

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WE WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH
DISCOVERING MINISTRY TO THE MARGINALIZED
AT EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH OF AKRON OHIO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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BY
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my holy covenant life partner, Chris Miley, of 25 years. Thank you for always standing beside me, encouraging me, praying for and with me. You have sacrificed for me in ways that others may never know. Your love has enabled me to accomplish all that God has desired of me in this project. To my Parents, Jack and Donna Hines; though my dad looks down from heaven, I hope when you look my way, it is with humble pride. Momma, you have stood strong beside me lovingly, encouraging me with your gift of intercessory prayer and kept a candle burning each day in hope of seeing this process completed. Thank you!

To the members and friends of Emmanuel Fellowship Church, if not for you, this great revelation of God's love and hope for Christian GLBT may just have continued to echo in the shadows of life. Thank you for your light, love and prayerful support.

Lastly, to all the GLBT people of the world who have been fearful to walk hand in hand with Jesus due to religious persecution, rejection, and marginalization, I pray that you will stand strong in knowing that you, too, may worship in spirit and truth with Christ through His Holy Word and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Be no longer afraid.

APPROVAL PAGE

Accepted by the faculty and the final demonstration examining committee of Ashland Seminary, Ashland, Ohio, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor o Ministry Degree.

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ABSTRACT

This project discovered how the participation in an open and affirming Church (Emmanuel Fellowship Church) contributed to a renewed self-image in the body of Christ for GLBT Christians. The author used a seven point Likert scale to survey members and friends of EFC.

The most prominent find was the people of EFC experienced inclusion and hope with open and affirming encouragement to seek Jesus, which increased their self-image, spiritual maturity and relationship with Christ. The results of this project calls the greater Church to incorporate GLBT Christians within their congregations and affirm them into the full Body of Christ.

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	v
AKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW.....	1
2. BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	4
3. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	56
4. DESIGN, PROCEDURE, AND ASSESSMENT.....	83
5. RESULTS.....	90
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	106
Appendix	
1. PROPOSAL.....	134
2. COVER LETTER AND ASSESSMENT TOOL.....	165
3. ESSAY RESPONSES FROM SURVEY.....	177
4. A DEVOTIONAL.....	202
REFERENCES.....	203

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

It is the purpose of this project to discover the ways in which Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio.

The research question is, In what ways did the Gay Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people experience a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church?

OVERVIEW

The focus of the project is to discover in what ways the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) people experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio. The specific focus of this project is to discover how the GLBT community was able to find a sense of hope and renewed self-image by experiencing inclusion, self-acceptance, the study of scripture, the practice of spiritual disciplines and growth in spiritual maturity.

This project is designed to discover how the participation in an open and affirming Church (EFC) contributed to a renewed self-image by experiencing inclusion, hope, a relationship with Christ and growth in spiritual maturity. The process to access this information was through distribution of a questionnaire to the GLBT population attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio.

The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative questions for evaluation.

PERSONAL FOUNDATIONS

Experience and Observation

My experience and observation was that Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender (GLBT) people have suffered rejection by the lack of inclusion into the Christian Church, which contributed to their inability to grow in their Christian faith and fellowship. Our spirituality can grow in and of itself with Christ, but it is vital to be connected to people who are journeying in the same direction, sharing in fellowship, prayer and worship. The GLBT people were suffering a great deal from the lack of opportunity to experience a renewed self-image in Christ because of being condemned and abandoned by faith communities they had been a part of their whole lives.

Pastors in most mainline denominations seem to struggle with how to minister to their own congregants when approached about sexual orientation issues. When a friend of mine came out to his former pastor, he was encouraged and instructed to get pornography to help him change his orientation from homosexual to heterosexual.

There has been such misguidance, rejection, ridicule and hatred from the Christian Church to the GLBT community that only a small percentage of that population considers Christianity as a viable religion that is life-giving. According to George Barna's research conducted by the Barna Group Inc., 2009; "...even

though a majority of adults have made 'a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today,' such a relationship was more common among non-gays (75%) than among gay adults (58%). The research also revealed that straight adults were nearly twice as likely as gays to qualify as born again Christians (47% compared to 27%, respectively)."

While dealing with this population, it was my experience that large constituencies of GLBT's were being welcomed into other religions, mostly Wicca and Buddhism. Meanwhile, I have also experienced mainline Christian denominations in the mid and northeastern area of Ohio (United Church of Christ, and Episcopalian, to name a few) attempting to reach out to this population, which was good, but they were watering down and compromising the gospel so as to be inclusionary. They were promoting the practices of Buddhism and New Age thinking that it was a requirement for inclusion of GLBT members.

I am privileged to be a part of a church community that incorporates the GLBT community and yet upholds the Gospel. These are people who are gifted, talented and hungry for a relationship with Christ and fellowship with one another. They long for opportunities to be involved in ministry. In the past eight years, I have seen them grow immensely, and even though at times it has been a struggle, they continue to be open to the direction given to them. They realize the importance of developing their relationship with Christ and one another. The Word of God is equally important to them as they participate in reading, meditating and studying. Many Christian GLBT people have felt they could not

reconcile their sexual orientation with their desire to worship and praise God. They felt to participate in one was to exclude the other.

My passion for Emmanuel Fellowship Church has been to be an agent of God for bringing all who enter here to a more complete knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. To establish, provide, maintain, and promote Christian character, spiritual development, and a community of faith. The goal is to be open and affirming by providing Christian fellowship for all those who come within its doors.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men," Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them. (Thurman 1976, 29)

We are called to love one another and to lay hold of the power of God to transform each human being into the likeness of Christ Jesus. However, the opportunity to grow in fellowship with Christ and the community of faith was cut off from those who are marginalized and seen as outcasts. The importance of loving one another because God loved us first is all throughout the scriptures. It is expressed in 1 John 4:9-11 which expresses the importance of our knowing that God loves us. First and foremost, God sent His only Son that we might live

through Him and experience His love through Jesus' atoning sacrifice for our sin. The challenge is then to love one another as God has loved us. "Merely 'believing' certain facts about Jesus does not make us children of God. Rather God is looking for belief that reflects the loving, just and holy character of the divine Parent in real-life interactions within the community of faith" (DeSilva 2004, 460).

Accountability is imperative in the body of Christ. However, it is important that our accountability to one another does not lead to judgment and condemnation. How do those who have been marginalized, who have felt no sense of hospitality, begin to know and experience the love of God? If God's church is loveless towards them, how do they come to love one another in Christ if they are separated from the very fellowship that can encourage and teach them how to love?

A call to love one another is a call to hospitality. Christian hospitality involves being fully present to the other. It brings service to the deepest level of intimacy between two who encounter one another. Hospitality is not without boundaries, but its focus is on the presence of God's love and healing of individuals.

The scriptures give us many examples of how Jesus reached out to the marginalized, those placed on the edges of society because they didn't fit into the schematics of the religious life. Mark 1:40-45 tells the story of a leper who by law was ceremonially unclean. The leper was not to touch or be touched; it would cause others to be made unclean according to the law. We find Jesus not only

healing the leper and thus restoring him back to community, but we see Jesus touching the leper before He heals him. "Jesus revealed his attitude toward ceremonial law. By touching the leper, he himself would be made ceremonially unclean. Jesus placed love and compassion above ritual and regulation" (Cooper 2000, 16).

Jesus looks to the heart of an individual, their faith in Him and reliance upon Him, yet, the marginalized are expected to meet certain criteria; if not, they are judged as useless to the Church and to the Kingdom of God. Thus they receive a message that tears at the heart of the possibility of their sacredness.

In Luke 7:36-50, Simon provided the most minimal and professional amount of hospitality in comparison to Mary. Jesus didn't hesitate or flinch in knowing that by her touch, the washing of His feet with her tears and the touch of her kiss would be to become ceremonial unclean. Jesus takes the opportunity to show to those present the real meaning of hospitality by using the actions of one who is rejected and marginalized by the religious leaders around them. "This was a woman, a sinner and an outcast. The least of these had become greater than the contemporary religious heroes. Only sinners answer the call for faith. Self-righteous people fail to see their need of it" (Butler 2000, 111). Even in the woman's brokenness she was able to reach outside of herself and serve Jesus in a deep and compassionate way. It is important to greet one another even in the midst of brokenness with a level of love and compassion. Our brokenness can meet, and in that, we can find strength for the journey of faith.

The marginalized have a deep desire, as all people do, to be a part of something bigger than themselves, to be a part of community, a Christian community. A place where people respond in Christian love and hospitality.

Jesus' fundamental concern in these verses is with this woman's restoration to the community of God's people (and not with her individualistic experience of forgiveness or assurance of divine acceptance) is suggested... he sends her away "in peace." Such language cannot be limited to "spiritual" well-being or even, in other co-texts, to "physical" vitality, but speaks of a restoration to wholeness, including (even if not limited to) restoration to the full social intercourse from which she has been excluded... It is one thing to have Jesus proclaim her forgiveness in order that her renewed status might be recognized by the community; it is quite another for that community actually to accept his pronouncement and to extend kinship to her. (Green 1997, 314)

Some of us have become religiously ritualistic in our relationship to Christ and one another. This then gives us no room for love and compassion, only for judgment, which the end result is marginalization.

To the Jews, the Samaritans were the dust under their feet. They were not to be trusted or even recognized as anything worthy of attention. The Samaritans were considered sinful outcasts and were not welcomed within the worshiping community of the Jews; thus, they worshiped where they could. Jesus goes on to teach us through the gospel of John as He is speaking to the Samaritan woman that there will come a time when it won't matter where we worship, only that we worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Plausibly this story reflects Johannine history in which Samaritans came into the community alongside Jews, but that is beneath the surface. More obvious is the continued theme of replacement (here of worship at the Temple) and the contrast between the more open faith of the Samaritans

and the less adequate belief of those at Jerusalem (2:23-25) and Nicodemus. (Brown 1997, 344)

Jesus' goal was to restore the Samaritans back into the vine by his conversation and revelation to the Samaritan woman of who He was. Jesus took an outcast, one who was marginalized from her community, society and the Jewish life, to proclaim the Messiah was here. He called her to be a missionary to her village, to give witness to the truth so that all could be set free. "An absolute declaration of deity...The announcement of the arrival of a Messiah represents an enormous fulfillment of promise. Jews and Samaritans had waited centuries to hear what this peasant woman heard from the lips of the Son of God" (Gangel 2000, 79).

We can see from these passages that Jesus had compassion for the marginalized, the outcasts and those who are treated with inhospitality. There is no room in the gospel of Jesus Christ for anyone to be turned away because they do not measure up to what some believe are the very religious standards that Christ fought in His day. Our spiritual insight and awareness is hindered by not hearing the cries of those who so desperately want to be a part of the community of faith in Christ Jesus. We need to become bold enough to reach out and touch those who are seen as untouchable. It will cause some of us to step out of our comfort zone, I realize, but it is something that must be done in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Grudem states the visible and the invisible Church is affirmed in 2 Timothy 2:19, that God knows who belongs to Him and what is in the heart of His children.

In its true spiritual reality as the fellowship of all genuine believers, the church is invisible. This is because we cannot see the spiritual condition of people's hearts. We can see those who outwardly attend the church, and we can see outward evidences of inward spiritual change, but we cannot actually see into people's hearts and view their spiritual state — only God can do that. . . Even in our own churches and our own neighborhoods, only God knows who are true believers with certainty and without error. (Grudem 1994, 855)

The assumption for the marginalized is that there is no possibility for them to be connected to the Lord. The outcasts are judged by outward appearances and not from the heart. In my experience in working with those who feel marginalized, it is important to love them and to show them a sense of hospitality; in so doing, they are encouraged to grow in their relationship with Christ. It is in welcoming the marginalized into the unity of the body of Christ that speaks to the true meaning of the gospel of Christ in Matthew 25:40-46.

Unity within the Christian Church brings a great witness to those who would doubt the power of almighty God. Onlookers evaluate the importance of their participation in the community of faith in Christ Jesus. However, as they see the infighting among us, they run the other direction. Jesus stated that our love for one another would be His most valued presence in the world (John 13:35).

If we as a body of Christ want to build upon the unity of the body, then it is necessary to challenge our status quo. Individually and corporately we need to reflect upon the damage that takes place when some feel they hold the power to say who can stay and who must go. "Christian wholeness and holiness are never about exerting power; rather, they are about extending welcome--especially to those who are on the margins" (Dahl 2011, 49).

As Walter Brueggemann notes in *Interpretation and Obedience*, "To welcome the stranger is to challenge the social arrangements that exclude and include. Thus any serious welcome of a stranger is a gesture that unsettles the power arrangements to which we have become accustomed" (Brueggemann 1991, 304).

God is not interested in the power of others by the fact that He sends Jesus for our salvation, which is rooted in an act of surrendered power that brings us grace. We then see the importance of relying upon the Holy Spirit who perseveres in maintaining and unifying the body of believers in Christ Jesus. Even though we may appear to be different and respond with different gifts, the Holy Spirit works in all of us who believe.

Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts also repeats this theme of the unifying work of the Holy Spirit. Whereas we might think that people who have differing gifts would not readily get along well with each other, Paul's conclusion is just the opposite: differing gifts draw us together, because we are forced to depend on each other. (Grudem 1994, 646)

Differing gifts, differing points of view and different orientations to life are all under the umbrella of the Holy Spirit for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Holy

Spirit is directing us to work together for the kingdom of God. We hurt the body of Christ when we allow the differences of each other to become the very thing that keeps us separated. We are all parts of one body and to ignore one part makes the body weak. It is important to ask ourselves if we are truly following the promptings of the Holy Spirit or are we being led by the movement of hatred and marginalization, disinheriting the very people that contribute to the body of Christ? We miss out on the opportunity to build up the kingdom of God. When I am more concerned with my comfort zone than the comfort of those who feel rejected and abandoned by the Church, then I do a disservice to Christ, to His children and the kingdom of God.

We need to ask ourselves this question: is the Church radiating, manifesting and unifying the love of God through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit to all people and most importantly towards each other? Obviously we have so much more to do and accomplish in the name of Jesus. There is still a lack of hospitality and love towards one another and a fracture in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit pursues oneness among us.

The fact that the faithful are moved by the Spirit, that the whole redeemed community is constituted by the Spirit as its principle of life, is manifest in their behavior. There are ethical criteria for the discernment of the possession of the Spirit...The sign of the new life is a new morality...The gifts of the Spirit are an unforeseeable, heavenly, marvelous and overwhelming intervention into human life. But they must be accepted and given effect to by men. Their purpose would not be fulfilled if they did not impel men to corresponding action. The deepest purpose of the Spirit is to be a Spirit of joy, of love, of service. (Rahner 1991, 644)

The marginalized and those who perceive themselves as outcast are still undergoing strife, disputes, and dissensions from factions within the community of Christ. Disharmony under Christ Jesus is people struggling with judgmental attitudes of the flesh. It is disheartening that even some of the marginalized at times react to this type of ridicule and begin to respond in like manner, which also contributes to the lack of unification by the Holy Spirit. This battle of tearing up the sacred is contrary to the whole concept of the body of Christ. This is not a good witness to those who are in desperate need of salvation. What is there to offer others when the gospel is violated?

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning--though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered...Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, O Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us--yes, establish the work of our hands (Psalm 90:1-6, 12-17 NIV).

By the work of our hands, in the name of Jesus and ignoring the favor that rests upon all of us, there is still discrimination and marginalization happening within the body of Christ, the Church.

The role of women leadership within the Church continues to be a battleground at times, the Roman Catholic Church being an example as well as protestant Christian denominations who are closed off to the opportunities of special gifts and talents by the leadership of women. There is no room for those who do not fit into the fold or who are ostracized because of their differences. When there is no room for change or the ability to step out of tradition, many people have abandoned fellowship in the church or broken free to find a place of acceptance and openness. Because of our lack of self-assurance when we are confronted by people who are different from us, we shy away or totally reject what is in front of us. This then causes our faith to be exclusive, dangerous and in a time of crisis.

In the last resort the only hope is in the moral forces which can be summoned to the rescue. If there are statesmen, prophets, and apostles who set truth and justice above selfish advancement; if their call finds a response in the great body of people; if a new tide of religious faith and moral enthusiasm creates new standards of duty and a new capacity for self-sacrifice; if the strong learn to direct their love of power to the uplifting of the people and see the highest self-assertion in self-sacrifice, then the entrenchments of vested wrong will melt away; the stifled energy of the people will leap forward; the atrophied members of the social body will be filled with a fresh flow of blood; and a regenerate nation will look with the eyes of youth across the fields of the future (Rauschenbusch 1908, 230).

Our human nature is fearful of change. There are many people within the Church today that stand guard at the door to decide if one should be greeted, welcomed, or declared not fit for the Christian Church.

Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the fundamental reality that humans always wish their thought and action to be understood as expressing high and lofty ideals. This disposition has two potential ramifications. It may lead to the usurpation of religious and moral values for courses of action that are, in fact, blatant egotism or an exercise of raw power. It may also mean the sincere invocation of ideals when engaging in acts otherwise considered immoral or despicable (Hillerbrand 2012, 315).

As Christians, we are all learning what Christ requires of us and working towards being Christ-like. In this then, we can allow ourselves to be in Christ and have the spiritual maturity to accept one another's differences. This doesn't preclude that we can't all be in the body of Christ and be obedient to what He asks of us. The Christian community that I know of wants so much to contribute to the body of Christ in the Church; however, will they be given a chance due to their marginalization?

Persecution continues within the walls of what we call the Christian faith family. Our history shows us the many persecutions and divisions between the poor and the rich, the Caucasian Christians and the Afro-American Christians and a Christian patriarchal church that excludes the leadership of women. When will the division end? When will we set aside our differences and look towards our oneness in Christ Jesus?

The things people do in Jesus' name often contradict his teachings. From Constantine to Christendom to the Christian Right, "after Jesus" can be remarkably depressing for thoughtful and sensitive souls. This dismal historical record surely was not what Jesus intended as he preached a merciful kingdom based on the transformative power of God's love (Bass 2009, Kindle location, 159).

Can we take the time to get to know one another? Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:26-29 that we are one in Christ Jesus no matter our circumstance, no matter our wounds or brokenness, no matter our prejudices or our sinfulness. Christ died for all. We need to pull the plank out of our own eyes so as to minister to each other with compassion and healing.

CONTEMPORARY FOUNDATIONS

Jesus, friend of sinners, we have strayed so far away. We cut down people in your name, but the sword was never ours to swing. Jesus, friend of sinners, the truth's become so hard to see. The world is on their way to You, but they're tripping over me. Always looking around but never looking up; I'm so double minded. A plank-eyed saint with dirty hands and a heart divided. Jesus, friend of sinners, the one who's writing in the sand. Made the righteous turn away and the stones fall from their hands. Help us to remember we are all the least of these. Let the memory of Your mercy bring Your people to their knees. Nobody knows what we're for, only what we're against, when we judge the wounded. What if we put down our signs, crossed over the lines and loved like you did. You love every lost cause; You reach for the outcast. For the leper and the lame; they're the reason that you came. Lord I was that lost cause and I was the outcast. But you died for sinners just like me, a grateful leper at Your feet. Because You are good. You are good, and Your love endures forever. Oh Jesus, friend of sinners. Open our eyes to the world at the end of our pointing fingers. Let our hearts be led by mercy. Help us reach with open hearts and open doors. Oh Jesus, friend of sinners, break our hearts for what breaks yours. And I was the lost cause, and I was the outcast. You died for sinners just like me, a grateful leper at Your feet (Casting Crowns, Come to the Well, 2012)

When I heard the lyrics of this song, it fit perfectly into the contemporary thoughts of what it means to be marginalized in the world today. Placed on the edge, across the line by the very people whom Jesus once saved, who now are too righteous to welcome those who are different or do not measure up. Love the

sinner but hate the sin is the blindsided reply. The problem is that when we say, “hate the sin”, ultimately the hate overflows onto the person we are to be loving.

Those who are on the edge of life, who feel marginalized and oppressed by those who are to love as Jesus loved, find themselves broken and in deep despair.

And so we hide our hearts away, only to find ourselves huddled in the margins with our arms folded across our chest. There the heart can no longer take in the things we so desperately need—love, joy, peace, kindness, trust. That’s why I define it as life in the margins, because it so limits our experience of life (McKinley 2005, 92).

Marginalization limits not only the experience of life but also an experience with faith in Jesus, fellowship with community, and a self-image that is broken and sheared by stained glass.

You see, Jesus identified with the stranger. He knew what a lack of hospitality feels like. He knew how it feels for people to be suspicious and afraid. He knew what it means to be rejected. And that’s why his whole ministry was spent identifying with those most of us spend our lives trying to avoid. Jesus knew that the stranger, the outcast is not just the one who needs us; we also need the stranger. If we are willing to open our lives to the “least of these,” then there is some hope that we may open our lives to God (Rhodes 1998, 135).

In Isaiah 61:1-3, we see the real mission of Jesus: to bring good news to those who are bound by oppression, to heal the broken hearted and to set the prisoners free. Jesus’ mission is our mission as well. The Church needs to get back to basics and not allow the religious culture of the times to dictate who and how people can come to Jesus.

Oppressive theology, or a theology that welcomes those who fit a normative definition of the dominant culture while excluding those who do not, is a ball and chain on the heart of the body of Christ, and with it we keep each other in bondage. The church of Jesus Christ is in the midst of change, not all of it for the better. Any theology that suggests that God receives some and rejects others is not reflective of the ministry of Jesus Christ (Flunder 2005, 7).

I sometimes wonder what it would be like if Jesus were to come at this particular time in history. What would please Him and what would once again be the spear in His side or the wounds in His hands? Would my actions or practiced faith be like the soldier who put the crown of thorns on His head?

I believe that if Jesus were in our shoes, he would reach out in love to his homosexual brothers and sisters and demand that they be treated justly, that we end the discrimination that has too often made homosexuals into second-class citizens and denied them their constitutional rights. If Jesus were in our shoes, he would work to create an atmosphere in society wherein homosexuals could be open about who they are without fear of oppression and persecution. If Jesus were in our shoes, those with homosexual orientation would be treated with dignity and respect (Campolo 2003, 200).

Let us then, as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, move to a more radical approach of love, grace and mercy towards those who are oppressed, outcast and marginalized. May our prayer be that of Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23 AMP. Let us not have another day where we witness to people a foundation of separation but only of unity in Christ Jesus.

CONTEXT

Emmanuel Fellowship church is located on 60 North Arlington Street, Akron Ohio. On March 16, 1986, a group of fifteen people gathered to form a Christian charitable organization. The group supported many non-profit organizations and needy individuals in its early years, including Hands Across America, People to People Ministries, Summit County Drug Board, Apple Creek Boys' Home, Wycliff Bible Translators, Violet's Cupboard, Stonewall Akron, Peer Services, Red Cross, Interval Brotherhood Home, and Higbee's Children's Christmas Association for Brain Tumor Research. In the tradition of the early Christians, these faithful believers met in each other's homes for prayer and worship services. They finally incorporated as Emmanuel Fellowship Church of North Canton on April 22, 1986. For the next three years, they worshiped God at a variety of locations: a florist shop, a rented house, and a rented storefront all while conducting fund-raising events to acquire a permanent home.

The group purchased the church building located at 60 North Arlington St. in Akron on January 9, 1989. For the next several months, they repaired and renovated their new home and held worship services there for the first time on Good Friday of that year.

Long known in the area as Emmanuel Fellowship Church, the congregation officially changed its name and dropped "of North Canton" in January of 2002.

Emmanuel Fellowship Church, with its unique blend of people from a wide range of Christian denominations, has had its share of peaks and valleys,

blessings and trials. Out of these came a renewed spirit of joy in the Lord, which inspired the people of EFC to expand the church's programs and presence in the community. Since 1996, the church's impact has grown and changed, it broadened its missions and sponsored a number of innovative Christian learning experiences to meet diverse spiritual needs.

A spirit of Christian love, service to God, help for the needy, and outreach to the outcast is what forms the legacy of Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

The principles by which we attempt to live are those directives taken from the Word of God. We are fully aware of how we fall short, but we also know that God is willing to help us through our sinfulness and frailty. Thus the reason for sending us Christ so that we can rise above worldly standards and strive for holiness.

We as a church community are still learning to grow in our spiritual maturity. At times, individuals within the community make decisions that are based on emotions rather than the truth. We are, however, fully aware of the goal and vision that the Lord has placed upon us. He desires first that we become like Christ and to be able to be Christ for those around us. Because we are established in a poor economic area, it is important to us to establish relationships with our neighbors and to draw them into the family of God by our assistance and hospitality.

The people of EFC are fully aware of judgmentalism and marginalization within society and the greater Church due to sexual orientation discrimination.

Thus, it comes easily to us to reach out to others who feel judged and marginalized. We value human life and the dignity for all of God's children.

We are an eclectic congregation. We are people who are made up of many different Christian denominations (Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Mormon and many more) and are unified in our faith. We are Caucasian, African American, and Latin American. We are heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, rich, poor, recovering alcoholics and drug addicts, single, married, and divorced. Some have grown spiritually mature while others are just starting out as infants in their spiritual walk. Some were saved at a young age and have walked with the Lord all their lives while others are new to their faith. Ages range from two years old to 82. We have young children as well as teenagers and those who are in college. We have laborers, college professionals, unemployed and people needing public assistance as well as others on SSI.

For the past eight years, there have been many changes within our church. We put into place bible study and prayer meetings weekly. We minister to the neighborhood by donating school supplies every year as well as hats and gloves during the cold season. We hand out food to the needy and have started to have annual picnic, prayer and praise sessions in which we feed the neighborhood for free and offer spiritual music as well as a message. We continue to tithe as a church to various organizations that are in need of assistance. For the past few years we have reached out to our military brothers and sisters by sending out over a thousand Christmas cards. We sponsor a child in Africa whose family has

suffered from HIV/AIDS and is in need of income for his schooling. We reach out to the GLBT community and others through our web page efcakron.org as well as setting up booths at pride events so as to reach out to the community to let them know they have a Christian home with us. We do it all for the Glory of God and wanting to please Him as well as to build up the body of Christ.

We have a little over 80 members. Most of the members live in the Akron area; however, we do have some that live as far north as Cleveland and south of Canton as well as the Youngstown area. Emmanuel Fellowship Church is the largest concentrated GLBT Christian population attending church in Akron. I believe that as God's word is preached and our service to others is given, we will continue to grow.

SIGNIFICANT TERMS

There are no Academic Terms at this time that I can think of that would not be understood by the readers of this specific project.

GLBT: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender.

Sexual Orientation: "one's natural preference in sexual partners; predilection for homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality. ORIGIN1990–95. (online Dictionary) The understanding of this term within the GLBT community of Emmanuel Fellowship Church as well as other spiritually minded but not limited to GLBT groups, is that a Sexual Orientation is an "individuals pattern of physical and emotional arousal toward other persons" (Frankowski 2004, 1827).

Transgender: 1. A person having a strong desire to assume the physical characteristics and gender role of the opposite sex. 2. A person who has undergone hormone treatment and surgery to attain the physical characteristics of the opposite sex. ORIGIN 1955–60; trans- + sexual, orig. in transsexualism (coined in 1953) (online dictionary)

Open and affirming: This is a term that is used in religious settings, more particular, Christian churches and organizations. This signifies to the GLBT person that they are welcome into full participation in the group setting of which they find themselves.

Renewed Self-image in Christ: For the Christian GLBT person growing up in their church, they have experienced rejection for who they are. They have been disqualified, abandoned and dismissed as viable Christians to participate in their churches due to their sexual orientation. Those who attend Emmanuel Fellowship Church are welcomed in full participation into the body of Christ. This participation in a Christian church encourages them to be spiritually formed in Christ. It gives them the acknowledgment, opportunity, and self-acceptance to know deep in their hearts that they are loved and belong fully to God and the body of Christ. With this being said, the outcome of such enhances and renews their self-image in Christ.

