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House Church Leaders: A Multisite Case Study

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Lance Croy
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HOUSE CHURCH LEADERS: A MULTISITE CASE STUDY

Has been approved by his committee as satisfactory completion of the dissertation

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of home gatherings. Billings (2011) identified three stages of house church formats: (a) *Oikos,* where the congregants assemble in the home for a complete meal, including the Eucharist; (b) *Domus*, where the curate renovates and dedicates rooms in their homes for Christian usage; and (c) *Aula*, where rented facilities house larger gatherings, the liturgy becomes more formalized, and the Eucharist is no longer a full meal (Billings, 2011). House church leaders and congregants sampled fit the three typologies while addressing a gap in the literature. Observations, diaries, individual interviews, and focus groups formed the data of this multisite case study, adding new knowledge to shared leadership in the home. Ten themes were developed to address the five research questions. The external and internal challenges facing house church leaders were identified as (a) *Western-base ecclesiology*, (b) *time constraints*, (c) *commitment and accountability*, and (d) *child care.* Regarding how house church leaders address these challenges, the participants reported (e) *marring the mission of whole-life discipleship by example*; this was performed *through intentional involvement, with encouragement,* and *for equipping the saints.* The theme about follower perceptions of church leadership was (f) *intimate families.* The observed leadership characteristics were (g) *interspersed and dispersed.* The themes describing the alignment of the leadership characteristics with shared leadership were (h) *size*, (i) *voice*, and (j) *shared purpose.*

Keywords: house church, shared leadership, qualitative research

Dedication

To Dad, the original Dr. Jones.

Acknowledgements

Tara, Adriana, and Nona—and the church that meets in your home.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of home gatherings. Billings (2011) identified the three stages of house church formats. The first is *Oikos ecclesia*, where the congregants assemble in the home for a complete meal, including the Eucharist (Billings, 2011). The second is *Domus ecclesiae*, where the curate renovates and dedicates rooms in their homes for Christian usage (Billings, 2011). The third is *Aula ecclesiae*, where rented facilities house larger gatherings, the liturgy becomes more formalized, and the Eucharist is no longer a full meal (Billings, 2011). There is a growing need to study the covenantal commitment and personal involvement of a small group of people within the house church model that differentiate it from the powerful pitfalls of the purpose-built model (Barrett, 2021). One of the challenges to emerge within house churches is leading within a more informal setting while balancing the appropriate amount of power and control (Miller, 2019). The current dissertation includes the results of a multisite case study examining the shared leadership of each type of house church gathering.

Background of the Study

Planting a house church is still one of the most effective strategies for reaching people within a specific community with unspecified constraints (Thiessen, 2020). Tennent (2007) noted that the lifeblood of Christianity is its theological translatability, which can be reinterpreted across diverse settings while maintaining its doctrinal essentials. From the mid-first century to the early fourth century, Christians met in homes without purchased or purpose-built structures with no evidence to the contrary (Cianca, 2018). These gatherings occurred in other tenement settings, not just in the home, but purpose-built structures did not appear until after the Peace of Constantine (Adams, 2016). For the purpose of this dissertation, house churches were defined as any recurring gathering in a home, including settings outside of a home, while excluding purchased and purpose-built buildings (for complete Definition of Terms, see Appendix A).

Filson (1939) stated, "The house church was the training ground for Christian leaders [and] can never be properly understood without constantly bearing in mind the contribution of the house church" (p. 112). Proponents of the house church model have argued that hierarchization and institutionalization led to the fossilization of the church God created during Pentecost (Simson, 2015). The Pentecost detailed the Holy Spirit's anointing upon everyone within the congregation, creating the priesthood of all believers (MacDonald, 2021). Most of the Apostles did not remain in Jerusalem, but left their prominent position in the church they founded (Shelton, 2018). Rather than allow an oligarchy to form, the Apostles decentralized their operations by planting more house church networks in every part of the known world (Kruger, 2018).

Similarly, the Apostle Paul did not envisage a highly organized gathering with ordained clergy, but a corporeal and familial assembly that mutually meets each other's physical and spiritual needs (Banks, 2020). The household for the Apostle Paul was not only foundational to the church's design, but pivotal for future leadership development (DeSagun, 2014). The house church model is never outdated because people in various cultures can easily gather in homes with very few barriers to entry (Towns, 2018). Most purpose-built churches (i.e., those that predominantly congregate in purchased buildings on the weekends) advocate for a healthy home group ministry during the week (Atkinson & Comiskey, 2014). While every house church is potentially a small group, not every small group is a house church. To differentiate the two, Comiskey (2016) noted that house churches and small groups share worship, the exercising of spiritual gifts, teaching, prayer, fellowship, and evangelism, but house churches retain the sacraments as part of their liturgy.

House churches also continue to be a global phenomenon with varying ecclesiastical structures (Stetzer, 2017). For example, scholars continue to study the unregistered house church movement in Asia amidst stringent surveillance and persecution (Han et al., 2018). The house church movement advocates an austere form of Christianity that is egalitarian, self-governing, and devoid of denominational structures (Reny, 2018; Ryrie, 2017). In a study of house churches

in the Philippines, Manaloto (2019) concluded that shared leadership, shepherding families, spiritual giftings, and saturating cities best describe this model.

Currently, in places like Iran, missiologists have estimated that there are nearly 1 million Christians due to the rapid growth of underground house churches (Casper, 2020; Zaimov, 2018). The upsurge has also come at a cost, with many converts facing severe persecution (Casper, 2019). Nonetheless, most of the growth has come from courageous women leading churches in their homes (Ellis, 2019; Parsa, 2020). In other Middle Eastern countries, a surge of Pentecostal migrant workers displaced from their homeland meeting in secret home groups while reaching out to others on the margins of society (Newberg, 2021). The changing religious landscape in the United States, as well as the organizational structures of house churches, present some interesting challenges for leaders as they navigate more informal power structures (Dzubinski & Stasson, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of home gatherings. The authors of other dissertations have explored important challenges faced by house church leaders (Andreas, 2014; Boyd, 2015; Hobart, 2009; Turner, 2011; Veliquette, 2013; Wiseman, 2006); however, the spectrum of *Oikos, Domus*, and *Aula* (ODA) is a house church framework that is unexplored in the leadership literature (Billings, 2011). By addressing a gap in the literature, the research findings can form new knowledge in the field (Simons, 2014). This gap harkens back to Filson (1939), who advised scholars to examine pastors in the context of their home because the leadership dynamic is socially, structurally, and functionally different from any other organizational setting.

Many pastors in the purpose-built model found themselves leading home churches because of the global pandemic (Corpuz & Sarmiento, 2020). COVID-19 abruptly altered ecclesiastical habits in the United States, with member engagement and funding sharply declining in many denominations (Barna Group, 2020; Boorstein, 2020; Surratt, 2020). According to Gallup, American church membership dropped below 50% during the pandemic—its lowest in 80 years of

the survey (Jones, 2021). The disaffiliation with Christianity amongst Millennials and Generation Z is at 42% (Burge, 2020). The Pew Research Center (2021) discovered a steady decline of respondents who do not identify with a religion. The Southern Baptist Convention (once the largest denomination in the United States) lost 287,000 members, while baptism, small group participation, and new church plants are diminishing (Gryboski, 2020; Shellnut, 2020). According to the American Worldview Inventory, a seismic shift is occurring with the next generation who do not know, do not care, and do not believe that God exists (Barna Group, 2021). Additionally, trust in pastors remains at an all-time low due to the many moral failings of leaders, church hypocrisy, or political disagreements within the congregation (Foley, 2021).

Within the church, there is generally a "strong, pastor-centric ecclesiology, where there is too much power in the hands of too few people. It is time we realized that spiritual abuse in the church is rearing its ugly head, and it is devastating (Diehl, 2020, para. 9). Christian institutions "often hold in common a thirst for power [and] an unrepentant self-defensiveness," making them virtually indistinguishable from secular organizations (Warren, 2021, p. 1). It is not a coincidence that there has been a rise in charismatically led programmatic churches patterned after the business world (Corcoran & Wellman, 2016). After removing one pastor from a church, an independent investigation revealed, "The imbalance of power was such that no one ever questioned the charismatic preacher. [The report recommended that] the leadership model should be one of distributed leadership instead of allowing so much power to be invested in one person" (Thirty-One: Eight, 2020, pp. 32, 84). As Miller (2019) noted, "This tension between hierarchy and equality exists in the idea of a social network of the church as an interconnected and mutually dependent community, is an idea more central to the gospel than one of hierarchy" (p. 441).

Given the climate, some notable pastors have walked away from purpose-built structures to plant house churches (Blair, 2020; Chan, 2018; Hodson, 2020). Many house church networks began forming to address this issue, providing leadership development resources to rethink the current ecclesiastical structure

(Barnhart, 2020; Blake, 2020; Heimbigner, 2020). According to Towns (2018), one of the biggest challenges to leaders is the lack of organization within house churches, with many lasting less than 2 years on average. The great paradox is balancing spirituality untethered to institutional hierarchy and providing adherents with some form of structure (Frost & Hirsch, 2013). The desacralization, decentralization, and democratization of the early house church model require a different leadership process for practitioners (Ledbetter et al., 2017). Consequently, "House church forms are discontinuous by nature, rising and falling in a short span of time without the staying power that institutionalization brings" (Esler, 2013, p. 71).

Issues involving power structures also exist in organizational leadership research (Schein & Schein, 2018). According to a recent study, researchers assigned formal titles to some teams, while others were nonhierarchical (Van Bunderen et al., 2018). Once the researchers introduced an external threat to the scenario, the interteam conflict spiraled into performance-detracting intrateam power struggles in all hierarchical samples while the egalitarian teams cooperated to accomplish the task (Van Bunderen et al., 2018). The phenomenon has caused researchers at Stanford University to examine holarchies (Koestler, 1967), promoting a fluidity shift in leadership studies with equal power disbursement and less vertical differentiation (Walsh, 2017).

Scholars have incessantly debated the issue of flatter organizational structures for years (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Mutizwa (2015) argued that conventional command-and-control hierarchies are inadequate when dealing with volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous environments that are rapidly changing. Critical leadership scholars have warned of the dangers of toxic leaders emerging when the environment is rapidly changing (Bastardoz & Vugt, 2019; Rolle, 2020). Psychologists have realized that human nature is prone to a dominant hierarchy that uses any advantage to assert itself over another (Peterson, 2018; Wageman & Fisher, 2014). Unchecked narcissism, Machiavellian duplicity, and psychopathy form the dark triad in leadership studies (Furnham et al., 2013). In Jones's (2017) dissertation, the conclusion was that toxic leaders are prevalent in

ministry, destroying and dividing biological and church families, individual lives, and relationships with God. The inherent bias within leadership studies is that organizations require a hero with a grand vision to mobilize others, instead of assuming that competent and committed people can organically organize themselves to meet and exceed objectives (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014; Fuller et al., 2019; Schweiger et al., 2020).

Therefore, the last 20 years saw the development of ambidextrous and nimble leadership styles, mixed with agile workflows disregarding job descriptions, blurring organizational boundaries, and completely up-ending traditional top-down management practices (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). An ambidextrous organization allows for cross-fertilization without cross-contamination, as interdepartmental units remove silos and stifling structures (Rosing et al., 2011). Agile teams are self-governing, thereby flattening the proverbial pyramid and making decisions faster in shorter sprints (Crocker et al., 2018; Rigby et al., 2019). Being nimble means leadership should rest and rotate between individuals best positioned to address the changing environment regardless of rank or role within the organization (Ancona et al., 2019).

This explains the evolution of leadership studies from a locus of leader-centered to leader-directed to leader-follower foci (Lowe & Gardner, 2020; Wilder & Jones, 2018). Resultantly, Northouse (2015) identified four common leadership themes: (a) leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs in a group context, and (d) leadership involves goal attainment. This dissertation continues expanding the traditional leadership definition whereby positional power dynamics morph into a dyadic dynamism of reciprocal identity between the leader and the follower (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Morgeson et al., 2010). Leadership is co-created as a social process between the leader and the led, and that relationality reverses the lens and strengthens the threads of the interconnectivity of influence (Bryman et al., 2011; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Huizinga (2018) argued that pastors are both followers and leaders in the church and within their home, adding to the dyadic duality of the construct.

Even though definitions of leadership are complex and continually evolving, they plumb the depth of someone's philosophical, ontological, and epistemological underpinnings, causing scholars to explore the ongoing local, cultural, and historical processes that bring the phenomenon into being (Bindlish et al., 2019; Hunt, 2004; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012; Vecchiotti, 2018). Leadership studies are not a unidirectional model predicated upon one person in a position of authority, but a unity of voices sharing the same experience (Drath et al., 2008). Interestingly, when organizational theory moved to more organic imagery and structuralism gave way to living systems, a prescient voice predicted that would happen during the middle of the mechanistic age. As Follett (1918) wrote, "A neighborhood is a reciprocally conditioning force, none of which acts alone. We propose that people should organize themselves into groups. The only place where we can change ourselves is on this level" (p. 31).

Currently, critical leadership studies continue questioning neo-charismatic leaders' modality and morality (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). The current nexus in theoretical studies examines meta-paradoxical leadership whereby "Leaders are often cognizant of the inherent pressure between being more formal and emphasizing their hierarchical positions, versus empowering others and sharing their leadership" (Pearce et al., 2019, p. 31). Future researchers need to examine the processual and reciprocal hybridity of leader-follower relationships integral to organizational success (Schweiger et al., 2020). When leadership and context intersect in complex and dynamic interaction, a unique problem emerges (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019).

Examining house churches and their leaders within the rise of post-bureaucratic research while more individuals are self-organizing into relational groupings presents a gap in the literature (Girrell, 2021; Jo et al., 2021). In Veliquette's (2013) dissertation, the author concluded, "There is a major knowledge gap about appropriate leader behavior under conditions of increasing employee participation" (p. 86). Additionally, Boyd (2015) pointed out that there are "significant gaps in support related to the family, team, and collaborative entities" (p. 143). At one time, many pastors relied on their charismatic gifts of casting

vision for their congregation from the pulpit every weekend (Simson, 2015). Congregants within house churches have more voice, however, which has shifted the power dynamic within a more informal organizational structure (Branick, 2012). "These social changes result in different models of church leadership, shifting from people management in classical paradigms [to] newer, emerging models of religious leadership" (Barentsen, 2015, pp. 52–53).

House church leaders navigate a pluralistic culture that is becoming increasingly post-Christian, while at the same time managing a plurality of leaders in a laterally integrated social network. The tendency is to revert to a command-and-control model where one person has amassed all the authority (Burke, 2018); however, that is neither biblical nor fits with the current praxis of leadership theory (Diehl, 2020). As Wilder and Jones (2018) posited, leadership "is not sovereignty above the community but stewardship within the community….A high ethic of care drives such leaders not simply for the accomplishment of organizational goals but for the flourishing and formation of each individual" (pp. 10, 18).

Purpose of the Research

House church leaders face two concurrent problems: the external threat of the rapidly changing religious landscape in the United States and internally leading within a more informal setting while balancing the appropriate amount of power and control. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings. This dissertation is an exploration of the nuances of the three forms of house churches (ODA) by asking several research questions and providing new information to the field of shared leadership within organizations.

Research Questions

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that qualitative studies revolve around a central research question and several subquestions. Additionally, case studies explore a process of something interlinking the research problem with the

research questions (Doody & Bailey, 2016). The research questions centered on how the experiences of the three types of house churches compare to one another:

1. What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders?
2. How do house church leaders address these challenges?
3. What are follower perceptions of church leadership within the three typologies of gatherings?
4. What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings?
5. Do these leadership characteristics align with shared leadership?

Significance of the Research

House churches have vastly different liturgies set by the leaders, and it displays their willingness to change their organization to fit their current context. The same phenomenon occurred with the inception of the church. Cianca (2018) claimed, "Rather than a homogenous community of believers forging a single new identity in Christ, early Christian groups were grappling with often opposing styles of leadership. This variety was perhaps nowhere more striking than in the house-church communities" (p. 3). Leading an organic house church does not mean each church organizes itself the same way. Even within more informal settings, leaders struggle with the appropriate amount of structure. Moreover, scholars have continued to praise house church studies as a theology of community, mentioning intersecting conversations of lordship and leadership (Shiner, 2020). The house church is less about being a place of worship than enabling God's grace through the gathering's worshipful togetherness (Turner, 1979). As Corpuz and Sarmiento (2020) concluded,

> The Church grew as a single monolithic religion with restrictions, formalism, and strict liturgical celebrations…. House Churches today bring an example of the simple, informal, and dynamic style of the early church. Such that the word 'house' in house Churches indicates a quality of intimacy, informality, and openness associated with one's own home. The phenomenon is an example that the church is truly changing and that the Church must adapt. (pp. 112, 117)

Conceptual Framework

Specifying a conceptual framework unlocks the rest of the dissertation (White, 2014). Within scholarly articles of house churches, the leadership theories revolve around servant leadership (Banks, 2020), shared leadership (Veliquette, 2013), or egalitarian leadership (Spencer & Spencer, 2020). These underlying conceptual frameworks of house churches presume a mutuality where every member fully functions synchronously, and the designated leader acts as a *primus inter pares* (first among equals) within the group (Ledbetter et al., 2016).

The language of servant leadership continues to resonate with Christians because it is connected to the language of the New Testament (Ledbetter et al., 2016). Numerous house church scholars and practitioners have advocated for this theory of leadership within their publications (Banks, 2020; Birkey, 2018; Branick, 2012; Chan, 2018; Chester & Timmis, 2008; Ledbetter et al., 2016; Manaloto, 2019; Partridge, 2020; Simson, 2015; Wilder & Jones, 2018). Similarly, egalitarian leadership "is an intrinsic aspect of servant leadership. Egalitarian leadership includes the equal leadership of men and women…It is mutual service between partners in ministry for Christ's sake…humble, without hierarchy of rank except between humans and God" (Spencer & Spencer, 2020, p. 4). The conceptual framework chosen for this dissertation was shared leadership.

Pearce and Sims (2002) conceptualized shared leadership as a type of group influence that originates from interactions among individuals that manifests itself as collective action. All group members engage in leadership at different points in time based on the tasks at hand (Veliquette, 2013). The challenge for researchers is explicitly observing what is accomplished by the team as they share information and move towards democratic decision-making (Wageman & Fisher, 2014). Hooker and Csikszentmihalyi (2012) discovered that shared leadership is conducive to being in a state of flow, and their participants reported experiencing greater intrinsic motivation, corporate interest, and social meaning.

Shared leadership within church congregations moves from coercion to cohesion as they face adaptive challenges (Ellis, 2017). This construct is evident in the Pauline letters, in which the Apostle never mentions formal authority

concerning those leading local churches (Ledbetter et al., 2016). When writing to the house churches, Paul forms compound words with the prefix *syn* (with- or co-), creating a "participatory society in which authority is dispersed throughout the whole membership" (Banks, 2020, p. 129). The cognitive information sharing, and behavioral decision-making of shared leadership form the conceptual framework of this dissertation with an underlying presupposition of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schwarz & Williams, 2020). The framework helps to formulate, explain, and understand the data discussed in the methodology (Abend, 2008).

Methodology

The current researcher employed a multisite case study design. Participants were purposively sampled through a monthly networking group of house church leaders. The participants were required to fit the criteria of the three typologies of house church models (ODA). After screening and selecting each site, house church leaders were informed about the case study parameters. Once the leader voluntarily consented and agreed to open up their home, data collection began.

Data collection consisted of diaries, observations from the field, and individual and group interviews. The ODA house church leaders kept a diary of their experiences for 10 days with provided prompts. Once on-site, fieldnotes were recorded along with unstructured interviews with the house church leaders and a focus group with the participants in attendance who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The unstructured interviews with each ODA house church leader lasted 60 minutes. The focus groups with five to seven participants from each ODA house church site also lasted 60 minutes. The house church leaders from each site and their congregants at each site comprised a maximum sample size of 12 to 24 people, which Creswell and Poth (2018) stated is a significant number to ensure data saturation.

Diary entries, observational fieldnotes, and interview transcripts comprised the data of this multisite case study. Data were subjected to several coding cycles. In the first cycle, the researcher reduced the data to a manageable size by chunking excerpts into a codebook based on the research questions. In the second cycle, the

researcher utilized in-vivo coding from the transcripts forming categories. The third cycle involved inputting the data into the Leximancer software program to generate visual themes for conceptualization. The concepts generated addressed the central and subsequent research questions. Moreover, it is essential to discuss the implications and limitations of the study at the forefront, offering an honest critique of one's work (Greener, 2018).

Scope and Limitations

Four limitations were apparent in this multisite case study. These were (a) studying only three house church sites; (b) the brevity of time spent at each site; (c) the lack of generalizability; and (d) regional, cultural, and international extrapolation. As mentioned in this chapter, studying ODA house churches addressed a gap in the literature. This multisite case study provided new knowledge in shared leadership related to adapting to challenges within the context of their homes.

Nevertheless, Brown (2008) argued that case studies do not allow enough time to capture a phenomenon. Consider Shamir (2011), who noted that time is an underexplored—yet critically important—dimension in leadership studies, especially from a conceptual framework of processual influence. From a process perspective, leadership takes time to develop, and most studies at best can only offer a snapshot, which is not as robust as some researchers perceive (Day, 2014). Simons (2014) argued, however, that some case studies could even be as short as a day if rich data and thick descriptions are collected. Case studies provide a powerful tool in generating new research questions that can be explored in-depth utilizing a different methodological approach (Klenke, 2014).

