage I am considering.</td>
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<td>29. I study the Bible to understand theologies of my church.</td>
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<td>30. As part of my study of the Bible, I consider how the church has dealt with issues throughout its history.</td>
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<td>31. When I read or study the Bible, I change my beliefs and/or behavior to accommodate new information or understanding.</td>
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<td>32. I read devotional articles and/or books.</td>
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<tr>
<td>33. I read or study the Bible:</td>
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<td>34. I work with other Christians believers for the purpose of introducing unchurched people to Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td>35. Based on my abilities and spiritual gifts, I assist in some way in the teaching ministry of my church.</td>
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<td>36. I invite unchurched people to attend church or small group meetings with me.</td>
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<td>37. I pray for people and/or organizations that are working for the salvation of the unsaved.</td>
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<td>38. When someone in my church is sick or experiencing some other problem and needs me, I help them.</td>
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<td>39. I meet with a small group of Christian friends for prayer, Bible study, or ministry.</td>
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<td>40. I assist in some way in the teaching ministry.</td>
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<td>41. I attend a church worship service:</td>
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<td>42. When I attend church worship service, I express a desire to be delivered from its power.</td>
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<td>43. I serve in a church ministry or community agency to help people in need.</td>
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<td>44. When a friend, believer, or neighbor suffers pain, hardship, or loss, I join them with my presence and suffer with them.</td>
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<td>45. I respect the church as my father, as my mother, as my church.</td>
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<td>46. I use my home (apartment, dorm room) to provide hospitality to strangers or to those in need.</td>
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<td>47. My actions in nature are guided by what is best for the environment.</td>
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<td>48. I give financially to support the work of the church.</td>
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<td>49. I do without things I want in order to give sacrificially to the work of God.</td>
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<td>50. I choose what to eat and drink and how to live my life based on the concept that caring for my health is being a good steward of God's blessing of life.</td>
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APPENDIX C

RESEARCH COVER LETTER
Andrews University
Leadership Department

THE STUDENT MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE

Dear Participant,

I want to thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. I know how busy college students are and there many things to be done that are important. However, I think you will agree that a study on the student missionary experience is timely.

This study seeks to discover the impact that a term of missionary service has on the spiritual formation of young adults in the Adventist church. The following survey entitled “Christian Spiritual Participation Profile” is one way we can look at how student missionaries participate in the spiritual disciplines.

The results of this profile will be compared with students who have not participated in the student missionary program. Know that the survey is anonymous and your name and identity will not be disclosed.

1. Answer the statements number 1 through 50 indicating your response:

N= Never
VR = very Rarely
R = Rarely
O = Occasionally
F = Frequently
VF = Very Frequently

2. Please make sure you fill in the appropriate response for the section left of the survey entitled “Gender” and “Age.”

3. When you have completed the survey place it in the envelope and return it to the Student Missions office.

Thank you again for your time in this project and thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

Troy Fitzgerald
Researcher, Andrews University
APPENDIX D

SM PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF A YEAR OF SERVICE
Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Areas of Perceived Impact</th>
<th>General Perspective of Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deepened Relationship with God</td>
<td>Holistic perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning to depend on God</td>
<td>Comparative superlatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanded worldview</td>
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<tr>
<td>The need for service</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Maturing as leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>254 200 71 175 66 229 212</td>
<td>18 140 220 91</td>
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<tr>
<td>112 211 202 117 14 225 210</td>
<td>20 38 182 90</td>
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<td>26 24 100 65 195 199 23 154 53 91</td>
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Note: This table shows how themes were constituted based on repetition in the data. The numbers are references to pages in the data file where this theme is discussed by student missionaries.
APPENDIX E

CHAPTER 5 THEMES
### Table 9

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Note: This table shows how themes were constituted based on repetition in the data. The numbers are references to pages in the data file where this theme is discussed by student missionaries.
APPENDIX F