PROJECT GOALS

It was the purpose of this project to discover the ways in which Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people have experienced a renewed self-image in

Christ by attending Emanuel Fellowship Church. To discover that which requires living a Christ-centered life, the project goals were as follows:

1. To discover how the People of EFC are growing in a deeper relationship with God by being able to share how God has been working in their lives.
2. To discover how they are living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life of internal attitudes with external behavior through spiritual disciplined practices.
3. To discover how they are living by the Holy Spirit to establish a spiritually integrated life that gives them the ability to express divine truth in times of suffering.
4. To discover how they are living out the redemption of Christ Jesus, utilizing the gifts given to them in the ministry of the church.
5. To discover how has being a part of the church developed their understanding of worship in the body of Christ.
6. To discover how has being a part of the church developed their participation of service in the body of Christ.

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The details of the procedure for the discovery project were as follows: I selected and gathered a sample population from members and friends who attended Emmanuel Fellowship Church on a volunteer basis. I designed the appropriate research instrument by using quantitative and qualitative assessment

tools. It was necessary to implement and gather the data by handing out evaluation forms to those who volunteered to participate in answering the assessment. The information was processed and used for evaluation in discovering the research question and goals of the project.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

In order to discover how the GLBT community of Emmanuel Fellowship Church has grown in their renewed self-image, I used quantitative and qualitative assessment tools. The project goals that were assessed were as follows:

1. How the People of EFC are growing in a deeper relationship with God by being able to share and discuss how God has been working in their lives.
2. How they are living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life of internal attitudes with external behavior through spiritual disciplined practices.
3. How they are living by the Holy Spirit to establish a spiritually integrated life that gives them the ability to express divine truth in times of suffering.
4. How they are living out the redemption of Christ Jesus, utilizing the gifts given to them in the ministry of the church.
5. How has being a part of the church developed their understanding of worship in the body of Christ.
6. How has being a part of the church developed their participation of service in the body of Christ.

In the quantitative assessment tools, I used survey questions, demographics, and a questionnaire. The Qualitative assessment tools were open-ended survey questions.

By using a questionnaire and open-ended survey questions with written documents to attain the themes of the GLBT members of Emmanuel Fellowship Church, I discovered whether or not they were growing in their renewed self-image.

PERSONAL GOALS

In the year 2000 when I began my journey with Ashland Seminary, I had no clue how the Lord was going to use me. I came to Ashland to receive a Masters in Clinical Pastoral Counseling, which I received, but I believe it was merely a means to an end.

In one of my first classes, I was challenged to find another church to worship in that was not a part of my Christian tradition. At the time, I was a Roman Catholic nun for about 23 years, and the only participation that I had been involved with was the Catholic liturgy. On the upcoming Sunday, I chose to attend Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

What an experience of welcoming, love and inclusion. Being very closeted at the time, it was nice to experience a place of worship where my covenant partner and I didn't have to be afraid of being ourselves and to acknowledge our love for the Lord in our oneness. I can say with great love and respect that we found our home at EFC.

I am passionate about my place at Emmanuel and the opportunity to say yes to our Lord by being chosen to be their shepherd. I am profoundly sure that what God has started at EFC He will bring to complete spiritual maturity. I want the Christian Church to see what I see and to be able to open its doors to the ever-widening opportunity for the faith, gifts, and talents of the GLBT Christians for an even greater call and ministry to the world. To this end, my personal goals for this project were:

1. I will know to what spiritual depth participation in a Christian church influences the self-image of the GLBT Christians at Emmanuel Fellowship Church.
2. I will be able to teach what has been learned from this project to other Christian churches or organizations struggling with inclusiveness to the GLBT community.
3. Bring more non-Christian GLBT people to salvation through the open and affirming presence of Christ through these churches and organizations.
4. I will continually be encouraged to be transformed in my own renewed self-image of Christ, ever manifesting my love for Him and love for others.
5. After completing this project, I anticipate that my spiritual life will continue to be challenged in showing to those who are still rejecting the Christian GLBT community the importance of our presence in the body of Christ.

CORE TEAM

Advisor: Rev. Dr. James Mitchell D.Min until February 2015.

Dr. Matthew Bevere D.Min. February 2015 to Present.

Field Consultant: Minister Sara Schwendeman

Resource Persons: Sandy Wellington, Deacon Maria Macalusso, Jenny Shaffer,
Minister Janet Black and Jackie Chapman.

SUPPORT TEAM

Christine M. Miley, Holy Covenant Life Partner of Author

Sara Schwendeman, Church member, Minister and Editor

Samara Peddle, Church member, Assistant Editor

Donna Hines, Mother of the Author

Linda Olinger, Church member (Now deceased from Cancer)

Prayerful support from the Spiritual Leadership of EFC and Congregation

The Support team met periodically either on an individual basis for prayer or via email. They were updated to the progress made as well as committed to pray for the project and author. This group helped to maintain the relevance of the project. I also emailed the congregation on occasion as well as making announcements in regards to progress. Everyone was very supportive of this process and desired for me to finish.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Accountability is imperative in the body of Christ. However, it is important that accountability to one another does not lead to condemnation. How do those who are marginalized, who feel no sense of hospitality or grace, begin to know and experience the love of God? If God's Church is loveless towards them, how do they come to love one another in Christ if they are separated from the very fellowship that can encourage and teach them how to love?

There are damaging effects towards Christian sisters and brothers who have a desire to be a part of the Church but for one reason or another have been alienated, marginalized and outcast. They have not been seen worthy of the Lord's love or welcomed in the fellowship of believers. The importance of inclusion, acceptance, grace and hospitality towards those who have felt marginalized from the body of Christ is vital.

Jesus shows in the gospels that His agenda was and is grace by the fulfillment of the law. In the Church today, there are theological thoughts and actions about the law that leads one to think that it is removed from the context of grace. This then leads to participation and opportunity for legalism to be placed upon those who are seen as outcasts and marginalized. Jesus fully revealed the law, thus bringing its fulfillment. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17 all scripture passages from ESV unless otherwise noted).

Those who are Christian desire to be like Jesus for that is the will of God for every Christian (Romans 8:29). The Holy Spirit gives guidance unto all wisdom through the Word of God and in one's inner being. A follower of Christ can be blinded at times to the extent of the movement of the Spirit or the high call of God on oneself or others because of fears, wounds or brokenness (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Biblical Foundation

“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Romans 10:4 NIV

In Christ's coming to this world and paying the price for our sins, He has made a way for all people to receive grace. It is important for all who believe to recognize that sin no longer has dominion since one is under grace, not under the law (Romans 6:14).

Time and again throughout the gospels Jesus pours forth His grace. Jesus, in His relationships towards all, is concerned with the spiritual intent of the law. Jesus comments on the law when it is necessary to help a person see their suffering or estrangement from God. His desire is to reestablish those who have been outcast or marginalized by society's norms through receiving the freedom in the gospel of grace (Mark 1:44). Jesus is living grace to save others and to bring lives to a place of healing and restoration. Society is bound up by the law; it has crippled itself from receiving the healing power that is in Christ Jesus. It is by focusing on the Mosaic laws (sacrificial, ceremonial, social and civil laws) that

some Christian brothers and sisters have caused others to be overpowered and blocked from being part of the family of Christ. Jesus, through his actions and words towards others, is concerned with the ethical and moral aspects of the law (Matthew 23).

One of the fruits that come from God's grace through Christ Jesus is hospitality to the outcast of society. Jesus looks to the heart of an individual as well as their faith and reliance upon Him. Yet, today, the outcast and marginalized are expected to meet certain criteria before they are welcomed into the body of Christ. They are judged as useless to the Church and to the Kingdom of God. They receive a message that tears at the heart of the possibility of their sacredness. They who are oppressed gather for fresh courage. They who are under fear, hypocrisy, and hatred by the dominion over them are no longer considered to be disinherited when Jesus' spirit is present. (Thurman 1976, 29).

The gospel of Mark is seen as a bedrock source for the gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the nineteenth-century, quests for the historical Jesus discovered that Mark was the primary source for Matthew and Luke (Guelich 1989, ix). Mark concerns himself with representing Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Mark begins with the testimony of John the Baptist and quoting from the prophet Isaiah to proclaim Jesus as the fulfillment of that prophesy and to state that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. "This was God's promised good news about God's eschatological deliverance, salvation, expressed in the person and ministry of Jesus...for Mark the 'gospel' clearly depicts Jesus as inaugurating God's

sovereign rule, the kingdom, through his words and deeds” (Guelich 1989, xxi).

The scriptures give many examples of how Jesus reached out to the marginalized, those placed on the edges of society because they didn't fit into the schematics of the religious life.

Mark 1:40-45 tells the story of a leper who by law was ceremonially unclean. The leper was not to touch or be touched as that would cause others to be made unclean according to the law. “The disease resulted in one being ‘unclean’ and ostracized from society (cf. Luke 17:12) and even from one’s own family and home (Lev. 13:45-46). Socially, a leper was the equivalent of a corpse (Josephus, Ant. 3.11.3. 264). Since leprosy was often regarded as a punishment for sin...such social ostracism was seen as having both prophylactic and moral grounds. Due to the mandate of isolation, their source of strength and sustenance was dependent upon others like them and/or the compassion of others to drop off food and supplies at the outskirts of villages and cities” (Stein 2008, 105).

The stories and life of Jesus at the time were making such an impact that even the lepers, specifically this one, had heard of what Jesus was doing for others. He thought if he would come humbly before this Jesus, he would have an opportunity for healing where there had been none. This man obviously knew the law and in approaching Jesus and those around him was to bring uncleanness to the whole assembly. The text states that the leper came imploring Him or beseeching, the Greek word *parakaleo*, which means to call near, that is invite, invoke, implore, desire, exhort, entreat, pray. To call for or

upon someone as for aid, to invoke God, to beseech, entreat” (Baker 2004, 2129). To the Jews, leprosy was seen as a disease that only God could heal (2 Kings 5:1-7). The Jews believed that leprosy was a curse from God due to sin in one’s life or the life of one’s parents. Jews believed that only God could forgive sins; therefore they believed that only God could heal a person of leprosy (Amaral 2011, 36). By beseeching Jesus, the leper was proclaiming in public the power of Christ as God. Jesus’ presence was giving the possibility for health and wholeness. His disease had caused him great rejection and marginalization which gave him the motivation to risk defilement for all present including Jesus (Leviticus 13:45, 46). Jesus is moved with compassion for this person who cries out to Him, concerned only for the leper’s healing, not for the ceremonial law but for ethical, moral grace. Jesus shows His concern for people’s restoration in their relationship to God and one another. Jesus does not wait to touch this outcast after He heals him but before He heals him to publicly show the importance of the moral and ethical aspects of the law. Jesus does not see leprosy as something to be avoided, should He become defiled, but something to be overcome so that those who are suffering can be released from both pain and humiliation (Amaral 2011, 37).

Jesus not only healed the leper and thus restored him back to community, but Jesus was seen touching the leper before the healing took place. “Jesus revealed His attitude toward ceremonial law. By touching the leper, He himself would be made ceremonially unclean. Jesus placed love and compassion above

ritual and regulations” (Cooper 2000, 16). Jesus demonstrated how much He was willing to identify with those He wished to heal.

Matthew and Luke also tell the story of a man healed from Leprosy (Matt. 8:1-4 and Luke 5:12-16). Mark states that the man fell to his knees begging while Luke 5:12 states that he not only begged Jesus but “fell with his face to the ground.” What is interesting to note is that all three of the gospels mention the leper’s humbleness in asking Jesus to heal him “believing that he could but wondering if he would” (Stein 2008, 105). Jesus then proclaims His intentions first by touching the leper before the healing took place. This puts Jesus in a particularly difficult position in regards to what the Jews considered to be an act of defilement. Not only was Jesus considered defiled but all those who stood with Jesus at the time (Stein 2008, 105).

Mark unmistakably intends to show that there is tension between the approach to religious observance and the interpretation of scripture as Jesus’ public ministry unfolds. “Faith itself sometimes needs to be stripped of its social and historical encrustations and return to its churchless incarnation in the human heart” (Rohr 2014, xx).

In a conversation with the Rev. Dr. James Mitchell, he expressed his thoughts in regards to the aforementioned tension. “Jesus maintained the core, the heart of the Law as he encountered the marginalized and confronted the legalistic interpreters and enforcers of the Law. Thus, Jesus as grace and truth restored the transformative nature of the Law by the Holy Spirit, and this is the gift for the Church today...but the call of discipleship is to live creatively in that tension as

we humbly accept God's love and live out grace in being faithful to the Word" (May 2015).

Jesus is seen reaching out to touch the leper which suggests "a lack of concern with ritual purity, or at least a deliberate preference for meeting need over ritual correctness" (France 2002, 116). Carson, France, Motyer, and Wenham in *The New Bible Commentary* suggests, "that attitude towards leprosy then was almost exactly that to AIDS today, a mixture of fear and disgust...Jesus deliberately became religiously unclean so that the man might become clean" (Cole 1994, 953).

Out of the three gospels, Mark is the only one to mention Jesus' feelings in regards to the leper approaching Him. Most translations read that Jesus was moved to compassion where there are a few manuscripts that read "being angry (*orgistheis*)... An explanation is that Jesus was moved to anger by yet one more instance of human suffering...Angered by the man's pitiful condition and the estrangement from Israel's worship that it entailed" (Dunn 2003, 1070). It is a desolate state to be when a Christian is marginalized and rejected from a place of fellowship and worship. Another explanation for Jesus' anger "is perhaps, that the suffering caused by the disease, both physically and socially, moved Jesus not only to compassion but to anger at the presence of such evil in the world; perhaps also over the insensitivity of the social taboo" (France 2002, 117). The suffering of others physically, emotionally and socially affected Jesus' life in His ministry to others. As followers of Christ, it is important to respond to others as

Jesus did. Jesus took a risk in touching and healing the leper not only to those who were dedicated to the law but to those who would enforce the laws.

Jesus reaches out to touch the leper and then responds, “I will; be clean.” The Greek words used for “I will” mean: “choose or prefer; by implication to wish, that is, be inclined to; by Hebraism to delight in; desire, intend, love, willing” (Baker 2004, 2087). In the text there doesn’t seem to be any hesitation to Jesus’ actions or words. His concern was for the one who was outcast. Once again we see Jesus bringing grace to the moment. France goes on to state that:

The need takes precedence over convention (even when firmly based in the OT). It is, of course, a nice point whether to touch the leper did in fact render Jesus unclean when the touch was itself the means of his cure. The touch which should have made Jesus unclean in fact worked in the opposite direction (France 2002, 118).

According to Stein, Jesus’ welfare for the marginalized and outcast leper was significant to those present. He was not only concerned for the leper’s healing but to reconnect the communal relationship that the leper so desperately was seeking due to his isolation caused by his disease and the reactions of others. The leper’s life was more important than the ridicule and rejection from those around him. Jesus healed not only the leper’s physical well-being; He also desired to reinstate him back into society. The law was specific and demanding about reestablishing the leper’s position in the community. “Since being healed was only part of the process of a leper being accepted into society, Jesus commands the healed leper to go to a priest in order to receive the needed certification of his cleansing (Lev. 14; m. Neg. 3.1)” (Stein 2008, 107).

Transformation and healing takes place, and Jesus uses the law to bring about the embodiment of grace so the outcast leper can be restored to the community. The power of the fulfilled law is unmistakable in the presence and action of Jesus Christ.

There are several stories within the gospels that produce this unmistakable risk of Jesus' actions within Judaism. Not only does He reach out to touch a leper to bring forth restoration, He also allows others who are unclean for various reasons to touch Him (Luke 7:36-50, Luke 8:42b-48).

In John 4:1-16 lies another moment of grace that Jesus offers to a Samaritan woman, who was not only an outcast to the Jews but also suffering from social marginalization from her own peers. To the Jews, Samaritans were not to be trusted or even recognized as anything worthy of attention. The Samaritans were considered sinful outcasts and were not welcomed within the worshipping community of the Jews; thus, they worshiped where they could. In John 4:4, it states that "it was necessary" for Jesus to take a faster route through Samaria where most Jews would take a longer route around so as not to encounter the Samaritans. "...there is a deeper reason, an inner constraint of love and obedience. He knew the ignorance and spiritual hunger of the Samaritan people, and the Father had sent Him into the whole world—not just part of it. He could not avoid these people in spite of the long history of resentment and antagonism between Jews and Samaritans" (Fredrikson 2002, pg.93).

Jesus teaches in the gospel of John as He is speaking to the Samaritan woman that there will come a time when it won't matter where we worship, only that we worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Jesus' goal was to restore the Samaritans back into the vine by His conversation and revelations to the Samaritan woman of who He was. Jesus took an outcast, one who was marginalized from her community, society and the Jewish life, to proclaim the Messiah was here. He called her to be a missionary to her village, to give witness to the truth so that all could be set free. "An absolute declaration of deity...The announcement of the arrival of a Messiah represents an enormous fulfillment of promise. Jews and Samaritans had waited centuries to hear what this peasant woman heard from the lips of the Son of God" (Gangel 2000, 79).

Even though the woman at the well came with confusion, excitement welled up inside of her when told that no matter her circumstances, there was hope for her. Jesus was demonstrating that the Good News is grace by the fulfillment of the law, and because He had come to her, she had a chance to be a part of the kingdom of God (Romans 3:21-26).

Within this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, relationship replaces religion, and worship is not just in Jerusalem but manifested throughout the world, worship that anyone could participate in and be a part of no matter how downtrodden their lives had become. It was through this new way of worshiping that brought inclusion and increase to the body of Christ.

“Since the kingdom of God is the age of the Spirit’s outpouring, true worshippers will worship the Father in virtue of the life, freedom and power bestowed by the Spirit, and in accordance with the redemptive revelations brought by the Redeemer” (Beasley-Murray 1999, 62).

All that has been said thus far is the summation of Romans 10:4. Jesus has fulfilled the law, and we stand now in righteousness through Christ for everyone who believes. The time has come for the world to realize that Christ Jesus has brought the freedom to worship Him in Spirit and truth. The redemptive word of Jesus is not given to some and excluded to others. All who desire to have and be with Jesus have been given the great privilege and entitlement to worship Him not only in religious circles but within their homes and most importantly in their hearts. No one can take this gift of worship away nor deprive anyone of it, for it is given by faith through grace.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

To welcome the stranger is to challenge the social arrangements that exclude and include. Thus any serious welcome of a stranger is a gesture that unsettles the power arrangements to which we have become accustomed. (Brueggemann 1991, 304)

It is in welcoming the marginalized into the unity of the body of Christ that speaks to the true meaning of the gospel of Christ in Matthew 25:40-46. Verse 45 of the Amplified translation reads, “And He will reply to them, solemnly I declare to you, in so far as you failed to do it for the least [in the estimation of men] of these, you failed to do it for me.” Who in today’s world are the least in the

estimation of humanity? Who are the ones who are rejected, held in contempt and abandoned from our pious religious circles? Who makes us uncomfortable? Who is the person that we don't want to sit next to or even offer the peace of Christ? Who are the ones we have felt justified in treating poorly? The expectation is to live Christian lives by the gospel of grace. Grace has been so freely given; shouldn't those who have received such grace give such grace?

The assumption for the marginalized is that there is no possibility for them to be connected to the Lord. The outcasts are judged by outward appearances and not from the heart. In working with those who feel marginalized, it is important to love them and to show them a sense of hospitality and grace. In so doing, they are encouraged to grow in their relationship with Christ. It is in welcoming the marginalized into the unity of the body of Christ that speaks to the true meaning of the gospel of Christ.

Unity within the Christian Church brings a great witness to those who would doubt the power of Almighty God. Onlookers evaluate the importance of their participation in the community of faith in Christ Jesus; however, as they see the infighting among Christians, they run the other direction. Jesus stated that our love for one another would be His most valued presence in the world (John 13:35).

In order to build upon the unity of the body of Christ, it is necessary to challenge the status quo. It is imperative individually and corporately to reflect upon the damage that takes place when some feel they hold the power to say who can stay and who must go. "Christian wholeness and holiness are never

about exerting power; rather, they are about extending welcome—especially to those who are on the margins” (Dahl 2011, 49).

One of the attributes of God is unity. Unity among believers is central to the portrayal of Christianity based upon the New Testament. To speak on behalf of Christianity is to speak to our unity (Culver 2005, 5). To tear at the unity of the Church is to deny that we are made in the image of God. God is one, and Christ calls out to this oneness, this unity, in His prayer for those who were with Him and those who would come to follow after (John 17).

Who has the power to say who gets in and who stays out of the body of Christ? There are many parts of one great body; all the parts are needed (1 Corinthians 12: 12-31). Robert Duncan Culver in his book, *Systematic Theology, Biblical and Historical*, quotes six features of the body of Christ, the Church. Organic Unity, Diversity, Universality, Mutuality, Visibility and Spirituality.

1. *Organic Unity* is not a unity to “be attained” but in fact to “be acknowledged” ...It was created at Pentecost and shall never dissolve.
2. *Diversity*; There are as many members as there are genuine believers. They differ among themselves in abilities and characteristics, but as each is true to the law of his own individual being (as redeemed by Christ) and lives out the life of the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22-26; 2:20), he will serve Christ effectively and with joy in his own inimitable and unduplicable way.
3. *Universality*; Wherever there is a Christian the great church of Christ is present by virtue of the vital union of all the parts. There are no Christians who have no

share in the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9; also 1Cor. 12:7). This without respect to the social, educational or economic situation of the believer.

4. *Mutuality*; Every member receives from and imparts to every other member of the body. In some degree, however ignored or unrecognized, the body is entirely affected by the spiritual health-situation of each member. None lives or dies, rejoices or grieves to himself...It is spiritual union in its practical mutual relationships.

5. *Visibility*; This is not to say that the universality of the church is visible to the world. It isn't even clearly visible to the genuine members who, sadly, do frequently question and harass one another...Christ is seen everywhere and anywhere that Christians live out their distinctly Christian union with Him.

6. *Spirituality*; The entire twelfth chapter of 1Corinthians deals of course with our spirits and God's Spirit, their relations and activities (Culver 2005, 877).

These six features speak to the core of the importance of unity within the Church and how that unity is humanly extemporized. The unity of the Church is manifested and controlled by the Holy Spirit through the living gospel of grace in the lives of those who have said yes to Jesus by faith. Those who are marginalized from the body of Christ, who are in Christ, have been denied access. They, too, are the hands and feet of Christ. Those who have judged the marginalized have brought judgment upon themselves.

What story or message is given from some Christians to the world that states only certain people can be part of the community of faith? "Theology's purpose is

to guide us in the ways of wise, faithful and righteous living, and to produce faithful Christian communities where we can become and live more whole and holy lives, reflective of the story of the Christian faith” (Reuschling 2011, 110). To deny some the availability of Christian community is to deny them the opportunity to learn of wisdom, faithfulness and righteous living. The body of Christ is broken, limping along life in denial of becoming healed and whole. Christians must stand up for those who desire to be unified with the whole community of faith and to ascend to a place of holiness that cannot be attained as long as we deny the unity of the Godhead in the body of Christ (Hebrews 12:14-15). We are all connected. We may be diverse in many ways, but our humanity reminds us that we are the same kind of human. Our father and mother (Adam and Eve) from our ancestral line reminds us that we are all part of one Family (Geisler 2011, 637).

Everyone is created in the image of God (Gen.1: 26-27), thus the importance of being respectful of one another and of the desire for everyone to grow in relationship to God. No one is without sin; no one can stand before a holy God without justification by faith. Also note that without faith, there can be no justification. Justification is an act of God to the unrighteous by faith in Christ Jesus, not of ourselves (Geisler 2011, 848). That being said, no one is excluded who is saved by grace, through faith, so as to be fully embraced by a loving God.

When the outcasts and those who are marginalized are on their knees and flat on their faces prostrate before the living God, pressing in on Him with great faith, knowing and believing in Him and are justified by that faith, how can any

Christian say with self-righteousness that I belong, but you do not? Those who are not considered outcasts minister in the name of Christ, but those who are not a part of the common circle must be fixed from what they are believed to be and so are marginalized before they can participate or even at times enter through the front door.

There is a deep, deep wound in the body of Christ, and this can no longer be if it is to be a unified church that Christ prayed for it to be (Galatians 3:24-28). God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one. This unity of the Trinity is demonstrated clearly, and it is the call of the Church to become the kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church is being called from God to be one in its obligation of inclusiveness.

It is truly by the grace of God that there is any unity in the church today. Some Christians recognize the work of grace in their lives which in turn acknowledges the need of grace in everyone's life. Unity and grace go hand in hand by faith. God's desire through Jesus Christ was to build up that unity within the Kingdom of God here on earth.

"In grace, God gives nothing less than himself. Grace, then is not a third thing or substance mediating between God and sinners, but is Jesus Christ in redeeming action" (Horton 2011, 267).

In Wayne Grudem's book of *Systematic Theology*, under the topic of *Means of Grace Within the Church*, he explores the idea that not only is life in general filled with the blessings of God's grace but that "the means of grace are any

activities within the fellowship of church that God uses to give more grace to Christians.” Grudem goes on to give a list of special ways we can receive more grace by our participation in church fellowship. It is in participation of receiving the sacraments teaching of the Word, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. It is in gathering together for worship, praying for one another, giving and sharing of our spiritual gifts as well as fellowshiping with one another that bind us together in this grace. Personal ministries to those in need and Evangelism help bring others under this grace that is provided for us by God. Lastly, but maybe most important, we can find the working of grace in Church discipline. It creates a humbleness and open-mindedness to be able to receive the grace given and to move within the other areas provided for us within the Church setting.

Grudem calls these items within the church as a “means of grace” available to believers through the works of the Holy Spirit to bring about various kinds of blessings to each individual. Taking a closer look at the importance of just one of these items, the Lord’s Supper is not only representative of the unity of Christians but in receiving grace:

One feeds on Christ in the Eucharist and so shares in his presence and fellowship and receives fresh grace. The wine and bread are tokens of Jesus’ love designed to empower us to service, obedience, and faithfulness...A further blessing...is unity. Paul labors the fact that the “one loaf” is representative of the unity of one people with their one Lord (1 Cor. 10:17). The rich in Corinth were sinning against the body of Christ by introducing divisions and discriminating against the poor (11:17-24). (Bird 2013, 794)

The thought that there are so many believers who do not attend church for personal reasons to receive this grace is sad. However, what is even more troubling are those who want to be part of church and are denied access to this “means of grace.” Has the Church bodies become so consumed with a form of tribalism and fear that Christianity has become a religion of sectarian expectations rather than a faith body of inclusive believers?

Grace is God’s merciful, unmerited favor toward all sinners. Grace is given to renew and redeem so that we may be “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness” (Eph. 4:24) (Horton 2011, 141).

Differing gifts, differing points of view, differing orientations to life are all under the umbrella of the Holy Spirit for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is directing believers to work together for the Kingdom of God. We hurt the body of Christ when we allow the differences of each other to become the very thing that keeps us separated. We are all parts of one body and to ignore one part makes the body weak. It is important to ask ourselves if we are truly following the promptings of the Holy Spirit or are we being led by the movement of hatred and marginalization, disinheriting the very people that contribute to the body of Christ? We miss out on the opportunity to build up the Kingdom of God. When a Christian is more concerned with their own comfort zone than the comfort of those who feel rejected and abandoned by the Church, then the disservice of fragmentation and divisiveness is done to the body of Christ and the kingdom of God.