Yin (2009) contested that case studies are the weaker sibling in the social sciences because of the inability to generalize the data. Qualitative studies generally adhere to a critical or interpretivist framework (Lapan et al., 2012). By choosing an interpretive framework and conducting the research in a specific context, the subjects in the study create their meaning alongside the researcher, and that meaning cannot be generalized across other populations (Wiersma, 2000). Most likely, the findings are only appealing to the study's participants and no one else

(Peters, 2018); however, Stake (2005) argued that particularization, not generalization, should be the main aim of qualitative studies. The goal is to capture intersubjectivity as it exists in experiential, practical, and presentational realities without propositional certainties (Simons, 2014). Yin (2009) acknowledged that multisite studies provide a more substantial basis for theoretical extension and explanation.

Lastly, case studies are also bound to a specific time and place (Stake, 2005). House churches in the United States, regardless of the variegation in typology, look different than house churches in other parts of the world. While interviews augmented by participant observations formulate the language of the study, the language is socially constructed (Wiebe et al., 2010). It is pertinent to note that diaries, observations, and interviews are valid tools for studying leaders in their specific contexts because researchers can seek empathetic understanding alongside their participants (Alvesson, 2003; Jain, 2021). The stories produced by the subjects can also lead to a greater conceptualization of the phenomenon (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic., 2021; Sandberg, 2005). Nevertheless, it is worth quoting Stake (1995): "Good research is not about good method as much as it is about good thinking" (p. 19).

Therefore, the scope of this multisite case study is to examine the three typologies of house churches (ODA) and how those leaders have addressed specific external and internal challenges within this model. Prayerfully, the findings reported in this dissertation may cause pastors and practitioners to think deeply about their current ecclesiastical structure and if it is worth adapting their model to meet the needs of the changing religious landscape in the United States, even if there are inherent internal challenges to overcome.

Definition of Terms

Aula ecclesiae – The third type of house church studied in this dissertation. Larger places, both private homes and public spaces repurposed for Christian usage, often resemble a more formal leadership and liturgical structure.

Domus ecclesiae – The second type of house church studied in this dissertation. Rooms in private homes are renovated and dedicated for specific ceremonial gatherings.

House church – Any recurring gathering in a home, including settings outside of a home, while excluding purchased and purpose-built buildings.

In situ – The original place(s) of the church.

Leadership – Processual influence resulting in transformation of some kind.

Oikos ecclesia – The first type of house church studied in this dissertation. Christians were meeting in homes to celebrate a meal containing the Eucharist.

Summary

House church leaders face two concurrent problems: the external threat of the rapidly changing religious landscape in the United States and internally leading within a more informal setting while balancing the appropriate amount of power and control. Given the rise of postbureaucratic research and the continual quest to flatten organizational structures to increase individual contribution within the group (Griep & Hansen, 2020), house churches make for an interesting case to study. The unexplored tripartite typology of house churches presents a gap in the literature and can add new knowledge to shared leadership research.

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to examine house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of home gatherings. The central question was: What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders? Additionally, how do house church leaders address these challenges? What are follower perceptions of church leadership within the three typologies of gatherings? What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings, and do these leadership characteristics align with shared leadership? In the next chapter, the researcher introduces the liturgy, laity, and leadership of house churches by examining the existing body of literature on this topic.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of home gatherings. The literature review consists of an overview of shared leadership, the concept of shared leadership within house church dissertations, and scholarly publications concerning the liturgy, laity, and leadership of house churches before purpose-built structures. The presuppositions and interpretations therein are based on the works of Billings (2011), who formed the *Oikos, Domus,* and *Aula* (ODA) typology and wrote:

> [There are] multiple instances of different Christian leaders preaching and teaching in private homes [with] a more fluid dynamic at work, one of multiple points of connection between those gathered around a primary anchor such as the patron of a house church (or perhaps earlier an apostle or other charismatic leader, and later a bishop), gradually extending the reach of the group and its ethos and message through the agency of its ever-increasing contacts with other individuals and in other networks, with a symbiotic process of assimilation. (p. 548)

Overview of Shared Leadership

Shared leadership (SL) creates an inter-organizational network where joint volition and collective efficacy differentiate it from other post-bureaucratic theories (Endres & Weibler, 2020). The salient theme is that SL happens voluntarily based on participants' values (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). The phenomenon emerges in nonhierarchical domains and contexts with low-structured organizational settings, such as self-managing and self-governing teams (Nicolaides et al., 2014). The processual level of influence is no longer localized in any individual who happens to be in a superior position, but occurs when the cadre collectively leads one another, as envisioned by scholars who first theorized and tested the concept (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

In order to widen the debate within leadership studies, Pearce and Sims (2000) wanted to explore the possibilities of SL at the group level of analysis and suggest a movement towards a multi-level construct. Therefore, Pearce and Sims

(2002) posited three antecedents and groups outcomes of SL. One antecedent is group characteristics, including (a) ability, (b) personality, (c) proximity, (d) maturity, (e) familiarity, (f) diversity, (g) strategy, and (h) size. The next antecedent is task characteristics, including (a) interconnectivity, (b) creativity, (c) complexity, (d) criticality, and (e) urgency. The final antecedent is environmental characteristics, which include (a) support, (b) reward, and (c) cultural systems. The three group outcomes are (a) group psyche, (b) group behavior, and (c) group effectiveness. Pearce and Conger (2003) defined SL as follows:

> A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence. The distinction between shared leadership and traditional models of leadership is that the influence process involves more than just downward influence on subordinates by an appointed or elected leader. Rather, leadership is broadly distributed among a set of individuals instead of centralized in the hands of a single individual who acts in the role of a superior. (p. 1)

For the next 20 years, Pearce and Colleagues (e.g., Pearce, Conger et al., 2008; Pearce, Manz et al., 2008) would continue to expand the theory studying SL and applying its concepts to improve citizenry behavior amongst teammates (Pearce & Giacalone, 2003) and corporate social responsibility (Pearce, & Manz, 2011). Perhaps the most significant contribution SL has made within the literature is the demythologization of the single-heroic leader. For example, a "new view of leadership posits that all organizational members are capable of leading themselves…and it is fundamental to the distribution and sharing of leadership throughout a work system" (Pearce & Manz, 2005, p. 133). Corporate history is replete with examples of toxic power figures, and SL could act as a buffer to decentralize their influence and aid against future corruption (Pearce, Conger et al., 2008).

In one of their most recent publications, Pearce et al. (2014) wrote, "Leadership does not derive solely from position, authority, or hierarchy. Instead, leadership is something anyone can be executed by anyone who has the best knowledge or skill to undertake the leadership necessary in any given situation" (p. xi). The new alternative to augment the pitfalls of abusive power is SL manifesting itself in four ways. They are: (a) rotating SL involving a conscious strategy to have different people assuming the role of leader at differing times; (b) integrated SL where roles and functions shift fluidly and move rapidly back and forth; (c) distributed SL involving teams empowering more groups into a broader reach of the organization; and (d) comprehensive SL that infuse these principles throughout every level of the organizational system (Pearce et al., 2014). In the remainder of this section, the researcher examines how other scholars have contributed to studies on SL.

Sally (2002) observed that SL has existed since ancient times, stating that "Republican Rome had a successful system of co-leadership that lasted for over 4 centuries. This structure of co-leadership was so effective that it extended from the lower levels of the Roman magistrate to the very top position, that of counsel" (p. 84). Terms associated with SL include collective leadership, distributed leadership, and team leadership and are sometimes used interchangeably (Avolio et al., 2009). The main difference between SL and collective leadership is that collective leadership takes on a contextual approach to distributing leadership based on the situation or the problem (Zhu et al., 2018). Team leadership can be seen as one form of team leadership but does not require decentralized distribution of leadership influence that encompasses both horizontal and vertical leadership influence (Day, 2014). Finally, participative leadership is different from SL because team members have authority over their tasks, but do not have the authority to influence other team members (Pearce & Herbik, 2004). Generally, the term distributed leadership is synonymous with SL.

 After considering the benefits of SL, Rice (2006) concluded that the theory applies to leaders in all types of organizations, from corporations, education, healthcare, and nonprofits, including churches. Nevertheless, the research articles

studying SL within nonprofit organizations are still relatively scarce (Pearce et al., 2004; Routhieaux, 2015). Some of the benefits on the individual level include overall job performance (Daspit et al., 2014), enhanced decision-making (Petrovia & Hristov, 2016), and retention (Kleinman, 2004). Researchers have supported that an individual's problem-solving, information processing, and decision-making capacity are greatly enhanced when shared between team members (Pearce, 2004).

That is why on the team level, some benefits include increased problem-solving capabilities through knowledge and information sharing (Clarke, 2012), creativity and innovation (Pearce, 2007), cohesion and proactivity (Mathieu et al., 2015), greater consensus through cooperative conflict management (Hu et al., 2017) and overall job satisfaction (Hansen & Høst, 2012). Wang et al. (2014) proposed that as work tasks become more complex, a higher degree of SL will necessitate team effectiveness. One study found that personality composition (according to the Big Five Personality Types, specifically agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability) is a strong moderator between SL and the team's performance (Martin et al., 2018). The teams could be manufacturing (Rolfsen et al., 2013), sales (Mehra et al., 2006), culturally diverse (Zhou et al., 2017), or even be geographically dispersed (Muethel et al., 2012). Nevertheless, numerous empirical studies suggested that SL has the most significant positive effect on the group level, including their attitude, behavior, cognition, and performance (Choi et al., 2017).

All of the factors ultimately benefit the organization by creating healthy holarchies (Robertson, 2015), adaptable strategies (Mihalache et al., 2014), and sustained growth (Pearce et al., 2013). Factors such as incentives and support systems also facilitate the effectiveness of SL (Serban & Roberts, 2016), while contextual factors such as cultural norms, flatter organizational design, and a commitment to empowerment result in the emergence of SL (Jain & Jeppesen, 2014). Continually, SL teams within organizations outperform traditional and vertical leadership structures, and it is the dawning of a new genre where leadership is a social process of influence that can be played by all, rather than a specific role that can be filled by only a select few (Pearce & Wassenaar, 2015).

The importance of SL is not the formal position or role of individuals, but their participative perspective and unique knowledge base each individual brings to ever-changing situations as the group maintains common beliefs, commitments, and values (Goksoy, 2016). Rather than an orchestra led by one conductor, Schlechty (2005) compared SL to a jazz ensemble following the rhythm of the moment. Mutual influence operating on multiple levels makes SL an intriguing phenomenon to study as corporate cultures and communities redefine and *transclude* (transcend and include) previous social boundaries as they move from individual to collectivist approaches (McGuire & Palus, 2008).

In the following section, the researcher outlines how previous scholars have chosen to measure SL for statistical analysis. The two earliest questionnaires developed to measure SL are those by Pearce and Sims (2002) and Avolio et al. (2003). Pearce and Sims (2002) based the first questionnaire on previous leadership behaviors distinguishing between aversive, directive, transactional, transformational, and empowering approaches and later revising the 70-item scale to four dimensions of SL, which are: (a) directive, (b) transactional, (c) transformational, and (d) empowering leadership (Ensley et al., 2006). Researchers asked participants within the team to rate each kind of leadership behavior twice (Gockel & Werth, 2010). First, subjects rated how true it was for their team leader. Then they rated how true it was for their fellow team members to assess SL.

Avolio et al. (2003) based the second approach on the 23-item Team Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The survey measures five different leader behaviors: (a) inspiring leadership, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) individualized consideration, (d) active management by exception, and (e) passive or avoidant leadership. Researchers average the team's responses to analyze data on the group level (Gockel & Werth, 2010). Studies divided from this point where some scholars decided to continue aggregating results while others focused on social network analysis (Wu & Cormican, 2016).

For example, a scale piloted by Carson et al. (2007) asked participants to indicate the degree to which the team has relied on each of their other teammates for leadership (on a scale of one being not at all to five being to a very great

extent). A sample question is: "To what degree does your team rely on Team Member A, B, C, D, (so on) for leadership?" The relationship density prompted researchers to create sociograms where two-headed arrows imply that multiple team members perceive others in the group as leaders (Wu & Cormican, 2016).

Using social network density to explicitly measure the extent to which team members are perceived to be involved, SL Wang et al. (2014) discovered a collective identity formed among group members that strengthened engagement, commitment, and enhanced team effectiveness. D'Innocenzo et al. (2014) emphasized the value of employing social network density to measure SL. After conducting a meta-analysis of more than 3,000 studies, these authors distilled SL down to five themes: (a) locus of leadership whereby the source of the leadership is internal versus external; (b) formality of leadership is when leaders are formally or informally selected from within the group; (c) equal and nonequal distributions meaning that designated leaders would shift and evolve over the life of a project; (d) dynamic quality of leadership referring to multiple leaders within a setting leading at the same time or various points; and (e) multiple roles and functions acknowledges that leaders are full participants within the group and can take directives from others. Success in SL stems from members engaging in behaviors that reflect their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Drescher et al., 2014). Similarly, Zhu et al. (2018) identified three characteristics that define SL: (a) lateral and horizontal leadership influence; (b) the emergent team phenomenon; and (c) the mutual distribution of leadership influence. Researchers have emphasized the reciprocal reliance and mutual influence among team members as the differentiating factor of SL (Carson et al., 2007). Other proximal and distal modifiers include intrateam trust (Drescher et al., 2014), team integrity (Bligh et al., 2006), and interpersonal perceptions displayed among team members (DeRue et al., 2015) are positively related to the emergence of SL. Complex projects have higher success rates when team members engage in high levels of communication, collaboration, and cohesiveness, which are key components of SL (Yang et al., 2011).

Empirical evidence from three meta-analyses reiterated that SL plays a decisive role in teamwork and effectiveness (Lorinkova & Bartol, 2021). Previous scholars have conceptualized SL as a one-time static antecedent without studying a team's dynamic interplay and changes over time. After conducting three longitudinal studies of 148 teams comprised of three to six members and comparing the results, Lorinkova and Bartol (2021) discovered that SL changes over time. The results demonstrated that SL is highest at the early phase of team development, peaks at the midpoint, and sharply decreases over time. "The results also showed that team size, social support, and team members' familiarity…acted as boundary conditions to influence the pattern of shared leadership development" (Lorinkova & Bartol, 2021, p. 99). The smaller the team (averaging around four members) and the more team members cared for and encouraged one another (creating social support), the longer SL lasted over time. Similarly, team members who did not have to orient themselves with others (familiarity) could immediately begin working on the task, thereby arriving at SL faster than others who first had to build interpersonal relationships within the group.

Finally, after a metanalysis of the current literature, Wu et al. (2020) concluded that SL's two most significant antecedents are team environment and team characteristics. Team environment includes: (a) shared purpose, (b) social support, and (c) voice. While team characteristics consist of: (a) heterogeneity, (b) maturity, and (c) size. The evidence empirically supports substantive moderators of intragroup trust and team interdependence. The positive consequences are (a) group behavior processes, (b) attitudinal outcomes, (c) team cognition, and (d) team performance. Wu et al. (2020) noted that by "Sharing leadership roles within teams, members…influence one another and are influenced by one another….We, therefore, suggest that…organizations [ensure] group members have an adequate opportunity to interact positively, build trust, and work toward common objectives" (pp. 60–61). Lastly, Mendez and Busenbark (2015) could not find a statistically significant effect that gender influenced SL. At the same time, Serban and Roberts (2016) suggested more quantitative and qualitative research to "offer a stronger and more holistic understanding of shared leadership" (p. 197).

Ultimately, SL addresses two of the three powerful C's of complexity, change, and competition within organizational studies (Pearce et al., 2014). Moreover, house church leaders face two concurrent problems: the external threat of the rapidly evolving religious landscape in the United States (change) and internally leading within a more informal setting while balancing the appropriate amount of power and control (complexity). It is essential, therefore, to review the literature of other dissertations on organizational leadership and house churches, thus fulfilling the purpose of this dissertation by examining house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of gatherings.

Shared Leadership Within House Church Studies

The following chronology of doctoral dissertations also studied SL *in situ* of house church settings. Wiseman (2006) examined spatial relations and their effects upon leaders in four postmodern and emergent church settings by creating a questionnaire sent to one hundred congregations with a 45% response rate. House churches represented a diffused power structure and interconnected organizational network where deep personal relationships replaced pulpit-centered and programmatic ministries. The house church created a space conducive to collaboration between congregants when they gathered.

For instance, the pulpit was removed and replaced with a central table containing the Eucharist (Wiseman, 2006). The house churches also placed several other tables around the room containing journaling materials, a bowl of water and a towel (borrowed from the Eastern Orthodox traditions), and other materials participants could interact with to directly influence the church service. One of the primary ways this happened was by modifying the sermon and song selection. House church pastors have a "dialogical understanding and practice of preaching [and the space reflects] a more egalitarian and community in conversation feel" (Wiseman, 2006, p. 9). Similarly, over one third of the music sung within the gathering comes from members within the house church sharing songs that they feel led to sing. "This intentional community building was essential for them as they made friendships, formed relationships, and created models of collaborative

leadership that continue to affect them and the ministry of their congregation today" (Wiseman, 2006, p. 133).

Hobart (2009) devised a mixed-methods study to explore four house church networks' post-bureaucratic structure in America. Members of two churches completed a questionnaire with 47 items on a Likert Scale, while the other two groups participated in a structured interview consisting of 10 questions. Hobart (2009) noticed a shift in thinking with many pastors challenging the bigger is better model of the megachurch into radically decentralized and dedifferentiated forms of ministry. Dedifferentiation occurs when someone brings together disparate parts once divided into a unified whole. Two of the 10 interview questions specifically dealt with SL asking, "Why does this church have the shared-leadership value? What does this mean beyond the pastors? How are tasks divided in a shared-leadership pastoral arrangement?" (Hobart, 2009, p. 144).

This author found that SL alleviated many pressures on a solo pastor within an organization (Hobart, 2009). In addition, by adopting a SL model, five characteristics formed between the four house churches based on post-bureaucratic theories of being open and interdependent: (a) significant increase in leadership for men and women who were not ordained and would not typically be considered for leadership responsibilities; (b) an openness to organizational change even though it may not have happened as rapidly as some parishioners would have liked; (c) the congregation as a whole had little desire for traditional bureaucratic structures; (d) there was a lack of centralized control with more peer accountability and shared norms; and (e) lay leaders were empowered to lead house churches. "Essentially, the home church-based congregations are groups or clusters of home churches that meet together regularly for shared worship and a wider sense of community" (Hobart, 2009, p. 13).

Turner (2011) studied the early church and concluded that it existed in two forms, "the house church and the whole church at any given location" (p. 38). After creating a qualitative study examining the leadership development processes in four North American house churches, a synthesis of the results revealed that charisma and formal education were overrated attributes in house church leaders'

development. Additionally, maintaining intentional relationships was the most pronounced variable across each house church, outscoring the other factors by four times as much. Moreover, the discipleship process was the key to leadership development within house churches (Turner, 2011).

None of the house churches relied on a formal curriculum in their leadership development, partly because of the asymmetries between traditional ecclesiastical structures and the burgeoning house church movement (Turner, 2011). Everyone in the processual leadership development model of house churches needed a participatory mindset with a significant level of transparency in sharing life where leaders could develop within a close-knit associative network. A small plurality of leaders could develop another group of leaders (Turner, 2011).

Veliquette (2013) studied SL and member engagement in three house churches from the Midwest in a naturalistic inquiry relying upon phenomenological and ethnographical methodologies (qualitative). This scholar argued that the trajectory of church history moved towards hierarchization and structuration within church polity. Conversely, house churches resemble early church models heavily reliant upon self-governing teams and laterally integrated clusters within a network. The sample purposefully included house church gatherings where every member could suggest activities within the liturgy, such as sharing a word, prayer, or song. "A central concept to the idea of shared leadership in the house churches studied was the belief that each person present had something valuable to contribute" (Veliquette, 2013, p. 179).

Participants strongly vocalized their discontent with the purpose-built model and disillusionment with a singular pastor in four areas (Veliquette, 2013). They were (a) the role and responsibilities of a pastor; (b) the informal nature of leading from someone's spiritual gifting rather than formal position; (c) the danger of having a solo leader; and (d) the problems with paying a pastor. The results indicated that the cultural artifacts of primarily meeting in a home provided familial flexibility where there was a sense of freedom that formed an intimate fellowship with one another and from house to house. "The culture of house churches compelled a high level of engagement that extended beyond participation in a

gathering once a week….referring to it as a lifestyle rather than an isolated weekly event" (Veliquette, 2013, p. 156). The lifestyle manifested itself into SL, where member engagement meant that each individual in the group (acting as co-teachers of that group) made the initiative to meet the needs of others within a collaborative decision-making process.

Andreas (2014) developed a quantitative instrument to survey Anglican house church leaders while critiquing the anti-clerical and anti-institutional sentiments pervading the literature. To Andreas's surprise, the results indicated that 100% of the respondents were bi-vocational and leading house churches on their initiative instead of being assigned to the role by their bishop. Only 34% had ordained officiants within their gatherings, which Andreas said presented a problem for the liturgical and sacramental nature of orthodox Anglicanism. Moreover, 100% of the respondents indicated that they did not follow any formal house church guidelines.

Nevertheless, Andreas (2014) acknowledged that the interconnected network of the early church movement where congregants frequently circulated encyclicals and shared fellowship is more in line with SL; however, "there is no such thing as informal worship" (Andreas, 2014, p. 173). One of the aims of this doctoral dissertation was to distinguish between sacerdotal house churches (those led by an ordained officiant) and nonsacramental ones led by a layperson. The arguments presented throughout the paper show that Andreas preferred an ordained officiant, especially when administering the Eucharist. Andreas (2014) also wrote in the introduction, "May every bishop, priest, and deacon in our great Anglican Patrimony come to discover how worship in a living room can be as authentic and numinous as it is in a cathedral" (p. ix).