SAMPLE OF THE WRITING PROCESS
Table 10

*Chart Showing the Writing Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Raw Data-Statements</th>
<th>Sample section of statements</th>
<th>Sample writing with numbers</th>
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<td>5 mostly sunny and warm but then sometimes there would be rain in the morning. It was an awesome experience but then it would be a little bit hard at times too. 207 a tropical storm—the situations were often serious, but never ended in disaster—just a lot of wind and rain, which watered some of the seeds inside of me that needed to grow up anyways. 209 One of the thunderstorms we occasionally experienced in Zhanjiang: short-lived but powerful, frightening but strangely alluring; you can’t help but run out into it, brave its dangers and passions. And at the end, all is sparkly-clean, like new. 224 as the season of spring weather. It is a mixture of turbulent and chaotic storms but also is filled with peaceful and mild weather. It promotes growth and gives hope for summer. That was a lot like my experience. It was filled with growth and pain. 233 Turbulence—like when you ride in an airplane. Reason: there were definite rough times dealing with the school’s attitude towards SMs, and school politics. One SM changed religions and left the SDA church and me questioning my own spiritual belief system. Weather proved to be an appropriate way to symbolize the SM experience due to its changing nature. (231,198, 224) The drama of trials and personal conflict, mixed with cultural problems caused SM to describe their year with raw honesty exposing the hard realities of being away from the security of home. (233,207) The balance of easy and hard times was reflected as SMs spoke of sunny and warm times as well as rain.</td>
<td>231 Like the weather, my experiences were unpredictable. There were many scary—stormy times, times in which I feared for my life. Yet there were so many times that were happy, joyful—sunny. 198 It would be a hurricane. It was a very turbulent, ever-changing experience—until I found the “eye” of the storm and let God guide the way he wanted to. 224 as the season of spring weather. It is a mixture of turbulent and chaotic storms but also is filled with peaceful and mild weather. It promotes growth and gives hope for summer. That was a lot like my experience. It was filled with growth and pain. 233 Turbulence—like when you ride in an airplane. Reason: there were definite rough times dealing with the school’s attitude towards SMs, and school politics. One SM changed religions and left the SDA church and me questioning my own spiritual belief system.</td>
<td>Weather proved to be an appropriate way to symbolize the SM experience due to its changing nature. (231,198, 224) The drama of trials and personal conflict, mixed with cultural problems caused SM to describe their year with raw honesty exposing the hard realities of being away from the security of home. (233,207) The balance of easy and hard times was reflected as SMs spoke of sunny and warm times as well as rain. (5, 209, 231, 224)</td>
</tr>
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Note: This table shows how the voice of SMs was retained in the reporting.
APPENDIX G

JOB DESCRIPTIONS
Job Description: Task-force Worker

Taskforce Dean (F) at Oakwood College in Alabama
Publishing date: 06/23/2004 3:10 pm
Location: Huntsville, Alabama

Duties: Assist the deans in the overall operation of the freshman women's residence hall.

Preferred field of study: Sociology, psychology, social work, nursing.

Vehicle: Not Required.

Skills Needed: People-oriented, good written and oral communication skills. Youth supervisory experience, activity planning/organizing, office experience a plus.

Lodging: Lodging in dorm; meals in cafeteria.

Also provided:

Stipend: 500 dollars/mon.


IMPORTANT:
If you are studying on an Adventist college campus in North America, please contact your chaplain's or missions office for more information or to apply. Your volunteer application and recommendation forms must be processed through them.
Job Description: Student Missionary

Type of Job: Teaching-Elementary  Positions Available: 1 of 1
Position Title: Music Teacher  Call Number: SSD-CAS-2004-01
Institution: Cambodia Adventist School
Country: Cambodia

Length of Service: 12 months  Beginning Date: Sep 01, 2004  Ending Date: Aug 15, 2005
Application Deadline:

Baggage Allowance: No  Terms: 
Meals Provided: No  Local Travel: No  Utilities Provided: Yes

Gender: Male  Marital Status: Single  Age Range: 19-25
Languages: Fluent English Required
Required Experience: 
Minimum Education: 3 Years College/Univ

Duties: Teach Music to elementary and secondary students. Theory and direct choirs. Direct chime group. Teach and direct recorder groups.

Living Allowance: US$150/Month

Lodging: Small apartment or shared bedroom. Stove, refrigerator, bed, table, dishes, pans, and utensils all provided.

Travel Destination: Phnom Peph, Cambodia  Airport: Pochentong International, Phnom Penh
Travel from Airport to Destination: 
Visa Required: Yes  Visa Type: B-NGO Volunteer
Work Permit Required: No
Visa/Travel Details: Visa will be provided to volunteer at the airport upon arrival.

Acceptable Dress: Clean, casual wear. Girls are very conservative for this culture. Men-Clean,
UnAcceptable Dress; Torn, grubby, revealing. No bare midriff or spaghetti straps.

Additional Information: Orientation provided.

Status of Position: Available
Final Decision: Division
Date Call was Listed: Nov 24, 2003
Division: Southern Asia-Pacific Division  Union: Southeast Asia Union Mission
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The undersigned agrees to participate in the research conducted by Troy Fitzgerald in association with his dissertation in the Leadership Program at Andrews University. I understand that I was selected because of my participation in the Student Missions Program.

I understand that this study will be conducted to discover the impact the student mission experience has on the spiritual formation of young adults. I understand that the surveys, interviews, and discussions are designed to gather information about the Student Missionary experience. I understand that I may decline or withdraw from the process at any time prior to its conclusion in April of 2001 without any negative consequences.

I also understand that my identity (by name and photo) and my school and the country I served in will remain anonymous and used only for the research of this dissertation. It is clear to me that my name, picture, and any other details that identify me will remain private. I understand that any pictures, video, or audio documentation will be used only for transcription purposes and data analysis. This effort to maintain anonymity will not preclude the review of the researchers notes and other data by his research advisor at Andrews University.

I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher question prior to signing this form. I understand that I can contact the researcher at the address and telephone numbers below if I have any further questions or concerns.

Researcher:  Troy E. Fitzgerald
Telephone:  Home (509) 529-8526  Work (509) 527-2834
Email:  troyfitz@bmi.net
Address:  PO Box 212
          College Place, WA 99324

Research Advisor:  Dr. Shirley A. Freed, Andrews University (616) 471-6163
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0105

Signature  ___________________________  Date  __________
Witness  ___________________________  Date  __________
REFERENCE LIST
REFERENCE LIST


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