The Church needs to ask itself if it is radiating, manifesting and unifying the love of God through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit to all people and most importantly towards each other. Obviously there is so much more to do and accomplish in the name of Jesus. There is still a lack of hospitality and love towards one another and a chasm within the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit pursues oneness among us:

The fact the faithful are moved by the Spirit, that the whole redeemed community is constituted by the Spirit as its principle of life, is manifest in their behavior. There are ethical criteria for the discernment of the possession of the Spirit...The sign of the new life is a new morality...The gifts of the Spirit are an unforeseeable, heavenly, marvelous and overwhelming intervention into human life. But they must be accepted and given effect to by men. Their purpose would not be fulfilled if they did not impel men to corresponding action. The deepest purpose of the Spirit is to be a Spirit of joy, of love, of service (Rahner 1991, 644).

The marginalized and those who perceive themselves as outcast are still undergoing strife, disputes, and dissensions from factions within the community of Christ. It is disheartening that even some of the marginalized at times react to this type of ridicule and begin then to respond in like manner, which also contributes to the lack of unification and grace. Unity demands wholeness in the body of Christ. In this wholeness, believers are to manifest a holiness that will reveal to the stranger a sense of welcome. This battle of tearing up the sacred is contrary to the whole concept of the body of Christ. This is not a good witness to those who are in desperate need of salvation. What is there to offer others when the Gospel of grace is violated?

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

The things people do in Jesus' name often contradict His teachings. From Constantine to Christendom to the Christian Right, 'after Jesus' can be remarkably depressing for thoughtful and sensitive souls. This dismal historical record surely was not what Jesus intended as he preached a merciful kingdom based on the transformative power of God's love (Bass 2009, 159).

Persecution continues within the walls of the Christian faith family. History shows many persecutions and divisions between the poor and the rich, the Caucasian Christians and the Afro-American Christians and a Christian patriarchal Church that excludes the leadership of women. Unity is what is needed in the body of Christ; it is time to set aside differences and look towards oneness in Christ Jesus.

As Christians, we are all learning what Christ requires of us and are working towards being Christ-like. In this, then, we can allow ourselves to be in Christ and have the spiritual maturity to accept one another's differences. This doesn't preclude that we can't all be in the body of Christ and be obedient to what He asks of us.

An example of discrimination and marginalization that has happened in the history of the church, as well as currently, is the role of women leadership. The oppression of women continues to be a battleground at times; the Roman Catholic Church being one of those examples as well as protestant Christian denominations who are closed off to the opportunities of special gifts and talents

by the leadership of women. There is no room for those who do not fit into the fold or who are ostracized because of their differences.

When there is no room for change or ability to step out of tradition, many people abandon fellowship in the Church or break free to find a place of acceptance and openness. Because of our lack of self-assurance when we are confronted by people who are different from us, we shy away or totally reject what is in front of us. This then causes our faith to be exclusive, dangerous and in a time of crisis.

Scott MacDougall, in his Huffington Post article *Reconsidering Christian Oppression*, 2014, it appears at times that Christianity is in such a state of crisis that even the conservative Christians regularly claim it is being oppressed. These particular Christians yell foul whenever their ideologies, power, or what they believe to be true in fact marginalize and oppress the very Christians they may be sitting with.

Unfortunately in today's society, mainline Christian denominations continue to promote a political, patriarchal leadership which was established long ago. In Bob Edwards' book, *Let my people go: A call to End the Oppression of Women in the Church*, he states that there was an official document called the *Decretum Gratiani*, which was a collection of 3,800 texts that brought discipline and regulations to the Church. It was compiled by Gratian, a Benedictine monk, in 1140.

Edwards states that this document caused women to be subjugated to men and became a powerhouse of rules and regulations reinforced by the Church. Thus the roles of women's activities in regards to teaching, leading and preaching were officially forbidden. "...as well as reliable witnesses of important events, they were effectively disqualified" (Edwards 2013, 19).

This pervading thought continues to hallow the halls of the great denominational churches and continues to place women under the submission of this patriarchy. The ideas contained in the *Decretum Gratiani* do not reflect the status of women in ministry according to the teachings of Jesus. Historically speaking, we can see not only women being in leadership roles in the New Testament but the Hebrew scriptures as well. We see Deborah in the book of Judges 4:4-5 given authority and leadership; Esther, in her book, took a risk of leadership for her people; Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:24-26 taught the male Jew Apollos "more adequately"; in the Gospel of Matthew 28:1-10 and Luke 24:9-11, the women were chosen to bear witness to the resurrection, and last, but not least, the Samaritan Woman, sinful and sorrowful, made missionary to her village in John 4:28-42. "If the Bible—in the Old Testament and the new—the angel of the Lord, and the resurrected Christ all agree that women can and should have authority, teach and bear witness to the work of God" (Edwards 2013, 25), then who are we to continue to get in the way of the Word of God because a Church document called *Decretum Gratiani* has been given higher authority than the scriptures itself?

It would be interesting to know how many patriarchal denominations do not know the history of the *Decretum Gratiani* but continue to carry out its rules and regulations because it has always been done that way. God chooses whom He will choose. God designates what gifts will be given to who and how He wants those gifts to be carried out. Marginalizing the very ones He has gifted and called for leadership causes the Church to turn their back on God. We are denying the power of the scriptures and what they are teaching us. There is a call for all Christians to become better people and to learn from our history.

First, those gifted by God for any ministry should serve in the capacities enabled by their gift, and human arrangements should facilitate their service and provide them the opportunities to serve. There is no suggestion whatsoever in Scripture or the history of Christ's people that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed along gender lines (Willard 2010, 9).

As Christians, we are called to follow the Word of God, to promote the Gospel and to do away with oppression and marginalization as Christ taught. The fears of the unknown experiences of life dictate to us instead of trusting that God knows what God is about. All human beings are made in the image of God, and Christ died for all. We need to live as people who trust in grace, this undeserved favor, so to be witnesses to those who believe they are outcasts and unworthy of this great body of faith in Christ Jesus.

Women Who Overcame

On the edges of Protestantism, far from mainline churches, women found their way in, no doubt by the way of the Holy Spirit. Margaret Fell (1614-1702) helped found the Society of Friends, the Quakers, Selina Hastings (1709-91) was

a major figure in Methodism, and Anna Howard Shaw in 1880 was ordained in the United Methodist Church. These are clear signs of how the Holy Spirit continues to manifest itself by gifting women in leadership roles within the church (Hillebrand 2012, 279).

In more modern times, there has been movement within the church to conscript the services, talents and gifts of women in leadership roles. However, there is still a prevailing attempt to keep women at bay in some patriarchal evangelical circles.

Michelle DeRusha's book, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, speaks of Edith Stein (1891-1942), who was canonized a saint in the Roman Catholic Church in 1991. Edith was born a Jew on the feast of Yom Kippur. She was the youngest of eleven children. She attended synagogue and participated in all of the feasts, but when she completed high school and entered college, she abandoned the faith. She graduated with honors in the field of philosophy which became one of the influences that led her back to faith (DeRusha 2014, 267).

During World War I, Edith continued to struggle between her faith and unbelief. Several things impacted her faith. It is known that during her time in Frankfurt, she saw a woman enter the Cathedral and witnessed her enter the sanctuary, kneel in a pew and pray. This moved her to realize that a personal relationship with God was attainable because all that she had witnessed in her life thus far were religious people praying only during church service. Another time was when a dear friend and fellow phenomenologist Adolf Reinach was killed. Edith visited his widow thinking the worse but found her with hope and the

ability to console those who were mourning. Edith then shared with a Jesuit priest, “It was my first encounter with the Cross and the divine power it bestows on those who carry it...That was the moment my unbelief collapsed and Christ shone forth—in the mystery of the Cross” (Herbstrith 1985, 25).

Even after these strong experiences, she continued to struggle with her faith until she picked up a book off of one of her friends’ book case. It was the autobiography of Teresa of Avila. She read it from cover to cover in one night unable to set it down. She received insight that God is more about love than knowledge. With this understanding and the prompting of Teresa of Avila in the pursuit of prayer, Edith launched into a new journey, one that would bring her to a saving faith. She put all of her effort into her spirituality and her relationship with Jesus. She was then baptized on New Year’s Day, 1922.

Edith set aside her dream of ever becoming a professor and instead embarked teaching German at a parochial school run by Dominican nuns. She dedicated her life to her students and to serving the poor (DeRusha 2014, 269).

Edith began to see her calling in life and entered the Carmelite convent in Cologne in October, 1933. It was at this time that she felt a call to help her fellow Jews from the Nazi regime. Her mother abandoned her due to her conversion to Christ, but Edith continued to write her to no avail. On August 2, 1942, she was arrested along with other Jewish Catholics. Edith ministered to the abandoned children, cleaning their clothes and comforting them while imprisoned. On December 9, 1942, Edith was put to death along with her sister Rosa and 987 other Jews in the gas chambers of Auschwitz (DeRusha 2014, 270).

What an amazing woman of faith who came to faith through another woman of faith. Lives were touched by her leadership to keep ministering to all those around her through horrible circumstances. She felt her life to be a sacrifice of others through the cross and life of Christ Jesus. She wrote a letter to her Mother Superior expressing her call (DeRusha 2014, 270):

Dear Reverend Mother: please permit me to offer myself to the Heart of Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for true peace that if possible the reign of Antichrist might be broken without another world war and a new social order might be established. I would like to do it today, if I could, since it is already the final hour. I know I myself am nothing, but Jesus desire it, and I am sure he is asking it of many others in these days (Herbstrith 1985, 95).

Edith was not unlike the Apostle Paul; all through his circumstances his thought was not himself but how his actions brought about the spreading of the gospel. Edith realized that the Holy Spirit was leading her and calling her into a leadership role of service, the service to help the helpless even in her helplessness. No greater call is manifest than the service of love, and it is not reserved only for the few and male but for the ones God calls out of the margins of life. According to the Holy Spirit, He will enable us all to effectively serve each other in love, provided we do not create a boundary where the cross of Christ has opened a door (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, NKJV).

Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was born in Albania, 1910 and died September 5, 1997. Agnes was eight years old at the time of her father's death. At age 18, December 1, 1928, she left her home, never to see her mother again, and joined the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto as a missionary to the people of India. She

became a Geography teacher until becoming the headmistress in 1937. Rarely stepping out of the convent for nineteen years, on September 10, 1946, at the age of thirty-six, she was on her way to a retreat in Darjeeling. She experienced a mystical experience with Jesus, one that she would refer to as “a call within a call”. The directive from the Lord was to leave all behind, give up all to follow Jesus to the slums in order to serve Him in the poorest of the poor. On the entrance registrar to the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa noted September 10 as “Inspiration Day”, the official start of the Missionaries of Charity. Unfortunately, Mother Teresa had to wait to be given permission by the hierarchy of the Church to be released from Loreto and begin as a Missionary of Charity. This was a grueling two years of letter writing and turmoil within herself to do what Christ commissioned her to do. Nine days after August 8, 1948, receiving permission from Pope Pius XII, she left the convent of Loreto toward the slums of Calcutta (DeRusha 2014, 308).

She was a spiritually dedicated leader for many people, young and old, orphaned children dying on the streets of Calcutta and political leaders, clergymen as well as laity. Mother Teresa, quoted in Edward W. Desmond’s, *Interview with Mother Teresa, Time Magazine, 1989*, <http://www.servelec.net/mothertheresa.thm>. “I’m like a little pencil in His hand. That’s all. He does the thinking. He does the writing. The pencil has nothing to do [with] it. The pencil has only to be allowed to be used.”

Edith and Agnes, along with many other women, are living history of how God moves in the midst of His people, choosing what society may see as the most

unlikely. Women are only one population of society that has been marginalized over the years within the Christian Community. There are many more in our society who are under persecution and oppression. There are Christian brothers and sisters who are on the fringes of fellowship desiring to be a part of the whole. The Gospel of Christ demands that we no longer stand by while others are crying out to belong so to reap the benefits of God's Kingdom and the grace of the gospel.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

...They also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison and did not help you? He will reply, I tell you the truth whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me—Matthew 25:45.

When hostility is converted into hospitality then fearful strangers can become guests revealing to their hosts the promise they are carrying with them. Then, in fact, the distinction between host and guest proves to be artificial and evaporates in the recognition of the new found unity—Henri Nouwen.

The above quotes speak to the heart of a discord that is present within the Christian Church. It is a battle cry of gay Christians fighting for their voice to be heard. This cry is the acknowledgement that they are not “strangers” and are tired of being ignored as the “least of these”. Gay Christians are immersed in the saving grace of Christ Jesus as well as partakers of the promises in the Word of God. Gay Christians have been placed on the edges of life, whose dignity has been taken from them because the societal Church designates a person as either worthy or not.

There is a Christian patriarchal position within the Church that causes those who are rejected and ridiculed to feel as if they cannot measure up to the status quo of what others would feel is necessary to be a part of the Body of Christ. This then heaps on more wounds to an already broken spirit from a place that is to show them love. Church is a place for those who are experiencing abandonment, oppression, inhospitality and marginalization to feel the rawness of acceptance

and the ability to see what grace is all about. Rather than inheriting the kingdom of God and all that it embraces, gay Christians are made to feel disinherited. As Disciples of Christ, He demands that we love one another (John 13:34-35, 1 Cor. 13:4-8a).

Gay Christians seek the same spiritual formation and direction as other Christians. They seek to stand in their redemption so as to work towards their sanctification. In order for this to take place, one must be in community with other believers. Gay Christians desire to have the availability to worship, hear God's Word preached and to be a part of the ministry of Christ. This demands an opportunity to be a part of a community of believers who are more interested in reaching out to the estranged than keeping safe within the confines of their injustice.

The challenge to Christians everywhere will be the uncomfortableness of creating radical inclusion and validation that whomever has opened their hearts to Christ Jesus is welcomed not in spite of but by virtue of their identity in Him. The Call to Christian maturity is to seek intimacy with God, and it is by this maturity and grace that we may be united as one (John 17:21).

The Battle for Gay Christians

In the field of spiritual formation and direction, many have written on the importance of having a relationship with God, knowing who we are in Christ Jesus, and the importance of loving others. These writers or spiritual advisors see the importance of challenging fellow Christians to risk changing thoughts and

behaviors that cause injustice, isolation, oppression and marginalization. For some Christians, this may cause an uncomfortableness or indignation to the personal and perceptual ideologies of their understanding of the truth of Christ. Expressed in these spiritual resources is the affirmative action to reach out to those who feel as if they do not belong, labeled marginalized and outcast.

Jung Young Lee provides a clear explanation of those who are considered marginalized within society in his book, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*.

...marginal people usually belong to subordinate groups, while those at the center usually belong to dominant groups. Marginal people are then the oppressed, the powerless, and the rejected. They are ethnic minorities, women, the unemployed, the poor, the illiterate, the homeless, and handicapped, the AIDS-infected, gays, lesbians and so on. Those who are not part of the institutions that dominate can be regarded as marginal people...all such forms and intensities of marginal experience share one thing in common: they allow the individual to know what it means to be at the edges of existence. (Lee 1995, 32)

The intensity that the marginalized feel is overwhelming. The marginalized are rejected, abandoned and disinherited from the very freedoms Christ came to bring. In regards to the disinherited, Howard Thurman, who was concerned about the civil rights of the African Americans, speaks out for all people suffering from marginalization when he states, "The religion of Jesus says to the disinherited: 'Love your enemy'. Take the initiative in seeking ways by which you can have the experience of a common sharing of mutual worth and value. It may be hazardous, but you must do it" (Thurman 1996, 100). Many times the marginalized have experienced more hatred than love. In turn, those who have

been hated upon respond in the same way not realizing that “the hounds of hell that dog the footsteps of the disinherited” have taken over the hearts of those who wish to be free from all hatred (Thurman 1996, 74).

It is this hatred that rises out of self-righteous words that has been passed down from generation to generation. Peter J. Gomes in *The Good Book, Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* makes it clear what the marginalized gay Christians are fighting against.

The argument goes something like this: Homosexuality is an abomination, and the homosexual is a sinner. At Sodom and Gomorrah God punished the cities for the sin of homosexuality. Saint Paul and early Christians were equally opposed to homosexuality, and homosexual practices are condemned in the New Testament Church. Therefore, if we are to be faithful to the “clear teachings of scripture” we too must condemn homosexuality; it is the last moral absolute, and we compromise it at our own peril. The sufferings and persecutions homosexuals have endured over the centuries are signs of God’s extreme displeasure with who they are and with what they do, and their behavior, as Saint Paul points out, is contrary to nature; and this then invites a terrible retribution. The AIDS epidemic is a terrible visitation, but it is the consequence, and only the latest one, of the sexual perversion of homosexuality (Gomes 1996, 145).

Gay Christians are more than their sexual orientation. They are people who hurt, who bleed, who are broken and yes, sinful but not because they are gay. Gomes also states because of this particular belief, a fire of prejudicial justification for marginalizing the homosexual is fueled. The “bible expresses such a prejudice, then it certainly cannot be wrong to act on that prejudice”. Thus, it is perfectly fine to marginalize the homosexual and to outcast them from the body of Christ until they get their act together and live a heterosexual lifestyle (Gomes 1996, 146).

Thurman reiterates that this particular hatred continues to manifest itself because there is “contact without fellowship, contact that is devoid of any of the primary overtures of warmth and fellow-feeling and genuineness” (Thurman 1996, 75).

Rev. Samuel Kader in *Openly Gay and Openly Christian, How the Bible Really is Gay Friendly* reflects accurately upon the thoughts and feelings of LGBT Christians:

Too many gay people who love God can testify they tried all the answers the church demanded: they became celibate, they started dating the opposite sex, they quoted the Bible daily, they had hands laid on them, they had exorcism, they went to counseling, they attended prayer session after prayer session, they fasted and sought God. When they were able to finally get quiet and listen, God’s message of reconciliation restored them to their rightful place in the Body as an openly gay Christian. It is too late for such gay Christians to buy the party line that they are an abomination or any such thing. Their relationship with God is too deep to accept a lie when they know their Shepherd’s voice (Kader 1999, 153).

Henri Nouwen in *Reaching Out* states that one of the main reasons for our lack of hospitality within the Church, is that fear destroys our ability to reach out to others. Those on the outskirts of society are the strangers we fail to take in. “Strangers have become more and more subject to hostility than to hospitality” (Nouwen 1975, 52). Nouwen speaks to the ambivalence toward the stranger:

Although it belongs to the core of a Christian spirituality to reach out to strangers and invite them into our lives, it is important to realize clearly that our spontaneous feelings toward strangers are quite ambivalent. It does not require much social analysis to recognize how many forms of hostility, usually pervaded with fear and anxiety, prevent us from inviting people into our world (Nouwen 1975, 51).

Kader speaks to this by saying that there is a rigid religious system operating within Christianity that keeps people in bondage. There is no sense of liberty due to the fact that they want to hold on to rules “which demonize gay people, and in so doing act just as the Pharisees of Jesus’s day...They are found fighting against God” (Kader 1999, 150).

In these religious systems, no one is free to think for fear of their peers and being put out of their religious institution...So many people hold to this system of marginalizing and demonizing merely because it is tradition, and they cannot see the damage they do to their own children. Jesus said the religious are therefore blind leaders of the blind. They all fall into a pit of legalism that prohibits the flow of God’s love (Kader 1999, 150).

Candace Chellew-Hodge, a United Church of Christ minister, in *Bulletproof Faith, A Spiritual Survival Guide for Gay and Lesbian Christians* builds the premise that it is important for gay Christians to remember Ephesians 6:16 while battling the challenges within the Church. Gay Christians are encouraged to put on a bulletproof vest to withstand the onslaughts of attack to one’s personhood and faith. Chellew-Hodge states, “Our modern day shield of faith has to be strong enough to protect us from all attacks so that we emerge safe and secure. Without this shield of faith, we cannot survive as GLBT Christians in this world. As Christians we would agree that fiery darts and arrows do come our way from the enemy, but never could we imagine that persecution would come from our very own brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus” (Chellew-Hodge 2008, xiv).

Chellew-Hodge reminds the GLBT Christians of some of the promises that belong to them: Isaiah 54:17, Romans 10:9-13 and Romans 11:29. She encourages gay Christians that they do not stand alone; many have gone before

them in being marginalized from the larger Christian Community. “Since Jesus’ death and resurrection, members of our common faith have been fighting to deny grace to other groups who do not fit their ‘orthodox’ idea of what constitutes a ‘true’ Christian” (Chellew-Hodge 2008, 124).

Yvette A. Flunder in *Where the Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion* speaks to the importance of celebrating community in all aspects of church life through what Christ Jesus has done for us (1Corinthians 5:16-20 NRSV). Foundationally, she states healthy boundaries and making room for growth and change will bring about a strong force within the intimacy and experience of God in Christian community. “Before celebration can occur, however, the community must look closely at how it perceives itself...I assert that the community cannot truly celebrate itself until individuals begin to ‘see’ themselves and each other through the eyes of faith...the eyes of God” (Flunder 2005, 40).

Flunder emphasizes verse 16 of 1 Corinthians 5 (NRSV). “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view”. Today, we have come to know Christ through the leading of the Holy Spirit by faith and the demonstration of His resurrection; however, if we were a religious people of His day, we would have seen Him as rebellious, subversive and a destroyer of what we believed was our faith and truth at the time. Flunder continues:

We must prioritize knowing each other deeper than what our eyes can see because celebrating community that is truly diverse requires a new way of seeing and a new way of being. The Scripture passage implies

that we can celebrate one another in some new and powerful way in Christian community—some way that both accepts who each of us is in a human sense and transcends our humanity, allowing us to see each other as God sees us (Flunder 2005, 43).

This speaks once again to Nouwen's point on the importance of hospitality from the perspective that it is more of a "fundamental attitude toward our fellow human being, which can be expressed in a great variety of ways...It does not require much social analysis to recognize how many forms of hostility, usually pervaded with fear and anxiety, prevent us from inviting people into our world" (Nouwen 1975, 51-52).

"We must acknowledge, see, and know people by more than externals for a celebration of community authentically to take place. People who are marginalized expose a great deal, but if we are basing all that is known on what is exposed to us, we have still missed the boat...Reconciliation and communion with God or each other cannot take place where relationship is only skin deep and does not discern the gift of God in each of us. The connecting point is much deeper than the obvious (Flunder 2005, 44).

Jean Vanier in *Befriending the Stranger* claims that it is of the utmost for Christians to be united in order to "help others to believe. Disunity is an obstacle to faith" (Vanier 2001, 35). Vanier believes that this particular disunity will prevent others from believing in the gospel of Christ causing the world to be filled with divisions that eventually will weave its way pervasively into our lives and communities. Vanier echoes Nouwen when he speaks to the importance of not creating barriers that cause isolation. When these barriers and forms of isolation are present within the Christian community, a disconnect takes place within our relationships.

Whenever we accept some people and reject others, we create barriers. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us bring down these barriers, otherwise we will remain closed up in the logic of fear and of exclusion and become agents of disunity within our own community. Jesus thirsts for unity and calls us all to unity (Vanier 2001, 35).

Tim Conder in *The Church in Transition: The Journey of Existing Churches into the Emerging Culture* states that our interests influence any decisions we may make individually or as a community of faith. Whatever we are influenced by with regard to our interests, values and prejudices will affect the community and its formation. “I believe many modern and existing churches have a number of prejudices about community formation that deeply impair or even preclude their ability to transition into effective emerging culture ministry” (Conder 2005, 140).

Conder states that the Church at times falls to its default setting in regards to its doctrine which delegates as a “Guardian at the Gate” in reference to those who may enter and who may not. He is not dismissing the importance of doctrine but stating that “allowing doctrine to dominate the process of joining Christian community is theologically, functionally, and missionally challenged” (Conder 2005, 142).

Our churches don’t need to replace doctrine with a more effective guard at the door of community participation. We need to strongly question the importance of placing any barriers at the church’s doors. With many people seeking access to church communities before engaging their doctrinal distinctives and belief narratives, we must begin to develop community formation models based on inclusion (Conder 2005, 146).

Redemption and Sanctification

John 17:20-23

Rick McKinley in *Jesus in the Margins, Finding God in the Places We Ignore* speaks to a great God who comes to Earth and purposefully places Himself in the margins of life to reach out to those existing in a life of margins and isolation, those not fully understanding the love of God because their only exposure has been brokenness and religious leaders who are concerned more about the law than relationship. According to McKinley, Jesus' first miracle during the wedding at Cana would have been considered a scandal in our day. Turning water into wine only contributed to the guests' already drunken state by giving more wine and the best of it. Jesus talking to Samaritan women, hanging with tax collectors and prostitutes along with healing a Roman soldier's servant were just a few things that Jesus did to keep the religious leaders of His day in a tizzy. God "longs to show you an untainted picture of what his love looks like. That you would see this man Jesus for who he truly is: a person who was marginalized by the religious community—but only because of his genuine love" (McKinley 2005, 56).

McKinley gives a definition of redemption: "Redemption is a theological word that means 'the purchase back of something that had been lost, by the payment of a ransom.' Jesus was on a mission to purchase back those who were lost. To get them back for his Father. Jesus is still on that mission" (McKinley 2005, 60).

Bradford A. Mullen in the article *Sanctification* gives a “generic meaning of sanctification...’the state of proper functioning.’ To sanctify someone or something is to set that person or thing apart for the use intended by its designer...A human being is sanctified, therefore when he or she lives according to God’s design and purpose” (Mullen 1996, 708). He clarifies that for those who are in Christ Jesus. By faith, believers are fully sanctified because of what Christ did on the cross. However, “The Christian is progressively sanctified through the Spirit’s ministry (2 Cor. 3:18)... A sanctified believer has assurance that he or she is Christ’s...still, professing believers are to ‘pursue’ sanctification (Heb. 12:14)” (Mullen 1996, 713).

Wyndy Corbin Reuschling in *Becoming Whole and Holy: An Integrative Conversation about Christian Formation* agrees with Mullen’s theological point of view concerning sanctification. It is understood to be a process of growing in a Christian’s life of formation. Sanctification is moving in the direction of holiness and the likeness of Christ. This journey has “moral dimensions, in that growth in holiness is manifested in particular behaviors and attitudes that are visible and practiced in the context of communities” (Corbin Reuschling 2011, 131).

Corbin Reuschling, from a perspective of Christian ethics, brings a concern that the Christian moves towards becoming holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16), and this involves the availability for “patterned ways of seeing and living with God and others” (Corbin Reuschling 2011, 132).

Becoming holy is a work of the Spirit, ‘the agent of sanctification applying the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice to the believers *in their common life*...The necessary intrinsic component is the Holy Spirit, cultivating in us the

intrinsic goods of the virtues that are part of God's own moral character. It is important, however, not to relegate these intrinsic goods or virtues to a private, interior space of our lives, lest they be solely understood as some kind of inward journey. The cultivation and practice of the virtues are deeply social and always embodied (Corbin Reuschling 2011, 132).

In *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, edited by Doug Paditt and Tony Jones, Samir Selmanovic speaks of "finding God in the other." Samir challenges Christians in the way that they spread the Gospel. The Good News is to be spread through loving others, however, many non-Christians or those who are Christian but marginalized rarely feel loved in the process. Samir's "thesis is that love accepts what others have to offer and we think non-Christians (marginalized and oppressed Christians, my emphasis) don't have much of anything to add to what is most valuable to us, namely the gospel" (Selmanovic 2007, 196).

Community as mentioned above is necessary for the Gospel to be lived out and for Christian formation to grow according to Corbin Reuschling and Selmanovic. The Holy Spirit along with an attitude of humility will transform all Christians and produce the possibilities of ongoing sanctification for all.

Humility is the ultimate expression of courage. In the context of the kingdom of God, a sheer display of power is simply too weak to be effective. We have created a false tension between keeping our Christian identity intact and approaching the world in humility. Humility is to be our identity. When we open ourselves to be taught by 'the other,' we don't become less the followers of Christ but more so (Selmanovic 2007, 198).