Boyd (2015) conducted multiple qualitative interviews and mini-case studies to examine church planters' organizational change strategies. The catalyst of change for house church leaders is the external environment creating an adaptive approach with natural social networks, decentralized decision-making, and the experience of creating a strong culture. House churches "provide an opportunity for leadership to be developed, not based on traditional criteria such as seniority, age,

or experience. Any person can lead others or a group" (Boyd, 2015, p. 120). The strategic sharing of resources has resulted in healthy collaboration and multiplication across groups furthering church planting efforts as long as leaders remain committed to the vision and mission of a healthy community.

In reviewing the literature, it is noteworthy to mention other significant studies on SL in the context of churches, even though the setting was not a particular house church as defined in this dissertation. From a theological viewpoint, Floyd (2020) argued that the *perichoresis* of the Godhead (the relationship between each person of the Trinity) eternally exists in a SL structure, extending into an interconnected relationship with humanity (also created in pairs). They were reiterating the arguments made by Ostermann (2014), where the Trinity and the *munus triplex* (the threefold office of the Christ) "is indeed wise and faithful for shared pastoral leadership in the local church to follow" (p. 51). Having this triperspectival understanding contributes to developing high-capacity leaders within the church (Floyd, 2020). Ellis (2020) noted little research into what tasks were shared, who was sharing them, and how co-pastoring teams within Nazarene and Wesleyan traditions worked together. While many co-pastors in the study had difficulty articulating how the dynamics worked among skeptics, they found six benefits of the praxis of SL. They were: (a) relationality, which assumes a growth-in-connection with God and others; (b) presence that moves beyond ecclesiocentric and institutional models that inhibit community; (c) equality that exhibits a fluidity of expertise as each person brings something valuable to the table; (d) nondomination that actively seeks to remove coercion by clergy while implementing appropriate checks-and-balances; (e) unity and collective agency, where everyone moves towards shared goals; (f) and difference, where mutual influence is respected and diversity protected. In another study focusing on the Wesleyan tradition, McPhail (2019) found that SL helps develop lay leadership through six variables: (a) exposure, (b) prayer, (c) observation, (d) hands-on experiences, (e) conversations, and (f) empowerment to alleviate the majority of work performed by a solo pastor by creating micro-communities of care within the congregation.

Similarly, Johns (2015) discovered that SL could prevent burnout among the lone pastor, add accountability, counter moral failures, as well as equip the rest of the congregants to use their spiritual gifts "in the collective work of reaching people beyond the church doors in the midst of a changing world" (p. 3). In trying to counteract the changing religious landscape, Brown (2014) claimed that SL is a viable solution to managing complexity, as it is rare that one person can possess all of the required knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to adapt to the environment. In the study, SL created an opportunity for diverse versatility in shepherding and serving the spiritual needs of others. "If leadership within the church is unable to adjust and adapt [to a SL model], there will be little chance that the church will be successful" (Atherton, 2014, p. 72). While that may appear to be a dire claim, Atherton (2014) argued that the Apostle Paul was a proponent and practitioner of SL, resulting in successful church plants amid challenging cultural settings. In a comprehensive study on the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Vester (2014) discovered that there is a form of vertical and hierarchical leadership within the early church, but the bishop acted as a steward in a "follow we" (p. 258) format with five patterns of SL. They were: (a) intersecting points of influence; (b) interconnectedness; (c) collective character; (d) collective trajectory and practices; and (e) multidirectional influence. It is important to note that individual stewards exerted authority, but were also in concord within the community serving alongside a plurality of presbyters, deacons, and laypersons. According to Swanner (2014), the construct of SL repeatedly represents "two-getherness" (p. 60) and should reflect teams of at least two people within every ministerial department of the church. Perhaps the greatest example of this two-by-two SL pattern is found within marriage (Daniels, 2014). Clergy couples are evident in the founding and formation of the early church as God's family spread across the known world from house to house, workplace, or other tenement settings.

The concept of SL has gained significant momentum since Pearce and Conger (2003) published their seminal work (Wu et al., 2020). Leadership is regarded as a processual social influence serially emerging over the lifetime of a team (Carson et al., 2007). Members of a group collectively participate in the

decision-making process, offer guidance to achieve group goals, collectively exert leadership influence, thereby fulfilling requirements traditionally reserved for a hierarchical leader (Shane & Fields, 2007). There is a positive relationship between SL and team outcomes (Chiu et al., 2016). For SL to occur, trust becomes one facet of social functioning essential for an effective team (Fausing et al., 2015). Team-mindedness built upon trust enables collaboration and goal attainment, especially within a ministry context (Johns, 2016).

Within the historical background of the church Robinson (2018) argued that Jesus, the Apostles, and Paul exemplified SL. Jesus specifically chose others to participate in preaching, teaching, baptizing, and ministering by joining them in pairs and empowering them to fulfill collective objectives. Acts 6 records a large group of priests becoming disciples, and this event details their willingness to set aside their official status to serve alongside new believers as coequals. The Apostle Paul stressed that "if all believers are equal in Christ, then there is no need for consolidation of power and authority… this distribution of leadership reflects the fact that all believers are endowed with gifts for use in ministry for the common good" (Robinson, 2018, p. 8).

Noticeably absent from all of these studies is the tripartite typology of ODA. Therefore, studying ODA house churches addresses a gap in the literature. The current study resulted in new knowledge in SL as it relates to adapting to challenges within the context of their homes. The purpose of this study was to examine house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of home gatherings. Therefore, it was necessary to review the literature concerning the liturgy, laity, and leadership of the three typologies of house churches (ODA) to begin the groundwork for conducting a multisite case study.

Liturgy, Laity, and Leadership of House Churches

Billings (2011) identified the three variations of house church formats. The first is *Oikos ecclesia*, where the congregants assemble in the home for a complete meal, including the Eucharist. The second is *Domus ecclesiae*, where the curate renovates and dedicates rooms in their homes for Christian usage. The third is *Aula ecclesiae*, where rented facilities house larger gatherings, the liturgy becomes more

formalized, and the Eucharist is no longer a full meal. Previous researchers have defined house churches one-dimensionally in that the ritualized weekly gathering primarily took place in a house and not in a purpose-built church building. The spectrum of ODA, however, is a house church framework currently unexplored in the leadership literature, deserving a closer examination of each one.

Oikos Ecclesiae

Scholars studying the architectural, apocryphal, canonical, epigraphical, historical, and sociological aspects of house church Christianity have painted an exciting picture of the early Jesus movement before Christendom established purpose-built churches (McGowan, 2014). The first churches met in homes patterned after the bipartite banqueting customs of Greco-Roman culture consisting of supper and symposiums (Alikin, 2010). These gatherings closely resembled the mystery cults, professional guilds, and civic associations (Balch & Weissenrieder, 2012; Neilsen, 2014), as opposed to the Jewish synagogue or Essenic communities at that time (Joseph, 2018).

First, the primitive church in Jerusalem did not require a *minyan* (quorum of 10 men) to convene a gathering, as custom in the Jewish synagogues (Korner, 2017). Second, Jewish-Christians not only continued celebrating the Sabbath at their local synagogue, but quickly began gathering on the first day of the week in the evening for an agape love feast (Lazar, 2021; Streett, 2013). Third, Christ-believers in the synagogues pushed the boundaries of Jewish norms with their rite of baptism for men and women and the sacred ritual of the Eucharist (Schnelle, 2020). Finally, the ex-communication and expurgation of this new sect from the synagogue fulfilled Jesus' words and prompted followers of the Way to forge their own identity (Barentsen, 2015).

House church meetings in the first century consisted of a meal in the dining room, where celebrants reclined around a triclinium designed to encourage discussion and reinforce group solidarity (Bowes, 2015). The leaders could be male or female, and were most likely the person who hosted the group in their house, deferring only when an itinerant Apostle was present (Madigan & Osiek, 2021; Osiek & Macdonald, 2006). One can overlook how important Mary (the mother of

Jesus) was in shaping the primitive house church (Dzubinski & Stasson, 2021). Not only was she present in the Pentecostal accounts, but her son (James) and nephew (Simeon Bar Cleopas) became instrumental leaders in the house churches in Jerusalem after Peter's departure (Cohick, 2009).

The Pentecostal account in Acts details the prelacy oscillating between a plurality of presbyters and congregational polity without one de-facto leader of that local congregation (Linton, 2005). Additionally, those baptized in the Holy Spirit returned from their pilgrimage to Jerusalem to lead house churches (e.g., Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Rome, to name a few) after the Pentecostal accounts (Green, 2010). Most of the Twelve Apostles left their prominent place in the primitive church they founded to plant or pour into other house churches, utilizing the thick network already established (Shelton, 2018)—only to reconvene at the Jerusalem Council while also surrounding the deathbed of Mary before John left for Ephesus (Pixner, 2010). An itinerant Apostle would lodge in a home and become the resident teacher for a short time before moving someplace else (Cloud, 2012). The itinerant-resident allowed SL to occur through local gatherings of hosts who opened their homes during the meetings by offering hospitality to traveling guests (Barrett, 2021).

The host opened the meal with an extemporaneous prayer explaining that the bread represented the body of Jesus Christ (Lee, 2021). After breaking bread, all who were in attendance ate in solidarity, unity, and equality, regardless of their social standing at the time (Sowers, 2011). The host served the meal proper, and as the informal conversation lent itself to the right opportunity, the host would offer intermittent prayers for others during the evening (Gehring, 2004). Wine mixed with water accompanied the entirety of the meal, but the host concluded the first half of the evening by praying over the cup as it now represented the blood of Jesus Christ, resulting in everyone partaking in the libation (Lazar, 2021; Streett, 2013). For first-century Christians, this meal was not just any meal but a special assembly consuming the Lord's Supper (Trebilco, 2011). The meal was a festive celebration of the resurrected Lord and grateful expectation of the eschaton (Wright & Bird, 2019). The second part of the house church gathering consisted of a convivial and

confraternal gathering known as a symposium (Alikin, 2010). Kateusz (2019) noted that

> The leadership patterns of these groups were relatively informal, featuring a bevy of symposiarchs (presidents) who alternated every meeting….Philo's description of an early first-century Judean meal ritual…is the most detailed first-century liturgy that has survived [describing] males and females [who viewed] themselves not only as attendants or suppliants but as priests in this [new] Temple. (p. 134)

The president became a kind of toastmaster, facilitating each member to share a song, a speech, or a special reading from a sacred text (Alikin, 2010). Speeches included spontaneous prophesying, which, unlike preaching, does not exposit a scriptural text (Westerholm, 2014). Nevertheless, as texts became available and circulated between the disparate house church networks, communal reading activities became the norm (Wright, 2017). Like other social networks at the time, participants would contribute to a collective fund and distribute the gifts to members affiliated with the group or take leftovers from the meal back to those not in attendance (Alikin, 2010). The readings and recitations only reinforced the reciprocity shared among members over a loving feast and festive gathering each week (Branick, 2012).

The nonhierarchical, open, participatory, and informal nature of the first house churches made it difficult for someone like Saul of Tarsus to try and destroy its rapid multiplication (Wood, 2014). The book of Acts portrays Saul going from house to house, arresting men and women co-leading this autocephalous movement (Thompson, 2014). After Saul's conversion and subsequent name change, the Apostle Paul would plant and pour into house churches giving some order without prescribing a fixed liturgy while primarily encouraging the banqueting customs of the culture (Hanges, 2017). One cannot underestimate the contribution of the Pauline corpus for understanding ecclesiology at that time (Gupta, 2010). The Apostle Paul defined leadership by social function, not by formal position, and the best way to understand this idea is to read the Epistles in the order they were written to trace this line of thought (DeSagun, 2014).

One reason is that many conservative scholars dispute the later Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) as having genuine Pauline authorship (Banks, 2020). The Pastoral Epistles (while canonical) began dividing eldership between genders, something other sources from that same period did not do (Walsh, 2019). Additionally, the organizational arrangements, pastoral care, and discipline within those letters expanded upon the role of a bishop, placing one person above the collective community serving as their overseer (Miller, 2019). Many scholars have concurred that "First and Second Thessalonians may be the earliest of Paul's extant letters (Keener, 2014, p. 581). Carson (2005) argued that there is important evidence that "Paul does not think of his leadership role at Thessalonica as somehow setting him apart from, or indeed above, his congregation. In fact, we see Paul acknowledging the need for mutuality between leader and congregation" (para. 32). Koester (2000), a leading Harvard theologian, would concur that "authorities were not fixed in a hierarchical structure. First Thess. 5:12–22 clearly shows that Paul has great confidence that the spirit will effect democratic teamwork which requires both mutual respect and recognition" (p. 114).

Therefore, the order for Pauline correspondence used for this dissertation is 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans, followed by the Prison Epistles. Banks (2020) noted that one of the most striking features of the early Pauline corpus is the absence of the term *hiereus* (priest), whereby the responsibility lies with every member of the body to play their particular part in leadership. "Paul's approach was revolutionary in the ancient world. [The church] transcended current social, ethnic, and religious ties, making them the most inclusive and innovative communities in the first century (Banks, 2020, p. 101). Soon, this innovative and integrated network (a body) sharing leadership responsibility under the headship of Jesus Christ would create more converts than the typical dining room could contain. Therefore, Christians began renovating their personal spaces into sacred spaces to house this growing movement (Cianca, 2018).

Domus Ecclesiae

In the second century, Ante-Pacem Christians (before the Peace of Constantine) turned their houses into churches (Sessa, 2009). The oldest and most

famous is at Dura-Europos in Syria, where parishioners removed walls to accommodate more guests in an assembly hall, a baptistry was added and set apart from other rooms, paintings depicting women at the well, along with graffiti under a doorjamb that stated, "One God in heaven" (Peppard, 2016, p. 207). It is important to note that the renovated house at Dura-Europos was no longer inhabited by the congregants, but used primarily for ritual gatherings (Cianca, 2018).

Another lesser-known house church is the villa at Lullingstone in Roman Britain near Kent (Cianca, 2018). The villa underwent many structural changes, including adding a chapel built for Christian use. Many of the rooms still contained a *lararium* (shrines dedicated to deities other than the household gods), shedding light on Christian-pagan coexistence emplaced in sacred space. Unlike Durene Christians, residents at the villa at Lullingstone continuously inhabited the space. Many other Christians met in smaller spaces above shops, above baths, upper rooms, or apartments, even adjacent to their commercial space (Adams, 2016).

Apart from renovating spaces to accommodate converts, the liturgy and leadership within house churches began changing. The Sunday evening meal expanded into morning gatherings (Alikin, 2010). Baptism became an initiatory rite of entry in the community itself (Jenson, 2011). Once a catechumen was submerged or sprinkled, they were considered communicants and could partake of the Eucharist (Peppard, 2016). The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist needed to occur under a bishop's supervision or with their permission (Kruger, 2018). It is important to note that fellow presbyters elected their bishop serving alongside local house church leaders within a limited jurisdiction (Karras, 2007). Nevertheless, the presidency of the gatherings began to consolidate into ruling offices and officers (bishops, presbyters, and deacons), ousting control away from the residential homeowner, women patrons, or itinerant apostles (Hellerman, 2013).

Aula Ecclesiae

By the early third century, a massive shift in the leadership and liturgy of the church began to occur as congregants gathered in large assembly halls before Constantine officially commissioned purpose-built structures (Snyder, 2003; White,

1990). Separate rooms divided clergy and laity, seating was assigned to specific members according to rank and standing in specific rows, and a lectern replaced the communal table. The Eucharist was no longer a shared meal, but pieces of bread and wine to accommodate more people administered during each service (Cianca, 2018). The officiant could only give the readings and recitations as the *Didascalia* (a treatise on church order much like the Didache 1 century before) attested to a fixed liturgy consisting of an: (a) opening prayer, (b) reading of scripture; (c) sermon, (d) eucharistic prayer, (e) the Eucharist, and (f) concluded by singing and prayer (Alikin, 2010). Prayers and songs became rote and routinized by a calendar, no longer allowing for spontaneous or charismatic utterances (Ledbetter et al., 2016).

The most mysterious development is the transformation of multiple local bishops to a mono-episcopacy that possessed monarchial authority over multiple jurisdictions (Holiday, 2010; Schöllgen, 2006). Christianity did not develop in a vacuum, but was based upon Greco-Roman banqueting customs, while also sharing many of the cultural underpinnings of that society (Simson, 2015). As Strand (2016) noted,

> The very Roman system of government at the time of the rise of Christianity, though it is referred to as Empire, was a form in which republican institutions were held in highest esteem….A basic feature of this Roman system was the collegiality of its magistracies, the top executive office, for example, being shared by two consuls….But such collegiality must eventually have found itself unequal to the strains put upon it, just as had been the case in the Roman government…giving ground to a new sort of political image based on a supreme ruler whose status had been achieved by gradual encroachment on the old republican institutions. (pp. 82–84)

Summary

The literature review warrants some reflection related to the study of SL within house church settings. First, any organization looking to distribute leadership should carefully consider the *propinquity effect* and how physical space profoundly influences behavior (Grenny et al., 2013; Whittington et al., 2009). The

propinquity effect is the spatial-temporal geography of everything from the design of a workplace, task contact points, and the (perceived) span of a supervisor and supervisee interacting within a dyad (Bligh & Riggio, 2013). Hall (1966) was the first to identify *sociofugal spaces*, those created to inhibit social interactions in linear forward-facing rows and *sociopetal spaces,* those created to increase social interaction like circular seating. The seating of house churches has evolved from reclining around dining tables to sitting in rows facing one person performing the service (Økland, 2021). One needs to closely examine the social agglomeration and spatial relations inherent in any structure that forge democratic or despotic leadership tendencies (Luff, 2020; Parés et al., 2017).

Secondly, in reviewing the literature, it is accurate that "team members cannot sustain the sharing of leadership over a long period of time because of a likely emergence of power struggles and process conflict" (Nicolaides et al., 2014, p. 13). This phenomenon is another paradox of leadership studies, whereby follower-trust develops over time and superiors use that same trust to supplant and subvert healthy antecedents and outcomes, resulting in devastating consequences (Bligh, 2017; Kramer, 2011). That is why the central questions of this dissertation asked: What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders? How do house church leaders address these challenges? What are follower perceptions of church leaders within the three typologies of gatherings?

Finally, scholars need to reexamine the original ODA typology to better understand a healthier model of pastoral leadership within team-oriented communities (Effa, 2015; Esler, 2013; Filson, 1939). That is why the final research question was: What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings, and do these leadership characteristics align with SL? Shared leadership emerged as the driving capacity within a collaborative context that fosters empowerment, group solidarity, and overall performance (Houghton et al., 2014). The best practices in a ministry context are when "church leaders are implementing a biblical model of shared leadership and utilizing the gifts and resources of the body to reach, evangelize, and simply be the church God has called her to be" (Johns, 2016, pp. 46–47). In the following chapter, the researcher discusses the

methodology that guided the current exploration of house church leaders *in situ*, creating an eclectic ecclesia that is creative, communicative, and collaborative in meeting the needs of each member as leadership roles revolve and love is reciprocated towards one another.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter is a description of the methodology of this exploratory multisite case study, including the underlying conceptual framework and the data collection protocols. From the last chapter, it is apparent that the spectrum of *Oikos, Domus,* and *Aula* (ODA) is a house church framework that is underexplored in the leadership literature (Billings, 2011). By addressing a gap in the literature, the research findings may contribute new knowledge to the field (Simons, 2014). Specifically, research is needed within shared leadership and co-pastoring contexts to find the proper balance between harmony and hierarchy and being in charge without being in total control (Smietana, 2021). To accomplish this task, it is necessary to study the processual influence of house church leaders and a few members of their congregation from each ODA site. Therefore, the methodology chapter contains a justification for the research design and its specific parameters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Purpose of the Study With Research Question

Exploratory qualitative research is standard in the social sciences when examining different organizational leaders (Saunders et al., 2012). Qualitative researchers focus on the how and the why of an issue (Adams et al., 2007). Although exploratory research has a broad range, it involves putting the researcher into the field to gain perspective (Stebbins, 2001). From this emic perspective, the researcher has direct involvement, interaction, and collaboration with participants to unearth polyvocal insights (Terrell, 2016). Collecting detailed accounts allows multiple angles to view a particular experience (Camic et al., 2003). Qualitative data are also multiperspectival and collected from interviews, observations, and artifact analysis, whether textual, visual, or another medium (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research is the recursive and reflexive process that inextricably links researcher and respondent together in relationality (Hibbert et al., 2010). From this framework, four analysis procedures emerge: (a) immersion into the data; (b) incubation and the illumination of the researcher; (c) explication and

thematization of codes; and (d) creative synthesis, as the interviewer is also the instrument and interpreter of the study (Patton, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings by having participants keep a diary, observing them leading *in situ*, and interviewing them afterward. Diaries, observations, and interviews are valid tools for studying leaders in their specific contexts (Jain, 2021) because researchers can seek empathetic understanding alongside their participants (Alvesson, 2003). The stories produced by the subjects can also lead to a greater conceptualization of the phenomenon (Sandberg, 2005). By exploring their stories, the researcher aimed to address five research questions:

1. What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders?
2. How do house church leaders address these challenges?
3. What are follower perceptions of church leadership within the three typologies of gatherings?
4. What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings?
5. Do these leadership characteristics align with shared leadership?

Research Orientation

Before addressing these research questions, it was important to articulate a conceptual framework underlying the entire scope of the dissertation. Klenke (2015) wrote that all researchers must acknowledge their biases and value judgments before leadership scholars implement significant contributions or changes to the organizations they examine. Articulating a conceptual framework is the foundation for qualitative researchers because it explains how one views reality, obtains knowledge, and decides on their methodology in an ethical manner (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The tripartite combination is referred to as the research tree, with the trunk's inner ring being ontology, the second ring being epistemology, and the third ring being the methodology (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). By delving deeper into the analogy, the tree roots are one's *Weltanschauung*, a German word

for the way one looks at the world or their worldview (Demeter, 2012). Ultimately, one's ontology, epistemology, and methodology shape their axiology; those values undergird the research design in everything from the psychological wellbeing and physical safety of the participants to the accuracy of the final publication (Klenke, 2015).