The ability to grow in our sanctification and stand firm in our redemption is encouraged by the availability of Christian community. "From the perspective of Christian ethics we must make commitments to human beings as a starting point

for allowing all persons to become. Becoming happens in a web of relationships—with the Trinitarian God and with others. The quality of these relationships has a huge impact on who we become” (Corbin Reuschling 2011, 140).

Adventures in Missing the Point, by Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo, addresses the issue of homosexuality and the Church. They speak of the importance of no longer ignoring the issue within the Church and how many times Christians miss the point of the Gospel. They go on to say that it is a shame and a sin that the GLBT Christians are forced to discover and use their talents and gifts outside of the church. There must be a better plan in welcoming the GLBT Christians into the church especially since there has been a struggle in their lives to grow in their relationship with the Lord. It would be a benefit and blessing for the straight church to recognize, welcome and embrace them into the community of faith. It is important to affirm them and celebrate their humanity and loving experiences “so that their participation in the body of Christ is ensured. Homosexuals are our brothers and sisters—and they must be treated that way. To do less is sin” (McLaren, Campolo 2003, 210).

Miroslav Volf in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* explores the importance of justice through the eyes of judgment or embrace. He expresses with passion that there is no justice of God when there is no embrace. In order for there to be justice one has to agree

to make space in yourself for the perspective of the other, and in order to make space, you need to want to embrace the other. If you insist that others do not belong to you and you to them, that their perspective should

not muddle yours, you will have your justice and they will have theirs; your justices will clash and there will be no justice between you...Embrace is part and parcel of the very *definition* of justice (Volf 1996, 220).

Volf also gives the example of how the story of the prodigal son is in tension between what is perceived as an 'injustice' and grace.

There is a profound 'injustice' about the God of the biblical traditions. It is called *grace*... in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), it was "unjust" of the father to receive back the prodigal as a son and, on top of that, to throw a party for him after the son had just squandered half of his inheritance. But the father was not interested in "justice." He acted in accordance with a "must" that was higher than the "must" of "justice" (v. 32). It was the "must" of belonging together as a family. Put differently, the relationship defined justice; an abstract principle of justice did not define the relationship. If we want the God of the prophets and the God of Jesus Christ, we will have to put up with the 'injustice' of God's grace and rethink the concept of justice (Volf 1996, 221).

In *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ*, Patrick S.

Cheng speaks to the doctrines of sin and grace in regards to the GLBT Christian community and how these doctrines have brought a deep sense of animosity because of how those doctrines have been used against GLBT people. Cheng is concerned that the culture has become more secularized and "allergic" to what he calls "sin-talk", as well as to the meaning of grace. Cheng is also aware that "once we have dispensed with the notion of sin, however, there is little need for the doctrine of God's grace" (Cheng 2012, Loc. 367).

There is almost a profound silence to the topic of sin-talk due to the GLBT people being deeply wounded and broken from homophobic religious leaders and communities.

Many of us have left the faith communities of our childhood because of the abusive ways in which these doctrines have been used against us. Some of us have even tried to kill ourselves—and, in some cases, succeeded—because of the belief that we are unredeemable sinners and that we are forever excluded from God’s saving grace (Cheng 2012, Loc. 367).

Cheng believes as gay Christians we can no longer ignore these doctrines; otherwise, it may come to harm us in the long run. He believes that there are at least four reasons to why we must break the silence about sin and grace.

First, sin-talk remains at the heart of the oppression and suffering of GLBT people today. Second, sin-talk is the primary reason why GLBT people of faith are denied full participation in the life of the Church. Third, ignoring the doctrines of sin and grace deprives us of the theological tools to describe the true state of the world. Fourth, GLBT Christians need a more fully developed theology of sin and grace in order to better dialogue with the broader Christian community (Cheng 2012, Loc. 395).

Cheng proposes that we move from a “*crime-based*” model of sin and grace, sin being understood as a “crime against God” and grace portrayed as an “acquittal and rehabilitation by God—to a Christ-centered model of sin and grace” (Cheng, Loc. 509). In the Christ-centered model, “sin is understood as immaturity, whereas grace is seen as deification (that is, becoming like God in the person of Christ and through the Holy Spirit)” (Cheng, Loc. 509).

In conclusion, Cheng is convinced that it is important for “GLBT people and many others—to wrestle deeply with the doctrines of sin and grace, as opposed to throwing them out...that a Christ-centered model of sin and grace will allow GLBT people of faith, as well as our allies, to enter into a more meaningful theological dialogue among ourselves as well as with the broader theological

community about the amazing grace of our lives and loves” (Cheng 2012, Loc. 3831).

A Desire for Christian Community

John 13:34-35

Andrew Marin, founder of The Marin Foundation located in Chicago, *Love is an Orientation, Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* asserts that the GLBT community have been searching for the embrace of the Christian community only to have doors shut in their faces. The GLBT Christians are desiring validation for who they are in Christ Jesus...“more GLBT people will continue to show their faces until the Christian community recognizes that GLBT people have also been created by the Creator. There are too many GLBT people for them to be a mistake by God” (Marin 2009, 76).

Marin speaks of the importance of validation in the GLBT’s lives. He encourages them not to look towards others for this validation. “When all is said and done only God can truly validate and judge anyone or anything. From my vantage point the GLBT community has been searching within the wrong sources” (Marin 2009, 84).

Marin believes that there needs to be refocus on both the Christian community in relationship to the GLBT people and the GLBT people towards the Christian community. This refocus or shift should be directed onto God. He states

that the “only way to get close enough to hear this validation or rebuke is by having an intimate, personal relationship” with God (Marin 2009, 85).

Validation comes from the Father alone, discerned through each individual as it pertains to their relationship with him, not from any other earthly being, organization, celebrity, dogmatic expression or perceived religious duty to another. He will always answer, and he will always do what is good in his sight for those who earnestly seek his voice (2 Sam. 10:12). The way forward with the GLBT community is not a debate on the Bible’s statements...but a discussion of how to have an intimate, real, conversational relationship with the Father...(Marin 2009, 87).

Larry Crabb and Marin join together to discuss the importance of community in *Becoming a True Spiritual Community: A profound Vision of What the Church Can Be*. Crabb expresses a conviction not only within himself but believes it a call from the Holy Spirit to form a spiritual community where people gather and “experience a kind of togetherness that only the Holy Spirit makes possible” (Crabb 1999, 22).

Together with the Holy Spirit, this spiritual community can manifest a sense of courage and vulnerability to “reach deep places in each other’s hearts that are not often easily reached. They discover places beneath the awkwardness of wanting to embrace and cry and share opinions. They openly express love and reveal fear, even though they feel so unaccustomed” (Crabb 1999, 22).

Bringing together the GLBT Christians with other Christians gives an opportunity for Crabb’s conviction to reach a “sacred place of vulnerability and authenticity.” Crabb believes that something is released and a sense of good begins to take place in the lives of those who participate together.

An appetite for holy things is stirred. For just a moment, the longing to know God becomes intense, stronger than all other passions, worth whatever price must be paid for it. Spiritual togetherness, what I call *connecting*, creates movement: *Togetherness* in Christ encourages *movement* toward Christ (Crabb 1999, 22).

Spiritual community is not an easy ordeal. It requires the ability to sacrifice and to stay committed no matter the concerns or occasions of turmoil. Spiritual community can cause us to face our “most troublesome fear...Becoming a Christian is one thing. Following Christ is another, especially when He tells us to get involved with other Christians. That’s when the fuss begins” (Crabb 1999, 154).

Red Letter Revolution by Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo dedicates a whole chapter to their dialogue on Homosexuality. This book was published in 2012, and since then, Tony Campolo changed his stance on the importance of homosexuals and marriage. In the Washington post article by Sarah Pulliam Bailey, *Acts of Faith; From Franklin Graham to Tony Campolo, Some Evangelical Leaders are Splitting over Gay Marriage*, “Campolo stated that Christian homosexuals should be granted the full marriage rite within the Church” (June 9, 2015. Washingtonpost.com). Because of this article, he has begun to be persecuted by some within the Evangelical community (correspondence with Campolo and this author).

Claiborne discusses a study that was done by the Barna Group several years ago. “They found that the number one answer to the first thing non-Christians thought when they hear Christian was ‘anti-homosexual.’ It should break our

hearts that often we are known more for what we are against than what we are for, for who we have excluded than for who we have embraced” (Claiborne 2012, 131).

Campolo asserts that Jesus “never spoke to the homosexual issue in those red letters” (Campolo 2012, 133), however, some scholars disagree. Sandra Turnbull in *God’s Gay Agenda* states that Jesus did speak of homosexuals in Matthew 19:11-12. Turnbull agrees that many have stated that Jesus mentioned nothing about homosexuals, that “he was not condemning of people with a same-sex orientation. In spite of this, I believe that Jesus did speak about homosexuality when he spoke about born eunuchs” (Turnbull 2012, 29).

Turnbull suggests that Jesus spoke about three types of eunuchs. One type is the one born that way, “natural-born eunuchs”, which she goes to show in her research that these are what we “understand to be gays and lesbians” today. The second type of eunuch is man-made referring to castrated males. And the third eunuch is one who dedicates their life for the kingdom of heaven (Turnbull 2012, 29).

In regards to this subject of eunuchs, Turnbull examines this term from a biblical context, historical culture background and an evangelical, Spirit-filled perspective. Most of the beginning to middle chapters of her text deal with the first two categories of eunuchs, whereas the last few chapters deal with the “high call” of a eunuch and what the church needs to do in regards to eunuchs (gay, lesbian Christians) today.

Turnbull suggests through her research that “Jesus created a third category of eunuchs in order to catapult eunuchs into fulfilling the purpose of God for their lives” (Turnbull 2012, 134). Of all the people that Jesus healed He did not feel the need to heal the eunuchs. He spoke positively of them and affirmed them. Jesus didn’t see the need to reprogram them or bring them to any restoration. He didn’t feel the need to fix them or restore them back to society. Jesus’ desire for the eunuchs was to receive their place in the kingdom of God and to work for that kingdom (Turnbull 2012, 137).

Jesus states prophetically that there are eunuchs who will make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God. Without a clear understanding of natural-born eunuchs as the Master Designer’s creation and man-made eunuchs as an attempt by the master counterfeiter to distort the true meaning and purpose of a eunuch, it would be easy to misunderstand Jesus’ comments on this new category of eunuch...Jesus certainly was not inviting people to physically castrate themselves, since this would only produce more man-made eunuchs...It is apparent that Jesus was not encouraging heterosexual people to somehow make themselves a different orientation (Turnbull 2012, 135)

Turnbull encourages that those eunuchs from birth, a “true eunuch”, would still have to choose to “dedicate themselves to God”, which is the call to all of God’s eunuchs. What Jesus offered was an invitation. He made clear that serving God for the kingdom of heaven’s sake was of utmost importance and, in fact, spelled out God’s agenda for eunuchs” (Turnbull 20012, 136).

The desire for the GLBT people dedicated to Christ is not only to be a part of the Church and build up the kingdom of God but to also grow in their spiritual maturity. Terry Wardle in *Outrageous Love Transforming Power* states that it is

important for a Christian to grow in their spiritual maturity. In order to do this, it is important to see that there are “foundational characteristics of Christ’s life that must ultimately become increasingly true of every life that responds to the call of Jesus” (Wardle 2004, 13).

Christian maturity, according to Wardle on behalf of all believers seeking this spiritual maturity, involves the issues of identity in God, intimacy with the Father, community with other believers, character in Christ over behaviors, responding properly in our brokenness, vulnerability in ministry and Holy Spirit empowerment with kingdom authority (Wardle 2004, 13).

Community is one of the foundational characteristics of Christ in our spiritual maturity that also validates our Christian walk. Wardle states that “A genuine commitment to Christ has always involved a commitment to His community. There is not one without the other” (Wardle 2004, 64).

Wardle quotes John 13:35, then goes on to say,

Christians must pay careful attention to this statement. According to Jesus, it is not our service, or giving, or wisdom, or even miracle-working power that speaks of our discipleship. It is our love for one another. Such love demands a deep commitment to be in community, demonstrating to the world that we are united in His name. How sad that there is so much division within the global Christian community and many local churches. Nothing reveals our immaturity like divisiveness and aggression so evident among Christians of the twenty-first century. Jesus was clearly dedicated to the transforming power of community. His followers must, by the power of the Holy Spirit, choose to do the same (Wardle 2004, 65-66).

Melanie Morrison quotes Micah 6:8 in *The Grace of Coming Home* and states that being fully alive and experiencing a deep relationship with God and the

Christian community, in particular the Christian community of the GLBT people and their relationship to the Church, is characterized by three things; “doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God” (Morrison 1995, 58).

Morrison articulates that God is concerned about relationships and not anything that we would call religious; instead, the vital words are integrity, compassion and an awareness of justice. By preference in regards to humility, “Reverence and gratitude acknowledge life as a precious gift. Humility is the recognition that none of us—not even God—exists outside of relatedness. We are all part of one another” (Morrison 1995, 58).

Walter Brueggemann in *The Prophetic Imagination*, second edition, quotes 1 Corinthians 1:25-28 in his preface to the revised edition. He refers to this passage in the sense of prophetic traditions which enable a sense of numbness to the world around us and continue to bring a sense of torture and pain to those who desire to be a part of a prophetic imagination. He uses the example of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, not to maintain their slavery in the midst of their new found worship but to help them to see their “freedom in God”. God’s desire was for them as well as Christians today to begin to live inside God’s imagination. This prophetic imagination is manifested in the life of Jesus (Brueggemann 2001, xx-xxi).

Brueggemann states that we will never know the full meaning of prophetic imagination until we can connect the “religion of *static triumphalism* and the *politics of oppression and exploitation*...Moses introduced not just the new free God and not just a message of social liberation. Rather, his work came precisely

at the engagement of the *religion of God's freedom* with the *politics of human justice*" (Brueggemann 2001, 7).

Profoundly, Brueggemann points out that the prophetic imagination "must ponder that there is no freedom of God without the politics of justice and compassion, and there is not politics of justice and compassion without a religion of the freedom of God" (Brueggemann 2001, 9).

Thus a truly free God is essential to marginal people if they are to have a legitimate standing ground against the oppressive orders of the day. But then it follows that for those who regulate and benefit from the order of the day a truly free God is not necessary, desirable, or perhaps even possible. Given the social setting of most churches in America, these matters may give us serious pause...From that it may follow that the freedom of God and the politics of justice are not so easily embraced among us, given our social setting and our derivative religious interestedness (Brueggemann 2001, 23).

Brueggemann exerts the necessity of Jesus to "dismantle the dominant culture and nullify its claims. The way of his ultimate criticism is his decisive solidarity with marginal people and the accompanying vulnerability required by that solidarity (Brueggemann 2001, 82).

Jesus' ministry, as radical as it was and is, illuminates perfect criticism that leads to the dismantling of the characteristics of those seen as guardians of prophetic traditions. Jesus and all that He said and did within the gospels was seen as a "clear and present danger to that order...the gospel of Christ never promises without threatening, it never begins without ending something, it never gives gifts without also assessing harsh costs" (Brueggemann 2001, 84).

Matthew Vines is quoted in the introduction of David P. Gushee's book, *Changing our Mind*, stating that the rejection and exclusion of the GLBT people is one of the major dividing issues in the church today. It has created doubt around moral credibility in their leaders by separating one's peers from the church. This is due to the fact that leaders within the established Church are not building close relationships with the GLBT people and therefore view them through a "political lens rather than a relational one...they generally choose to accept the status quo (Gushee 2015, Loc. 206).

Vines credits Gushee for taking a risk and putting his "reputation on the line to defend an unpopular position among his peers that the church must apologize for the harm it has inflicted on the LGBT community and that our interpretation of Scripture on same-sex relationships has been at the root of that harm (Gushee 2015, Loc. 227).

Gushee speaks to the importance of not abandoning the bible, church traditions or historic Christian beliefs because of this strong prevailing push in our culture with the GLBT people but he asks

whether the Church should change our mind and our practices in relation to Christian LGBT people and their relationships—not because we are under pressure from a hostile culture to do so, but because within the terms of our own faith we might now conclude that this is one of those cases in 2,000 years of Christian history where we have gotten some things wrong (Gushee 2015, Loc. 457).

Gay people exist. They should not be bullied by any Christian, traditional or otherwise. They should not be criminalized because of their love for one another

nor discriminated against. There is no room for fear or the threat of violence in their lives or blame for worldwide social ills. There is no room for stigmatization or contempt. Dehumanization and mistreatment of the GLBT people should not be taking place in our churches or culture (Gushee 2015, Loc. 668).

“It says something really terrible when the least safe place to deal with sexual orientation and identity issues is the Christian family and church” (Gushee 2015, Loc. 713).

Gushee is not backing down from his ethical standard in regards to a morally libertine culture where anything is acceptable; however,

If what we are talking about is carving out space for serious committed Christians who happen to be gay or lesbian to participate in society as equals, in church as kin, and in the blessings and demands of covenant on the same terms as everyone else, I now think that has nothing to do with cultural, ecclesial and moral decline, and everything to do with treating people the way Christ did (Gushee 2015, Loc. 1765).

On Gushee’s journey in changing his mind, he experienced and reflected that God, by way of the Holy Spirit, was bringing GLBT people in his life.

Friendships began to develop. In Christian community, I was experiencing what happens when people begin to know and love each other. Conversations over breakfast. Prayer for one another. Mutual support. Mutual need. Constant learning from the lives of each other...I do not speak for my congregation, but certainly can say that my heart has changed due in part to what I believe God has been doing among us (Gushee 2015, Loc. 1808).

Gushee believed that Jesus was manifesting himself within these “gentle, hurting gay and lesbian Christians than among their adversaries” (Gushee 2015,

Loc. 1830). So, Gushee makes a commitment with those who have suffered under the hand of Christian rejection due to one's sexual orientation and makes a commitment to remain beside them through all that will come before them, hoping that one day it will be resolved (Gushee 2015, Loc. 1872).

Gushee then concludes his book:

I end by apologizing to those who have been hurt by my prior teaching and writing on the LGBT issue. Where I have the chance to amend my written work I will do so. I ask for your forgiveness. I apologize that it has taken me so long to get here. I look forward to continuing the journey together in your company, if you will have me. Meanwhile, I will join you in working for reform in the Christian church, and a safe place for you, your loved ones, and everyone else to follow Jesus (Gushee 2015, Loc. 1873).

With all that has been spoken of from these various spiritual leaders, it is reiterated by Turnbull: "I am convinced that at this time God is not only bringing a eunuch people out of spiritual darkness, but He is also bringing a eunuch people into His Glory" (Turnbull 2012, 159).

In closing, Crabb emphasizes that the church needs to continue to mirror Christ within an established community of faith.

The church needs many things. It will properly prioritize its needs only when it gets its purpose straight. Its purpose is to draw people into Christ, to mirror Christ to one another, to show Christ to others by the way we live. That happens only in a community of people on a journey to God, only in a group of people who turn their chairs toward each other...The church is a community of spiritual friends and spiritual directors who journey together to God. We must become that community. Prayer is the starting point (Crabb 1999, 234).

“But all who are hunting for you—oh, let them sing
and be happy. Let those who know what you’re all about

Tell the world you’re great and not quitting.

And me? I’m a mess. I’m nothing and
have nothing: Make something of me.

You can do it; you’ve got what it takes
But God, don’t put it off (Ps. 40:17, MSG).

CHAPTER 4

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE and ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this project is to discover "the ways in which Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio." The goals that were established to guide and help evaluate the project were:

1. To discover how the people of EFC are growing in a deeper relationship with God.
2. To discover how they are living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life.
3. To discover how they are living by the Holy Spirit in times of suffering.
4. To discover whether the members of EFC feel free to express their spiritual gifts in the ministry of the church.
5. To discover whether being a part of EFC has affirmed their place in the body of Christ at worship.
6. To discover how being a part of the church developed their participation of service in the body of Christ?

Context

Emmanuel Fellowship Church, 60 North Arlington of Akron, Ohio was the context for my project. The Church is comprised of approximately 100 members and friends. Of those 100, about 80 of them are members. From those

members and friends, there are about eight to ten straight people who attend on any given Sunday. From the 88 members, 50 to 65 of the GLBT are faithful in attending most Sundays. The rest of the members attend according to their life situations and convenience.

The church has an active Web page, efcakron.org. The church is active in many ministries through the generosity of its people that joyfully affects the neighborhood it resides in as well as the community of faith. Every year EFC has a school supply drive in which children are invited to receive backpacks filled with the materials that they will need for the beginning of the school year. This is the eleventh year, and 350 backpacks will be handed out to all who come. Attached to this wonderful day is a carnival with many areas for the children to play as well as be creative in the craft tent. The church also offers food and free haircuts.

EFC has a wonderful spirit-filled praise team who is led by two gifted individuals. The first is the keyboard player who finds phenomenal ways to create nuances within the music, and the second is also the visual scribe who not only takes care of the web design but leads our worship with exorbitant giftedness. By prayerful discernment, both they and the praise team members help to create an atmosphere for the Holy Spirit to reside. In the recent past parents to visit out of state who attend a church where Chris Tomlin leads worship and stated that they were moved by the worship and the excitement that was present in the church. They felt the Holy Spirit move among the people of EFC as well as within them.

The little church on the hill started over 29 years ago by twelve to fifteen men and women who desired a closer walk with Jesus and the availability to worship the Lord without judgment for who they were. In the beginning of their journey, many times while getting out of their vehicles to attend church, the males would wait to walk in the with the females to appear to be together (male with female) so as not to be attacked in any way. It took great courage for the founders of this little church to face the many fears they had in order to worship in Spirit and in Truth. They worked hard to pay off the church building and to remodel it. Sacrifice, tears, joy and love of the Lord and one another continues to manifest itself in all that is done at EFC. The spiritual leadership, trustees and council work diligently to create a godly atmosphere and are faithful to Christ and their duties from which they have been called. They are dedicated men and women who desire to grow in their relationship with Christ and to serve God and His people in what they are asked to do.

Participants

The questionnaire was distributed to those GLBT members and friends of Emmanuel Fellowship Church who voluntarily wanted to participate in the project. Of the questionnaires distributed to EFC, 30 participated in answering and commenting towards this project. Out of those 30 participants, males, females and one transgender contributed their thoughts, feelings and experiences. I chose this population because I have witnessed their spiritual growth over the past fifteen years, eleven of those years as their pastor. Having a place that we can all call our church, a place of worship, fellowship, communion, hearing the

Word preached and studied is rare for our community and is needed to be seen by others. The Holy Spirit dwells at Emmanuel Fellowship Church, and it is important that it is celebrated.

Most of the members and friends live in the surrounding Akron area, but a few live about 20 to 25 miles outside that radius. The age range of the participants is between 29 to 79.

Emmanuel Fellowship Church was first established within the homes of its members until one member put up his home as collateral for the present church building. Their desire was to have a place to worship God through Christ Jesus and the preaching/teaching of the Word of God. To have a place to be themselves, to fellowship with one another while not having to look over their shoulders wondering when they would be asked to leave because of being GLBT. They created a home when no other place of worship would receive them. At times, they personally battled against the shadows that had rejected them and told them that they were an abomination to the Lord; they wanted to be loved and have the freedom to love back. Many gifted individuals have come and gone over the years for various reasons, but someone always is able to step in and do what is in front of them to keep the church going. The people of Emmanuel Fellowship have the desire to worship in the face of many fears that they may carry, either by self-hatred, hatred from others or the name calling and rejection of those who claim to have Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The people of EFC are standing up to say they matter, Jesus died for them, He loves them and they love Him so that they may worship in Spirit and Truth. God is with them. If God is for us, who

could be against? This project, through proof of this survey, will show the depth of insight of the people of Emmanuel Fellowship Church. Their great desire to draw closer to the Lord will be a witness to God's tremendous love and His vision of being a people called out to bring in the lost. To establish a covenant of Grace where there has been none and to share that gospel with all those who desire an intimate relationship with God.

I am confident that Chapter five will show some wonderful, surprising results that are an encouragement to any Christian establishment of the importance of having an open and affirming attitude towards the GLBT Christian community within the body of Christ.

Procedure and Assessment

The purpose of this project was to discover in what ways the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio. The specific focus of this project is to discover how the GLBT community were able to find a sense of hope and renewed self-image by experiencing inclusion, self-acceptance, the study of scripture, the practice of spiritual disciplines and growth in spiritual maturity.

This project was designed to discover how the participation in an open and affirming Church (EFC) contributes to a renewed self-image by experiencing inclusion, hope, a relationship with Christ and growth in spiritual maturity. The process to access this information was through the distribution of a questionnaire

to the GLBT population attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio. The questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative questions for evaluation. I was hoping to have more participants; however, 30 will still give us a good distribution of the whole and how their participation at Emmanuel has benefited them in their spiritual growth and maturity. The participants were informed they were under no obligation to participate in this project. Once consent to participate was given to me, I then handed out a copy of the survey to those willing to be a part of the project.

I used the seven-point Likert-scale designed with three sections: demographics, survey questions and open-ended questions. The survey did not require the name of the participants. Participants returned the survey by placing it in a designated box that was placed in the church hall. When I received the surveys, I evaluated and calculated the results.

To measure the success of the goals in this project, a seven-point Likert-scale questionnaire was designed with a place for open-ended questions. Six Likert-scale questions as well as the five open ended questions addressed the participants ability to see growth in their relationship with God along with living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life and helped to discover whether the participants utilize the Holy Spirit in times of suffering and are free to express their spiritual gifts to affirm their place in the body of Christ at worship while being a part of Emmanuel Fellowship Church. An assessment evaluation form that summarized the results of each goal was compiled and will be reported in Chapter 5.

The goals of this project seek to understand if the people of EFC, by their presence and participation in an open and affirming church, manifest a longing and deep desire to have and/or build upon their relationship with God. Having the availability to worship in a place that is accepting of one's sexual orientation encourages a relationship with God.

By participating in the spiritual disciplines offered at EFC, the hope is that each individual will continue to grow in their spiritual experiences and begin to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives so as to live a transformed life. A transformed life in Christ that may not come about without the presence of God and the fellowship of other believers to encourage and guide. The renewed self-image that one receives by being a part of the body of Christ only stimulates individuals to want to participate even more through ministry and service to others.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The purpose of this project was to discover in what ways the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio. This chapter will present the results from the research and analysis of the discovery. The results were based on the evaluation of the six goals of the project. A seven-point Likert scale was used to compile the averages of the participants' responses.

The survey that was created was discussed in chapter four. The survey served as a tool to measure the extent to which the project goals and the research question were achieved. The twenty-four quantitative questions and five qualitative questions addressed each of the five project goals and gave an opportunity for the participants to add any other thoughts that were not asked of them.

In this chapter the results of the survey will be presented in relation to the goals they were designed to measure. Each goal will be presented in the order of prominence achieved in the scoring of the answers. Due to the fact that 30 participants answered qualitative questions concerning the project goals, a chart will be placed within this chapter addressing their thoughts and spiritual progress of a renewed self-image in the body of Christ.

Goal #4: Expressing Spiritual Gifts

The goal that scored the highest distinction was: “To discover whether the members of EFC feel free to express their spiritual gifts in the ministry of the church.” The average score for the four quantitative questions was 6.29.

What we see from the participants is that most of them agree that they feel free to participate in using their spiritual gifts in the ministry of the church by rating moderately true and very true. This is demonstrated by the answers to four questions from Goal #4 with ratings ranging from 5.96 to 6.6. The individual questions and scores are listed in the table below.

Questions	Scores	Responses
4.) I feel a part of the community of Christ when I participate in the services that EFC provides.	6.4	30
10.) It is important to me as a believer to be involved in some of the ministries of the church.	6.2	30
16.) Rather than just sitting in the pews, I have a strong desire to participate in the ministries of the church.	5.96	30
22.) I am excited that I have a place to come to where I can express the gifts given to me.	6.6	30
	6.29	N=30

7=very true; 6=considerably true; 5=moderately true; 4=somewhat true; 3=slightly true; 2=a little true; 1=not at all true.