Ontology

The ontological researcher seeks to understand the meaning that participants have attached to various structures and symbols through a shared dialogue (Lincoln et al., 2018). A social constructionist ontology understands leadership research as processual, social, and contextually constructed within the organization where it is co-occurring on the micro, meso, and macro levels at all times (Griep & Hansen, 2020). While some social constructionists do not deny objective reality, they can set it aside to focus on studying the subjective meanings of their subjects (Schwarz & Williams, 2020). According to Crotty (1998), social constructionist ontologies share three assumptions. First, meaning is constructed by subjects as they engage with the world. Therefore, researchers ask open-ended questions so participants can candidly discuss their views; Second, people make sense of their worldview through specific lenses (e.g., social, historical, cultural). Therefore, researchers seek to understand the specific context of the participants by visiting them in that setting. Third, meaning arises in and out of interaction within a community. Therefore, the process of qualitative research is inductive, with interpretations and sensemaking happening simultaneously with researcher and respondent.

Epistemology

The emergence of postbureaucratic, boundaryless, and networked organizational structures requires an epistemic paradigm where knowledge is co-created between the researcher and researched (Klenke et al., 2016). The entitative distinction between what exists (ontology) and what one can know (epistemology) is intersubjective (Hosking, 2011). The diminution of the hard sciences reducing knowledge to quantifiable experiments neglects the gestalt of the human experience (French, 2016). Taking an existential approach, although a relatively new idea within leadership studies, allows for the researcher to explore the self (micro), the

social sphere (meso), and the strategic (macro) domain (Fusco et al., 2015). Existential epistemologists often choose stories as their primary mode of communication because the meaning-making process is through lived experience that is reflected upon to gain insight (Noddings, 2012).

A continued topic of debate among scholars is the hypothetico-deductive model used for testing research (McPhetres et al., 2021). The method dominating leadership research for the past 100 years is the self-administered survey interpreted by the researcher through quantitative statistical analysis (Avolio et al., 2009). Qualitative studies generally adhere to a critical or interpretivist framework (Moore et al., 2012). By choosing an interpretive framework and conducting the research in a specific context, the subjects in the study create their meaning alongside the researcher; this meaning cannot be generalized across other populations (Wiersma, 2000). One of the main criticisms of qualitative research from the objectivist, positivistic, and quantitative community is the lack of validity, reliability, and generalizability of the results (Klenke, 2014). Social scientists have found that the researchers could replicate only 39% of quantitative studies, and even those results produced a smaller effect size than the original (Nosek, 2015).

Moreover, every study presents unique situations that could influence the internal validity of the results (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Following Guba and Lincoln's (1989) five criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative studies, the current researcher sough to ensure the (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) confirmability, (d) transferability, and (e) authenticity of the data. Salkind (2010) suggested triangulating the data and cross-checking with the participants to verify the accuracy of their statements. To avoid quoting others solely in excerpts, DuBois et al. (2018) suggested that researchers upload the complete dataset into online repositories as long as sensitive information remains confidential.

One of the hallmarks of good qualitative studies is the infusion of first-order (informant-centric) examination from the participants of the study and second-order (theory-centric) analysis from the literature review (Gioia, 2021). Weaving theory, praxis, and poiesis together in the research project is also a testament to qualitative studies' unique contribution to the field of study (Leggo et al., 2011). Interpreting

personal experiences through a scholarly framework is a rigorous academic endeavor and a valid research tool if the method fits the purpose of the study (Ng & Carney, 2017). Moreover, Klenke et al. (2016) listed several benefits of qualitative research within leadership studies. These are as follows: (a) the benefit of providing extensive thick descriptions of a phenomenon; (b) the benefit of the researcher to gain up-close access to their participants, instead of having to rely on inferential and impersonal statistics; and (c) the benefit of having participants share their lived experience through their authentic voices. Therefore, the current researcher employed a multisite case study to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders.

Multisite Case Study

Case study research occurs in a real-life, contemporary context using multiple data collection tools with in-depth analysis (Simons, 2014). While there is some controversy concerning case studies being an umbrella term for all types of projects (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), scholars view case study research as a valid methodology, even though the case itself may be the "object of the study as well as a product of the inquiry" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Case studies can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive (Yin, 2018). They can also be intrinsic or instrumental (Stake, 2005).

The multisite case study in this dissertation was instrumental because the research built upon shared leadership theory. Additionally, this case study explored a phenomenon with clear limits or boundaries (Mills et al., 2010). The boundaries could be the research questions themselves, a limited time frame, or the physical locations of the study (Lapan et al., 2012). As introduced in Chapter 1, some of the study boundaries were: (a) studying only three house church sites; (b) the brevity of time spent at each site; (c) the lack of generalizability; and (d) regional, cultural, and international extrapolation. For this dissertation, the case study was bound to the three typologies of house churches. The ODA typology forms the multisite case study "usually designed for purposes of comparison and sometimes referred to as comparative case studies…multiple cases are considered to be examples of the same type of case sharing common characteristics" (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 247).

Smith (2018) outlined the most successful sources of data for qualitative case studies. These are (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observation, (e) participant observation, and (f) physical artifacts. Whatever the form the data takes, case studies often offer scholars thick descriptions (Hyett et al., 2014), an in-depth understanding of the site under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and deeply rich and often diverse pools of contextual information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Gerring (2004) noted that case studies can be "small or large, qualitative or quantitative, experimental or observational, synchronic or diachronic" (p. 353).

There are also several advantages of choosing a multisite case study instead of just studying one site. Firstly, multisite case studies increase the chances of covering most of the phenomenon when the data is triangulated (Smith, 2018). Triangulation entails using multiple data points to broaden one's understanding of the subject matter (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). For instance, instead of cross-checking artifacts, participant observations, and interviews with each other, the data are also cross-examined across the other sites for comparison (Lapan et al., 2012). Secondly, findings from the multisite case studies increase the utility of informing actions and relevant application to other stakeholders (Rogers-Dillon, 2005), essentially producing within-site patterns and cross-site synthesis (Mills et al., 2010). Thirdly, multisite case studies have enhanced the "trustworthiness of findings to other contexts by comparing data across sites, while preserving the site-specific understandings foundational to the methodology" (Jenkins et al., 2018, p. 1969). Resultantly, multisite case studies provide deep insights across a bounded field of study, broadening the researcher's understanding.

There are limited research design procedures for multisite case studies within the literature (Sharp et al., 2012). There is also no standardized guideline for sampling the number of sites needed to ensure data saturation (Axinn & Pearce, 2006). Yin (2009) suggested purposive sampling instead of random sampling to select the best sites given the aim of the study. Nevertheless, multisite case studies are continually evolving, and scholars regularly remix their methodologies to create better results (Alpi & Evans, 2019). Scholars have repeatedly recommended a

rigorous research design (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). According to Yin (2018), a rigorous design includes: (a) the study's protocols; (b) the study's propositions; (c) the unit of analysis; (d) the linking of data; and (e) criteria for interpreting the findings. The following sections contain detailed information of the researcher's attempt to collect data at each ODA site consisting of diaries, observations, and individual and group interviews from the field of study that bind this multisite case study.

Participants and Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling to identify participants. Case studies often select participants using purposive sampling instead of random sampling (Moore et al., 2012), with the aim of achieving depth instead of breadth from information-rich sources (Palinkas et al., 2015). Those who met the study's criteria came from a pool of potential participants (Campbell et al., 2020). The pool came from a monthly Zoom meeting of house church leaders from various house church networks in the United States. Each month house church leaders join the session to discuss current issues and provide encouragement, prayer, and support to one another.

It is imperative to identify house church leaders that participate in the following activities: meeting for a meal that celebrated communion (*Oikos*), reconfigured the rooms in their homes to accommodate the assembly (*Domus*), and gathering in a place other than a purpose-built structure with no intention of ever purchasing a building (*Aula*). The ODA house church leaders serve as the participants for the diary prompts, observations, and individual unstructured interviews. The ODA house church leaders were tasked with identifying five to seven parishioners from their congregation to serve as the focus group participants.

Ethical Considerations

As qualitative studies involve human subjects who produce sensitive material for publication, the researchers must place participants' needs and their safety and security at the forefront (Austin, 2014). The results from the 1979 Belmont Report summarized three ethical principles to guide researchers (Lapan et

al., 2012). These principles are: (a) beneficence, which seeks to maximize positive outcomes while minimizing physical and psychological harm; (b) respect, which treats subjects with dignity, especially among disadvantaged people groups; and (c) justice, which ensures nonexploitive, carefully considered, and fairly administered procedures to all involved. Moreover, a governing body oversees most research and is committed to upholding the ethics of the individual and institution (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Institutional Review Board

The research project began by submitting a nine-page application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). According to Grady (2015), IRBs "provide a core protection for human research participants…from possible harm and exploitation… aiming to ensure that ethical principles are followed and that adequate and appropriate safeguards are in place to protect subjects' rights and welfare" (p. 1148). The application and approval process ensured that three safeguards would be in place. The first one is that participation was voluntary. Secondly, anonymity and confidentiality remained intact. Lastly, all data remained securely stored in a password-protected file apart from the published results, and the only document linking the actual identity of each participant was the printed Informed Consent Forms, which were kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Initial Contact

After the IRB accepted the proposal, potential prospects from the monthly Zoom meeting were emailed to explain the study's parameters (see Appendix B). The email also asked respondents to complete a brief questionnaire. This was done to ensure that (a) the potential prospects were over the age of 18 years, (b) they met in one of the three ODA typologies of house churches, (c) they were willing to find five to seven parishioners from their house church to participate in a focus group, and (d) that they were available between specific dates to complete the study.

Three house church leaders comprised the first half of the purposeful sample—one leader representing each of the three ODA typologies. Additionally, five to seven members attending one of the three ODA house church typologies also formed the latter part of the purposive sample size. From *Oikos,* it is one house

church leader and five to seven parishioners. From *Domus,* it is one house church leader and five to seven parishioners. From *Aula,* it is one house church leader and five to seven parishioners. All participants had to sign an Informed Consent Form.

Informed Consent

Researchers in the social sciences must consider the ethical challenges of their work because it penetrates the personal, professional, and social spaces of their subjects while bringing private matters to the forefront (Padgett, 2017). The most common ethical considerations revolve around harm, consent, privacy, and confidentiality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Human subjects must voluntarily consent to the study without coercion from the researcher or even the gatekeeper granting access to the site (Berg, 2004). In this case, the three house church leaders that were purposively selected also acted as the gatekeepers as they granted permission to access their premises. Not only did the house church leaders have to sign an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C), but the pastors distributed copies to congregants of their church, who also had to voluntarily agree to be a part of the study by signing the Informed Consent Form. The data collection phase began after confirming dates to visit each site to observe and interview the participants.

Data Collection

Hyett et al. (2014) noted six common data points for case studies. This dissertation utilized three: (a) physical artifact in the form of a diary, (b) participant observations, and (c) interviews. The rationale for these choices was informed by continual conversations with the dissertation committee in the iterative process of planning this study. Therefore, diary responses, observational field notes, individual interview transcripts, and focus group transcripts were the sources of qualitative data for this dissertation.

Diaries

Three ODA house church leaders kept a one-page diary entry for 10 days. The diary text was recorded and saved to a Google Doc seen only by that participant and the researcher. Diary studies allow researchers to capture life as it is lived (Bolger et al., 2003). Technological advancements have made diaries a welcome addition to qualitative studies because participants can record events,

thoughts, feelings, and behaviors using their own words at any time during the study's duration (Ohly et al., 2011). Moreover, participants using diaries provide anecdotal data revealing hidden accounts, often in very candid ways (Patton, 2015). The diary prompts were piloted with an individual who was not otherwise involved with the study to ensure the first point of data entry occurred smoothly.

Each day, there were different diary prompts, consisting of open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, and a chance to share artifacts such as diagrams, photos, and videos to explain their experiences (Singh & Malhotra, 2013). By asking three ODA house church leaders to share reflections through diary entries, greater insight about their experiences as relevant to the research questions emerged. A list of each prompt is provided (see Appendix D). Diaries provide analytical reflection, emotional engagement, and offer an invaluable first piece to the jigsaw puzzle in starting to know the study's participants (White, 2021). Ideal compliance means each ODA house church leader completes each prompt for each day, even though missing entries do not necessarily undermine the results (Ohly & Gochmann, 2017). Solicited diary studies can be the sole source of data, but they also can serve as a memory aid for the subjects to recall events and elaborate upon in future interviews (Mackrill, 2008).

Observations

After reading the diaries, observations of the three ODA house church leaders will occur by capturing the data into a Yellow Legal Pad during one weekly gathering with their congregation. While case study research calls for a less structured approach to participant observations, scholars advised creating a plan to consider precisely what behaviors to observe, focusing the notes on the research questions (Mack et al., 2005). Through observations, the researcher begins with a blank page filling it with maps and diagrams to detail the social and spatial interactions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Additionally, it is also important to distinguish between objective observations and what is happening subjectively by noting questions that can be asked later during the interview phase (Lapan et al., 2012). For example, an objective statement would be that the house church leader began the meeting at 7:05PM. A subjective statement is that the house church

leader started the meeting 5 minutes late. According to Berger (2012), observation is an ongoing activity, and the data are continually evolving, so it is best to create an Observational Protocol to follow (see Appendix E).

It is also important to differentiate between direct and participant observations during the planning process. Direct observations can be active or passive, covert or noncovert, but researchers do not immerse themselves in the study (Wästerfors, 2018). Think of a scientist behind a two-way mirror, where there is always a barrier between the researcher and researched. Engaged participant observational research removes the barrier by having the practitioner-scholar participate in the on-site activities (Robey & Taylor, 2018). Participant observations can document events as they unfold in response to specific situations in real-time (Michel & Grandy, 2018). As the researcher gets more involved in the event, an interesting role reversal happens as they move from being a spectator to becoming an active participant (Michel & Grandy, 2018). This often requires a delicate balance of notetaking while also being fully engaged in the social phenomena (Mills & Morton, 2013). The cryptic scribbles, scratch notes, and crude diagrams form field notes (Mills & Morton, 2013) which is neither a full discourse about a given topic nor a fully textual dataset (Sanjek, 1990). Therefore, scholars recommend conducting an interview after the observational session to form a complete set of data (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Individual Interviews

Individual unstructured interviews with three ODA house church leaders were conducted utilizing diary prompts and observations to elucidate additional information. Each individual interview with each ODA house church leader lasted 60 minutes while recording and transcribing with the Otter.ai App. The advantages of utilizing this technology were secure data generation and storage, time savings, and cost-effectiveness without compromising a positive participant experience (Gray et al., 2020).

Unstructured interviews generate qualitative data by going in-depth into a topic by allowing people to tell their personal stories, which can also be an emotionally rewarding experience for the respondents (Guthrie, 2013). Researchers

guide participants through open-ended questions, listening intently and interjecting additional prompts to elucidate more detail (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). An interview cannot technically be considered unstructured, but rather a guided conversation between the researcher and respondent (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). That is why Lapan et al. (2012) recommended starting with a grand question and not interrupting until the participant has said a great deal about a given topic before moving on. Open-ended questions and additional prompts were formulated by analyzing previous datasets such as diary responses and observed behaviors to extract more detail during the unstructured interview (Ohly & Gochmann, 2017).

While the interview is an informal conversation, asking the three ODA house church leaders the same questions can help with data saturation and staying on target with the purpose of the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Following Harvard University (n.d.), it is best to create an Individual Interview Protocol with the sample questions and probes attached (see Appendix F). After each individual interview, the researcher reflected on what the participant revealed, and that reflexive process produces deep, often hidden meaning structures latent within the text (Fink, 2000).

Focus Groups

Focus groups will help add additional information in attempting to answer the research questions. Perhaps there are current needs that the house church leaders are not addressing. Only by interviewing the followers at each ODA site, specific parts of the research question become clear. While moderators of a focus group must try to remain neutral, the participants can have contentious conversations about topics and find common understanding leading to greater conceptualization for the researcher (Krueger & Casey, 2015). It is important to note that the focus group consisted of five to seven participants from each of the three ODA house church sites. Each of the three ODA focus groups lasted 60 minutes while recording and transcribing with the Otter.ai App. Questions came from the preceding diary responses, individual interviews, and observations that are aligned with the overall research questions.

Focus groups have also become a valuable data collection tool because they mimic everyday group communication (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Focus groups also expedite a study compared to individual interviews (Gill et al., 2008). The group input creates symbolic interactionism allowing the researcher to understand how a panel of experts or key informants perceive a specific topic (Patton, 2015). Focus groups allow members who share a common characteristic to speak openly and candidly about important or sensitive issues (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that the size of the focus group should be between six and 12 people so that it is "small enough for all members to talk and share their thoughts, and yet large enough to create a diverse group" (p. 1410).

A successful focus group is contingent upon a competent moderator, usually with an assistant who notes nonverbal cues and speaks too much or too little (Côte-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 2005). Successful moderators act as an epoché who create a safe environment where multiple perspectives can be shared, illuminating some truth about that given situation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Even though the dialogue can be more informal and unstructured, it is essential to follow a Focus Group Protocol if the group gets off task or off-topic (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Krueger and Casey (2015) recommended creating a Focus Group Protocol with a specific script and interview questions (see Appendix G for the current researcher's modification of their outline).

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers aspire to illuminate social meaning accomplished through data analysis (Bryman, 2004). Content analysis within leadership studies can be done by three approaches: (a) conventional, (b) directed, or (c) summative (Parry et al., 2014). All three approaches have to do with coding the data, which happens creatively since qualitative research deals primarily with verbiage instead of numeric data points (Lapan et al., 2012). For instance, Saldaña (2016) listed 32 different qualitative coding methods while Leech and Onwuebuzie (2007) detailed 21 more methods. With conventional analysis, "coding categories are derived directly from the text data" (Parry et al., 2014, p. 137).

Coding the data also creates categorical, not hierarchical clusters, emphasizing the underlying relationships and hidden meaning structures (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The researcher analyzes the data in five specific steps using the acronym RITES as a heuristic interpretive technique. They are: (a) read and reread the text; (b) interrogate the text by asking basic questions in order to code appropriately; (c) thematize the text by connecting disparate parts of the story; (d) expand upon associations and concepts, and (e) summarize the results (Leggo, 2008).

It is also important to note that data collection and analysis happens concurrently within qualitative case studies (Klenke et al., 2016). The interweaving of data collection and analysis formulate new questions, achieve higher conceptualization than mere explication, and allow theories to develop alongside growing volumes of information in an iterative cycle (Miles et al., 2014). An example of this is the original five research questions posed for this dissertation. The diary prompts added more questions to the study. After reviewing the artifacts contained in the diaries and looking over the field notes from the participant observations, more questions arose. Additionally, individual interviews and focus groups provided an ideal space for follow-up questions. The emerging themes ultimately explained or expanded upon the original five research questions to complete the cycle. Therefore, it was essential to detail the coding cycles used for this multisite case study to understand the findings.

First Cycle

The diary responses, field notes, and interview transcripts formulated the raw data of this dissertation. First-cycle coding can contain a single word, a whole paragraph, or an entire page of text (Saldaña, 2016). The first cycle of coding also serves as an opportunity to scrub the data by replacing names with pseudonyms to ensure participants remain anonymous (Wolcott, 2009); however, scrubbing the data too thoroughly by stripping out contextual information eliminates the strength and very essence of qualitative research (Pratt et al., 2020).

By utilizing the exploratory method of holistic coding, the researcher can lump large portions of the text into a few preliminary codes without going line by

line (Dey, 1993). Holistic coding is appropriate for beginning qualitative researchers because of its applicability to different kinds of studies with a wide variety of data forms such as diaries, interview transcripts, and field notes (Saldaña, 2016). Codes enable the researcher to sort a large dataset just as file folders can help organize emails and should be conceptually congruent to the study's purpose (Lapan et al., 2012). In this case, the initial research questions acted as a preliminary codebook (Roberts et al., 2019), placing the different responses by the participants under each heading. Scholars have continued to debate the inclusion of longer quotations within qualitative research rather than merely citing someone only in edited excerpts (DuBois et al., 2018). For instance, Eldh et al. (2020) wrote, "Modifications can be made to exclude superfluous text yet should fortify the content and meaning of the interpretation. Furthermore, to put flesh on the bones, the quotations may represent a selection, accurately reproduced, rather than the entire dataset" (p. 4).

The final corpus of codes remains controversial among researchers (Saldaña, 2016). Guest et al. (2012) argued that the most salient portions of the research questions merit examination allowing the researcher to delete the rest of the data that does not apply. Not wanting to delete interesting data from this dissertation, a section labeled "other" acted as a subject heading to include remarks that did not easily fit within the five research questions. By chunking and displaying corresponding data, researchers can determine whether more codable units fit within the initial codebook or whether more subcodes need to be added and analyzed (Roberts et al., 2019). Nevertheless, first-cycle coding is rarely perfected and needs to be filtered and focused through subsequent cycles (Saldaña, 2016).

Second Cycle

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended a lean coding method whereby a shortlist of preliminary codes can be expanded into no more than 25 to 30 categories, later combining into five or six major themes. In case studies, the researcher compares similarities and differences of incidents and interactions (Lapan et al., 2012). One method is in-vivo coding, which "draws from the participant's own language for codes" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 83). The objective is to

produce a manageable account of the data that address crucial aspects of the research questions to provide a systematic and transparent account of how categories and themes emerged (Elliott, 2018). Some of the codes may be relabeled, subsumed into other codes, or dropped altogether (Saldaña, 2016).