Nineteen of the thirty participants indicated that they felt a part of the body of Christ while being active in the ministries of EFC. This then produced a greater desire to be involved in ministry. Twenty three out of thirty participants showed an excitement in expressing the gifts that have been given to them by God.

Ministry has become an important part of the life of the church. The members of EFC have come to know that serving others in ministry acknowledges their place in the body of Christ and gives glory to God.

The responses to Question 4 indicate that twenty eight (Moderately true to Very true) respondents out of thirty feel a part of the community of Christ as they participate in the services provided by EFC. Twenty six of the participants (Moderately true to Very true) felt it is important to be involved along with a strong desire to participate in the ministries of the church. Twenty nine of the participants (Moderately true to Very true) state they are excited to have a place to come to where they can express the gifts given to them by God.

Goal #6: Developed participation in service

The goal that scored second in prominence was: "To discover how being a part of the church developed their participation of service in the body of Christ." The average score for the four quantitative questions was 6.28.

The purpose of this goal is to discover how being a part of EFC has developed their participation in reaching out to others through ministry, prayer, assisting others and long for other GLBT Christians to be a part of the body of Christ. What we see from the participants is most of them agree that being a part

of EFC has developed their participation and service in the body of Christ by rating considerably true and very true. This is demonstrated by the answers to four questions from Goal #6 with ratings ranging from 5.79 to 6.75. The individual questions and scores are listed in the table below.

Questions	Scores	Responses
6.) I have a desire to minister to others because of my participation within the church.	5.79	29
12.) I have a greater desire to pray for others who are struggling in life.	6.3	29
18.) I have a yearning to assist others in reaching out to them in times of trouble.	6.31	29
24.) I long for other GLBT people to have what I have in the body of Christ.	6.75	29
	6.28	N=29

7=very true; 6=considerably true; 5=moderately true; 4=somewhat true; 3=slightly true; 2=a little true; 1=not at all true.

The capacity and opportunity for reaching out to others in the body of Christ has increased as the participants continue to grow spiritually. Their feeling of acceptance and exploring their spiritual gifts encourages them to pray for and assist others. Question 12 demonstrates that twenty four participants out of twenty nine desire to pray for others that are struggling in life while Question 18

shows twenty seven participants out of twenty nine assist and reach out to others in times of trouble.

For Question 24, the average rate was impressive at 6.75 out of a possible 7.0. This was the highest rated question of the whole survey. This indicates because the participants experience and participate in the body of Christ through EFC, there is an overwhelming longing for other GLBT people to have what they have. This is highly demonstrated in the fact that twenty seven of the participants rated very true.

Goal #1: Growing a Deeper Relationship with God

The goal that scored third in prominence was: “To discover how the people of EFC are growing in a deeper relationship with God.” The average score for the four quantitative questions was 5.98.

The purpose of this goal was to discover if the people who participated at EFC were growing in a deeper relationship with God. What is shown by the participants is that most of them agree that their growth in their relationship with Jesus to be considerably true and very true by their participation at EFC. This is demonstrated by the answers to four questions from Goal #1 with ratings ranging from 5.37 to 6.56. The individual questions and scores are listed below.

Questions	Scores	Responses
1.) I am coming to enjoy getting to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior.	6.56	30

7.) I ask Jesus to be with me and help me throughout the day.	6.06	30
13.) I feel comfortable talking about my relationship with Jesus to others.	5.37	29
19.) In the midst of a crisis, I have learned not to hesitate in believing that Jesus will help me find a way through it	5.96	30
	5.98	N=30/29

7=very true; 6=considerably true; 5=moderately true; 4=somewhat true; 3=slightly true; 2=a little true; 1=not at all true.

Question 1 scored the strongest with eight respondents stating considerably true and twenty respondents stating very true. Question 13 scored the lowest in this section. Eight respondents circled very true, nine circled considerably true and five circled moderately true, which leaves seven circling anywhere from somewhat true to not true. While the overall score was positive for Goal #1, the scores between Question 1 and Question 13 seem notable. This may indicate that it is taking some time to build ones relationship with Christ and also stand before others proclaiming that one is gay and Christian.

Goal #2: Living out spiritual experiences through a transformed life

The goal that scored fourth in prominence was: "To discover how they are living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life." The average score for the quantitative questions was 5.9.

The purpose of this goal was to discover if the people who participated at EFC were living out their spiritual experiences through the disciplines of the Holy Spirit to bring forth a transformed life. What we see from the participants is that most of them agree that they are experiencing a transformed life by rating moderately true to very true. This is demonstrated by the answers to four questions from Goal #2 with ratings ranging from 5.44 to 6.43.

Questions	Scores	Responses
2.) Listening during prayer time in the Holy Spirit has become a very important part of my spiritual growth.	5.44	29
8.) Studying the Word of God is important to me for increasing my faith.	5.9	30
14.) Before making decisions in my life, I now turn to God in prayer for guidance.	5.83	30
20.) Because I believe Jesus loves me for who I am, I find myself wanting to make better decisions from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.	6.43	30
	5.9	N=29/30

7=very true; 6=considerably true; 5=moderately true; 4=somewhat true; 3=slightly true; 2=a little true; 1=not at all true.

Goal #2 indicates that more than half of the participants have come to practice the discipline of listening during their prayer time and consider it to be important

to their spiritual growth. An impressive amount of participants study the word of God and see it as an important part of their spiritual discipline for increasing their faith. Six participants rating moderately true, four rating considerably true and fifteen rating very true out of thirty participants, seek God’s guidance through prayer before making life decisions. Twenty seven out of thirty participants rated considerably true to very true indicating they believe strongly that they are loved for who they are and in turn want to make better decisions from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Goal # 5: Affirmed a place in the body of Christ

The goal that scored fifth in prominence was: “To discover whether being a part of EFC has affirmed their place in the body of Christ at worship.” The average score for the quantitative questions was 5.71.

The purpose of this goal is to discover whether the participants as being a part of EFC feel affirmed during worship as part of the body of Christ. This is based upon their rejection from the churches they once belonged to, not only feeling rejected by their church but also from the body of Christ in turn. What we see from the participants is most of them agree that being a part of EFC affirms that they still have a place in the body of Christ through their worship.

Questions	Scores	Responses
5.) I thought because of who I am I was not found worthy enough to worship God.	4.06	30

11.) Because EFC is open and affirming I know that I can worship God openly.	6.73	30
17.) Participating in worship services make me feel that I am part of the Body of Christ.	6.46	30
23.) Being accepted in worship services has increased my participation in feeling worthy to receive all that the services have to offer.	5.6	28
	5.71	N=30/28

7=very true; 6=considerably true; 5=moderately true; 4=somewhat true; 3=slightly true; 2=a little true; 1=not at all true

Goal #5, Question 5 indicates that there may still be a discrepancy between those who feel “worthy” to worship God and those who do not, due to past negative experiences of being both Christian and GLBT. Question 5, seventeen participants rated very true to somewhat true. Thirteen participants rated slightly true to not at all. Question 17 whose average rating is 6.46 indicated that they feel a part of the body of Christ by their participation in the worship services at EFC. Twenty two out of twenty eight participants for Questions 23 rated moderately true to very true. This indicates that when the participants are accepted in worship services, it has increased their participation in feeling worthy to receive all that the services have to offer. Twenty nine of the participants who rated considerably true to very true are overwhelmingly moved in their faith and worship to God by being part of EFC which is open and affirming to the GLBT Christian community.

Goal #3: Holy Spirit guidance in time of suffering

The goal that scored sixth in prominence was: “To discover how they are living by the Holy Spirit in times of suffering.” The average score for the quantitative questions was 5.65.

The purpose of this goal was to discover if the people who participated at EFC were living by Holy Spirit guidance in times of suffering. What we see from the participants is that most of them agree that they are resting in the Holy Spirit to get through their difficulties. This is demonstrated by the answers to four questions from Goal #3 with ratings ranging from 4.93 to 6.36.

Questions	Scores	Responses
3.) When I am feeling discouraged, I have learned to meditate on the truths of God’s Word to get me through.	5.36	30
9.) I can meditate on the Word of God which helps me to act in the Holy Spirit instead of my emotions.	4.93	30
15.) I have come to believe that suffering is a part of life not because God is punishing me for who I am.	6.36	30
21.) While others may ridicule me for who I am, I am able to focus on the promises of Jesus for my life.	5.96	30
	5.65	N=30

7=very true; 6=considerably true; 5=moderately true; 4=somewhat true;

3=slightly true; 2=a little true; 1=not at all true

Goal #3 indicates that over half (twenty two rated moderately true to very true) of the participants have learned to meditate on the truths of God's Word to get them through times of discouragement. Twenty two of the participants rated moderately true to very true in regard to learning to access the Holy Spirit before making decisions based on emotions. Question 15 indicates that of the thirty participants, twenty three of them believe that their suffering is not occurring because of who they are but because we live in a sin-filled world. This is a tremendous accomplishment for the people of EFC. Twenty seven of the participants rated moderately true to very true indicating that even though they may be ridiculed for being GLBT, they are able to focus on and trust in the promises of Jesus to see them through.

Responses from Participants

The questionnaire used for the evaluations also encouraged the participants to answer open-ended questions. The qualitative chart below ranks their responses to those questions. In Appendix 4, you will find full responses of the participants.

Qualitative Questions Ranking Results

Questions: Ranking in order of Frequency	Frequency	N=30
<hr/>		
#1. Please describe how EFC has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus.		
<hr/>		
1. EFC is accepting of who I am as GLBT.	29	
2. I know Jesus loves me.	29	

3. I now have a relationship with Christ and its growing deeper.	16
4. Before EFC I was broken and not accepted in the body of Christ – low self-worth.	15
5. Through the Word of God preached at EFC I know who I am in Christ.	09

#2. How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?

1. My prayer life has increased and means more to me today.	22
2. I didn't have a prayer life before.	15
3. I pray before making decisions in order to do God's will.	10
4. I pray for others.	05
5. I ask for prayer.	03

#3. How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?

1. I am encouraged to go to the Word, trust, learn and meditate on it.	25
2. I have learned how to read the bible	22
3. I am learning how to study the bible	19
4. I am learning how to apply the bible to my life	14
5. I want to continue to access the Scriptures for Holy Spirit direction.	10

#4. In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?

1. I am Christian and gay.	29
2. Because of EFC I have a new found confidence	23
3. The truth of God's Word helps me to be out and Christian	14
4. I still struggle with being out in regards to my Christianity	09
5. Never was a problem	04

#5. Please express anything that you would like to add that you were not asked?

1. Because of EFC I am affirmed in who I am and whose I am.	24
2. EFC has offered an open and accepting environment to worship in Spirit and truth.	19
3. I have had negative experiences in other churches.	16
4. Being a part of EFC has changed my life.	15
5. I have received healing as well as seeing others healed.	10

It is fully evident by this discovery project that the people who attend EFC, whether members or friends, have gained or are in the process of receiving and living out a new self-image in Christ Jesus. Moreover, by their participation, they have felt a greater sense of being part of the Church and the body of Christ. I believe that the reason Emmanuel Fellowship is so effective in touching the lives of all who enter is due to their dependency on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual leadership of EFC are gifted people who desire to follow the Holy Spirit by prayerfully discerning the Word of God and the revelations that are given to them. The people of EFC desire to receive the promises that God has established by His Word for all believers. It is pleasing to see the results of this discovery and what has been found in this project.

Twenty eight of the participants were excited to express they felt that through their participation at EFC they are growing in a deeper relationship with God. They are coming to enjoy getting to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is very hopeful for our community in which, as stated before in this document by Barna Research, there is such a small percentage of GLBT that feel accepted or have a desire to become Christian. EFC wants to be a catalyst for change in our community. We want to reach out to all people to draw them closer to Christ no matter the sexual orientation or position in life. Twenty one participants, also maintain that they reach out to Jesus to help them and to be aware of His presence throughout the day. These actions by the participants can only bring about more spiritual growth and a deeper relationship with God. While this is all

happening, seventeen of them are beginning to have the desire beyond their fears to talk to others about their relationship with Jesus.

The participants of EFC are processing the spiritual experiences they are encountering which is manifesting transformation in their lives through God's grace. Twenty five of the participants have been active in seeking guidance from God in prayer, listening to the Holy Spirit and realizing their faith has increased due to meditating upon the Word of God in their lives. What is incredible to see is the members and friends of EFC believe that Jesus loves them for who they are and because of that, twenty seven of them are finding themselves wanting to make better decisions in their lives by the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Suffering is certainly a part of living in a fallen world. However, due to the rejection and abandonment of loved ones and the Church, the Christian GLBT have an added suffering that at times overwhelms and devastates the heart. A wrenching of the soul takes place and causes an imbalance so as to rip one away from the foundations of creation and most importantly the Creator. Twenty three of the participants when discouraged are learning to turn to the Holy Spirit by meditating on the truths of God's Word to help them through their struggles and sufferings. The participants are still learning that by meditating upon God's Word through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, they can begin to act on the truth before them rather than being swayed by the emotions that overwhelm them during times of struggle. The participants of EFC are learning that suffering is a part of everyone's life and not a punishment for being GLBT. The injustice and ridicule for who they are can be devastating; however, the people of EFC are

learning to focus on the promises of Jesus which gives them the strength and ability to work through the emotions that at times cause them to sink into darkness. Having a place they can call home that is open and affirming and encourages standing in the light of Christ has been a Godsend in a world of uncertainty.

Twenty six of the participants feel a part of the community of Christ when participating in the worship services of EFC. As believers, they see the importance of being involved in the ministries that have been established by the body of Christ at EFC. They are excited and have a strong desire for the opportunity to grow in the gifts and talents that God has placed on their lives to build up the body and kingdom of God here on earth.

Because EFC is open and affirming, twenty nine of the participants of this study feel that they can worship God openly. In Goal 5 we can see that thirteen participants have always felt that they could worship God in their lives no matter their sexual orientation; whereas, fourteen feel because of who they are they have been unworthy to worship God. The thirteen participants, even though they feel worthy to worship God, twenty five participants also realize having a place to worship communally is a great part of being in the body of Christ. As believers, it is important to have private worship, but God also desires that we come together in fellowship to worship Him. Of those fourteen participants, they have come to believe through their participation in an open and affirming church that they are worthy to worship our God. God desires our worship to celebrate His glory, in

that, we receive the unfolding of that same glory which draws us closer to the love of God.

Due to their participation at EFC, twenty four participants of this discovery project have a desire to minister to others through prayer and twenty seven of the participants yearn to help others out in times of trouble. One of the most exciting discoveries from this project was that twenty seven participants long for other GLBT people to have what they have in the body of Christ. It is their desire for others to receive Christ as Lord and Savior, to build a relationship with Jesus and then have a place to come to where they can be themselves, worship God, participate in the spiritual disciplines and continue to grow in their spiritual maturity and self-image in Christ.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

Never has it been a greater time for all GLBT Christians than now. The Holy Spirit is truly present with us and is calling the Church to see the many manifestations of spiritual gifts being allocated for the greater good of the kingdom of heaven on earth. No longer can we be put aside as being an abomination of the Lord when in fact our Lord is using those of us in ministry through the gifts and talents that He has placed upon us and in us. We confess that just as there are straight people who do not believe in our Lord, there are still many of the GLBT people who do not yet believe, but for those who do believe, we are just as much a part of the body of Christ as those who claim Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Receiving my Masters in Clinical Pastoral Counseling from Ashland Seminary in 2004 brought me to a place of freedom that I had not fully known. We were encouraged strongly to meet with a counselor to discuss anything that we felt needed to be resolved in our lives. As you can imagine, being a lesbian and Christian was something that I wanted to get resolved. I was very cautious to bring this topic up knowing Ashland's policies in regards to being a homosexual. I had a wonderful counselor at the time, and even though she shared with me that she felt my lesbianism was from some wound or brokenness in my life, I was willing to take the challenge and journey to seek the truth. I was open to all of her direction and most importantly participated in what was called at the time inner healing prayer. It was during this time that I received my answer and

healing. Encouraged by my counselor to spend some time in prayer, I went to my prayer closet that evening. While praying and seeking God through the process of inner healing is when the Glory of God entered my prayer closet. I am not kidding when I tell you that I literally felt and saw God's glory! It was as if all of life stopped for that moment; breath, life and death was void in the presence of the Most High. I had no sense of time during it, but the message was clear. He poured forth a love as I have never known or have words for. He spoke, and yet He didn't. With the fullness of creation, He affirmed who I was and then revealed to me how He would use me to touch the hearts of those who were lost and broken. He told me that I would become the Pastor of EFC one and a half years before I became the Pastor, unknowing to myself and the congregation as well as the spiritual leadership at the time. He revealed to me In that moment the truest form of mercy, grace and favor. I will never ever forget that moment. There will never be anyone who could convince me, confuse me or create a doubt in me that would have me questioning who I am in Christ Jesus. I was and still am humbled by the fact that He should choose me when there are so many other people who could be more. I desire to educate and share my knowledge and experience with whomever will listen. I am not here to judge those who reject what I stand for and whom I stand up for; otherwise, I would be no different from those who have rejected, ridiculed and abandoned me. I want what I have been given to be given to those who do not have.

The purpose of this project was to discover in what ways the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) people have experienced a renewed self-image

by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio. The overall goal of this project is to discover how the GLBT community was able to find a sense of hope and renewed self-image by experiencing inclusion, self-acceptance, the study of scripture and the practice of spiritual disciplines and growth in spiritual maturity by participating in an open and affirming church (EFC). The overall results of the assessment indicated that the GLBT Christian community of Emmanuel Fellowship Church are receiving tremendous blessings, increased self-image in Christ and spiritual growth. It is possible that the results of this discovery along with this particular community of GLBT Christians can be a model for those who are seeking a way for evangelical inclusion to the Body of Christ.

Project Goals

Six goals were used as standards for measuring the extent to which the discovery was successful. The project goals were:

1. To discover how the people of EFC are growing in a deeper relationship with God.
2. To discover how they are living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life.
3. To discover how they are living by the Holy Spirit in times of suffering.
4. To discover whether the members of EFC feel free to express their spiritual gifts in the ministry of the church.
5. To discover whether being a part of EFC has affirmed their place in the body of Christ at worship.

6. To discover how being a part of the church developed their participation of service in the body of Christ?

On a seven point Likert scale, two of the six goals scored above 6.0: 6.29 (goal #4) and 6.29 (goal #6). Four of the six goals scored below 6.0: 5.98 (goal #1), 5.9 (goal #2), 5.71 (goal #5) and 5.65 (goal #3). The respondents indicate that expressing their spiritual gifts in a place where they can develop their participation within a Christian service helps them to feel a part of the Body of Christ. They also indicated that having an opportunity for growing a deeper relationship with God, through the guidance and experiences of the Holy Spirit, helped them to have a transformed life. It was evident that according to the results of the assessment, the participants have gained a better self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

Goal Four: Expressing Spiritual Gifts

It is evidential that expressing spiritual gifts provides the highest score of all the goals. The desire of a dedicated Christian is to participate and minister in the fluidity of the church. A Christian endeavors to be present in order to serve the faith community and all who are in need. Ministering within the church provides a particular outlet to express spiritual gifts. In so doing, the Christian feels a part of the whole body of Christ. The participants get a feeling of excitement and acceptance in knowing that they can come to a place to share the gifts that have been given to them by God. This affirms that they are a part of the body of Christ.

Sixteen of the participants expressed that they had negative experiences within other churches, whereas EFC offered an open and accepting environment to worship in spirit and truth. Twenty four of the participants expressed that because of EFC, they are affirmed in who they are and whose they are. There is a healing that has taken place within an atmosphere of encouragement for using their spiritual gifts. Twenty six of the participants in question sixteen of this goal expressed a desire to be in ministry rather than just sitting in the pews. EFC has gone from an individualized, group-based ministry to a more community-orientated ministry that opens the doors for all gathered to participate in whatever projects or ministries that are represented during particular times throughout the year. This gives the opportunity for every member and friend of EFC to get involved and participate in God's calling rather than just a minimal participation among the few. Being a part of EFC has changed the lives of those who are present and encouraged to use the gifts that have been given to them.

In the qualitative questions for this goal, twenty four of the participants feel that because of EFC, they feel affirmed in who they are and whose they are. Nineteen of the participants feel that EFC has offered an open and accepting environment to worship in spirit and truth. This has brought change and spiritual growth within their lives.

To reiterate Conder, we must not place a "guard at the door of community participation"; rather, we need to "develop community formation models based on inclusion" (Conder 2005, 146). It is in this inclusion that all the gifts of the Spirit

may be accessed thus making a way for the marginalized to feel a part of the body of Christ.

Goal Six: Participation in the Body of Christ

Twenty eight participants in question twenty four indicated that they long for other GLBT people to have what they have in the body of Christ through their participation in an open and affirming church. Being a part of something bigger than they are has spurred the participants to assist others by reaching out, especially to those who are in times of trouble. Because of their participation within the church, they yearn to minister to others with a greater desire to pray for and to help where they can.

This is not to say that their desire to help and pray for others was not there originally, but being a part of something that encourages and celebrates who you are in Christ fuels the fire for working in the extraordinary. Question six results are lower than the rest of the questions for this particular goal. The participants come from a wounded and broken place due to their past experiences of being rejected and disqualified for participating in ministry by churches who have marginalized them because of their sexual orientation. This, then, has caused them to be more cautious and insecure when it comes to participating in ministry.

In the qualitative questions for this goal, twenty nine felt that EFC was accepting of who they were as GLBT. Because of this, sixteen participants felt that they now have a relationship with Christ, and it's growing deeper. Twenty nine of the participants also stated that they know Jesus loves them. For these

participants, they have found a new freedom that has not been a part of their lives for a long time.

To echo Flunder, when we prioritize getting to know each other on a deeper level, we celebrate community in a “new way of seeing and a new way of being”, which then “transcends our humanity, allowing us to see each other as God sees us” (Flunder 2005, 43). Feeling a part of God and knowing that the participants belong to Him inspires and encourages them to reach out to human kind in a way that brings glory to God and His kingdom. This is a deep desire for the GLBT Christians to be an instrument for God in this broken world.

Goal One: A Deeper Relationship with God

One of the major impacts in this discovery project is that the participants are experiencing a deeper relationship with God. They credit it to their attendance and participation at EFC. A quantitative question provides us with some insight to how the participants responded to the following, “Please describe how EFC has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus.” Twenty nine of thirty participants responded that they feel accepted for who they are as GLBT as well as knowing that Jesus loves them. There seems to be a correlation in regards to developing a better self-image, knowing that they are loved by God and acceptance from others. Sixteen of the participants feel they are growing deeper in their relationship with God as well as fifteen feel that before EFC, they were broken and not accepted in the body of Christ which manifested low self-worth. The ratings for question thirteen show that the participants were more uncomfortable communicating to others their relationship with Christ. This, I

believe, is due to many Christians believe that it is impossible to be gay and Christian. This has caused the participants to feel rejected, judged and marginalized from family members, church members and clergy alike. At times, because of these experiences, they have shied away from proclaiming that they are both gay and Christian.

The participants state they are enjoying the opportunity to know Jesus more as their Lord and Savior. They are reaching out to Him for help and assistance with day to day circumstances. Even in the midst of a crisis, Jesus is the one they believe can help them through it. Experiencing this type of relationship at a deeper level encourages them to share with more confidence, along with inviting others to what they have.

I realize Question seven was a dual-focused question, and the answers are not precise. The rating for that question was 6.06, which in itself is not a low rating. The problem arises in how many of the participants ask Jesus to be with them or to ask Him to be with them through the day. The question should have read, "I ask Jesus to be with me to (not and) help me throughout the day". For the GLBT Christians who have been marginalized in the past, this is still a remarkable rating in which they feel the need to reach out to Jesus.

In the qualitative questions for this goal, twenty nine participants were able to proclaim that they are Christian and gay. Twenty three of the participants have a newfound confidence in who they are. Their self-worth has increased which gives them confidence and recognition they are a part of the Body of Christ.

Selmanovic affirms “love accepts what others have to offer” (Selmanovic 2007, 196). “Becoming happens in a web of relationships—with the Trinitarian God and with others. The quality of these relationships has a huge impact on who we become” (Corbin-Reuschling 2011, 140). Together, acceptance and love is foundational for the GLBT Christian to become all that God would have them be as well as service to Him and those He places on their journey.

Goal Two: A Transformed Life

The participants have come to realize by attending EFC a transformational life is produced by prayer along with reading and studying the Word of God. It is also evident that the guidance of the Holy Spirit is foundational to a transformed life. The ratings for this goal were below 6.0 (5.71). Not that it is such a low rating; it simply indicates that prayer and studying the Word is a more challenging spiritual discipline than what has been mentioned.

Due to the challenges of being marginalized and treated with inhospitality, GLBT Christians have not received spiritual direction in their lives to grow in the ways of other Christians. The bible is used to condemn the marginalized, which does not make a way to encourage the reading/studying of it. In turn, because it is being used to accuse the GLBT people of being an abomination, there are deep wounds giving affirmation to not being loved by God. No one wants to build a relationship through prayer with a God who feels an abhorrence towards them.

Seventeen of the participants rated considerably true to very true in regards to listening to the Holy Spirit during their prayer time for spiritual growth. This is a

low rating of which I believe the participants have not had many experiences or direction from the Holy Spirit because of being rejected by mainline Christians or the fear of being outcast and marginalized. However, twenty seven of the participants rated considerably true to very true when it comes to them believing that Jesus loves them for who they are and wanting to make better decisions from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. This shows that even though they do not have experience or direction in listening and following the direction of the Holy Spirit, their desire is to have it. EFC has given these participants a place where they can come to experience and receive the direction they are looking for in their spiritual journey.

The participants, however, expressed that they are growing in the spiritual disciplines offered to them. In the qualitative questions for this goal, twenty two participants out of thirty stated that their prayer life has increased and means more to them today. Fifteen participants never had a prayer life before coming to EFC, and they now pray before making decisions in order to do God's will. Nineteen of the participants see the importance of studying the Word of God in their lives today. In fact, the very Word they have experienced condemnation from becomes an opportunity for them to reclaim as their own. The participants also realize for their faith to grow, prayer and the Word of God are essential for the transformational life they are seeking.

Goal Five: Affirmed in the Body of Christ

Thurman reminds us that those who are oppressed gather for fresh courage. They who are under fear, hypocrisy, and hatred by the dominion over them are

no longer considered to be disinherited when Jesus' Spirit is present (Thurman 1976, 29).

Question eleven in goal #5 has a rating of 6.73, which is the second highest rating in the assessment. Twenty nine participants out of thirty stated that because EFC is open and affirming, they know that they can worship God openly. During times of worship, God is fully present for the people of EFC. It is during those times they feel an increase of acceptance and affirmation of being part of the body of Christ.

It is important to mention that question five under this goal has the lowest rating of 4.06. The concern I see with the participants is that there is an underlying belief that because of who they are in their sexual orientation, they did not feel worthy enough to worship God. I stand on this premise because of how they answered questions eleven, seventeen, and twenty three. EFC is open and affirming for the GLBT community which allows them to worship unconditionally. This gives them an understanding that they too are a part of the Body of Christ. The participants feel a sense of acceptance and worthiness at EFC and what it has to offer with regards to worship. This increases their desire and participation to worship freely. I realize that for some GLBT Christians, their ability and worthiness to worship God is not dependent upon what others think or say to them. However, in my experience with the people of EFC and other GLBT Christians, this is rare.

In the qualitative questions for this goal, fifteen participants stated that before EFC, they were broken and not accepted in the body of Christ which developed a

low self-worth within them. However, nine participants know who they are in Christ Jesus because of the Word of God preached at EFC. Sixteen participants have had negative experiences in other churches, but fifteen participants feel being a part of EFC has changed their lives.