Abbott (2004) likened the process to decorating a room, stepping back to take a look, and rearranging a few more things until it is just right. Each participant is likely to describe the same phenomenon differently, so repeated patterns began to emerge by analyzing the data in this manner (Roberts et al., 2019). Thematic content analysis recognizes those patterns by engaging in this iterative process during the subsequent cycles of coding (Lapan et al., 2012). In order to be fully aware of possible linkages between data points, researchers are encouraged to enlist the aid of some technological tools (Moylan et al., 2015).

Third Cycle

Lastly, qualitative scholars have suggested importing the raw data into Leximancer software, which operationalizes a visual vocabulary necessary in the sensemaking process of understanding big data (Angus et al., 2013). Leximancer (n.d.) automatically analyzes data by providing interactive visualizations, high-level conceptualizations, and actionable insights. Angus et al. (2013) noted, "An advantage of generating the concept list automatically is that… subtle or unusual relationships may be more likely to emerge [extracting] major thematic and conceptual content directly from an input text" (p. 262).

Several themes will emerge by utilizing successive and repetitive first- and second-cycle schemas to shrink the codes to a manageable size and then comparing and contrasting the list with concept maps generated from the Leximancer software. Generally, themes display the groundedness and density of each code (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2020). "Groundedness shows how many data segments are associated with each code, and density shows how many links a code has with any other codes in the project" (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2020, The Qualitative Research Project: Learning by Doing section). While Creswell (2014) noted that generating themes is the final step in qualitative studies, they are also a starting point for scholars to develop new theories or conduct future research. Nevertheless,

the researcher-generated themes are propositional generalizations, even if they emerge in a shared social context (Stake, 1995).

Disseminating Findings

Sharing the findings of this multisite case study with key stakeholders (the ODA house church leaders) democratizes the research process by ensuring proper power balances between researchers and respondents, correcting inaccuracies and misunderstandings, and illuminating any actionable insights (Lapan et al., 2012). In attempting to understand the nonhierarchization of house church leaders, it would be an odd choice to create a power differential between the interviewer and interviewee through a more formalized and structured approach (Patton & Cochrane, 2002). Just as this dissertation studies shared leadership, the research design itself is a shared process between the three ODA house church leaders and a few participants from their congregation.

Summary

House church leaders from a monthly networking group and a few people from their congregation formed the purposive sample for this multisite case study. The participants were required to fit the criteria of the three typologies of house churches (ODA) addressing a gap in the literature. Data collection began once the house church leader voluntarily consented and agreed to open their site. Data collection consisted of diaries, observations, and individual interviews for each of the three ODA house church leaders and focus groups with participants at each ODA site. The data were analyzed using recursive and reflexive coding cycles. The codes and subcodes comprised categories and concepts forming themes generated by the researcher. The themes formed the findings of this exploratory multisite case study on house church leaders. As Klenke (2015) noted, "Qualitative leadership studies, when conducted with the same degree of rigor and concern for validity and quality, have several distinct advantages…by offering more opportunities to explore [the] leadership phenomena in significant depth" (p. 5). In the following chapter, the researcher presents the findings reflecting the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the

needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings.

Chapter 4 – Findings

In this chapter, the researcher details the findings of this multisite case study that examines house church leaders within the three typologies of house churches. According to Billings (2011), the three typologies are *Oikos ecclesia*, where the congregants assemble in the home for a complete meal, including the Eucharist. The second is *Domus ecclesiae*, where the curate renovates and dedicates rooms in their homes for Christian usage. The third is *Aula ecclesiae*, where rented facilities house larger gatherings, the liturgy becomes more formalized, and the Eucharist is no longer a full meal.

The chapter details the methodology step-by-step to show readers how over 53,000 words of raw data were chunked into a little over 26,000 words for review. The initial coding cycle resulted in 665 in-vivo codes, and the subsequent cycles reduced that number to 202 codes while forming 14 temporary categories. After comparing the researcher-generated categories with the clusters and connections made by running the dataset through the Leximancer software program, 10 themes emerged. The 10 themes form the findings of this multisite case study and are an attempt to address the five research questions.

RQ1 asked: What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders? The findings revealed that there are two external challenges and two internal challenges house church leaders are facing. The two external challenges are: (a) *Western-base ecclesiology* and (b) *time constraints.* The two internal challenges are: (c) *commitment and accountability* and (d) *child care.* RQ2 asked, how do house church leaders address these challenges? The findings revealed (e) *marring the mission of whole-life discipleship*, which contained the subthemes of *by example, through intentional involvement, with encouragement,* and *for equipping the saints.* RQ3 asked: What are follower perceptions of church leadership within the three typologies of gatherings? The findings revealed that participants perceive the house church as: (f) *intimate families.* RQ4 asked :What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings? The findings revealed a tension between being: (g) *interspersed and dispersed.* Lastly, RQ5 asked: Do these leadership characteristics align with shared leadership? The

findings revealed one team characteristic of shared leadership and two environmental antecedents. The team characteristic is: (h) *size*. The environmental factors are: (i) *voice* and (j) *shared purpose*. In the following section, the researcher explains how these 10 themes emerged.

Preliminary Protocols

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher sent the Initial Contact Email to 60 addresses whose names were saved from a monthly networking group of house church leaders. Out of the 60 emails listed, four returned with a Mail Undeliverable notification, while seven others replied and completed the brief questionnaire. The initial respondents had an age range between 21 to 55 years old, with the average age being 40.8 years old. The initial respondents also skewed 70% male compared to 30% female. The brief questionnaire asked initial respondents to classify the typology of their current house church gathering. *Domus* was the most common, with four people conducting house churches in this type of setting. By comparison, *Oikos* had two, and *Aula* had one response.

Each respondent was available during the times this multisite case study was being conducted, so it was a matter of narrowing down one pilot subject (P1) and three house church leaders from each ODA site (O1, D1, A1). House church leaders who fit the three ODA typologies and expressed more of a willingness to open up their site for a focus group were preferred over others who did not share the same enthusiasm. Compare these two responses from the brief questionnaire as an example: "We have approximately 6 to 7 total in our community. They may be willing" to "I would love to!"

The researcher sent a follow-up email containing the Informed Consent Form to the three house church leaders (O1, D1, and A1) chosen to participate in this multisite case study and one pilot subject (P1) who is not part of the official dataset. The P1 subject completed the diary prompts for 10 days. Day five and day seven were left incomplete or filled with N/A. Additionally, P1 did not need an entire page to detail their responses, nor did P1 express any confusion over the wording of each prompt. The only issue P1 raised was the difficulty in answering

open-ended questions instead of more direct forms of inquiry. Nevertheless, it was officially time to begin the multisite case study.

After receiving the signed Informed Consent Form from O1, D1, and A1, they were each sent a link to a Google Doc containing the 10 diary prompts and had 10 days to complete it. After completing the diary prompts, the researcher sent subsequent emails between O1, D1, and A1 setting up times to visit their site and conduct individual interviews and focus groups. After receiving the signed Informed Consent Forms from members of their congregation, the data collection process continued.

Rich Description of Each ODA Site

Before divulging the totality of the findings, it is vital to provide some rich and thick descriptions of each ODA site, as suggested by Maxwell (2013) and Yin (2014), to understand their specific context better. It is also poignant to mention that even though Billings (2011) ODA typology provides the framework for this multisite case study, some observed practices differ slightly from what was initially theorized. Moreover, particularistic details provide a more focused case study illuminating contextual factors so that concrete descriptions can convey meaning about the case and greater understanding to the reader (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The following details what it was like to actively observe each ODA house church painting a rich depiction and thick description.

Oikos

On a Saturday night, beginning at 5:30PM, the researcher entered the home of O1. Some light refreshments were on a central island in the kitchen that overlooked the living room. In the living room was a TV with a countdown timer overlayed upon a digital juice background and some music that reminded the researcher of the copyright-free beats of a trendy YouTube travel vlogger. Six others, including the researcher, were engaging in small talk over chips and salsa. As the countdown timer reached 5 minutes, people grabbed their snacks and proceeded to sit in the living room. O1 sat by their spouse while the other couple sat on the couch with their 6-month-old baby on their lap. The researcher chose to sit on a dining room chair next to the other attendee.

The countdown clock inevitably counted down to zero, and a service from a purpose-built church in another state played on the TV. What the researcher initially thought was a livestream of the service was actually a weeks-old broadcast from this multisite purpose-built church. There were contemporary worship songs that everyone in the living room stood up and sang along to since lyrics were also provided during the telecast. After the three songs concluded, the announcements felt irrelevant because the researcher was watching from such a great distance from the mother campus and could not physically participate in any of the activities mentioned. During this segment, O1 sprang up and grabbed wine glasses, a bottle of wine, and some matza crackers. After announcements, another person at the purpose-built church took center stage, shared their testimony, and led the congregation into communion. What was appreciated was the fact that O1 had also distributed the elements to all the adults. The purpose-built church played another song, and everyone in the home sat back and watched. Afterward, a video bumper played, and it was a typical megachurch sermon interspersed with movie clips and bible snippets. The researcher started to feel as though he had made a mistake in selecting this site as the first case to study, but then again, there was no other choice in this category.

A little after 7:00PM, the video presentation ended, and O1 leaped to fire up the grill. O1's spouse asked if anyone wanted more wine or any other alcoholic beverage that they had. People seemed to imbibe and happily found their place helping set out the plates and sides in the kitchen or venturing outside to "supervise the flames." The menu contained brats boiled in Heineken beer first, then cooked on the open grill, a salad with a tasty apricot balsamic, and sides of more chips, salsa, pork and beans, with homemade rice crispy treats for dessert. It was still light enough to eat outside, so after everyone had fixed their plate, they sat around a patio table to eat and talk.

What stood out about this moment was that the O1 house church leader did not try to commandeer the conversation and attempt to shoehorn any takeaways from the sermon. The O1 house church leader appeared content to listen and ask questions about the topics that naturally arose. There was a spattering of stories

related to mission work in Africa, the struggles of the couple having their first child, and interjections about various recipe techniques, including the beloved Rice Krispy treats, along with the proper way to make the Italian ravioli filling entitled "ping." The researcher engaged in the dialogue, trying to chew with his mouth closed and forgetting about taking notes.

When people finished eating, no one stood up to clear away the plates. A few times, people got up to go to the bathroom or refill their beverages, but everyone was content to sit around the table talking as if they all had known each other for a long time. As the sky finally gave up its orange hue, the lawn lights came to life, and the couple with the baby mutually decided that it was time to go. At this time that O1 asked to pray over everyone, and the group just paused as the prayer mentioned each member's name and tiny little anecdotes obtained from the dinner conversation.

What started as a typical watch party for a conventional purpose-built church turned into a delightful evening over the dinner and dialogue that ensued. The researcher began to think that if he had been in the same state and attended the building where this church met every weekend, he most likely would have left immediately following the service. As O1 stated in their diary, their home church is "A place where we can make them a meal, play card games, talk about life, and open up about meaningful topics….We talked, ate, played games, shared the word, prayed, and ate again." The extended time of fellowship seemed to fly by, and the researcher was not used to being in or at church for more than 90 minutes at a time. It was almost 9:00PM, and the researcher still needed to conduct an interview and focus group, but it was decided to schedule that for another date.

The researcher's takeaway was the effort made by O1 to be fully present with people and genuinely pray for their needs without an ulterior agenda. It was also a reminder of the growing debate during COVID if viewing church online constitutes being in church, especially when the parishioner can view sermons in solitude using Cheez-Its as their communion cracker because of supply chain shortages (Johnson, 2020). At this site, what stood out was the sacred bond of

communion in community with real wine and bread, then more wine, brats, and free-flowing Christ-centered conversation.

Domus

Arriving at 10:00AM on a Sunday, the house church began by going around the living room with each person giving an update of what was happening in their life. The researcher was introduced and explained a little bit more about this research project. Afterward, D1 wanted to get everyone's take on some current events in the news, and sadly everyone commented about another tragic school shooting. After everyone spoke, D1 spent some extensive time in prayer. The prayer contained long pauses and deep breaths between words. It was very sobering in light of the shock everyone was still feeling from the fatalities and also very reverent as if D1 did not want to rush the fact that God was listening. The long pauses also allowed others to interject their requests echoed with agreements and "amens" as a few others prayed aloud.

After the prayer, D1 explained that each of the five house churches in their network, including one house church in Mexico, were "united scripturally." The unification was accomplished through a third-party reading plan resourced by another house church network. The reading plan for that Sunday contained Romans 4 and Psalm 52 with a memorization portion of Matthew 6:16–34. Much of the discussion revolved around Romans 1 and 2, which they had read a few days prior from the same plan. D1 noted that "anyone can comment on what we read" because the "reading plan was central to the gathering, even if the leader was taken out."

D1 continued to ask questions concerning the text, and once again, long pauses filled the air as people thought about their responses. Many questions seemed to be direct instead of open-ended, so it was difficult to tell whether people were sharing their thoughts or searching for the answers they thought D1 was probing for in the questions. Nevertheless, the environment felt relaxed as everyone took turns responding. The calmness of the adults in the room was heightened by the frenetic energy of the numerous young children who were also present. Some of the children were old enough to enter and leave as they chose, but the younger ones stayed under the watchful eye of their parents. The young children added an

interesting dynamic and volume level to the group. Those in attendance appeared comfortable with the children chiming in from time to time and more than accommodating if the child needed their parent's attention resulting in the adult having to step away for a few moments. Given the gravity of the horrific tragedy discussed earlier, the researcher could not help but think that this house was the safest place those children could be.

After everyone shared their views on the scripture passage, D1 summarized some closing remarks. D1 wanted to end with a song and the final long pause of the morning came as the group waited for the phone to pair with the Bluetooth speaker. Finally, the song played was "Spirit of the Living God" by Vertical Worship. The researcher thought the song was well-chosen for the moment, given what was shared by everyone. Interestingly, two of the three house churches that the researcher visited relied upon elements from programmatic or purpose-built churches. Not that there is anything wrong with swiping a sermon from a more traditional church or using a song from a contemporary worship band, but the researcher pondered whether the house church movement could become a big enough niche that resources could be produced in-house, so to speak, by other house church networks for other house churches, analogous to the reading plan that everyone was using.

It was now 12:13PM, and D1 asked once more if there was anything anyone else wanted to share. D1 noted that "We never know when we are going to finish since there's nobody waiting for us to start another service." No one made any additional comments because many parents wanted to put their kids down for a nap so they could give the researcher a full hour of uninterrupted time to conduct the focus group.

Aula

It was a Friday at 6:00AM, and the researcher was trying to find a greasy spoon restaurant overlooking a golf course. Little did the researcher know that he had to access the service road of the golf course, which led him straight to the place. Upon entering, the researcher informed the hostess that he was here for the group that met every other Friday and was taken to a small private banquet room in

the back. Subject A1 greeted him as 16 or so people sat around a table configuration that can only be described as the capital letter "U" with a macron placed a top of it "Ū."

A1 informed the researcher that the group has been renting here for a while, and they get a "good deal" on the room. A few more people trickled in, ordering and paying for a large breakfast with copious amounts of coffee. As plates of pancakes, omelets, extra sausage links, and ramekins of warm syrup fill the remaining space on the table, a printed packet containing bible verses, renaissance paintings, and a little blue Clipart stick figure on just about every page is passed around for everyone to take their copy. After praying for the meal, A1 had a few "housekeeping" items to discuss, which is shorthand for their announcements.

The announcements consist of upcoming dates of service projects in the community. In the off weeks when the group is not exceeding their caloric intake for breakfast, they are heavily committed to helping out other organizations with whom they have established a strong partnership. The group can serve food to the unsheltered at a drug rehabilitation center. The group can volunteer to tutor struggling students at a youth center. The big upcoming trip is a chance to fly to South America to install water wells while attending to the needs of a church and school in the country. There appears to be no pressure from A1 to coax anyone into anything. These opportunities exist as a chance to "do a good deed" and "invite a friend" who may be a Christian or a "not yet Christian."

The meeting officially begins with A1 impromptu calling on various individuals to share updates on various activities they have been involved in since the last time they met as a group. Starting this way not only reemphasizes the group's ethos and experiential values but offers a clever way to get people talking aloud around the table. The study begins and is fittingly on mentoring and discipleship, but A1 tended to ask more open-ended questions so others in the group can share their stories. While plenty of scripture verses are copied and pasted into the packet, A1 deferred to the paintings printed on each page, sporadically calling on people to imbue their intersubjective perspective on DaVinci's Last Supper, for instance. Again, this technique eliminates any pressure for the person to

produce the correct answer and makes the entire exercise a free association game, which is quite fun to listen to and play.

The researcher's observation revealed that A1 did a masterful job facilitating the conversation. When someone in the group asked a direct question, A1 paused for a moment to think about it and then named two other people to give their thoughts on it. After those two people finished, A1 followed up by synthesizing their responses driving home the main point the others overlooked. This is an indirect way of communicating that the researcher has admired from the existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, as noted by Ben Simpson (2011). When scripture is read or referenced, it is used to commend another's point of view rather than condemn it. The group closed by going around the table and praying. If anyone did not feel comfortable, they could say "pass," and the next person recited something.

People come and go throughout the meeting, some heading to work while others were just getting off work. A1's calm demeanor gently greets them with a wave of the hand. While the group lasts a few hours, it does not matter who comes and goes. Another mantra reiterated this morning was "showing up is catching up." A1 did not seem to mind interruptions from visitors, waitstaff, or interjections from new people like myself or longstanding members. A1 appeared content and engaged to listen about what the Holy Spirit was doing in each person's life as they tried to activate their faith. In the diary portion of this multisite case study, A1 stated, "We support and care about each other. Encourage and uplift each other. Gather together and learn from each other…Getting people committed and involved."

The researcher thought the *Aula* group would be the most liturgical, but many denominational and dogmatic structures were nonexistent. One of the participants mentioned an upcoming baptism at a hotel pool during the housekeeping portion of the meeting, but overall, it was a very eclectic gathering. As the researcher reflect on what he just observed, he noted that no one used the word church to describe themselves. The group lovingly refers to themselves as the "little blue guys." These little blue guys and girls appreciate art, literature, and even

the best cultural artifacts by weaving scripture and story together in one dynamic setting that meets every other week. The substantive difference is in the pace of life they try to cultivate as they eagerly share testimonies of their most recent adventures together in the off weeks they were not meeting. As A1 and a few people stayed behind, the researcher started the interviews and focus group, completing the data collection portion of this qualitative multisite case study.

Before presenting the findings, the researcher should show how data condensation created the final thematic descriptions (Malterud, 2012). The following section details how the data were captured, chunked, coded, categorized, clustered, and completed.

Diaries, Interviews, and Focus Groups

For the diary prompts, O1 completed every day except for Day 10, creating a document with 1,219 words. D1 completed every day and created a document with 3,675 words. Lastly, A1 completed each day but wrote N/A for Day 5, forming a document with 771 words. Each ODA participant and P1 did not need an entire page to record their thoughts in the diary prompts.

For the individual interviews, O1 produced a transcript containing 7,879 words, D1 produced a transcript containing 8,094, and A1 produced a transcript containing 8,345 words. The *Oikos* focus group had three participants (O2, O3, and O4) and produced a transcript containing 9,063 words. The *Domus* focus group had five participants (D2, D3, D4, D5, and D6) and produced a transcript containing 6,817 words. The *Aula* focus group had four participants (A2, A3, A4, A5, and A6) and produced a transcript containing 7,810 words. The final sample size contained 16 people, three house church leaders, and 13 participants from the ODA typologies. The raw data contained 53,673 words.

First Cycle

The condensing process began by chunking data for the first cycle of in-vivo coding. The five research questions comprised the codebook categories, and data paragraphs were placed under the corresponding question. The *Oikos* codebook contained 6,744 words, the *Domus* codebook contained 7,066 words, and

the *Aula* codebook contained 7,653 words condensing the dataset to 21,463 words. The first coding cycle entailed reading and rereading the dataset, highlighting words, phrases, and sentences in yellow. Initially, the codes from this process were kept separate from each ODA typology. Therefore, *Oikos* had 201 in-vivo codes sorted alphabetically (see Appendix H), *Domus* had 219 in-vivo codes sorted alphabetically (see Appendix I), and *Aula* had 245 in-vivo codes sorted alphabetically (see Appendix J), totaling 665 first cycle codes.

Second and Subsequent Cycle

The second coding cycle arranged and rearranged all of the ODA typologies under the headings of the five research questions numerous times. Instead of the in-vivo codes from each ODA typology being separate in their respective documents, now they all inhabited the same worksheet. This process also subsumed some of the dense statements that were repetitive and eliminated elements that did not fit the boundaries of this multisite case study. Usually, excerpts under the label *Other* were expelled because they did not occur with enough frequency to warrant further exploration. Each ODA typology was color-coded to quickly identify if others across the sample size experienced a similar phenomenon. *Oikos* is red, *Domus* is green, *Aula* is blue, and black was assigned to combine repetitive words. The codes formed 14 temporary categories under each research question representing many of the sentiments shared by the diverse sample size across different house church settings. The subsequent rounds (over 30) during this cycle reduced the dataset to 202 in-vivo codes that were ultimately used to form the final themes of the findings (see Appendix K).

Third Cycle and Final Check

In the third coding cycle, the researcher imported the 21,463-word dataset into the Leximancer software. The software also produced some interesting insights (see Appendix L). Comparing the clusters created by the Leximancer software alongside the temporary categories generated by the researcher, 10 themes emerged. The 10 themes and a brief description were emailed to all 16 participants. Only four had a few clarifying questions, but all the participants felt that their

thoughts were accurately portrayed and not taken out of context. Even though the emergent themes stem from the participants' verbiage, Elliott (2018) noted that the researcher is sensitized to an underlying linguistic framework of shared leadership by conducting an exhaustive literature review.