Therefore, it is important for fellow Christians to see the importance of being open and affirming in their interaction with the GLBT Christians so as not to be a stumbling block to those who are seeking the same relationship and affirmation.

Goal Three: Holy Spirit Guidance in Time of Suffering

Question fifteen had the highest rating within this goal. It is imperative for the GLBT Christian to know that in life they will experience suffering and a form of persecution (Matthew 5:11-12) not because of one's sexual orientation but because we are in a fallen world and suffering for Christ's sake should be the expectation of any Christian. What is difficult is when the persecution comes by way of a Christian to another Christian.

Question nine shows that the participants are learning to act out the belief of question fifteen to obtain question nine.

Question twenty one deals with the importance of not taking on the ridicule of others because one is gay and Christian. The standard for the GLBT must be to stand on the promises that is given to all of God's followers. If one suffers from low self-worth, it is easy to be carried away by the yoke of this world and the words that bring condemnation. Twenty seven out of thirty participants feel strongly that they are able to overcome the ridicule of others and focus on the

promises for their life. This is a strong percentage of GLBT Christians within EFC that have been able to overcome this particular disparagement. The people of EFC continue to learn and to practice meditating upon the Word of God when there are times of discouragement. They know that God's Word belongs to them, and it is a place of refuge for them.

The participants also know that they need to continue to trust in the Lord and the workings of the Holy Spirit. Question nine exhibits this struggle with a rating of 4.93. The struggle is between trusting the Word of God, meditating upon it and being obedient to the Holy Spirit during times of emotional upheaval. As human beings, it is easy to want to make a decision in the midst of an emotion only to find oneself in a place that produces consequences instead of blessings. This struggle is common to all followers of Jesus. Many times Christians stand in the flesh instead of the Spirit of the living God, yet through all of it, because believers belong to Jesus, He is able to make a way when one thinks there is none. What can be seen from this particular goal is that the participants know they can trust the Holy Spirit during any time of difficulty or suffering.

In the qualitative questions for this goal, twenty five of the participants are encouraged to go to the Word, trusting, learning and meditating on it. Twenty two have learned how to read the bible, nineteen are learning how to study the bible and fourteen are learning to apply it to their lives.

Application

I believe there is a welcoming and loving presence at EFC that comes from the people who gather as a community of faith. It is a place where God is present and desires to do a mighty work in and through its people.

EFC has an opportunity to open its doors wide, to be seen not only by the community it surrounds but also by all onlookers from an evangelical perspective. Just as the Samaritan woman came to the well by herself to draw water, so the GLBT Christians of EFC have come to the well of God's Word drawing from its resources. We have met our Savior, and He has prepared us to tell our story to the villagers and onlookers. We are no longer afraid to go out from the familiar into our rightful place alongside other Christian brothers and sisters knowing fully we may be taking a risk. This discovery project compels us to declare what Christ has revealed in us and must be shared with those who would listen. As the Samaritan woman took a risk in sharing her experiences of Christ to evoke a response from those who listened to her, we, too, desire to gather other GLBT people to the possibilities of Christ.

As GLBT Christians, we realize that there has been a tension within the church and will continue to be for a while until open and affirming relationships can be established.

It is for (GLBT Christians, my emphasis) to pray their way, personally and corporately, into a peaceful and courageous acceptance that the tension between institutional authority and prophetic mystery is and will always be part of the life of the Body of Christ, the journey of the People of God through history, because it was always a part of Jesus' own prophetic life and ministry (Schneiders 2011, 125).

There are a few things that EFC can do to help others come to a more open and affirming attitude and action.

1. For GLBT Christians who do not know how to handle scriptural arguments in regards to GLBT issues, we will create and implement a discipleship class along with an opportunity for sharing, praying and creating a space of healing.

2. One thing that is clear we need to address is the availability of members and friends at EFC to be comfortable with publically being Christian as well as gay. A support group can be established of seasoned gay Christians to minister, support and give practical guidance to those who are working towards the above mentioned situation.

3. Some of the young GLBT Christian adults that attend EFC struggle with inviting their friends to worship because their friends have had bad experiences with the Church. They have been wounded by the Church so they shy away from it missing out on the opportunity for spiritual growth and communal faith. It is important to create a space for young, marginalized GLBT adults (Christian and non-Christian) to meet with those who have experienced freedom and healing in this issue preferably in someone's home or a coffee shop. Somewhere that will not bring any form of intimidation or marginalization. Once the young GLBT adults see that there are possibilities for healing and worship without being rejected, a door may open for them to be a part of the community of faith with EFC.

It is the challenge of the GLBT Christians to not lose hope but to remain faithful to the call of God, to pray, to study the Word of God and let Him lead us where He would have us go.

Further Study

Something that I would suggest that warrants additional research is to put together another discovery project that would reach out to Christian denominations who at this point in time reject GLBT Christians along with those who are struggling to incorporate them into the ministry of their churches. It would be interesting to find out what holds these congregations at bay. What the fears are; what are the logistics that seem to get in the way of inclusion? Another project could be to see what the tensions are within those denominations and the influence that the pastor has on those congregations in regards to GLBT Christians. What are the fears, tensions and spiritual training that has caused the pastors to look the other way when faced with a GLBT Christian in their congregation? This struggle within the greater Church has many opportunities for further study; one only needs to open their minds to see the brokenness and the willingness to discover how to build a bridge from division to inclusion.

Personal Goals

On one of my anniversaries as being the Pastor for EFC, a card was given to me by the congregation. It is in a frame and hanging in my office by my desk affirming my call to shepherd this congregation, a call that God had placed upon my heart over eleven years ago.

Pastor, once before the foundations of the world, Jesus and His Father had a conversation about the great plan of redemption. That conversation included you. Jesus looked down the corridors of time and knew that you would be born. He saw your needs when he said to His Father, "I will go." At the Father's appointed time, Jesus came to earth so that you would never need to be far from Him. What an incredible journey He made; what an overwhelming expression of love; what an awesome purpose He had in mind. You were on His heart. When He left His home in heaven, He saw you; When He became a man on earth, He was seeking you; When He stretched out His hands upon the cross, He was reaching out to you; When He returned to His Father, He was preparing a place for you. He has called you to shepherd His people. He is the one who keeps you, upholds you, and gives you strength. You are the one He calls His own. (Author unknown).

This is not just an affirmation for me as a shepherd to the Christian GLBT community but a call to all GLBT people who desire to be set free to worship our Lord and Savior. Freedom to be who they are yet knowing that Jesus loves them enough not to leave them where they are. This discovery project has the hand of God all over it. Those who are tapped into the Holy Spirit cannot deny this discovery and what God is doing in bringing revival as well as recognition of His people in the Christian GLBT community of faith.

I formulated five personal goals that are an acknowledgment of what I have discovered and what will yet be discovered as I continue on this journey that God has placed me. The goals are as follows:

1. I will know to what spiritual depth participation in a Christian church influences the self-image of the GLBT Christians at Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

2. I will be able to teach what has been learned from this project to other Christian churches or organizations struggling with inclusiveness to the GLBT community.
3. Bring more non-Christian GLBT people to salvation through the open and affirming presence of Christ through these churches and organizations.
4. I will continually be encouraged to be transformed in my own renewed self-image of Christ, ever manifesting my love for Him and love for others.
5. After completing this project, I anticipate that my spiritual life will continue to be challenged in showing to those who are still rejecting the Christian GLBT community the importance of our presence in the Body of Christ.

Goal One: Come to Know Spiritual Depth and Self-image in Christ

In regard to goal #1, I believe that this project has helped me to discover what I felt in my heart, through my own experiences at EFC, was happening, and it is in fact happening. The people of EFC are growing, and they are open to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Being part of an open and affirming church for the GLBT Christians has made all the difference with their spirituality and relationship with Christ in their lives. The members and friends of EFC are people who come to worship God with sincere hearts and open minds. They desire to know the Word of God in their lives, apply it and thus increase not only their knowledge of God but their experiences of the Holy Spirit. They long to live in the truth instead of their emotions and rejoice when they are able to make right life choices. When

gathering together in worship, hands are raised and voices are lifted to give praise to our Lord. He is the Lord of Lords and deserves our praise. Though we may fall short at times, we know that God loves us and that we need to turn to Him, repent and allow God's unconditional love to flow once again in our lives.

The people of EFC, even though there may be struggles with life situations, desire not to stay stuck in sickness, brokenness and woundedness. The healing power of God is made manifest in the lives of His saints through weekly communion, fellowship, prayer and hearing the gospel of grace. We hold our bibles up high to remind ourselves that God's Word never returns void, and we are privileged to accept it in our lives and proclaim that the Word of God belongs to the GLBT community. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit is touching the lives of all who enter EFC. Come and see!!

Goal Two: Inclusiveness to the GLBT Community

There is a great deal to be expressed in regard to goal #2. I have been a student at Ashland Seminary since 2000. I received my Masters in Clinical Pastoral Counseling in 2004. I did my Master of Divinity equivalency in 2007, a requirement at the time in order to begin the process of the Doctor of Ministry in 2007. I have enjoyed the journey a great deal and thank God every day for the education that I have received. When I started the process of this education, I was a Roman Catholic nun. Through the years, I made many friends who came to know my spirituality through personal encounters and many of my writings for class. My spirituality was never questioned, and at times, I was asked to lead prayer in my classes. No one at the time felt that I was an abomination or

rejected me. No one questioned whether I was a Christian or filled with the Holy Spirit. I have been a lesbian ever since I was aware of my sexual orientation at a very young age. I realized that I was different but never knew what it was called or brought attention to it until I grew older.

When I began the D.Min program and came out for the first time in all my years being at this institution, some heads turned, and I believe for the first time some may have questioned my spirituality. I am unsure to what degree people questioned it just because they had a bit more information of who I am; that did not change the fact that I am still chosen by God and by His grace. My faith is stronger than it has ever been and still there is much to learn with opportunities for growth.

I believe there is a great amount of education that I could present to other churches and organizations struggling with inclusiveness without watering down the Word of God. What I find troubling is that in all of my sixteen years at Ashland Seminary, I never had one class on how to address the issue of Homosexuality within the church setting or even an open discussion about it. Out of all my classmates through this process of the D.Min program, I could see the uncomfortableness with the subject. People would put their heads down when they saw me coming or be excited in discussing other people's projects until I shared about mine. I didn't take it personally. I just prayed and realized it was just because of fear, lack of knowledge and/or relationship with me that they responded the way they did. We need a forum by which to answer the questions and to bridge the gap that has taken place due to the fear of not knowing what to

say or how to encounter a Christian GLBT person. I did have one classmate ask me, “how do you deal with the promiscuity in your church?” Again, I so appreciated his desire to learn and ask, but at the same time, it also showed his way of thinking about GLBT people. So many myths that have become truths which then become judgments that are followed with rejection. I believe that there needs to be an opportunity and venue for dialogue.

I am not ignorant to the fact, nor should any of us be, in knowing that every church on every continent there dwells individuals struggling with acceptance of their sexual orientation within the Christian setting, and there is no one to guide them.

No seminary has traveled to the cutting edge to address it in such a way that will bring about healing as well as inclusion. They may address it in regards to sin, but then they continue to oppress a person’s brokenness, wounds and the inability to be open about who they are which deepens their fear of God and others. I long to be able to be the person who brings hope and education to pastors and students that would bridge this gap at Ashland, but that of course may be for another topic of discussion.

Goal Three: Non-Christian GLBT to Salvation

In regard to goal #3, the possibilities are endless when there is an opportunity for those who have been shunned, rejected and abandoned to finally feel a part of something bigger than themselves. To be a part of the kingdom of God on this earth can be far reaching to those who feel that they will never measure up to the

expectations of churches and organizations that close the doors to opportunities to grow in their relationship with Christ. We need each other, and we need community. Jesus didn't do it alone; He had many disciples and most importantly the twelve. Fellowship is important to God; otherwise, Jesus would have done all of it alone. Jesus lead by example in regards to the importance of working together and for us to be willing to see Him in our differences. What a revival would take place if we could just be open and affirming to those who do not know Christ in the GLBT community. We need to be without expectations, reaching into the margins of life, lifting up those who so desperately need Christ for salvation. Jesus stated that "a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23), and "God is Spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). The people of EFC worship our Father in spirit and in truth, and because of it, we can say we are making a difference in peoples' lives who would not have it otherwise. We don't need to be the only place that supplies this type of openness and who invites the marginalized. This is a call from Christ for all people to be drawn in, saved and receive eternal life. I pray that EFC continues to be a pattern by which other churches and organizations may see the tremendous work that is being done in the GLBT community by God's grace and Holy Spirit guidance.

Goal Four: Transformed in My Own Renewed Self-Image

In regards to goal #4, this project alone has been not only an encouragement to myself but to other GLBT Christians that I have shared it with. I am

overwhelmed with some of the responses that I have received already, which in turn places a fire within me to continue this work as well as making sure that I am doing all I can to continue to grow in my spiritual maturity.

Being in ministry at times can be overwhelming, stress-producing and draining. However, I do believe it is important to take the time that is needed to continue to learn and develop all areas of my life. Most importantly to take the time that is needed in personal prayer, meditation and the study of scripture. I don't want to rest on my laurels but humbly and firmly remind myself that I am only as good and helpful as I have been in the presence of God.

This project and the writing of this dissertation has taken its toll at times. Other times I am thrilled with what has come about because of it. I am grateful that God asked me in 2007 to begin this journey, and I am excited that it has touched the hearts of many people. I want to remain steadfast and persevere in my relationship with the Lord. I want to be the earthen vessel He has created to touch the hearts of all He send my way as well as being open to do the work He wants me to do. I want to get out of God's way so that His will be done.

"I have glorified you down here on the earth by completing the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4 AMP). I want to glorify God according to what He has asked me to do, and I cannot do that on my own. I also know that there are things in my life that did not finish in a way that glorified God, but by His grace and mercy through forgiveness, God gave me the ability to continue on.

Jesus needs me to finish the race that He has placed before me, and I do not want to disappoint Him. I am fully aware that without Him I can do nothing. He is my rock and fortress, the strength that no one should be without. I will keep my head high and my feet on God's path to reach out to all who come my way in the GLBT community as well as all others who desire to know how to minister effectively to us. It is a privilege and honor that I do not take lightly.

Goal Five: The Importance of Our Presence in the Body of Christ

In regards to goal #5, I had a very spiritual and humble advisor, Dr. James Mitchell, who retired before the completion of this dissertation and defense. He bent over backwards to treat me with dignity and acceptance. He had encouraged me and prayed for me during times all he received back from me was silence during this project. He even stated that he had learned from me; wow! In his desire to grow closer to the Lord and to grow in his spiritual walk as a spiritual director ministering to the broken, he asked me a wonderful question that I believe is pertinent to this paper. "What do I need to be aware of to be more sensitive and compassionate with those of the GLBT community as I engage others in ministry in the local church and in Spiritual Direction?"

I believe this to be one of the most profound questions that pastors, ministers and spiritual directors could ask. Being not only a pastor but one with a clinical background, I often answer questions with questions. What would you do to be more sensitive and compassionate as you engage with anyone in ministry in the local church and spiritual direction? Please, I do not mean for this to sound brash in any way or mean any offense by this question. I am simply saying that we

(GLBT) are human beings attempting to get through life like everyone else. We have our brokenness and woundedness much like everyone else in the world.

What we do need is to be treated equally. To be seen as children of the most high God, worthy to be received into the fold. Not to be treated differently or inhumanely. To look upon us with respect and dignity. To show us you love and care for us even in the midst of our messes at times. To be lifted up in places of honor and not afraid to open the church doors. To encourage us to build our relationship with Christ knowing that we may fall at times but willing to help us up. To encourage our relationships, to maintain faithfulness to Christ and one another. Incorporate us within the body of Christ, promoting those of us who have a calling to become spiritual leaders and ministers.

I thank God for the encouragement of Dr. Mitchell along with Dr. Bevere, my current advisor, for without their acceptance and willingness to help, this project may have fallen to the wayside. I know that I cannot say it any better than what Paul said in Galatians 3:26-29:

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you (NLT).

Concluding Thoughts

Through this discovery project, it is evident that the GLBT Christians of EFC have received Christ's desire to reestablish those who have been outcast or

marginalized by society's norms through receiving the freedom in the gospel of grace (Mark 1:44).

The results of this discovery project can be used in such a way to promote the acceptance and affirmation of GLBT Christians into the full body of Christ throughout many denominational demarcations. Emmanuel Fellowship Church has proven that the workings of the Holy Spirit is evident. They are a people who desire to grow closer to the Lord, to open their minds and hearts to the Word of God as well as being obedient to what God is asking of them individually and as a community of faith. Simply stated, the GLBT Christians need to be treated as any other Christian as well as given the opportunity in any denomination to be part of the body of Christ.

Emmanuel Fellowship Church is and will continue to be a prophetic community to those who are open to seeing the movement of God within their midst. This is emphasized by the results of the data within this project. Sandra Schneider's definition of a prophet is, "One immersed in the life of people in a particular time and place commissioned by God to interpret the situation in the light of God's dream for this people and the whole of humanity" (Schneiders 2011, 82).

God is revealing to the Christian world the importance of the GLBT Christians within the body of Christ. God is affirming them and raising their self-worth and self-image by manifesting His presence within their individual lives and cooperate worship.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: love each other.

What is Christ asking of us to do? How may we be a better witness for Christ to those who are rejected, abandoned and marginalized? Together, let us be the best that we can be through Christ Jesus. Let us never lose heart for the race God has placed before us.

All whom My Father gives (entrusts) to Me will come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will most certainly not cast out [I will never, no never, reject one of them who comes to Me]. For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will and purpose but to do the will and purpose of Him Who sent Me. And this is the will of Him Who sent Me, that I should not lose any of all that He has given Me, but that I should give new life and raise [them all] up at the last day (John 6:37-40 AMP).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Proposal Project

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WE WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

A PROJECT PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

THERESA M. HINES

ASHLAND, OHIO

NOVEMBER 29, 2012

It is the purpose of this project to discover the ways in which Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio.

The research question is, in what ways have the Gay Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church?

OVERVIEW

The focus of this project is to discover in what ways the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio. The specific focus of this project is to discover how the GLBT community was able to find a sense of hope and renewed self-image by experiencing inclusion, self-acceptance, the study of scripture, the practice of spiritual disciplines and growth in spiritual maturity.

This project is designed to discover how the participation in an open and affirming Church (EFC) contributes to a renewed self-image by experiencing inclusion, hope, a relationship with Christ and growth in spiritual maturity. The process to access this information will be through distribution of a questionnaire to the GLBT population attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron, Ohio. The questionnaire will include both quantitative and qualitative questions for evaluation.

PERSONAL FOUNDATIONS

Experience and Observation

My experience and observation is that Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender (GLBT) people have suffered rejection by the lack of inclusion into the Christian Church which contributes to their inability to grow in their Christian faith and fellowship. Our spirituality can grow in and of itself with Christ, but it is vital to be connected to people who are journeying in the same direction, sharing in fellowship, prayer and worship. The GLBT people are suffering a great deal from the lack of opportunity to experience a renewed self-image in Christ because of being condemned and abandoned by faith communities they have been a part of their whole lives.

Pastors in most mainline denominations seem to struggle with how to minister to their own congregants when approached about sexual orientation issues. When a friend of mine came out to his former pastor, he was encouraged and instructed to get pornography to help him change his orientation from homosexual to heterosexual.

There has been such misguidance, rejection, ridicule and hatred from the Christian Church to the GLBT community that only a small percentage of that population considers Christianity as a viable religion that is life-giving. According to George Barna's research conducted by the Barna Group Inc, 2009; "...even though a majority of adults have made 'a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today,' such a relationship was more common

among non-gays (75%) than among gay adults (58%). The research also revealed that straight adults were nearly twice as likely as gays to qualify as born again Christians (47% compared to 27%, respectively)."

While dealing with this population, it has been my experience that large constituencies of GLBT's are being welcomed into other religions, mostly Wicca and Buddhism. Meanwhile, I have also experienced mainline Christian denominations in the mid and northeastern area of Ohio (United Church of Christ, and Episcopalian, to name a few) attempting to reach out to this population, which is good, but they are watering down and compromising the gospel so as to be inclusionary. They are promoting the practices of Buddhism and New Age thinking that is a requirement of inclusion for GLBT members.

I am privileged to be a part of a church community that incorporates the GLBT community and yet upholds the Gospel. These are people who are gifted, talented and hungry for a relationship with Christ and fellowship with one another. They long for opportunities to be involved in ministry. In the past eight years, I have seen them grow immensely; and even though at times it has been a struggle, they continue to be open to the direction given to them. They realize the importance of developing their relationship with Christ and one another. The Word of God is equally important to them as they participate in reading, meditating and studying. Many Christian GLBT people have felt they could not reconcile their sexual orientation with their desire to worship and praise God. They felt to participate in one was to exclude the other.

My passion for Emmanuel Fellowship Church is to be an agent of God for bringing all who enter here to a more complete knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. To establish, provide, maintain, and promote Christian character, spiritual development, and a community of faith. The goal is to be open and affirming by providing Christian fellowship for all those who come within its doors.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men," Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them. (Thurman 1976, 29)

We are called to love one another and to lay hold of the power of God to transform each human being into the likeness of Christ Jesus. However, the opportunity to grow in fellowship with Christ and the community of faith has been cut off from those who are marginalized and seen as outcasts. The importance of loving one another because God loved us first is all throughout the scriptures. It is expressed in 1 John 4:9-11 which expresses the importance of our knowing that God loves us. First and foremost, God sent His only Son that we might to live through Him and experience His love through Jesus' atoning sacrifice for our sin. The challenge is then to love one another as God has loved us. "Merely 'believing' certain facts about Jesus does not make us children of God. Rather

God is looking for belief that reflects the loving, just and holy character of the divine Parent in real-life interactions within the community of faith” (DeSilva 2004, 460).

Accountability is imperative in the body of Christ. However, it is important that our accountability to one another does not lead to judgment and condemnation. How do those who are marginalized, who feel no sense of hospitality, begin to know and experience the love of God. If God’s church is loveless towards them, how do they come to love one another in Christ if they are separated from the very fellowship that can encourage and teach them how to love?

A call to love one another is a call to hospitality. Christian hospitality involves being fully present to the other. It brings service to the deepest level of intimacy between two who encounter one another. Hospitality is not without boundaries, but its focus is on the presence of God's love and healing of individuals.

The scriptures give us many examples of how Jesus reached out to the marginalized, those placed on the edges of society because they didn't fit into the schematics of the religious life. Mark 1:40-45 tells the story of a leper who by law was ceremonially unclean. The leper was not to touch or be touched; it would cause others to be made unclean according to the law. We find Jesus not only healing the leper and thus restoring him back to community, but we see Jesus touching the leper before he heals him. "Jesus revealed his attitude toward ceremonial law. By touching the leper, he himself would be made ceremonially

unclean. Jesus placed love and compassion above ritual and regulation" (Cooper 2000, 16).

Jesus looks to the heart of an individual, their faith in Him and reliance upon Him, yet the marginalized are expected to meet certain criteria; if not, they are judged as useless to the Church and to the Kingdom of God. Thus they receive a message that tears at the heart of the possibility of their sacredness.

In Luke 7:36-50 Simon provided the most minimal and professional amount of hospitality. Jesus didn't hesitate or flinch in knowing that by her touch, the washing of His feet with her tears and the touch of her kiss would be to become ceremonial unclean. Jesus takes the opportunity to show to those present the real meaning of hospitality by using the actions of one who is rejected and marginalized by the religious leaders around them. "This was a woman, a sinner and an outcast. The least of these had become greater than the contemporary religious heroes. Only sinners answer the call for faith. Self-righteous people fail to see their need of it" (Butler 2000, 111). Even in the woman's brokenness she was able to reach outside of herself and serve Jesus in a deep and compassionate way. It is important to greet one another even in the midst of brokenness with a level of love and compassion. Our brokenness can meet and in that we can find strength for the journey of faith.

The marginalized have a deep desire as all people do to be a part of something bigger than themselves, to be a part of community, a Christian community. A place where people respond in Christian love and hospitality.

Jesus' fundamental concern in these verses is with this woman's restoration to the community of God's people (and not with her individualistic experience of forgiveness or assurance of divine acceptance) is suggested... he sends her away "in peace." Such language cannot be limited to "spiritual" well-being or even, in other co-texts, to "physical" vitality, but speaks of a restoration to wholeness, including (even if not limited to) restoration to the full social intercourse from which she has been excluded... It is one thing to have Jesus proclaim her forgiveness in order that her renewed status might be recognized by the community; it is quite another for that community actually to accept his pronouncement and to extend kinship to her. (Green 1997, 314)

Some of us have become religiously ritualistic in our relationship to Christ and one another. This then gives us no room for love and compassion, only for judgment which the end result is marginalization.

To the Jews, the Samaritans were the dust under their feet. They were not to be trusted or even recognized as anything worthy of attention. The Samaritans were considered sinful outcasts and were not welcomed within the worshiping community of the Jews; thus, they worshiped where they could. Jesus goes on to teach us through the gospel of John as he is speaking to the Samaritan woman that there will come a time when it won't matter where we worship only that we worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Plausibly this story reflects Johannine history in which Samaritans came into the community alongside Jews, but that is beneath the surface. More obvious is the continued theme of replacement (here of worship at the Temple) and the contrast between the more open faith of the Samaritans and the less adequate belief of those at Jerusalem (2:23-25) and Nicodemus. (Brown 1997, 344)

Jesus' goal was to restore the Samaritans back into the vine by his conversation and revelation to the Samaritan woman of who He was. Jesus took an outcast, one who was marginalized from her community, society and the

Jewish life to proclaim the Messiah was here. He called her to be a missionary to her village, to give witness to the truth so that all could be set free. "An absolute declaration of deity...The announcement of the arrival of a Messiah represents an enormous fulfillment of promise. Jews and Samaritans had waited centuries to hear what this peasant woman heard from the lips of the Son of God" (Gangel 2000, 79).

We can see from these passages that Jesus had compassion for the marginalized, the outcasts and those who are treated with inhospitality. There is no room in the gospel of Jesus Christ for anyone to be turned away because they do not measure up to what some believe are the very religious standards that Christ fought in his day.

Our spiritual insight and awareness is hindered by not hearing the cries of those who so desperately want to be a part of the community of faith in Christ Jesus. We need to become bold enough to reach out and touch those who are seen as untouchable. It will cause some of us to step out of our comfort zone, I realize, but it is something that must be done in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Grudem states the visible and the invisible Church is affirmed in 2 Timothy 2:19, that God knows who belongs to Him and what is in the heart of His children.

In its true spiritual reality as the fellowship of all genuine believers, the church is invisible. This is because we cannot see the spiritual condition of people's hearts. We can see those who outwardly attend the church, and we can see outward evidences of inward spiritual change, but we cannot

actually see into people's hearts and view their spiritual state — only God can do that. . . Even in our own churches and our own neighborhoods, only God knows who are true believers with certainty and without error. (Grudem 1994, 855)

The assumption for the marginalized is that there is no possibility for them to be connected to the Lord. The outcasts are judged by outward appearances and not from the heart. In my experience in working with those who feel marginalized, it is important to love them and to show them a sense of hospitality; in so doing they are encouraged to grow in their relationship with Christ. It is in welcoming the marginalized into the unity of the body of Christ that speaks to the true meaning of the gospel of Christ in Matthew 25:40-46.

Unity within the Christian Church brings a great witness to those who would doubt the power of almighty God. Onlookers evaluate the importance of their participation in the community of faith in Christ Jesus. However, as they see the infighting among us, they run the other direction. Jesus stated that our love for one another would be His most valued presence in the world (John 13:35).