The 10 Themes Explained

Qualitative researchers usually present findings, rather than results, by organizing the final report's section headings under the theme that emerged during the coding and categorization process (Austin & Sutton, 2015). This method allows the participant's stories to be told with quotations from the transcripts (Austin & Sutton, 2015). This section of the chapter will explore each theme in more detail.

External Challenges

RQ1 asked: What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders? The participants understood the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings. A1 explicitly understood that those challenges could come "both from within and beyond the house church," while D1 labeled them as "cultural and structural."

Western-Base Ecclesiology. House church leaders were well aware that there are external, internal, and even some "unhealthy expectations" (A1) regarding the West's understanding of house churches. "Americans," as O1 said, "especially those that have prior church backgrounds or biases as a result of being raised in a different construct [do not] have a paradigm for a church being in a home or being people." Continuing the thought, D1 added, "The average American Christian, or churched nonbeliever, is speaking a completely different language when it comes to church. It's been really difficult in the West to convey what the church is to people." A1 added what would become the best expression of this external challenge called "base-level ecclesiology." The question A1 wants Americans to wrestle with is "What comprises a church?"

The house church is "not one size fits all, but it does scare folks," O1 said. Additionally, many with "variant church backgrounds [have a] framework of a

delivered message, foremost, it's kind of the queenpin of a gathered community" (A1). The house church "is so different, and oftentimes, at odds with American church" (D1). Others "miss some of the traditional stuff" (O1). Therefore, A1 is trying to delve deeper into the question of "What are the expectations that come from more of the traditional model?" Being able to understand "the concept of basic ecclesiology [helps] dismantle some of the wrongful notions of what it means to be church" (A1).

It was even interesting to learn what others in the focus groups labeled their prior church before attending a house church. A cursory glance at linguistics helps one better understand the underlying noetic constructs. It was a challeneg in this dissertation to properly define and differentiate between house churches and purpose-built churches, which was the term ultimately chosen. Here are some ways house church members described other "nonhouse church contexts" (O4). They were: "traditional church" (D2); "big churches" (A5); "mega-churches" (O2); "seeker-focused model" (D4); "service-oriented church" (D5); "historic model" (A3); and "conventional church" (A4).

A1 is trying to envision what would be a "better expression of the church, especially in the Western context?" This vision is mainly unforeseeable, however, when it is practically incompressible to someone in the West that the church can be anything other than what they have seen. For instance, D1 noticed that people "simply cannot fathom the idea that a church isn't a place to go to. [The church] is a people to join and commit to, not an event to check out." Therefore, trying to execute this vision "takes clarity. Clarity of understanding, clarity of teaching" (A1). Nevertheless, *Western-base ecclesiology* is the "largest" (D1) "core challenge" (A1) that house church leaders experience.

Time Constraints. The second external challenge house church leaders face are the *time constraints* that people have. This phenomenon could be attributed to Americans' "busy lives" (A4). Part of this challenge also coincides with certain cultural expectations people have regarding the amount of time they intend to spend in church. During the focus group, O3 said, "People will come in, and they'll be like, 'Oh, wait, y'all go too long.'" A3 said, "It's hard for a lot of people to take

the time and put in the effort." The complaint is understandable considering each of the three house churches visited for this multisite case study lasted longer than two hours which is atypical of the 60- to 90-minute service lengths at other purpose-built churches. O4 said, "We could spend 45 minutes on one Scripture [and] there's people that can stay 3 hours at church." One house church leader had

> [One] particular meeting that actually goes for about 9 hours every Sunday. So, they start with breakfast…Many of them are next-door neighbors to one another, so everyone's coming and going constantly throughout the day. Ending with dinner at some point until we're all tired and need to go to bed. (A1, Individual Interview)

For someone not culturally conditioned to spending the Lord's Day this way, house church leaders face another significant challenge when considering the length of their gatherings. Time felt as if it was passing faster when visiting the *Oikos* and *Aula* house churches because of the meal and festivities during that evening. There was a point during the *Domus* gathering when it felt a bit lengthy. O2 attested that "it's very hard to…invite people into the home group" due to this external challenge. While their leader contends, "[we try to be] respectful of people's time, but we don't try to put a time constraint" (O1).

Nevertheless, there is also a growing House of Prayer movement with locations all over the United States that are usually open 24 hours a day, 5 days a week, offering Christians an extended time to dwell in the Lord's presence (Eckholm, 2011). Houses of Prayer, the house church movement, Sabbatarianism, and other expressions of Christianity beyond the purpose-built model may help offset congregants' external cultural expectations about church lasting too long.

Internal Challenges

Not only do house church leaders have to address these external challenges, but there are also still two more internal challenges from the findings. The first is *commitment and accountability,* and the second is *child care.* Each internal challenge offers a unique look into the culture of house churches.

Commitment and Accountability. O4 said, "It's hard to get people to come in and to stay committed at the internal level." D5 said, "Everyone sees you

and expects a commitment from you." The commitment or lack thereof is "in two ways: one just regularly coming and second to commit to help" (O1).

During the interview, D1 shared how difficult it was that every time they held a house church gathering, it was never the same people coming week after week resulting in an incohesive group that could not properly form and norm. If people start regularly attending, they realize very quickly that "you can't slip in and out" (D2). The house church setting is more "invasive" (D1), "in your face" (O4), and "more one-on-one… with less room to hide" (O3). Congregants will be asked to "do [their] part for the home church to be successful" (O1). Genuine commitment within a house church requires more than just showing up and sharing something. It revolves around leading various components that make up the house church itself. O1 said,

> Why doesn't someone talk to the group about what prayers we might pray or carry prayer lists? Who would want to deal with all the potluck if that's what we want to do once a month? Who could take care of leading us, you know, into worship? Or who would be interested in bringing the message? Those commitments are very, very difficult. (Individual Interview)

Ultimately, house church leaders are not afraid to "hold each other accountable" (A1) and keep "each other in check" (A3). They desire "ownership and accountability" (A1), with every member of the body of Christ contributing; however, "some people don't like the accountability" (O4). Others are "a little over overwhelmed with the intensity" (D2). In an attempt to foster "healthy accountability" (A1), house church leaders are not afraid to conduct crucial conversations regarding personal and spiritual health where others feel as if they "can't hide [or] disguise anything" (D4). As "people still want to do their own thing" (A2) or have "had enough responsibility" (O2), they struggle to stay for the "long-term" (O3).

During the focus group, D2 noted, "I'm the only one left. The only member left from the original start" of that particular house church. Like many purpose-built churches, the house church relies on committed volunteers serving in various

ministry capacities. The findings display that "accountability all around" (A4) can also be "a little too much for [some]" (D4).

Child Care. According to the findings, the final challenge house church leaders face is how to handle *child care.* This was a prominent theme across all three house church typologies. For example, O1 asked, "How can we effectively incorporate the babies, kids, during the gathering?" D1 noticed that "kids are always pushed to the side because, you know, they're kind of unpredictable." Lastly, A1 said,

> We have one family that has 11 children. So, you can do the number on that. It's mayhem. It's beautiful. I love it…this is the one that needs to multiply, especially when all families with children are there. They outnumber adults. (Individual Interview)

Nevertheless, house church leaders "want the kids of the church to be involved [and] it's important that our kids feel just as equally valuable as the adults do" (D1). Without relying on the programs that often pervade the purpose-built model, house church leaders must think beyond their people's base-level ecclesiology of what they are accustomed to having. Likewise, house church participants must apply themselves to something that requires a great deal of time and a very high level of commitment and accountability to ensure children are protected and an integral part of the gathering. One of the house churches that A1 oversees does this:

> The kids are in the next room. And that's an adjoining room, so it's not like they're separated, but they're doing art. Worship art. And they actually create pictures, and God has used that powerfully to speak words through their art. And they're very much engaged in that and often involved in some of the prayers at the outset… It's all family. (Individual Interview)

Another house church participant speaks to the value of having kids involved during the gathering:

> I remember confessing something on a Sunday…something that I shared, and I asked for forgiveness, um, and when kids see that, parents asking for forgiveness amongst themselves, and then when they see that, I mean,

they're being ministered to. And they're seeing, wow, my mom and dad, like, you know, they had this disagreement, and one of them felt offended, and this is how you go about it the right way. So, having the kids in there and then watching it and seeing that, I mean, it's a great thing. (D3, Focus Group)

The theme of *child care* is also conspicuously absent from many texts written about creating or conducting house churches. Perhaps this is an underdeveloped field for researchers to explore in future studies. In surveying the first 100 years of Christianity, Lutheran scholar Schnelle (2020) noted, "It is remarkable that [in the Pauline household codes] the children are addressed as autonomous persons who were probably present in the church assemblies" (p. 339). Undoubtedly, "the conversations between the adults are not interrupted or less interrupted when everybody's separate" (D5). As A1 noted,

At one point, the kids will go into another room and watch a video curriculum while the adult group [is] tackling a passage of scripture from a Discovery Bible Study mode. They reconvene and share with one another. Well, the parents would ask the kids…"Hey, what did you learn from the videos?" Because we want accountability, and engagement, and insight. And then kids right back say, "Hey, what did you guys learn in your time?" And they were kind of coming back at shared experience, right? And the two were purposely adjoined. So, it was even common lessons at age-targeted levels. But, um, but it was a beautiful, it's been a beautiful expression of church life. (Individual Interview)

RQ1 asked: What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders? The findings revealed that there are two external challenges and two internal challenges house church leaders are facing. The two external challenges are: (a) *Western-base ecclesiology* and (b) *time constraints*. The two internal challenges are: (c) *commitment and accountability* and (4) *child care*. The findings for Research Question 2 are presented next.

Marrying the Mission of Whole-Life Discipleship

RQ2 asked: How do house church leaders address these challenges? House church leaders recognize that any model of "leadership [and] that sort of thing, is always touted as a difficulty or challenge" (A1). According to D1, the "solution forward is just bearing with one another in relationship." The house church leaders interviewed distilled their knowledge, skills, and experience to one core mission, purpose, ideology, or *raison d'être*, which is *marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship*. The term comes from A1:

> I would identify this as a disciple-making cohort methodology that I want to institute….So that the movement is more defined by disciple-making at its core. Like I want to keep that at the very heartbeat of what we do. And my own ideology, you know, is we date a model, we marry a mission. My married mission is I want to, want to be about disciple-making…It's less about the model, and how we go about doing that, and the priority of disciple-making. (Individual Interview)

While D1 noted,

> I want to be all about Jesus, not just all about the model of church….If the church is people, then it changes everything….The leadership of the house church spends his or her energy pouring into people. The life of the house church leader is primarily filled with personal interaction. God wants me to make disciples [so] our core leadership here is making disciples, and that's something that I feel, like, is a fresh perspective. (Individual Interview)

To address the four external and internal challenges, the house church leaders interviewed are less inclined to implement the latest church planting best practices. Instead, house church leaders present "deliverables in a different way [creating] holistic development [where] relationship building gives an opportunity for…leadership development, and emergence. Churches that are on mission actually grow deeper in community and serve the purposes of God more readily" (A1). O1 said, "I believe every person, especially the leader of the church, has a responsibility to love, encourage, and equip." Therefore, the following four subthemes explain how discipleship happens amongst house church leaders

attempting to address these challenges. *marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship* occurs (a) *by example*; (b) *through intentional involvement*; (c) *with encouragement*; and (d) *for equipping the saints.* In the following section, the researcher describes these subthemes in more detail.

By Example. First and foremost, house church leaders in this multisite case study are trying to follow the example of Jesus regarding discipleship. O1 said, "If I'm not loving like Jesus loves, I'm not leading well." Emulating the ultimate exemplar entails "being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did" (D1). House church leaders are trying not to make this a "theological position, but rather like a methodological opinion" (D1) because "Jesus modeled a different way" (A1).

The way house church leaders try to actualize this is through "the Jesus model. I'll show you, then you try it. I'll show you again, you try it again" (O1). House church leaders try to build strong "relational equity" where the leader and the led can both "can grow together," often through their missteps by "holding one another to our core mission" (D1). House church leaders what to ensure their followers have also given "evidence they've married that [same] mission [of] what it means to be a disciple, let alone what it means to be disciple-making" (A1). The second subtheme of what *whole-life discipleship* looks like *through intentional involvement* with others.

Through Intentional Involvement. House church leaders cannot make followers of Jesus Christ if they do not "befriend people" (D1). "The intention [is] not only leading them to Christ but inviting them into his body" (D1). There is an "intensity of or intentionality of…doing life together" (A1). After all, "leadership is a life-long journey" (O1). House church leaders "always involve others" (O1). It is "life-on-life" (A1) with "the focus [of] spending time with one another" (D1). For example, D1 explained what *intentional involvement* looked like from one of their mentors:

> [This person] takes me with [them]. [This person] takes me to work with
> [redacted]. [They have] a boring construction job. And [this person] shows
> me how to pray throughout the day. And how [this person] intercedes. And

how [this person] jumps on phone calls with members [of the] church and pours into them. Um, and [this person] pours into me by being with me while [this person] pours into others. [Once] I asked if I could meet because I needed [this person's] advice. And [this person] was like, "for sure, but I'm gonna have a kid I'm discipling with me." And it's, like, mildly strange to bring someone to a meeting, but it was, like, beautiful…. And so it's on the way. (Individual Interview)

Another house church leader firmly declared, "I'm not a fair-weathered friend. I'm not a fair-weathered disciple-maker. I'm not settling for a shallowed-out relational expression. We go the distance in long-suffering and caregiving. We go there in conversation [and] we go there doing life together" (A1). House church leaders that *intentionally involve* others in their "everyday life activities" (A1) allow for encouragement towards [the mission], but then engagement [in it]" (A1), which are the last two subthemes.

With Encouragement. During the focus groups, the findings revealed that house church leaders are adept at "infusing courage" into the souls of their followers (A3) because "the leadership encourages me to do these things that I've been praying for" (A2). "There's love and support from your leaders" (A6) as they are "lifting each other up" (A4). Ultimately, "those with authority in my life…mentor me" (D3). The "relationship with each of my leaders goes far and deep" (A5). Some are "trying to get me not to call them mentors, and just affirming me as a friend" (D5). House church leaders are seen as "friendly, relatable, and approachable" (D6); however, *marrying whole-life discipleship by example, through intentional involvement, with encouragement* is ultimately *for equipping the saints* in their respective ministry.

For Equipping the Saints. House church leaders adhere to "engaging [others] at every level of life" (A1) to help people "do something they couldn't do on their own or that they didn't see in themselves that they could do" (O1). House church leaders want to ensure everyone's spiritual "gifts are being utilized from all" (D1). "The charge of leadership is that you're always…equipping [the saints] relationally and transactionally, leading a home church, or any in any capacity"

(O1). Understanding the difference between equipping people for the house church and equipping those for another capacity is essential.

In house churches, leaders want to equip the saints to *marry the mission of whole-life discipleship*, or "make disciples to make disciple-makers, if you will" (A1). The saints are "being discipled, and we are discipling" (D2), creating a "healthy, robust leadership pipeline" (A3). House church "pastors are looking for people that want to step up [and] if you're hungry to be a leader, you're gonna be it" (O4). The type of leadership required could be stepping up to address various needs within the house church body or stepping out to start a house church of their own.

Take the internal challenge of *child care* as an example. Rather than administering a programmatic solution, house church leaders would rather "build and pour into others, into leaders" (O1). Those leaders with the spiritual gifts to step up and solve the challenge of *child care* are equipped and empowered to do so. It is not necessarily up to house church leaders to address the challenges themselves. They would rather stay faithful to the core mission and have "people stepping up and becoming leaders" (O1) who are equipped to handle the issues that the group is facing.

When it comes to multiplying house churches, it is crucial to "identify leaders among leaders" (A1) and equip their disciples to "take a fateful step out and do it" (O1). A1 said, "it leads to actually a multiplication of the church in a healthier manner than the traditional models where someone in the pew looking at the pulpit would go 'I could never do that,' and therefore sits in silence." During the focus group, one participant eagerly remarked, "Who knows? Maybe down the road, I can start a new home church" (O3). House church leaders typically "have a pastor in training" (D1) and "promise [themselves] that we're going to coach up that next leader" (O1) by "[enhancing] your leadership skills to learn more about maybe something that you're lacking" (O2).

The other side pertaining to *equipping the saints* may have nothing to do with anything that directly influences the gathered house church community but a person's relationship with God. Participants in the three typologies of house churches "have someone there to support you in anything, whatever it may be"

(A3). House church leaders in this multisite case study realized "people are still holding back on how to fully operate under their God-given gifts" (O1) and that "mentoring and or skill-training…is the core practice of disciple-making" (A1). "If I'm going to equip you to do what you're supposed to do, I need to give you the tools to do it" (O1). Part of the tool chest entails spiritual disciplines that actualize someone's spiritual giftedness. Some of those spiritual disciplines are: a "prioritization of Scripture" (A4); "evangelize together" (D2); "definitely a time to prayer" (O3); and "a mechanism of resourcing and connectivity [with one another]" (A1). Additionally, D2 said,

> Some disciplines [do not] have to be super Spiritual. The beauty of this
> ministry is the simplicity of multiplying is on us and how we create
> relationships with people. That people want to hang out with you. That
> people want to have dinner with you and catch up. Super simple basic
> things that you already do. You already eat at a table, right? Why not just
> talk about Jesus and see how people are doing…. Sometimes [you] just
> need to hear them out, and they just need to vent. And at the end, you can
> say, "let's pray." And that was it. That was the most spiritual part was a
> prayer, but it was meaningful because you heard them, and they're not just
> another number. (Focus Group)

House church leaders address challenges by "[walking] through some pretty hard stuff [together] and never [leaving people] in these moments" (O1), but by "being with the church throughout his [or] her daily life. (D4). The solution is to remain faithful to the *Married Mission.* One house church leader said, "I will walk to hell and back with someone, and still be there at the end" (A1). The question A1 asked is, "How are we seeing discipleship played out or disciple-making played out through the ranks of our effort?" Through personal discipline and participative discipleship (two words that share the same root), house church leaders *marry the mission* by following the *example* of Jesus Christ, through *intentional involvement* with others, with a great deal of *encouragement*, for *equipping the saints* to lead an effective ministry as the body and bride of Christ. As D1 said, "I want to labor

towards making a bride that's worthy of Jesus." The results of this type of betrothed friendship create *intimate families* within the house churches.

Intimate Families

RQ3 asked: What are follower perceptions of church leadership within the three typologies of gatherings? The most prominent theme within and across the three typologies of house churches was the perception of an *intimate family*. D6 said, "The church gathers similar to family…you're opening your home, your heart, your family." A2 noted, "We're so intimate in a family." O2 reiterated, "[We are] one big, huge family." The perception of an *intimate family* "doesn't feel disjointed" (A4), is "more close-knit [and] tight-knit" (A6), and "even more united than we already are" (D2).

Being an *intimate family* also means the house church is a "messy community" (D4) where family members "eat, argue, fight, [and] forgive" (O4). Even "being a [house church] leader is a lot like being a parent" (A1). The house church leader as a parent is trying to create a "home church environment, where it was small and intimate [to] have these deep relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ" (O2). Having small, intimate, and deep relationships with others often produces friction. "We know each other, and we know when something's wrong" (A3). One person "confessed that [they] just didn't want to do Christian things" (O3).

The findings revealed that the familial environment of the house church made confession a contributing component to the level of intimacy of those involved. For example, O2 said, "[there is] intimate conversations about confessing to one another…where the [people] share the most intimate moments and details of their lives." O3 reiterated, "You feel like you can trust everybody with the secret where you wouldn't trust your neighbor, or even your sister, or your brother." O4 echoed the sentiment and stated, "Every time we confessed to each other, something beautiful came out of that. Weeping, sobbing. Those are special moments." During the other focus groups, participants shared similar views. "I remember confessing something…something that I shared and I asked [that person]

for forgiveness….The more blood, sweat, and tears together, the more we felt like we were united" (D3).

As previously mentioned, house church participants shared the benefits of having their children present during the gatherings, especially when parents confess to one another. Likewise, house church participants also believe their Heavenly Father is present during these intimate moments of confession. "My own bias of belief is that the Holy Spirit works uniquely within each family…. It was so intimate, it was so, I mean, the Holy Spirit was there" (A2). House church participants "want [their leaders] to keep it an intimate family" (A2). "It's ironic because we were so involved in [the purpose-built] church, but at the same time we felt disconnected to the people" (O2). One person during the focus group even called their house church a "home base church" (A4). The terminology is fitting for creating a safe space where people can be genuinely vulnerable. Members of each ODA house church repeatedly described themselves as a "being family, being the body, you know, and the different parts of the same body" (A3) that is "genuine, personal, family-oriented, [and] Spirit-led [because it is] very hard to confess something that's deep and personal" (O4). The following section addresses RQ4.

Interspersed and Dispersed

RQ4 asked: What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings? The findings revealed that house church leaders are trying to balance the division into smaller and small groups while also trying to multiply an interconnected network of house churches. Being *interspersed* (small groups) and *dispersed* (larger network) creates tension; however, house church leaders in this multisite case study "believe it is a beautiful, Biblical tension to be held in the body of Christ" (D1).

As previously stated, the bifurcation between children and parents into smaller groups is a challenge house church leaders are trying to address. There are some things that are "easy with a smaller group [then] breaking out [to] even smaller…more specific groups" (D1). "It's nothing too crazy. It's just the women, and then the men in the whole group. And so that's where our discipleship has been stemming from" (D2). For instance, O1 said,

[Peeling] off into sexes. We'd get together as a group, a couple of gals, a couple of guys, or a couple of couples. We separated again, the guys and the gals [where everyone is] going to go to different rooms. (Individual Interview).

One of the observations made during the *Aula* gathering was that it was all one gender with the opposite sex meeting at a different site during a different day and time throughout the week. It is evident that house church leaders are content with "[splitting] into two smaller groups for the majority of the gatherings" (D3) so others can be discipled two-by-two. The *interspersion* that occurs allows women to start "texting each other" and the men to be more "intimate with you in a small group like this" (O4). Ultimately, "there's accountability top to bottom, through and through, everyone, right together" (A3). This reinforces the theme of *commitment and accountability.*

As the cell grows to four or more, people begin "appointing a leader who is going to lead this group" (O2) that ideally "leads to actually a multiplication of the church in a healthier manner" (A1). House church leaders are characterized by "a communal expression of church [becoming] much healthier, more organic, more multiplying. [However,] there's been a little bit of resistance because anytime you think of multiplication, you always think, this is really hard" (A1). The *dispersion* caused by the multiplication of one house church to the next forms a "network of house churches" (D1). Where "there's no individual here or group over here" (A3) because "everyone is connected" (D1).

Each of the three ODA house churches surveyed for this multisite case study was part of a network of other house churches. A1 said,

[One church is] legally identified both as a denomination, technically by the government, right, an association of churches, and a church. We kind of have this unique setting with the government that we're identified as both, that's uncommon….The entirety of the network…is intending to provide the organic, decentralized construct, or association [when] the spread is too great. (Individual Interview)

House churches are "localities [that] have a plurality of eldership that are mutually submitted to the other localities [that are] overseeing a handful of churches, then submitting to people that are locally overseeing other handfuls of churches" (D1). The house church leaders welcome "creative thoughts of how we can continually convene, or keep connected to one another, even as we would multiply" (A1). When asking a focus group how their house church was different from a typical small group at a purpose-built church, the participants mentioned the network as the differentiating factor. The overarching network made it appear that the smaller house church was connected to something much larger than itself. A3 explained,

> Because when I went to a traditional church and I was in a small group, our small group didn't go socialize with another small group. We just stayed within a small group. So that's why I like the house church environment better as a small group, compared to the traditional churches. Everybody is intertwined with each other. There's interaction among the other churches. (Focus Group)

Shared Leadership

RQ5, the final research question of this dissertation, asked whether any of these characteristics (the challenges, the ways leaders address these challenges, and followers' perspectives) align with shared leadership (SL). The findings revealed that they do, as over half of the 202 codes generated for this multisite case study resembled concepts related to SL, generating the final three themes. The most prevalent and pronounced themes of shared leadership for RQ5 are: team characteristic: *size*; team environment: *voice* and *shared purpose.* the following section contains details on the final three themes.

Size

Previous researchers have mostly ignored *size* as it relates to SL (Wu et al., 2020), primarily due to the inconsistencies and contradictive findings (Edelmann et al., 2020). For instance, Zhu et al. (2018) theorized that the larger the team, the more it mitigated the emergence of SL. In comparison, Nicolaides et al. (2014) could not conclusively find any moderating effect of team size and SL after

performing their meta-analysis. Nevertheless, researchers studying this characteristic still include team size as a controlling variable because of its impact on SL (Wu & Cormican, 2021). The logic follows that larger teams cannot effectively interact with each member and "impede the exhibition of shared leadership as they put more strain on team processes" (Wu et al., 2020, p. 54).

The findings from this multisite case study revealed that house church leaders are determined to keep their teams small, ranging between two persons to 12. As previously noted, it is one-to-one discipleship and two-by-two smaller groups; when it is four or more, it is time to start appointing leaders within that group and connecting the quadrants with other circles "so that nobody falls through the cracks" (O2). Quadrants perhaps is an appropriate word to explain how leadership is shared between people because it denotes the four equidistant parts of a circle, rather than a top-down pyramid structure. House church leaders try to "include everyone [and] treat them equally" (A4). The imagery of interconnecting circles denotes the much more extensive house church network. Again, the theme of *Interspersed and Dispersed* is evident. O1 said, "you can have shared leadership in which four couples equally share the responsibility." A1 said,

> I would cap it at 12…If I got beyond 12, I wasn't giving my best…but I cannot go over 12. And it became a discipline for me to think about leadership, multiplication, and expansion. It even gave me the concept, kind of a Jethro model concept, of how do I do a distributed measure of leadership development or disciple-making development and not have it fall completely on our shoulders? (Individual Interview)

Team size is an essential factor of SL because it allows group members to "share responsibilities amongst everyone so that no one person is doing all the heavy lifting" (O1). D3 said, "there's a shared responsibility…then we'll rotate, we can rotate….We kind of share that responsibility….It's almost like it's just happening without really giving it, like, you know, a form, like, a formal form to it." Other house church participants said they rotate the role of leader based on an agreed-upon timeframe so everyone in the small group can have a turn leading. For example, "6 months for one person or a year for one person, then you rotate to

another person [and] that person will lead us for a season" (O1). A1 said, "The three of us follow up with each other and take turns leading and orchestrating the weekly gatherings."

Team size is a critical characteristic of SL for the house church leaders in this multisite case study who are trying to abide by "these two values: everyone's cared for by someone, and no one cares for too many that's beyond their spread or the span of care" (A1), thus ensuring that "nobody feels forgotten [and] nobody falls by the wayside" (D4). This multisite case study shows the positive outcomes of a smaller team size upon SL. As O1 said, "There's always a second, you know, a second chair that you're getting ready to influence."

Voice. The internal team environment of SL is typically comprised of three elements: (a) shared purpose, (b) social support, and (c) voice (Wu et al., 2020). The elements of team environment work collectively and concurrently together, creating an atmosphere conducive to SL emergence (Wu et al., 2020). The final two themes of *voice* and *shared purpose* address two of the three elements of team environment that are a necessary component of SL.

Voice is defined "as constructive change-oriented communication, participation in decision making, and involvement in key processes" (Wu et al., 2020, p. 54). When leaders signal to their team that they can willingly speak up, offer constructive feedback and innovative suggestions, encourage others to get more involved, and candidly discuss team performance or processes, team members are prone to proactively take a leadership role. According to Ali et al. (2020), "there is high interpersonal complementarity [that] strengthens…facilitates, [and] legitimizes shared leadership" (pp. 406, 409, 417). The findings revealed that team voice behavior, as it is often called, is part of the environment within the three typologies of house churches, according to study participants.

Members of the house church (including male and female participants, not just the leaders, across a spectrum of ages from each ODA site) reiterated that "everyone has a voice" (A2). "We have the opportunity to speak what's on our mind" (D3). "You have comments, you have ideas, you have things that you want to share…pastors are more of facilitators during gatherings and guide the

discussion" (O4). "It's not just the pastor preaching, and that's it" (A2). House church leaders turned "a monologue into a dialogue [and] that changed everything" (D2). Team voice behaviors allow house church participants in this multisite case study to "gather together and learn from each other [where] there's no wrong question" (A4). "People can be really sharing their story or something personal" (D4). One house church participant called it a "distribution of storytelling…where the depth of conversation is so rich" (A2). Others honestly "care what my brother or sister had to say" (D2).

When it comes to SL, house church leaders actively seek input from their team. House church leaders listen to "other views from other people [because it] helps you understand [the issue] more" (A1). "It's up to the leadership to make sure that everyone's being heard" (D1). O1 said,

> As a leader, I want to make decisions, and I'm responsible for decisions, but I can't do it alone, especially as a Christ-follower. And I need you to do two things: bring your opinion and then bring me data to back it up…. Because it's relational, I need your opinion, and I need the data to back it up. Those are, like, those two are vital to leadership and home church, in my opinion. (Individual Interview)

Shared Purpose. Much SL research has dealt with team outcomes instead of the environmental and contextual factors that foster SL emergence (Kukenberger & D'Innocenzo, 2019). "On the basis of past theory building, a shared purpose, reciprocity, and a trustful team environment can be synthesized as necessary conditions for shared leadership [on the individual and team level, which] contribute to a multilevel theory of shared leadership" (Klasmeier & Rowold, 2020, pp. 915, 925). *Shared purpose* occurs when the group has a mutual understanding of goals, motivation, and commitment to focus on these shared objectives, increasing their willingness to participate and lead the achievement efforts (Wu et al., 2020).

As mentioned, the primary purpose for leaders and their participants in the three typologies of house churches is *marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship*. Everything in this multisite case study centers on that theme. There is

a "co-equal, co-dependence" (D3) that takes "the pressure off of the leader to have to be the High Priest. Jesus is the High Priest" (D1). A1 said,

> I've always been a shared leadership [person]. I see a distributed model as a means by which we can pursue that spiritual care, spiritual formation….Jesus modeled a different way. "Come follow me," right, was the mantra. And I think we don't do that, as it were, largely because we haven't been disciplined in such a manner. So, what I'm trying to institute across the board in this decentralized model is really the core of it. In fact, I'm less about the model, to be honest with you, than I am about disciple-making. The model just happens to be the best expression that I know to foster healthy disciple-making. (Individual Interview)

D1 stated,

> I'm pretty passionate about marrying the mission and dating the model. I don't think house church is the solution to everything… in that same breath, I think it's really good hardware for the software that Jesus gives us…. We just want to have the absolute minimal hardware to run the gospel on. (Individual Interview)

Lastly, A1 said the intent of the house church leader is

> To guard against the institutionalization of a movement. As soon as a movement becomes an institution, that deadening effect of bureaucracy and decision making, and all of that, falls into play….The need of what had been traditional or formal leadership is quite different within the distributed model [where] holistic involvement is engendered within the context of the decentralized ideal. (Individual Interview)

Within a house church, "everybody's here for a purpose to be with other like-minded people. And I think that's what helps us the families be closer and feel comfortable with each other….We've always tried to raise up a couple alongside us" (O2). In the house church environment, "Things are different [and] everybody's feet are under one table" (O1). House church leadership "isn't from, like, bottom of the ladder to the top of the ladder. It's, like, from that chair to this chair in the same

house" (D1). Ultimately, house church leadership is made up of a *shared purpose* to make disciples one life at a time.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their homes or other tenement settings. In this chapter, the researcher explained how the 10 themes emerged from the raw data of over 53,000 words that were chunked into a little over 26,000 words, coded into 665 then 202 in-vivo codes, categorized into 14 temporary groupings, and thematized to form the findings of this multisite case study. The 10 themes were: (a) external: *Western-base ecclesiology* and (b) *time constraints*; (c) internal: *commitment and accountability*; and (d) *child care*; (e) *marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship by example*, *through intentional involvement*, *with encouragement*, and *for equipping the saints*; (f) *intimate families*; (g) *interspersed and dispersed*; (h) team characteristic: *size*; (i) team environment: *voice*; and (j) *shared purpose*. In the final chapter, the researcher summarizes the findings, discusses their implications, and suggests areas for future research.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The final chapter is a summary of the findings of this multisite case study, as well as a discussion of their implications regarding house church praxis and shared leadership theory. The chapter concludes with suggested areas for future research. The study was based on the need to examine house church leaders *in situ* within three typologies of home gatherings. While the authors of other dissertations have explored important challenges faced by house church leaders, the spectrum of *Oikos, Domus*, and *Aula* (ODA) is a house church framework that is unexplored in the leadership literature (Billings, 2011). By addressing a gap in the literature, the research findings of this multisite case study can form new knowledge in the field (Simons, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings. The following section details how the findings of this dissertation attempted to answer the research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

RQ1 asked: What are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders? The findings of this multisite case study revealed that there are two external challenges and two internal challenges house church leaders in this study reported to experience. The two external challenges are: (a) *Western-base ecclesiology* and (b) *time constraints.* The two internal challenges are: (c) *commitment and accountability* and (d) *child care.* The literature review espoused that house church leaders face two concurrent problems: the external threat of the rapidly changing religious landscape in the United States and internally leading within a more informal setting while balancing the appropriate amount of power and control.

House church leaders recognize that they are trying to "guard against institutions [because] you don't want hierarchy in place and power structures" (A1), but the participants in this multisite case study did not comment at length on the power dynamics or power distance at play. D3 observed that "[house church

leaders] have an authority over the group, and yet all of the group feels as if they're just their friend" (Focus Group). The literature review of house churches also emphasized the task-based nature of overseeing and serving as functions of the body, not as specific offices of authority occupied by one person (Banks, 2020). The literature review also described house church leadership as a choice of commitment instead of a chain of command where everyone voluntarily submits to one another (Birkey, 2018). It is possible that more time in the field would yield a greater perspective concerning power and authority within ODA house churches. Nevertheless, researchers should examine toxic leadership, abusive supervision, and destructive behaviors in any church context, especially because the Bible explicitly prohibits that heavy-handed approach (Jones, 2017; Wilder & Jones, 2018).

RQ2 asked: How do house church leaders address these challenges? House church leaders interviewed in this multisite case study are less inclined to implement the latest church planting best practices. The house church leaders interviewed distilled their core ideology to one phrase: (e) *marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship.* This theme also has four subthemes: (a) *by example,* (b) *through intentional involvement,* (c) *with encouragement,* and (d) *for equipping the saints.* The literature review of house churches hinted toward a particular type of organizational design beyond hierarchical structures (Towns, 2018).

The findings of this multisite case study revealed how seriously house church leaders take the discipleship process, which is different from the programmatic approach of purpose-built churches. There is a network organizational structure at play on the macro level, but on the micro level, it is pure peer-to-peer learning (Turner, 2011). Historically, the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*—literally, "little churches within the church"—have led to reformation and renewal through small groups of people "organically linked to one another in common purpose" (Birkey, 2018, p. 77). While a great deal of literature discusses disciple-making movements (Farah, 2022), the self-development required to invest in *whole-life discipleship* is often lacking or treated as a separate spiritual discipline in many purpose-built churches (Mathis, 2016).

RQ3 asked: What are follower perceptions of church leadership within the three typologies of gatherings? The need for this question arose from the processual, connectionist, and constructivist understanding of leadership instead of the traditional positivist and positional one. The literature review slanted towards a dyadic dynamism of reciprocal identity between the leader and the follower (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Morgeson et al., 2010). Leadership is co-created as a social process between the leader and the led, and that relationality reverses the lens and strengthens the threads of mutuality and interconnectivity of influence (Bryman et al., 2011; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). A unique phenomenon emerges when leadership, followership, and context intersect in complex and dynamic interactions (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019). In this dissertation, leadership was defined as processual influence resulting in a transformation of some kind either on the individual, group, organizational, or societal level, often identified as SOGI (Hoole & Martineau, 2014; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2008). Therefore, there was a need to study followers' perceptions to enhance the researcher's understanding of leadership.

The findings of this multisite case study revealed that participants perceive house churches as: (f) *intimate families.* Freud was one of the first to introduce the metaphor of leaders as good parents, but this imagery remained dormant for many years (Brandāo, 2016). Conger (1991) noted that rhetorical devices used in leadership studies invoke potent symbols that elicit deep cultural embeddedness and strong emotional connections. Current studies center around the transmission and replication of leadership memes that impact the self-identities people project upon prototypical behaviors from the leader-warrior, leader-problem solver, leader-politique, and leader-teacher (Zaccaro, 2014). The literature review noted that the Apostle Paul also used terms drawn from familial life as a father who conceived the church, mother who bore them, and nurse who cared for them, "rather than analogies from the legal, political, or even religious sphere" (Banks, 2020, p. 150). In future studies, it would be interesting to observe how followers describe the leadership phenomenon in the context of house churches and whether that language is helpful or harmful to creating clarity.

RQ4 asked: What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings? The findings in this multisite case study revealed a tension between being: (g) *interspersed* locally and *dispersed* geographically. The findings are in line with those of Andreas (2014), Boyd (2015), Hobart (2009), Turner (2011), Veliquette (2013), and Wiseman (2006), who also observed a close-knit, laterally integrated, associative cluster forming house church networks. Ultimately, there "is a multiplication of disciples making disciples, and leaders developing leaders, resulting in indigenous churches (usually house churches) planting more churches. These new disciples and churches begin spreading rapidly through a people group or population" (Coles & Parks, 2019, p. 315). The network approach of house churches contrasts with the purpose-built model of a centralized mother church that aims to franchise its programs to other unreached neighborhoods (Farah, 2022).

Lastly, RQ5 asked: Do these leadership characteristics align with shared leadership? The findings of this multisite case study revealed one team characteristic of shared leadership and two environmental antecedents. The team characteristic is: (h) *size.* The environmental factors are: (i) *voice* and (j) *shared purpose.* The literature review discovered that house church leadership theories revolve around servant leadership (Banks, 2020), shared leadership (Veliquette, 2013), or egalitarian leadership (Spencer & Spencer, 2020).

It is important to note that servant leadership was mentioned on several occasions throughout the interviews and focus groups. It is plausible that if servant leadership theory had been chosen as the underlying framework, many of the observations in this dissertation would have been colored through that lens. The findings from this multisite case study share some characteristics of servant leadership, such as: (a) listening as a means of affirmation (Daft, 1999); (b) *primus inter pares* (Greenleaf, 1977); (c) agape love (Patterson, 2003); (d) community building (Spears, 2005); accountability, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011); and (e) "The *sine qua non* of servant leadership [as the] holistic, moral, and ethical development [of followers]" (Sendjaya et al., 2008, p. 403).

Zdero (2013) forecasted that the house church movement would move from hierarchies to servant leadership (encompassing RQ5), from denominations to Spirit-led networks (RQ4), from paper membership to bodily members (RQ3), from a seminary-based system to an apprenticeship model of discipleship (RQ2), and from weekly worship to constant worship (RQ1). It was also interesting to note the similarities and differences between the literature and the final 10 themes that formed the findings of this multisite case study. Therefore, the 10 themes identified in this dissertation need additional discussion.

Discussing the Themes

The core findings of this multisite case study indicate strong leadership development within house churches. *Marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship* segues to *intimate families,* which segues towards *interspersed and dispersed* groupings, naturally leading back into the overarching *mission*. The family tree is a lineage of linkages building an individual's nest from the branches of other trees in an interconnected network rooted in one *shared purpose*. Marriage, family, and a nest egg are a recursive cycle, with the idea that the person being discipled will leave the nest (simultaneously joining a larger network), creating a return on the personal investment made into them by making disciples who also make more disciples. This harkens back to Filson's (1939) seminal article, which stated that studying house churches "affords a partial explanation of the great attention paid to family life in the letters of Paul…He knew that the Christian tree would be known by its fruits in home life [particularly] the home which housed the church" (pp. 109–110).

The traditional purpose-built model tries to reach and teach people in their congregation on Sunday morning to live out the Great Commission in small groups by serving or supporting the ministries throughout the week (House, 2011). In the ODA house, churches analyzed for this multisite case study doing precedes teaching. It is all a matter of sequencing. There is an example over explanation. Experience instead of exposition. Participation rather than pontification. Personal disciplines before peer discipleship. Showing, not telling. Traditionally, the purpose-built model focused on event-driven programs to try and reach and teach

as many people as possible through the truth of God's Word to join the way. The house church leaders in this multisite case study, however, seem content to focus their efforts on just one life at a time instead of the masses. As Chester and Timmis (2008) observed in leading a house church, "The larger the group, the more inevitable is the superficiality of our relationships. [As] G.K. Chesterton said, the man who lives in a small community lives in a much larger world" (p. 113).

House church leaders during the diaries and individual interviews, cited certain verses which lent the scriptural authority to support their ministerial efforts. Such as Acts 1:1, where "Jesus began to do and teach" (English Standard Version, 2016). House church leaders in this multisite case study also mentioned other supplemental scriptures, such as:

- Matthew 5:19 – "Whoever does [these commandments] and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (English Standard Version, 2016)

- John 7:17 – "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my authority" (English Standard Version, 2016)

- Romans 2:21 – "You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" (English Standard Version, 2016)

- 1 Timothy 4:16 – "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (English Standard Version, 2016)

- 2 John 1:9 – "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (English Standard Version, 2016)

Part of this understanding stems from the seven shrinking concentric circles of relationships found within Jesus' ministry. They are: (a) the resurrected Lord appeared to more than 500 at one time (c.f. 1 Cor. 15:6); (b) there were 120 gathered in the upper room during Pentecost (c.f. Acts 1:15); (c) Jesus appointed 70 others to go ahead of him (c.f. Luke 10:1); (d) out of those disciples Jesus called twelve to be his apostles (c.f. Mark 3:13); (e) Peter, James, and John were granted special access to significant moments in the life of Christ (c.f. Matthew 17:1, Mark

5:37, Mark 14:33, Luke 8:51); (f) Jesus personally invests in Peter (c.f. John 21:15); and (g) has an intimate friendship with John (c.f. John 13:23).

House church leaders in this multisite case study *marry the mission of whole-life discipleship* by primarily focusing on one-to-one relationships that organically segue into *intimate families* of two-by-two with deep levels of *commitment and accountability.* When there are four or more, the small group begins taking steps to multiply the movement across houses and neighborhoods in an *interspersed and dispersed* network. Each spatial relation also carries unique challenges that the house church leaders try to address and alleviate. Perhaps it is worth creating a model to pictorially display how the findings of this dissertation work together (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Discipleship Grid

Number of Relationships	Doing	Teaching	Challenges
1-2-1	By Example	With Encouragement	Western-Base Ecclesiology
			Time Constraints
2x2	Through Intentional Involvement	Intimate Families	Commitment & Accountability
	Size		
4 or More	For Equipping The Saints	Shared Purpose	Child Care
	Voice		Interspersed & Dispersed
Marrying The Mission of Whole-Life Discipleship			

Note. To better understand the grid, the left column represents the number of relationships conducive for house church leaders to disciple at a time. The top column is significant because doing precedes teaching. For house church leaders, teaching does not necessarily mean sermonizing but a way of life that tries to unite to one *shared purpose.* It is also worth mentioning that as the relational dynamics change (far left column), so do the challenges house church leaders face (far right column). The entire bottom row is built on the foundation of *marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship,* highlighted in yellow and distributed throughout the entire discipleship process.