If we as a body of Christ want to build upon the unity of the body, then it is necessary to challenge our status quo. Individually and corporately we need to reflect upon the damage that takes place when some feel they hold the power to say who can stay and who must go. "Christian wholeness and holiness are never about exerting power; rather, they are about extending welcome--especially to those who are on the margins" (Dahl 2011, 49).

As Walter Brueggemann notes in *Interpretation and Obedience*: "To welcome the stranger is to challenge the social arrangements that exclude and include.

Thus any serious welcome of a stranger is a gesture that unsettles the power arrangements to which we have become accustomed” (Brueggemann 1991, 304).

God is not interested in the power of others by the fact that He sends Jesus for our salvation which is rooted in an act of surrendered power that brings us grace.

We then see the importance of relying upon the Holy Spirit who perseveres in maintaining and unifying the body of believers in Christ Jesus. Even though we may appear to be different and respond with different gifts, the Holy Spirit works in all of us who believe.

Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts also repeats this theme of the unifying work of the Holy Spirit. Whereas we might think that people who have differing gifts would not readily get along well with each other, Paul’s conclusion is just the opposite: differing gifts draw us together, because we are forced to depend on each other. (Grudem 1994, 646)

Differing gifts, differing points of view, different orientations to life, are all under the umbrella of the Holy Spirit for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is directing us to work together for the kingdom of God. We hurt the body of Christ when we allow the differences of each other to become the very thing that keeps us separated. We are all parts of one body and to ignore one part makes the body weak. It is important to ask ourselves if we are truly following the promptings of the Holy Spirit or are we being led by the movement of hatred and marginalization, disinheriting the very people that contribute to the body of Christ? We miss out on the opportunity to build up the kingdom of God. When I am more concerned with my comfort zone than the comfort of those who feel

rejected and abandoned by the Church, then I do a disservice to Christ, to his children and the kingdom of God.

We need to ask ourselves this question: is the Church radiating, manifesting and unifying the love of God through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit to all people and most importantly towards each other? Obviously we have so much more to do and accomplish in the name of Jesus. There is still a lack of hospitality and love towards one another and a fracture in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit pursues oneness among us.

The fact that the faithful are moved by the Spirit, that the whole redeemed community is constituted by the Spirit as its principle of life, is manifest in their behavior. There are ethical criteria for the discernment of the possession of the Spirit...The sign of the new life is a new morality...The gifts of the Spirit are an unforeseeable, heavenly, marvelous and overwhelming intervention into human life. But they must be accepted and given effect to by men. Their purpose would not be fulfilled if they did not impel men to corresponding action. The deepest purpose of the Spirit is to be a Spirit of joy, of love, of service. (Rahner 1991, 644)

The marginalized and those who perceive themselves as outcast are still undergoing strife, disputes, and dissensions from factions within the community of Christ. Disharmony under Christ Jesus, are people struggling with judgmental attitudes of the flesh. It is disheartening that even some of the marginalized at times react to this type of ridicule and begin then to respond in like manner, which also contributes to the lack of unification by the Holy Spirit. This battle of tearing up the sacred is contrary to the whole concept of the body of Christ. This is not a good witness to those who are in desperate need of salvation. What is there to offer others when the gospel is violated?

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning--though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered...Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, O Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us--yes, establish the work of our hands (Psalm 90:1-6, 12-17 NIV).

By the work of our hands, in the name of Jesus and ignoring the favor that rests upon all of us, there is still discrimination and marginalization happening within the body of Christ, the Church.

The role of women leadership within the Church continues to be a battleground at times; the Roman Catholic Church being one of those examples as well as protestant Christian denominations who are closed off to the opportunities of special gifts and talents by the leadership of women. There is no room for those who do not fit into the fold or who are ostracized because of their differences. When there is no room for change or the ability to step out of tradition, many people have abandoned fellowship in the church or broken free to find a place of acceptance and openness. Because of our lack of self-assurance when we are confronted by people who are different from us, we shy away or

totally reject what is in front of us. This then causes our faith to be exclusive, dangerous and a time of crisis.

In the last resort the only hope is in the moral forces which can be summoned to the rescue. If there are statesmen, prophets, and apostles who set truth and justice above selfish advancement; if their call finds a response in the great body of people; if a new tide of religious faith and moral enthusiasm creates new standards of duty and a new capacity for self-sacrifice; if the strong learn to direct their love of power to the uplifting of the people and see the highest self-assertion in self-sacrifice, then the entrenchments of vested wrong will melt away; the stifled energy of the people will leap forward; the atrophied members of the social body will be filled with a fresh flow of blood; and a regenerate nation will look with the eyes of youth across the fields of the future (Rauschenbusch 1908, 230).

Our Human nature is fearful of change. There are many people within the Church today that stand guard at the door to decide if one should be greeted, welcomed, or declared not fit for the Christian Church.

Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the fundamental reality that humans always wish their thought and action to be understood as expressing high and lofty ideals. This disposition has two potential ramifications. It may lead to the usurpation of religious and moral values for courses of action that are, in fact, blatant egotism or an exercise of raw power. It may also mean the sincere invocation of ideals when engaging in acts otherwise considered immoral or despicable (Hillerbrand 2012, 315).

As Christians we are all learning what Christ requires of us and working towards being Christ-like. In this then, we can allow ourselves to be in Christ and have the spiritual maturity to accept one another's differences. This doesn't preclude that we can't all be in the body of Christ and be obedient to what he asks of us. The Christian community that I know of wants so much to contribute to the body of Christ in the Church. However, will they be given a chance due to their marginalization?

Persecution continues within the walls of what we call the Christian faith family. Our history shows us the many persecutions and divisions between the poor and the rich, the Caucasian Christians and the Afro-American Christians and a Christian patriarchal church that excludes the leadership of women. When will the division end? When will we set aside our differences and look towards our oneness in Christ Jesus.

The things people do in Jesus' name often contradict his teachings. From Constantine to Christendom to the Christian Right, "after Jesus" can be remarkably depressing for thoughtful and sensitive souls. This dismal historical record surely was not what Jesus intended as he preached a merciful kingdom based on the transformative power of God's love (Bass 2009, Kindle location, 159).

Can we take the time to get to know one another? Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:26-29, that we are one in Christ Jesus; no matter our circumstance, no matter our wounds or brokenness, no matter our prejudices or our sinfulness. Christ died for all; we need to pull the plank out of our own eyes so as to minister to each other with compassion and healing.

CONTEMPORARY FOUNDATIONS

Jesus, friend of sinners, we have strayed so far away. We cut down people in your name, but the sword was never ours to swing. Jesus, friend of sinners, the truth's become so hard to see. The world is on their way to You, but they're tripping over me. Always looking around but never looking up; I'm so double minded. A plank-eyed saint with dirty hands and a heart divided. Jesus, friend of sinners, the one who's writing in the sand. Made the righteous turn away and the stones fall from their hands. Help us to remember we are all the least of these. Let the memory of Your mercy bring Your people to their knees. Nobody knows what we're for, only what we're against, when we judge the wounded. What if we put down our signs, crossed over the lines and loved like you did. You love every lost cause; You reach for the outcast. For the leper and the lame; they're the reason that you came. Lord I was that lost cause and I was the outcast. But you died for sinners just like me, a grateful leper at Your feet.

Because You are good. You are good, and Your love endures forever. Oh Jesus, friend of sinners. Open our eyes to the world at the end of our pointing fingers. Let our hearts be led by mercy. Help us reach with open hearts and open doors. Oh Jesus, friend of sinners, break our hearts for what breaks yours. And I was the lost cause, and I was the outcast. You died for sinners just like me, a grateful leper at Your feet (Casting Crowns, Come to the Well, 2012).

When I heard the lyrics of this song, it fit perfectly into the contemporary thoughts of what it means to be marginalized in the world today. Placed on the edge, across the line, by the very people whom Jesus once saved, who now are too righteous to welcome those who are different or do not measure up. Love the sinner but hate the sin is the blindsided reply. The problem is that when we say, “hate the sin”, ultimately the hate overflows onto the person we are to be loving.

Those who are on the edge of life, who feel marginalized and oppressed by those who are to love as Jesus loved, find themselves broken and in deep despair.

And so we hide our hearts away, only to find ourselves huddled in the margins with our arms folded across our chest. There the heart can no longer take in the things we so desperately need—love, joy, peace, kindness, trust. That’s why I define it as life in the margins, because it so limits our experience of life (McKinley 2005, 92).

Marginalization limits not only the experience of life but an experience with faith in Jesus, fellowship with community, and a self-image that is broken and sheared by stained glass.

You see, Jesus identified with the stranger. He knew what a lack of hospitality feels like. He knew how it feels for people to be suspicious and afraid. He knew what it means to be rejected. And that’s why his whole ministry was spent identifying with those most of us spend our lives trying to avoid. Jesus knew that the stranger, the outcast is not just the one who needs us; we also need the stranger. If we are willing to open our lives to

the “least of these,” then there is some hope that we may open our lives to God (Rhodes 1998, 135).

In Isaiah 61:1-3 we see the real mission of Jesus, to bring good news to those who are bound by oppression, to heal the broken hearted and to set the prisoners free. Jesus’ mission is our mission as well. The Church needs to get back to basics and not allow the religious culture of the times to dictate who and how people can come to Jesus.

Oppressive theology, or a theology that welcomes those who fit a normative definition of the dominant culture while excluding those who do not, is a ball and chain on the heart of the body of Christ, and with it we keep each other in bondage. The church of Jesus Christ is in the midst of change, not all of it for the better. Any theology that suggests that God receives some and rejects others is not reflective of the ministry of Jesus Christ (Flunder 2005, 7).

I sometimes wonder what it would be like if Jesus were to come at this particular time in history. What would please him and what would once again be the spear in his side or the wounds in his hands? Would my actions or practiced faith be like the soldier who put the crown of thorns on his head?

I believe that if Jesus were in our shoes, he would reach out in love to his homosexual brothers and sisters and demand that they be treated justly, that we end the discrimination that has too often made homosexuals into second-class citizens and denied them their constitutional rights. If Jesus were in our shoes, he would work to create an atmosphere in society wherein homosexuals could be open about who they are without fear of oppression and persecution. If Jesus were in our shoes, those with homosexual orientation would be treated with dignity and respect (Campolo 2003, 200).

Let us then as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, move to a more radical approach of love, grace and mercy towards those who are oppressed, outcast

and marginalized. May our prayer be that of Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23 AMP. Let us not have another day where we witness to people a foundation of separation but only of unity in Christ Jesus.

CONTEXT

Emmanuel Fellowship church is located on 60 North Arlington Street, Akron Ohio. On March 16, 1986, a group of fifteen people gathered to form a Christian charitable organization. The group supported many non-profit organizations and needy individuals in its early years, including: Hands Across America, People to People Ministries, Summit County Drug Board, Apple Creek Boys' Home, Wycliff Bible Translators, Violet's Cupboard, Stonewall Akron, Peer Services, Red Cross, Interval Brotherhood Home, and Higbee's Children's Christmas Association for Brain Tumor Research. In the tradition of the early Christians, these faithful believers met in each others' homes for prayer and worship services. They finally incorporated as Emmanuel Fellowship Church of North Canton on April 22, 1986. For the next three years, they worshiped God at a variety of locations - a florist shop, a rented house, and a rented storefront - while conducting fund-raising events to acquire a permanent home.

The group purchased the church building located at 60 North Arlington St. in Akron on January 9, 1989. For the next several months, they repaired and renovated their new home and held worship services there for the first time on Good Friday of that year.

Long known in the area as Emmanuel Fellowship Church, the congregation officially changed its name and dropped "of North Canton" in January of 2002.

Emmanuel Fellowship Church, with its unique blend of people from a wide range of Christian denominations, has had its share of peaks and valleys, blessings and trials. Out of these came a renewed spirit of joy in the Lord which inspired the people of EFC to expand the church's programs and presence in the community. Since 1996, the church's impact has grown and changed, broadened its missions, and sponsored a number of innovative Christian learning experiences to meet diverse spiritual needs.

A spirit of Christian love, service to God, help for the needy, and outreach to the outcast is what forms the legacy of Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

The principles by which we attempt to live are those directives taken from the Word of God. We are fully aware of how we fall short, but we also know that God is willing to help us through our sinfulness and frailty. Thus, the reason for sending us Christ was so that we can rise above worldly standards and strive for holiness.

We as a church community are still learning to grow in our spiritual maturity. At times individuals within the community make decisions that are based on emotions rather than the truth. We are, however, fully aware of the goal and vision that the Lord has placed upon us. He desires first that we become like Christ and to be able to be Christ for those around us. Because we are established in a poor economic area, it is important to us to establish

relationships with our neighbors and to draw them in to the family of God by our assistance and hospitality.

The people of EFC are fully aware of judgmentalism and marginalization within society and the greater Church due to sexual orientation discrimination. Thus, it comes easily to us to reach out to others who feel judged and marginalized. We value human life and the dignity for all of God's children.

We are an eclectic congregation. We are people who are made up of many different Christian denominations (Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Mormon, and many more) and are unified in our faith. We are Caucasian, African American, and Latin American. We are Heterosexual, Homosexual, Bisexual, Transgender, Rich, Poor, Recovering Alcoholics and Drug Addicts, Single, Married, and Divorced. Some have grown spiritually mature while others are just starting out as infants in their spiritual walk. Some were saved at a young age and have walked with the Lord all their lives while others are new to their faith. Ages range from two years old to 82. We have young children as well as teenagers and those who are in college. We have laborers, college professionals, unemployed and people needing public assistance as well as others on SSI.

For the past eight years, there have been many changes within our church. We put into place bible study and prayer meeting weekly. We minister to the neighborhood by donating school supplies every year as well as hats and gloves during the cold season. We hand out food to the needy and have started to have

annual picnic, prayer and praise sessions in which we feed the neighborhood for free and offer spiritual music as well as a message. We continue to tithe as a church to various organizations that are in need of assistance. For the past few years we have reached out to our military brothers and sisters by sending out over a thousand Christmas cards. We sponsor a child in Africa whose family has suffered from HIV/AIDS and is in need of income for his schooling. We reach out to the GLBT community and others through our web page efcakron.org as well as setting up booths at pride events so as to reach out to the community to let them know they have a Christian home with us. We do it all for the Glory of God and wanting to please Him as well as to build up the body of Christ.

We have a little over 55 members. Most of the members live in the Akron area; however, we do have some that live as far north as Cleveland and south of Canton as well as the Youngstown area. Emmanuel Fellowship Church is the largest concentrated GLBT Christian population attending church in Akron. I believe that as God's word is preached and our service to others is given, we will continue to grow.

SIGNIFICANT TERMS

There are no Academic Terms at this time that I can think of that would not be understood by the readers of this specific project.

GLBT: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender.

Sexual Orientation: "one's natural preference in sexual partners; predilection for homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality. ORIGIN1990–95. (online

Dictionary) The understanding of this term within the GLBT community of Emmanuel Fellowship Church as well as other spiritually minded but not limited to GLBT groups, is that a Sexual Orientation is an "individuals pattern of physical and emotional arousal toward other persons" (Frankowski 2004, 1827).

Transgender: 1. A person having a strong desire to assume the physical characteristics and gender role of the opposite sex. 2. A person who has undergone hormone treatment and surgery to attain the physical characteristics of the opposite sex. ORIGIN 1955–60; trans- + sexual, orig. in transsexualism (coined in 1953) (online dictionary)

Open and affirming: This is a term that is used in religious settings, more particular, Christian churches and organizations. This signifies to the GLBT person that they are welcome into full participation in the group setting of which they find themselves.

Renewed Self-image in Christ: For the Christian GLBT person growing up in their church, they have experienced rejection for who they are. They have been disqualified, abandoned and dismissed as viable Christians to participate in their churches due to their sexual orientation. Those who attend Emmanuel Fellowship Church are welcomed in full participation into the body of Christ. This participation in a Christian church encourages them to be spiritually formed in Christ. It gives them the acknowledgment, opportunity, and self-acceptance to know deep in their hearts that they are loved and belong fully to God and the

body of Christ. With this being said, the outcome of such enhances and renews their self-image in Christ.

PROJECT GOALS

It is the purpose of this project to discover the ways in which Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emanuel Fellowship Church. To discover that which requires living a Christ centered life the project goals are as follows:

1. To discover how the people of EFC are growing in a deeper relationship with God.
2. To discover how they are living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life.
3. To discover how they are living by the Holy Spirit in times of suffering.
4. To discover whether the members of EFC feel free to express their spiritual gifts in the ministry of the church.
5. To discover whether being a part of EFC has affirmed their place in the body of Christ at worship.
6. To discovery how has being a part of the church developed their participation of service in the body of Christ.

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The details of the procedure for a discovery project is as follows: I will select and gather a sample population from members and friends who attend Emmanuel Fellowship Church on a volunteer basis. I will design the appropriate research instrument by using quantitative and qualitative assessment tools. It will be necessary to implement and gather the data by handing out evaluation forms to those who volunteer to participate in answering the assessment. The information will be processed to be used for evaluation in discovering the research question and goals of the project.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

In order to discover how the GLBT community of Emmanuel Fellowship Church has grown in their renewed self image I will be using quantitative and qualitative assessment tools. The project goals that will be assessed are as follows;

1. How the People of EFC are growing in a deeper relationship with God by being able to share and discuss how God has been working in their lives.
2. How they are living out their spiritual experiences through a transformed life of internal attitudes with external behavior through spiritual disciplined practices.
3. How they are living by the Holy Spirit to establish a spiritually integrated life that gives them the ability to express divine truth in times of suffering.

4. How they are living out the redemption of Christ Jesus, utilizing the gifts given to them in the ministry of the church.
5. How has being a part of the church developed their understanding of worship in the body of Christ.
6. How has being a part of the church developed their participation of service in the body of Christ.

In the quantitative assessment tools, I will be using forced-choice survey questions, demographics, counted observations and a questionnaire. The Qualitative assessment tools that will be used will be open-ended survey questions, and written documents.

By using a questionnaire and utilizing open-ended survey questions with written documents to attain the themes of how the GLBT members of Emmanuel Fellowship Church, I will discover whether or not they are growing in their renewed self image.

PERSONAL GOALS

In the year 2000 when I began my journey with Ashland Seminary, I had no clue to how the Lord was going to use me. I came to Ashland to receive a Masters in Clinical Pastoral Counseling which I received but I believe it was merely a means to an end.

In one of my first classes, I was challenged to find another church to worship in that was not a part of my Christian tradition. At the time I was a Roman

Catholic nun for about 23 years and the only participation that I had been involved with was the Catholic liturgy. The upcoming Sunday I chose to attend Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

What an experience of welcoming, love and inclusion. Being very closeted at the time, it was nice to experience a place of worship where my covenant partner and I didn't have to be afraid of being ourselves and to acknowledge our love for the Lord in our oneness. I can say with great love and respect that we found our home at EFC.

I am passionate about my place at Emmanuel and the opportunity to say yes to our Lord by being chosen to be their shepherd. I am profoundly sure that what God has started at EFC he will bring to complete spiritual maturity. I want the Christian Church to see what I see, and to be able to open its doors to the ever widening opportunity for the faith, gifts, and talents of the GLBT Christians for an even greater call and ministry to the world. To this end, my personal goals for this project are:

I will know to what spiritual depth participation in a Christian church influences the self image of the GLBT Christians at Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

I will be able to teach what has been learned from this project to other Christian churches or organizations struggling with inclusiveness to the GLBT community.

Bring more non-Christian GLBT people to salvation through the open and affirming presence of Christ through these churches and organizations.

I will continually be encouraged to be transformed in my own renewed self-image of Christ, ever manifesting my love for him and love for others.

After completing this project, I anticipate that my spiritual life will continue to be challenged in showing to those who are still rejecting the Christian GLBT community the importance of our presence in the body of Christ.

CALENDAR

<u>Month</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Action</u>
December	2012	Project Approval
January	2013	Evaluation Completed
March	2013	First Draft of the Final Paper
April	2013	Final Draft of Final Paper
May	2013	Defense

CORE TEAM

Advisor: Rev. Dr. James Mitchell D.Mi

Field Consultant: Dr. Dianne Kerr, Ph.D

Resource Persons: Sandy Wellington, Maria Macalusso, and Janet Black

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Christine M. Miley, Covenant Partner of Author

Sara Schwendamen, Church member, Deacon and editor

Samara Peddle, Church member

Donna Hines, Mother of the author

Linda Olinger, Church member

Jim Dixon, Church member

The Support team will meet every month. They will be updated to the progress made We will pray for the project and author. This group will help to maintain the relevance of the project. I will also email weekly regarding my progress.

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APPENDIX 2

COVER LETTER FOR SURVEY

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take this survey. The information you offer in this survey will become a vital part of a research project I am conducting for my doctor ministry degree. The purpose of this project is to discover the ways in which gay lesbian bisexual and transgender people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church of Akron Ohio.

This is not a test. There is no right or wrong answers. Your answers need to reflect your own personal beliefs and where you see yourself in your spiritual journey. I asked for your open and candid responses, no matter what others may think or want to hear.

Please do not identify yourself by name. Your responses will be kept anonymous. The information I get from you and others through this survey will be used for statistical purposes for this project only. You will not be identified by your answers.

Please return the completed form by February 3, 2013 in the social hall of Emmanuel Fellowship Church in a box labeled: Survey Questionnaire.

Again, thank you so much for your time and voluntary cooperation in participating in this survey.

Sincerely,

Theresa M. Hines
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Ashland Seminary

APPENDIX 3

SURVEY EVALUATION

Survey Evaluation

It is the purpose of this project to discover the ways in which Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people have experienced a renewed self-image in Christ by attending Emmanuel Fellowship Church.

Demographics

Please put a check mark next to the space that best describes you:

Level of Education:

Some High School High School Graduate Some College
 Bachelors Degree Graduate Degree (Masters and or Doctorate)
 Other (Specify)

Race:

Caucasian African American Latin American
 Other (Specify)

Birth Year:

1925 – 1945 1946 – 1966 1967 – 1985 1986 – 1995
 Other (Specify)

Gender:

Male Female Transitioning (Male to Female, or Female to Male)

Are You a Christian? Yes No Other (Specify)

Past Religious Denomination:

Roman Catholic Protestant: (Specify) Presbyterian
 Episcopal
 Methodist
 Baptist
 Lutheran
 Other (Specify)

----Buddhist Wiccan Other (Specify)

Length of participation at Emmanuel Fellowship Church:

0 – 6 Months 7 – 12 months 1 – 3 years 4 – 6 years
 7 -10 years 10+ Years (Specify how many if you like)

Member or Friend:

Member Friend

Survey Questions: Please circle the number for the correct answer for each statement. 1. Not at all True 2. A little True 3. Slightly True 4.Somewhat True 5.Moderately True 6.Considerably True 7.Very True.

1. I am coming to enjoy getting to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

1. Not at all True
2. A Little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very true

2. Listening during prayer time in the Holy Spirit has become a very important part of my spiritual growth.

1. Not at all True
2. A Little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very true

3. When I am feeling discouraged, I have learned to meditate on the truths of God's word to get me through.

1. Not at all True
2. A Little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very true

4. I feel a part of the community of Christ when I participate in the Services that EFC provides.

1. Not at all True
2. A Little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very true

5. I thought because of who I am I was not found worthy enough to worship God.

1. Not at all True
2. A Little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

6. I have a desire to minister to others because of my participation within the church.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

7. I ask Jesus to be with me and help me throughout the day.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

8. Studying the Word of God is important to me for increasing my faith.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

9. I can meditate on the Word of God which helps me to act in the Holy Spirit instead of my emotions.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

10. It is important to me as a believer to be involved in some of the ministries of the church.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

11. Because EFC is open and affirming I know that I can worship God openly.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

12. I have a greater desire to pray for others who are struggling in life.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

13. I feel comfortable talking about my relationship with Jesus to others.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

14. Before making decisions in my life, I now turn to God in prayer for guidance.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

15. I have come to believe that suffering is a part of life not because God is punishing me for who I am.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

16. Rather than just sitting in the pews, I have a strong desire to participate in the ministries of the church.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

17. Participating in worship services make me feel that I am part of the Body of Christ.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

18. I have a yearning to assist others in reaching out to them in times of trouble.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

19. In the midst of a crisis, I have learned not to hesitate in believing that Jesus will help me find a way through it.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

20. Because I believe Jesus loves me for who I am, I find myself wanting to make better decisions from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

21. While others may ridicule me for who I am, I am able to focus on the promises of Jesus for my life.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very true

22. I am excited that I have a place to come to where I can express the gifts given to me.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True

7. Very True

23. Being accepted in worship services has increased my participation in feeling worthy to receive all that the services have to offer.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

24. I long for other GLBT people to have what I have in the body of Christ.

1. Not at all True
2. A little True
3. Slightly True
4. Somewhat True
5. Moderately True
6. Considerably True
7. Very True

Open ended Questions: Please answer all the questions below thoroughly. Feel Free to use the back of the paper if you need more space.

1. Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self image of yourself in Christ Jesus?
2. How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?

3. How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?

4. In What ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?

5. Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?

APPENDIX 4

ESSAY RESPONSES FROM SURVEY

Participant #1: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“Through the Word I know who I am in Christ Jesus—purchased, made clean, co heir with God’s Holy Son. Changed me from what other churches said I was. Now I can stand tall in Jesus.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“I pray every day to Jesus, to praise, glorify him for self and others. I pray before I make decisions in my life.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“I read my bible, I do bible word, reference and topical studies. I have learned How to use the bible along with all the tools; commentaries, concordances along with looking tem up in the Greek and Hebrew.

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“I am who I am, Christian First, gay is only a part of who I am—not my full identity.

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“Jesus is the Holy gift of God for all who call on Him shall be saved. No one has the right to keep him away, rejected, much will be answered for.

Participant #2: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“It helped me build a relationship. I love Him completely.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“I spend at least one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening; half praying, half listening.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“Pastor reads from different languages and goes to the history of the Word.”

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"Christ - in loving Christ. Self - I found love for myself. Others - so I can love others."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"I came here broken-spirited. Believing in Jesus only to water baptism. Now I have a personal relationship filled with the Holy Spirit and truly believing he loves me and Jesus died for all. Even if we love someone like ourselves. Pastor teaches us to love the Lord, love ourselves. Give to others. I am free to be a child, and I am feeling a gift of healing so deep, I can't put into words. I am home until I meet my Father."

Participant #3: Question #1, "Please describe how Emanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"Learning to erase all the negative self-talk I have built up. Re-learning the truth of what it means to be saved, how we are saved by faith only not works or being straight or other demands man has made up. I've learned and a desire is continuing to grow of wanting to forgive others who have wronged me, to see them as God sees me, a lamb he loves equally. Once broken but now restored."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I talk to God through the day now. Pray in detail, cry-release-see answers over and over. Pray with my partner. See and believe his movement in my specific prayers. I journal and re-read the prayers and it re-affirms me in times of doubt. Ironically I grew up in a church and went to Christian college and never did this or had the depth of relationship I have now. The desire to do His will keeps growing...even though I doubted so much and at times didn't care to try anymore."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"I definitely read more and desire to read more as time goes on. I see God responding to me through His Word and its exciting every time and pushes me to read more. I've learned how to study the bible more in depth."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"This I still struggle with, however, I push myself to share about my church or God when I can and meet others where they are without preaching or making

them feel how I used to feel (like I'm talking down to them or am "holy" and self-righteous)."

Question#5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"EFC has changed my life and I feel God's call and I feel special and loved by God. I never knew that before (since coming out, I felt I lost it forever. But now I know that a lie from Satan)."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"My experience with EFC has been the greatest tool to my loving relationship with my Lord. I've got access to so much that I still don't access. I wish I could express in this survey what all the things I have been blessed through, prayed up through, been lifted up through, been ministered to through, been praised by God through, received healing from and continue to receive healing, but in doing so, I would surely identify myself and therefore void the survey. I in no way want to undermine the efforts of Theresa Hines. I hope that the long run of list above shows how I've been touched. "

Participant #4: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"Before EFC, I really didn't know Christ. The image of myself was actually pretty bad. Although I knew it, I tried very hard for it not to show. I really hadn't even recognized what all issues I had. I just believed pretty much more of the bad things people said about me than the good things. Now, with knowledge of who I am in Christ, through teachings the Pastor and other have shown me, I don't judge myself as much by others standards. I work hard at staying in the truth by reading my bible and going to bible study. The truth is that Jesus love me for who I am."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior long before coming to EFC, but I had no relationship or fellowship with the Lord or Jesus. After attending for a short time, I became involved in Wednesday night prayer service, intercessory prayer, and began learning what that meant. I hadn't had a prayer life before. I didn't even know "how" to pray or have comfort through prayer. It became a daily practice for me and for a time, I was very faithful in it, but I soon got distracted away from daily but always remained faithful to Wednesday nights and was asked to join the prayer chain."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"I am a seeing-is-believing person. Or I was. Once experiencing trials, I found getting into the Word was a way for me to find peace and comfort. At first, it was just a bit haphazard. I didn't know "what" to read, just that being in the Word made a difference. I started attending bible study to try to cut down on having to read entire books because I only seemed to get the book, not necessary the verse I needed. Over these last several years, I've come to know where to go in the Word and how to apply it in my life. That seems to me the difference. Knowing what something says is one thing. Being able to apply it to my life helps me to also recognize that there are many solutions. And most of the troubles in my life stemmed from only a couple of places of my life. Accessing the bible keeps me seeing the truth, dispelling most of the untruths I'd learned over the years."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"I was fortunate in the respect that I was ignorant of the conflict. When I was younger, I wasn't out or Christian. I took Jesus as my Savior, but didn't really become a "Christian" until coming to EFC. When I came out, I wasn't practicing any spiritual process really though could feel the tug. After being out for 5 years or so, I found EFC, and I've been growing in my confidence about speaking out as a Christian though still shy due to limited "seen" interactions. I'm trying to "see" or "recognize" those opportunities."

Participant #5: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"It reaffirms that the Word is living. The same scripture can speak a different message, depending on what is going on in life and how the Holy Spirit wants to minister."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"I still struggle being out with people claiming to be Christian. I hear the way they speak of homosexuals (perverted, abomination, "weird"). I don't want to be judged by people who are set in their hate."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"I have to fight the urge to judge other Christians as being hypocrites when they close their eyes to the truth as long as it doesn't affect them. However, we are all hypocrites, which is why we need to learn and rely on the Holy Spirit for the Truth."

Participant #6: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"Before coming to EFC, I had attended a church that made me feel I was not of equal value in the eyes of God; that I could not serve equally with others. EFC has taught me that in the eyes of God, I am HIS child. As His child, I will receive all that he gives to his children. No exceptions. I am valued as His child."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I now pray daily, many times per day. In other churches, prayer was a part of service; we were asked to pray for our leadership. Personal prayer life was not focused on."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"We are encouraged to spend time in the Word to learn for ourselves. When Pastor teaches, she says, "Do not take my word for it... check it out for yourself." We are responsible in growing our own knowledge of God."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"In realizing my worth in the eyes of God, I no longer believe the "hate speech" that has been poured upon my head for many years. I live as a Christian. Being gay is a very small part of who I am. I work/live to be seen as a Christian first."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"At EFC, I am loved, encouraged, supported and led to live as a Christian. These supports also include accountability before God and others. This is how it should

be. For any father that raises a child, we must be raised with love but also with discipline. This is how our family lives life for God.”

Participant #7: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“Very open/receptive. Laid-back atmosphere”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“The same”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“Somewhat”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“Never was a problem”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

Participant #8: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“I’ve come closer to Jesus through the knowledge that I’m loved AND my sexuality is nothing negative to be judged by.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“I pray daily to the Lord and know that I’m heard and am important.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“By educating me. The bible is better understood, but I’m still learning and want to continue learning.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“My understanding of God’s word has made it easier to be out as a Christian. I have greater inner peace with who I am.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

Participant #9: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped through its acceptance of all of the whosoever’s, John 3:16. It has been a very important influence in the way in which I perceive myself!”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“My prayer life has increased 10-fold since my attendance here at EFC.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“By continually going back to the Word in everything EFC participates in. By challenging us to prove God’s word even the Word is given in Church.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“I have gained confidence with myself because EFC has proven it is tuned to the Word of God. They (EFC) show us that none are righteous, no one, that all the whosoever’s have fallen short. That we are covered by God’s grace. That because of whom I may be does not get me to Heaven, but it is who I am in Christ. By His grace I AM a new creation! Thank you God!”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“In closing, I would like to say it has been a spiritual blessing to me to know that T. Hines is a person after God’s own heart. It has been because of that heart after God that we at EFC have been able to keep our eyes set on Jesus! It has been because of not her, but the person she is and daily still becoming a new creation in Christ. That has become a reason that I have been here! She was an encouragement, yes, before I even started attending by what growth I could see in others before I became a member. Her encouragement of keeping a prayer

journal was a positive start for me. No, I do not do this daily yet, but it has become a more frequent event daily. It was not until after I was a member that I was shown this is a form of prayer, a way of talking to God and developing a prayer life. Do I attend EFC because of this, yes! More so, I attend EFC because I want a heart after God's own heart, and it has been because of the example of T's own heart after God! I thank God every day for these things and EFC! What a personal blessing EFC has been to me, and because of that and the things I have learned from EFC and the Spirit of God (the Comforter), I am even able to pray now for those who have persecuted me because I know I have an Advocate with the Father because I am covered under His Grace!"

Participant #10: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"Through fellowship and teaching of the ministry team. The love is felt from everyone! Since attending, I have found my purpose; I am happier because I am made to feel important."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"The Pastor and Deacons taught that prayer can just be talking to God which gives me the courage to be more open and willing. I used to be afraid because of not knowing how to. Also, I ask for help for everything, bad then the good. I seek Jesus more now than ever."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"I didn't know the order of the books in the Bible by heart and would get embarrassed. Bible study and readings during service made a big difference."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"The Seminar by Pastor T. about what the Bible says about homosexuality... loving God is most important. HE made me who I am. Plus, I don't want to deny God."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"Attending church is a joy because I now love to be in fellowship and hear Pastor preach. It's all REAL!"

Participant #11: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“I came to EFC broken and angry with God. I thought that the struggles in my life were because God was punishing me. I felt bogged down in darkness. EFC was a beacon of light that broke through my walls. EFC, it’s Pastor and members, brought Truth into my life, heart and mind. I found love, encouragement, and peace at EFC. Through Pastor’s teaching, I have gained a deeper understanding of who God is and how deep His love truly is. It is here at EFC, not anywhere else, but at this little church that I accepted my identity in Christ through faith, saved by grace. It is in this that I have accepted myself fully as God’s Beloved; not bits and pieces of me, but all of me. This acceptance has allowed me to open myself fully to God’s will in my life. My chains are gone! Amazing love, amazing grace, and I find my self-esteem right in the middle of it. I believe God worked through Pastor and EFC to help bring me to a healthier image of myself, and EFC continues to stretch, encourage and challenge me to grow deeper.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“My life has always included prayer from a very young age, but it was at EFC that I learned how truly vital a strong prayer life is, not only to my spiritual wellbeing but to my emotional and mental wellbeing as well. My prayer life has grown, not only in length or frequency but also deeper. I’ve learned to pray with details, learned the use and advantages of a prayer journal, but maybe most significantly to change, I’ve learned about intercessory prayer. It is with this knowledge that I learned God was calling me to be an intercessor. Praying for others and knowing and trusting that my faith family was also praying for me and my loved ones is where I came to learn how vital prayer is to a church’s spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. EFC taught me that prayer is foundational, and I’ve been blessed because of it.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“Incredibly so! The Word of God is so important to EFC. The people thirst for it. We are a bible-believing church! I’ve been so encouraged to go to the Word, read the Word, trust the Word, learn the Word, meditate on the Word, eat the Word and chew on it. The sermons and prayers are filled with the Word; the bible studies are filled with it. We are up in our ears with the Word of God! Growing up Catholic, reading my bible or frankly, simply owning one, really wasn’t a priority in my life. Now I sit with my faith family lifting my bible in the air proclaiming, “This is my bible.” It was such a shift in my life but one that has made all the difference. Not only am I encouraged to access the Word myself, but if I need it, I have spiritual leaders at EFC that will go into the bible with me to help search out answers and Truths. All in all, it was Pastor and EFC that catapulted me into God’s Word.”

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"As I stated previously in question 1, I have learned and gained an identity in Christ. It is this Christ-identity that I have gained confidence in God, who He is and how great His love is. This confidence in God has given me the confidence and strength to be out and Christian. If God is for us, who can be against us? It is by God's grace that I am able to do so. God's grace has empowered my confidence and strengthened my faith. In this way, I believe EFC has a unique ministry to meet the marginalized; to see them as God sees them; to love them as God loves them; to help gain souls for the Kingdom of Heaven. I'm not in the closet as a lesbian nor am I in the closet as a Christian. It is by grace through faith that I can be the face of Jesus."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"Walking through the doors of EFC changed my life. I have seen transformations by the power of the Holy Spirit take place in myself and the people of EFC. I have seen healings. I have heard testimonies of bonds and chains being broken because there was a place that held their arms open ready to love those who thought they were unlovable. You cannot help but feel God's presence in this place. I've heard many people say it, and I've said it myself: there's just something about this church. I believe it's God's Spirit dwelling inside its walls, inside its people, and most assuredly so, inside its Pastor."

Participant #12: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"I have a spark of hope that I am acceptable to God."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I began praying again."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"During worship services, the Word is explained and made real to me - encouraging and inviting me to read the Word."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

“I’m not there yet; give me time.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“Like many others, I’ve had very negative experiences in churches. I have hope of being able to worship and serve God, and I am learning that here. Many of my answers may seem negative, but I have become much better than I was.”

Participant #13: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“I used to think that because I was gay I couldn’t be Christian but because of EFC I know that is not true. I am a Christian first and gay second.”

Questions #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“I feel more comfortable praying openly, and with others, now I pray about everything first.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“I now know that the Word of God is my instruction book on how to live my life.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“Even if others don’t think so I know I am a Christian and nothing anyone says now matters because I know the truth.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“Because EFC is open and affirming we welcome everyone gay, straight, some with mental health issues. We have to accept others, even thou others don’t always accept us.”

Participant #14: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“When I entered the church for the first time, I was completely lost. Through bible study, all the love that’s felt from everyone in the church, I gave myself to Jesus, and I now feel whole for the first time in my life. All I want to do now is give back to people the love that has been shown to me. I now have Jesus in my life.”

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I didn't have a prayer life before. All I did was blame everyone else for the misery I was living with. Now, I talk to Jesus and he, through prayer, has changed me. Now I do what he wants me to do, and I love where I am today. I love this church."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"Just by having bible study each week, I want to get as close to Jesus as I can get. I want to know everything about Him. Church service, bible study, and all the people that go to this church do it for me. It's great."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"You know, I don't care what people think of me anymore. I know I'm living for Christ, and I'm doing what he wants me to do, and I know I'm going to the right church to get what I need. This church has taught me that Jesus comes first and all else will follow. I want people to see the love of Christ through me. I don't have to say or do anything. I let Jesus shine in me. I try anyway."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

Participant #15: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"I was raised to believe that being homosexual was an automatic sentence to hell. My self-esteem was low. I have since learned that God loves me, which has allowed me to love myself."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I will actually pray now. I am learning to ask others to pray for me. I still need to work on prayer, but I know that people at church will help me. I just need to ask."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"Through many special services, I have been taught how to read the Word. I also have many people to ask for assistance and who are willing to sit down with me and help."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"I am out in all aspects of my life. I now have the confidence to share what I am learning with others. I share the Truth of God's love with others and invite them (gay or straight) to come to church."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"Before EFC, God did not exist for me. If he could not love me because of my sexuality, then I did not need him. Now I know that he is there and wants me to share him with others."

Participant #16: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"The more I come to church to worship God and of course Christ, the more I feel the Holy Spirit within me and feel close to Christ no matter what is going on in the outside world. I know whatever is going on, He'll see me through anything and with Him anything is possible."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I now pray daily, several times a day in fact. When I wake up in the morning, I thank him so dearly for allowing it. As I move through my day, I thank Him many, many times for helping and allowing things to turn out in "my" favor."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"Since I was baptized again, I now feel much freer to read the bible daily, which I do. I don't know why or how this cam about, but I know God has a big part in encouraging me to, and I'm very very thankful He has encouraged me to do it every day."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"Being 'gay' and Christian has never been an issue with me. I just always have been both and very happy to be."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"I pray this survey helps you Tee to obtain your doctor's degree."

Participant #17: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"Over the years at EFC, I have found that God is a sustaining God that is always sturdy and true no matter where I wander to. He is always right where I left Him and always feels the same."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I can't really say it has changed at all. I've always talked with my God and felt a need to do so."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"We have a very good teacher at EFC, and I've had a great change in the way I understand the Word. I find it very hard to read anything because my eyes get holes in the words or missing parts of words unless there's backlight like on a computer."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"I don't feel it is necessary to be 'out'. No one needs to know that for me to feel life is complete. As for being a Christian, everyone needs to know that, and if I don't tell it, then a lot of people won't know it or know where to find it."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"I feel I've said it all and maybe more than I needed to."

Participant #18: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"EFC is a strong faith-based community. It helps an individual grow because of this."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

“I’ve started to pray differently, in a stronger conversation way.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“I have been encouraged by the tools used to access more of the Word and study. It is enjoyable to learn about a new app or website.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“I have gained more confidence in Christianity. There was a lingering part of me that had a hard time believing God does not love all people. I know that it is not true. EFC is a community that teaches that God’s love is for all, and that is what I enjoy.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“Being accepted at worship makes life easier. I know God loves me for who I am. Not being accepted socially just makes it harder to concentrate.”

Participant #19: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“I never believed I was worthy in Jesus’ eyes before EFC! Now I know He loves me.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“I pray every day for everyone now versus only praying in times of need.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“EFC has encouraged me to access the Word of God by meeting me at my level! No matter how inexperienced or experienced in the Word you are, EFC meets you there!”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“Being out is hard enough, but being out and Christian you have to encounter ridicule in many more circumstances. I have learned with the Holy Spirit and prayer, I can be with God instantaneously, and with God I know I am loved.”

Knowing you are loved by God, you become confident and have greater self-confidence.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“EFC has been a place to learn and grow at a place that is yours. No judgment. No set scheduled. Just love and grace! EFC gives you knowledge and power to love who you are - one of God’s children.”

Participant #20: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“By looking forward in life and allowing myself to see God as a loving father.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“It has not.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“Through jumping through the scriptures and reading.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“There are no issues with that.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

Participant #21: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“I am accepted and respected by others. Christ is why we come together. Every meeting begins with prayer which is a reminder to all that he is always with us no matter who we are.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“It has increased, and my understanding has changed. I now no longer “recite”. I speak to Jesus and he speaks to me, to and from my heart and not my head. It is something I like to do and no longer a duty or expectation.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“I have been taught how to not only read the Word but how to study. If I have a question, I am encouraged to look it up, not just take Pastor’s word for it. Also, by studying the bible, I know the truth in the Word when others try to manipulate it to tell me I am going to hell.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“I finally know I am the righteousness of God. I am covered in Grace. I am glad to be out so I can share what I have learned so others (all others) can learn that they too can have a healthy, loving relationship with God and that God desires all of us to have that relationship.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“I was born and raised Roman Catholic, but I never had the understanding of the Word and the love of God as I have now since attending EFC. Pastor Tee loves the Lord, and it is so obvious that not only is she anointed, but the church is blessed.”

Participant #22: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“I am learning how to be more open with Jesus in prayer.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“It is now more clear on how to read the bible to me because of EFC. I am so grateful!”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“Very much so! Learning praying skills, learning how to read the bible with understanding.”

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"I am not openly out."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"I love the church. It is so good to be able to worship Jesus openly, and we, as gays, are accepted and loved at EFC. God bless Pastor T for being a wonderful teacher and leader to God's sheep (us)."

Participant #23: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"I am a member of this church because of you, Pastor T. The messages I've received has opened my mind, settled my spirit and inspired me."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I've set a time in the morning to study the Word of God. That really (attending EFC) has been the spark that lit my fire. I love it; I've learned I've improved as a Christian."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"You encouraged me to journal, you encouraged me to read, study, pray, and meditate. Somehow I do not think I'd be as inspired if I did not attend EFC. The respect I have for Pastor T and the desire to do God's will is truly a shining light for me."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"I'm still cautious from time to time to openly talk about it, but I'm confident when I'm asked to answer honestly letting them know that God made me as I am and is judging me only by the content of my heart."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

Participant #24: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"With being raised Baptist, I was told over and over again that being gay was the ultimate unforgivable sin and no matter what "those people" do, they would never be permitted to go to Heaven. "Those people" would have a one-way ticket to hell to be tortured until the end of time. EFC has taught me that God loves all His children no matter if they are straight or LGBT. We all have a place in Heaven as long as we believe and follow His path He has made for us."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"Before EFC, I only prayed when times were rough. Now I pray multiple times a day. I pray for the mercy and grace He pours over me daily as well as pray for other people and their needs. I have learned that the prayers we send up to Heaven help to make miracles happen!"

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"With being raised Baptist and having the train of thought 'if you're gay you have no hope for going to Heaven', I thought if that's true, why waste my time reading the bible. After attending EFC for a very short time, I was encouraged to read God's Word and seek out His Truth. I am glad to say that today I have multiple bibles and always have one with me. I find myself today, if I have free time, I open the bible and read it more than watching TV."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"Thanks to EFC, I now know that I can be out and be able to say that I am the righteousness of God! I know that the original Word had nothing in it that would be against homosexuality. The anti-homosexuality was put into the bible within the last 100 years. I stand on the original transcripts with confidence!"

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

Participant #25: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

“EFC has empowered me to a higher opinion of myself. I don’t know I’m accepted, I feel it. The EFC family has embraced everyone that walks through the doors, accepting and receiving just as they are.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“It has more than doubled. I never prayed in tongues until EFC.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“How hasn’t EFC encouraged? Seminars, bible study, CDs, Sunday services, spiritual book giveaways, instructions on how to research scripture, Pastor putting tabs in bibles.

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“I no longer feel the need to have to conform to what others think. I share stories and invite others to services, programs, and events proudly.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“Many churches focus on the homosexuality aspect and throw the rest of the person out. EFC focuses on the whole person encouraging a full relationship with God and the church (EFC).”

Participant #26: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“Before coming here, I had a surface relationship with God. I was afraid to go deeper to find out just how bad I was in God’s eyes. Hearing the Word and learning to study the bible, I now want to know God on a deeper level, down to my core. I now believe that I am the righteousness of God!”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“I used to give lip service to prayer, never really feeling comfortable. Now I have a prayer space in my home. I pray first thing in the morning and right before bed. I also pray before making ‘most’ decisions. A big change is that I’m now asking for prayers from others.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

"We are taught that the bible is written for each of us. Coming to bible study each week has taught me how to search for meaning and answers in my life through the Word. I'm not afraid to read the bible and write directly on the pages."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"My family and friends know I am gay, and they hear me discuss what I have found at EFC - God's grace, mercy, peace. I openly share lessons that I've learned as a Christian, and I'm proud to say that Jesus is my Lord and Savior."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

"Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on how my life and love for God has grown since coming to EFC. There was a time I hid from God and Christianity because I wasn't sure of the expectations. Now I understand the role I must play in being an example of God's light and love on this Earth."

Participant #27: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"For now, it affirms that I am ok as I am. I believe as long as I stay, I will grown further into the person I'm meant to be."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I haven't prayed or had much of a spiritual life in several years until I cam back to Akron and many times over since attending EFC."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"I look forward with enthusiasm to getting back into the Word of God."

Question #4, "In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?"

"Still a battle, but I feel with the support of EFC, I can feel more comfortable reconciling the two again."

Question #5, "Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?"

“After many years of isolation and having lost faith in both God and man, I feel I now have a place to rebuild both.”

Participant #28: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“Being at church shows me that I am worthy of God’s love. EFC is a very accepting church and lets me be me. I feel comfortable.”

Question #2, “How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?”

“I am noticing that I pray more often for God’s guidance in my life decisions.”

Question #3, “How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?”

“EFC is a very welcoming and loving place. Pastor T is always available to talk to as well as giving you the tools you need to grow closer to God.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“I see other members being themselves and celebrating who they are, and it gives me strength and reminds me that that is how I want to be.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

“I have been waiting all my life to find a place where I can worship and grow in my faith. God has brought me here, and I am so happy to finally find this home through him.”

Participant #29: Question #1, “Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?”

“I never had a self-image in Christ Jesus before coming to Emmanuel Fellowship. My self-image was that Jesus wouldn’t want to know me. I never knew Jesus personally. You might wonder then how I was saved. I was watching a TV “preacher” once and he said if you wanted to be saved and wanted to go to heaven to put your hand on the TV and repeat after him. I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior in that moment. Obviously I didn’t know how it was supposed to work. I didn’t know that Jesus was my personal Savior (as I look back on it now I can recognize simple virginal faith). For many years after that I did not pursue Jesus or try to understand what it really meant to be saved. I was too afraid to

go to any other church but the Catholic Church. It was safe there. I didn't pursue them, ask questions, seek clarity and they returned the favor.

I know now, because of what I've learned through my church, that I was saved through grace by faith in love and that love does not discriminate. Our God is a God of love. He loves me for who I am. Jesus died on that cross just especially for me. My God knows me better than I know myself, He made me after all. I am free from condemnation and I cannot be separated from the love of God. He is the vine and I am a branch. I am loveable and lovely. I, too, worship in spirit and in truth."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I used to think prayer was what the priests did up on the alter during mass. He prayed for the holy roman catholic church, the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, the people of St. Rose parish, and then would name a couple of people also. I really didn't think "real" prayer was for us regular people. Did God really listen to us normal people when we prayed, especially if we hadn't been to confession and did I confess ALL of my sins and say ALL of my Hail Mary's and ALL of my Our Fathers in repentance of my sins. It was all so complicated so why would God listen if I hadn't done it all right? And THEN I realized I was gay. Why would God listen to me of all people? I really didn't understand prayer anyway. How are you supposed to pray to God if He would not hear you? What's the secret formula? It seemed like the priests had the formula and they weren't sharing. Maybe the formula was in the bible. But I sure didn't understand the bible enough to figure out the "pray-the-right-words-so-God-will-hear-you" secret formula.

Now I know prayer can be as simple as saying, "Jesus"! He understands what my mouth can't say. He understands the groaning's of my heart. When I draw near to the Father through the Son by the power of the Spirit the Father inclines His ear to me. Jesus claims me as His as I abide in Him and I can ask anything in His name and I will have it. Prayer is the exercise of my faith and hope. Prayer is practicing the presence of God. It feels good to speak with Jesus in prayer and praise."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

"Everything I know about the bible I've learned at EFC. When I was growing up the bible was in a pretty, as well as, dusty box on the lower shelf of the coffee table in the living room of our home. The bible was a big white King James Version with maps, color illustrations and a lot of words that were in red. As a child I often dusted off the box and pulled out the bible because I was curious. I tried to read it but couldn't understand any of it. I realized now God was calling me and I was trying to answer. I had not guidance from my parents concerning God or the bible. The Catholic Church gave no encouragement to read the bible.

The first bible I ever owned, that was my own, I bought after attending EFC for a short time and realized people brought their bibles to church and read along in

them when the Pastor talked about scripture. I didn't want to be left out. I was 35 years old. I now know the bible is "God-breathed", the "Sword of the Spirit", "Holy Scripture", "Living Words", and the "Truth". I know how to access the bible to lookup all of these truths, find the meanings of these truths, apply them to my life, help me through difficulty, comfort me in difficult times and fill me with joy."

Question #4, "In what way have you gained confidence in yourself to be out and Christian?"

"I've been so used to hiding who I am for so long that allowing people to know that I'm gay AND Christian has been a slow guarded process. I've only been "out" as gay at work since my employer included in their anti-discrimination policy the words "sexual orientation" and started covering same sex partners on the health care insurance. This has only taken place within the last three years.

It has taken me longer to allow people to know I'm Christian. I knew I would be judged with "you can't be a Christian because you're gay". It's taken me 11 years at EFC to understand how many ways that statement is wrong. For one thing no one has a right to tell anyone they can't be a Christian. Through the teachings, preaching and living examples at EFC I've learned that nothing can separate me from the love of God. I can walk boldly with my Christianity and yes by the way I am gay. I pray that my Christianity shines through and my homosexuality is just a part of who I am."

Question #5, "Please express anything else you would like to add that you were not asked."

"It is my strongest desire that more of the GLBT community will find their way to an Emmanuel Fellowship or a Christian church like EFC so they may feel the everlasting, nonjudgmental love of Christ. I pray and open myself to the Lord so that He may use me, through Emmanuel Fellowship, to reach others."

Participant #30: Question #1, "Please describe how Emmanuel Fellowship Church has helped you to develop a better self-image of yourself in Christ Jesus?"

"Through fellowship, involvement in services and committees, and sermons and special programs, I learn and am reminded often of how God loves and wants to bless my life and how I can continue to grow in my relationship with him."

Question #2, "How has your prayer life changed since attending EFC?"

"I pray more. I have a prayer journal. I listen for God's voice."

Question #3, "How has EFC encouraged you in accessing the Word of God?"

“I am encouraged to read and study the Word from others. Bible studies and meeting with the Pastor to learn how to study the Word has encouraged me. Hearing the Word in service is also helpful.”

Question #4, “In what ways have you gained confidence in yourself in order to be out and Christian?”

“I have learned and am reminded that I am loved and a beloved of God which helps me daily. I also have the support of the church family which helps me know I am not alone.”

Question #5, “Please express anything else that you would like to add that you were not asked?”

APPENDIX 5

DAILY DEVOTIONAL, OCTOBER 28, 2014

This was my devotional on the last day of my completing first dissertation. It impacted and related to my project in a profound way so I felt that it was important to incorporate it.

His Mission and Ours: “The son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

IN WORD: Think of the odd assortment of people to whom Jesus was drawn. In this passage, it’s a dishonest tax collector. Elsewhere, it’s a prostitute; a raging, demon possessed lunatic; an adulteress; beggars; lepers; and just about everyone else who had no legitimate case to make about their own righteousness and well-being. His harshest words were reserved for the self-righteous, those who thought they needed nothing more than what they already had. They were just as lost, but could not know it unless they were directly confronted. The overt sinners, though, knew it already. They needed help.

If Christ was so drawn to sinners, why isn’t the body of Christ equally drawn? Many of us can hardly say we live to seek and save what is lost. We often act as if we live to affirm and support what is superior. We tend to avoid the unseemly and cultivate the faithful. Cultivating the faithful is good, as Jesus spent three years doing so with his disciples. But His search for that which was lost and broken was zealous and relentless. Is ours?

IN DEED: If our identity is in Jesus, and His Spirit is living in us, we will be drawn to others as he was. We will be brokenhearted about those who suffer in sinful, diseased conditions just as He was—and is—brokenhearted. The zeal of our search to bring His redemption into a captive world will in some way reflect His zeal. It will be a diagnostic measure of the reality of our union with Him.

Is this alarming? Perhaps for many of us it is. The knee-jerk reaction to the imperative of seeking and saving the lost is to try to cultivate a desire to do so. Resist the urge. Be aware of the need, but respond by cultivating your union with Jesus. You cannot muster up the appropriate zeal, but fellowship with His Spirit will make His agenda contagious to you and those around you. Let His mission become yours (Tiegreen, 2003, pg.301)

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