The limitations and structurization of space are analogous to the ODA typologies studied in the literature review. Church history and archeology are replete with examples of churches modifying their living spaces, leadership, and liturgy to accommodate more converts (Cianca, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to discuss the implication the findings can have within the field of house church studies.

Implication for House Churches

House church leaders in this multisite case study demonstrated their fidelity to love God and their neighbors under one *shared purpose,* therefore, carrying implications for radical hospitality amongst ecclesiastical contexts. Butterfield (2018) noted that the word radical means a complete and total transformation of the root. This author continued,

> Radically ordinary and daily hospitality is the basic building block for vital Christian living…. Let God use your home, apartment, dorm room, front yard, community gymnasium, or garden for the purpose of making strangers into neighbors and neighbors into family. Because that is the point— building the church and living like a family, the family of God. (Crossway, 2020, Notable Quotes section)

The infrastructure of the early church contained several pillars integral to its success. Schnelle (2020) claimed five are: (a) the circulating and numerously copied writings that eventually formed the New Testament; (b) traveling emissaries between house church networks; (c) numerous co-laborers sharing the responsibility of leadership; (d) reciprocal financial support from house-to-house and across regions; and (e) a highly developed culture of hospitality. House church leaders would greatly benefit from more scholarly studies that paint a vivid contextual and cultural depiction of home life for the first 3 centuries of Christendom. Banks (2020) attempted a narrative exegesis based on the available biblical, supplemental, archeological, and inscriptional evidence. In an appendix at the end of the book, Banks (2020) stated, "My hope [is] that readers may glimpse something of what the church once was and still can be…even though we can't

simply imitate [the] earliest Christians…we can seek to experience the essential character of how they met" (p. 174).

The findings from this multisite case study revealed that people have preconceived notions of what the church should be, whether that framework is biblical, cultural, or deeply personal (*Western-base ecclesiology*). Hopefully, by reexamining radical hospitality, church leaders can transform their thinking into what the ideal familial community looks like in their home or other tenement settings (seriously considering *time constraints*, *commitment, and accountability*, and *child care*). Some house church leaders, however, can easily fall into the pattern of some who just have "traditional church in a house," as D2 said. House church leadership requires a safe place where an *intimate family's* hospitality habituates a lifestyle shared amongst all the participants. Filson's (1939) seminal article stated,

> In a mission movement which required resourcefulness and courage, [the hosts] were likely candidates for leadership. It was not merely an inherited theory of polity but in part at least the actual leadership provided by the hosts of the house churches which determined the form of church life. The house church was the training ground for the Christian leaders who were to build the church…. The house church enabled the followers of Jesus to have a distinctively Christian worship and fellowship from the very first days of the apostolic age…. It was the hospitality of these homes which made possible the Christian worship, common meals, and courage-sustaining fellowship of the group. (pp. 109, 112)

House church leaders are trying to replicate that very same training space today. For example, Francis Chan recently announced a residential church planting effort where attendees can spend 8 weeks to 9 months training with the house church leaders in San Francisco before being sent out to the most unchurched cities in America (We Are Church, 2022). House church planting efforts are no longer a one-off event, but an ongoing one-to-one investment. Ideally, the nest egg forms a network with a self-reinforcing feedback loop, forming an interknit connection of leaders spread across *interspersed and dispersed* groupings, sharing a way of life.

Therefore, it is crucial to discuss the implication of this multisite case study regarding shared leadership within the house church context.

Implication for Shared Leadership

House church leaders in this multisite case study demonstrated their fidelity to *marrying the mission* to produce *intimate families*, therefore carrying implications for shared leadership (SL) regarding marriage. House church leaders that are married to one another perhaps display the most significant expression of a mutually reciprocal and equitable partnership, which gets to the essence of SL theory and imagery found within scripture. SL theory has already garnered a great deal of attention in industrial and organizational psychology, organizational behavior, entrepreneurship, strategic management (Gichuhi, 2021), and higher education studies (Koeslag-Kreunen et al., 2021). Pembroke (2011) opined, "We know very little, however, about how Christian married persons actually approach the challenges of mutuality [and] equality….The theme of equality has a close relationship with the next one – namely, shared leadership" (pp. 150, 167).

SL studies within marriage could help restore proper parity between a male and female co-equal and co-leading under the headship and direction of Jesus Christ. Some seminaries have written position statements challenging the church to rethink its former traditions and interpretations to reaffirm the full participation of women in all church ministries (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2022). The scriptural support in these papers includes the creation account, the ministry of Jesus, the resurrection narratives, the widespread practice of the early church, and Pauline letters, where women are integral to all aspects of the church. In addition to the biblical account remains the historical record of women sharing leadership alongside men. Alikin (2016) noted,

> In the first century, women played an active role in hosting, leading, and performing leadership tasks in the gathering of Christian communities….In the second and third centuries, there was a growing tendency to exclude women from leading roles in Christian communities….This is supported by various "orthodox" sources that present a negative picture of this practice. The sheer amount of evidence in the available sources demonstrates that

there were a considerable number of Christian groups, who followed the first century practice of women in leadership roles and communities, as advocated by the Apostle Paul. (p. 237)

Practitioners should also consider how *size, voice*, and *shared purpose* aid the emergence of SL within a group. Mendez and Busenbark (2015) argued that the promise of egalitarianism in SL is twofold. First, SL theory often changes the stereotypical leader prototype from agentic and assertive terms to more communal ones where concern for other's needs and a welcoming environment ensues. Secondly, SL provides more opportunities for all group members to participate in leadership, even those often underrepresented in leadership roles, such as women and minorities.

House church leaders can act as conveners who convoke a safe space where commonality and diversity convey strength instead of indifference (Clary, 2021). Ultimately, this type of "*communitas* may negate the importance of traditional leadership. Instead, leadership may be more distributed, akin to peer governance" (Thompson, 2021, p. 18). Undoubtedly, the nexus of house churches and SL is an exciting field of study and may help restore the proper parity and balance of men and women co-leading and co-laboring together. The researcher now suggests some areas for future researchers seeking to confirm or expand these findings.

Areas for Future Research

The implication for house churches and SL are contingent upon several future research areas for scholars to consider. For quantitative researchers, it would be worth studying and segmenting house churches by more specific criteria such as age, ethnicity, and gender, regardless of the survey instrumentation employed. The micro-cultures that exist in U.S. house churches are just as diverse and variegated as the proverbial melting pot of this country, and failing to note those differences in this study is why future researchers need to consider them. As Smith (2006) observed, "Culture will defeat many research designs" (p. 918). Generally, the United States is "high in performance orientation and low in in-group collectivism. Characteristics of these countries to be competitive and result-oriented but less attached to their families or similar groups" (Northouse, 2015, p. 310). Considering

the nine variables of the GLOBE study—such as (a) performance orientation, (b) future orientation, (c) gender egalitarianism, (d) assertiveness, (e) institutional collectivism, (f) in-group collectivism, (g) power distance, (h) humane orientation, and (i) uncertainty avoidance (House et al., 2004)—add greater insight to how house churches play against type of certain cultural norms. For qualitative researchers, it is worth studying *child care*, house church networks, and theorizing a Christian component of SL. In the following section, the researcher addresses each one in more detail.

Child Care

The theme of *child care* is conspicuously absent from house church literature. The gap in the literature provides an opportunity for researchers to conduct ethnographies and textual analyses. With more extended time in the field, researchers can observe the house church culture on a week-to-week basis instead of just a one-time event and document how house church leaders address this challenge within their congregation. Researchers could also have house church leaders document their thoughts and interventions forming a comprehensive autoethnography of the phenomenon. Several online forums containing house church leaders and attendees have been very vocal about this issue. One email thread from a house church network produced 27 heated exchanges about the topic. Researchers could also compile this digital data and run textual analyses to sort the findings into the various solutions implemented by the numerous house churches across the country.

Ultimately, studying how house church leaders incorporate children differs from the purpose-built model and can help reinforce the theme of *intimate families*. House church leaders must manage their households well and ensure their spiritual progeny (at any age) is cared for and properly growing in the faith. By studying this area in the future, scholars can assist practitioners with various pedagogical methods that significantly contribute to the strong history of Christian education and spiritual development.

House Church Networks

When it comes to solving the challenge of *child care,* house church leaders heavily rely upon their network for support. The networks of disparate house churches across the United States is another fascinating area for future study. Endres and Weibler (2017) called for "more explorative studies that approach leadership phenomena inductively, and thus do not start with 'leadership' or what is assumed to be leadership, but rather with interaction dynamics and practices as they occur in a specific setting" (p. 231). The findings of this multisite case study addressed the ODA typologies, but failed to grasp the interconnected intricacies of constellations of house church clusters across a geographically dispersed network.

Ogden (2018) viewed networks as a shared and multidimensional system requiring facilitative leaders, guardians, gardeners, curators, and collaborators to hold the whole thing together. The ability of networks to increase learning through the coupling of clusters only aids in its adaptability to address internal and external challenges (Schreiber & Carley, 2008). One empirical study found that "joint-motivational network identity, which includes a collectivistic network identity, joint network motivation, and a largely value-laden attitude towards network participation, is related to shared leadership" (Endres & Weibler, 2020, p. 275). As previously mentioned, each ODA house church in this multisite study belonged to a more extensive network. Since house church leaders are already in favor of the networked approach, they present an untapped spring of resources for furthering the study of SL—not just on the micro- and meso-levels, but on the macro- and meta-levels as well.

Along with exploratory studies of house church networks, scholars can compile longitudinal studies to see if the house church networks remained with nonlinear forms of distributed and decentralized leadership. Church history details the sequence of a local plurality of presbyters morphing into a bishopric who presides over selected regions, then into a monarchial pontiff with power over all (Lampe, 2003). The *Domus* house church in this study was on the same reading plan across every site, and if an overseeing college of cardinals decides to standardize more liturgy, one cannot help but notice certain parallels with the past.

It will be interesting to see how house church networks evolve their leadership structure in the future as they face more internal and external challenges. Perhaps the best safeguard to power consolidating into one centralized authority figure is forming a Christian component of SL.

Christian Component of Shared Leadership

Lastly, scholars could use a grounded theory approach from the ethnographies and exploratory case studies to create a Christian component of SL just the like hybridization occurring with shared transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), shared authentic leadership (Hmieleski et al., 2012), and shared egalitarian leadership (Birmingham & Simard, 2022), among others. One could formulate shared trinitarian leadership, combining the best framework from secular scholarly studies with a scriptural foundation. It could also be possible to use the discipleship grid from the findings of this multisite case study to help establish the nomenclature and norms for what a Christian component of this new theory entails.

The Genesis account details God creating everything out of nothing within the communal co-existence of the Trinity—or, to paraphrase Augustine, the inseparable equality of one substance with divine distinctives (Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, the triune God shared authority with the co-equal couple empowered to procreate, rest, and recreate in a manner that honors their Creator (Robinson, 2018). Finally, the New Testament speaks to a synergistic partnership between this sovereign Lord and His vice-regents, leading in a capacity that avoids the pitfalls of power this world continually propagates. By theorizing a Christian component of SL, scholars can move the needle forward regarding the reciprocation of communication, compensation, and collaboration extending into the field of followership studies (Croy, 2021). Nevertheless, there needs to be more creative methods in the future to investigate SL thoroughly (Zhu et al., 2018). Ultimately, following Jesus Christ's example by *marrying the mission of whole-life discipleship* is a holistic journey where the sacrificial love of God continually transforms the love others have for their neighbors. The house church leaders in this multisite case study are trying to share that love one life at a time.

This dissertation began by postulating that house church leaders face two concurrent problems: the external threat of the rapidly changing religious landscape in the United States and internally leading within a more informal setting while balancing the appropriate amount of power and control. The findings of this multisite case study revealed that house church leaders face external and internal challenges. They are identified as *Western-base ecclesiology, time constraints, commitment and accountability*, and *child care.* The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings. House church leaders address these challenges by *marrying the mission of whole-life disciples*hip and creating *intimate families* that are *interspersed and dispersed*. The conceptual framework chosen for this dissertation is SL. Looking at the literature and latent themes through this lens concluded that *size*, *voice*, and *shared purpose* were part of SL, as defined in this dissertation. In this chapter, the researcher detailed the implications of these findings regarding house churches and SL theory while providing several areas for future investigators to study.

Summary

The researcher will conclude this dissertation with a selection of quotes from prominent scholars and past theologians. Wilder and Jones (2018) wrote that Christian leadership is marked "by union with Christ, communion with others, and a mission to exercise dominion over some specific aspect of God's creation [creating] holy ambition… not simply for the accomplishment of organizational goals but for the flourishing and formation of each individual" (pp. 17, 18). The primary domain is the house, where a leadership lifestyle is replicated, and love is reciprocated. Despite the challenges house church leaders encounter, they are trying to share the duties and delight of discipleship across a different organizational structure from the purpose-built church.

Marshall and Payne (2009) described this configuration as the trellis and the vine. The trellis represents the structural and visible work church leaders perform. Any measurable institutional achievement the church can point to, such as

buildings, programs, and outreach events, often defines success. The vine represents the intangible and often invisible spiritual growth occurring within people. Vines need support, but every structure contains certain restrictions. For some churches, "Maintaining and improving the trellis constantly takes over from tending the vine" (Marshall & Payne, 2009, p. 10). Marshall and Payne suggested an organizational culture built around SL where pastors are freed to spend more time with their people to address this issue. Bonhoeffer (1939/1954) stated it this way:

> He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter… Christian [fellowship] is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. (pp. 27, 30)

House church leaders activate their faith and participate in the fellowship of believers by following the *example of Jesus Christ*, *through intentional involvement* alongside others, with constant *encouragement*, *for equipping the saints* to manifest an "incarnational expression of love…that permeates every single corner and aspect of society" (A1, Individual Interview). To conclude, Follet (1920) wrote, "It is not enough to love the Beloved Community, we must find out how to create it" (p. 59). Despite the challenges, house church leaders are trying to create a loving community through the 10 themes that represent the findings of this multisite case study. Expectantly, future researchers can declare the lessons of shared leadership from a larger sampling of house churches that are dedicated to following the life of Jesus Christ, who not only shared his love but shed his blood to make us whole.

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Appendix A

Definition of Terms

Adherents – Devoted to a particular person or idea.

Adhocratic – Any flexible, adaptable, and informal organizational structure without bureaucratic policies or procedures.

Agape feasts – Literally love feast. At the inception of the house church, congregants gathered for a communal banquet (supper) where the Eucharist was part of a full meal, and free-flowing conversation followed (symposia).

Apostolic – The successional ministry of those sent to plant and protect churches.

Aula ecclesiae – The third type of house church studied in this dissertation. Larger places, both private homes and public spaces repurposed for Christian usage, often resemble a more formal leadership and liturgical structure.

Catechumen – An unbaptized disciple learning within the community.

Celebrant – One initiating and officiating a religious gathering.

Cenacle – The upper room where the disciples celebrated the Last Supper, and the first church began.

Clergy – Ordained religious officiants.

Communicant – A disciple who has taken the Eucharist.

Confraternity – A religious fellowship with charitable purposes.

Coregents – A shared leadership structure under the sovereign rule of the triune Godhead who is coeternal and coequal.

Corporeal – The body of believers where each member mutually edifies, educates, and encourages one another.

Diaconate – The official office of deacons.

Disciple – A learner on a lifelong journey.

Domus ecclesiae – The second type of house church studied in this dissertation. Rooms in private homes are renovated and dedicated for specific ceremonial gatherings.

Embodiment and emplacement – The gathering of physical bodies in a particular place profoundly affecting the human experience.

Eucharist – The sacrament of bread and wine consummated and consumed.

Hegemony – Leadership

Holarchy – Autocephalous nodes behaving partly as wholes or wholly as parts.

House church – Any recurring gathering in a home, including settings outside of a home, while excluding purchased and purpose-built buildings.

In situ – The original place of the church.

Kerygmatic – The undisputable doctrines in proclaiming and practicing the Christian faith.

Laity – Common people with something in common.

Leader – Processual influence resulting in transformation of some kind.

Lectern – An installed podium where clerics recited sermons.

Liturgy – The order and organization of a church gathering.

Monarchical episcopacy – The consolidated power in the office of bishops.

Noetic – Relating to the mind.

Oikos ecclesia – The first type of house church studied in this dissertation. Christians were meeting in homes to celebrate a meal containing the Eucharist.

Oligarchy – A small group of people retaining and maintaining control.

Plenipotentiary – Divested power invested into someone with the full authority to speak and act on their behalf.

Polity – The various forms of church governance.

Prelacy – Collective governing of the church.

Presbyters – The office of elders.

Processual – The dynamic interplay of inputs, throughputs, and outputs in living systems.

Purpose-built – Referring to buildings specifically purchased for recurring church gatherings.

Sacrament – The rite of baptism and the Eucharist.

Tenement – Other dwellings where the church congregated.

Triclinium – A three-figured table arrangement in the dining room where diners reclined for suppers and symposia.

Appendix B

Initial Contact Email

To Whom It May Concern:

Over the last two years, it has been encouraging listening to your stories as you lead house churches throughout the United States.

It has become apparent that many lead very diverse gatherings in challenging settings, and I wanted to study these contexts in greater detail for my doctoral dissertation.

Would you be interested in participating in this exploratory qualitative study? It is called *House Church Leaders: A Multisite Case Study* and will consist of:

- House church leaders keeping a diary for 10 days with provided prompts
- Visiting the house church and collecting field notes of a typical gathering while on site
- A 60-minute audio-recorded interview with the house church leader
- A 60-minute focus group (also audio-recorded) with those in attendance who also agree to be a part of the study

Please note that all participation is voluntary and uncompensated. Moreover, personal information will remain anonymous and confidential. All participants must sign an Informed Consent Form.

Please complete the brief questionnaire to be eligible for consideration.

1. Age:
2. Does your house church consist of: *(Circle one)*
   a. Gathering for a meal with Communion elements in a home
   b. Regular gatherings at your home with worship, teaching, prayer, and communion
   c. Regular gatherings in a rented facility without the intention of purchasing a building
3. Can you suggest five-to-seven congregants over the age of 18 from your house church to participate in a focus group? *(Circle one)* Yes / No
4. Are you and your site available between May-August 2022 to participate in the study? *(Circle one)* Yes / No

Regards,

Lance Croy
Southeastern University

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: House Church Leaders: A Multisite Case Study

Researcher(s): Lance Croy

Institution: Southeastern University (SEU)

Purpose: The purpose of this multisite case study is to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings. The central question is, what are the external and internal challenges facing house church leaders? Additionally, how do house church leaders address these challenges? What are follower perceptions of church leadership within the three typologies of gatherings? What are observed leadership characteristics within house church gatherings, and do these leadership characteristics align with shared leadership? The spectrum of Oikos, Domus, and Aula (ODA) is a house church framework unexplored in the literature. The research questions explore how the three types of house churches compare and contrast with one another.

Procedures: If the subject agrees to the study, the study will consist of:
- House church leaders keeping a diary for 10 days with provided prompts
- Visiting the house church and collecting field notes of a typical gathering while on site
- A 60-minute audio-recorded interview with the house church leaders
- A 60-minute focus group (also audio-recorded) with those in attendance who also agree to be a part of the study

Date(s): Summer 2022

Please read this form and ask any questions before agreeing to be part of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and subjects can discontinue their participation at any time without reprisal or penalty.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Interview: This study has minimal risk of emotional, psychological, or physical stress or injury. The researcher will benefit by collecting and analyzing data.

Compensation: There is zero payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Privacy: Any personal information provided will be kept confidential, and the only individual record linking the subject to this study is this

document. After the study is complete, the researcher will thoroughly scrub the data by assigning pseudonyms to the subject and removing all personal identifiers. The researcher may choose to utilize data obtained for future papers, projects, or presentations honoring the confidentiality clause.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher's name is: Lance Croy. If you have questions, you may contact the researcher via email at: lcroy@seu.edu.

The researcher will give the participant a copy of Page 1 of this Informed Consent Form.

Statement of Consent: *(Please Check)*

☐ I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions. I am 18 years of age or older. I consent to participate in this study.

Print Name_____

Sign Name_____

Date_____

Researcher Signature_____

Pseudonym_____

Appendix D

Diary Prompts

Day 1 – Draw your definition of leadership or describe leadership with a metaphor.

Day 2 – Share your story as to what motivated you to lead a house church.

Day 3 – What is it about leading a house church that is different from leading within a non-house church context?

Day 4 – What do you see as the greatest challenge in leading a house church?

Day 5 – Please upload any founding documents (Mission, Vision, Values, Ministry Charter, etc.) and speak to the challenges of implementing it within a house church setting.

Day 6 – Describe 3-5 characteristics of your leadership team(s).

Day 7 – Please upload an image of your organizational structure and speak to how you and your leadership team share responsibility in meeting the needs of the congregation.

Day 8 – Generally, how would congregants describe their experiences of participating in a house church?

Day 9 – What is a personal testimony of someone who attends your house church?

Day 10 – Re-read and reflect on the past nine days from this diary and pick one day to elaborate upon in more detail.

Appendix E

Observation Protocol

A: Mapping (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).
1. The spatial layout
2. The social scene
3. Diagram interactions

B: Appearance (Mack et al., 2005)
1. Age
2. Gender

C: Verbal Behavior (Mack et al., 2005)
1. Who speaks to whom?
2. Who initiates?

D: Physical Behavior (Mack et al., 2005)
1. Who is doing what?
2. Who is not interacting?

E: Traffic (Mack et al., 2005)
1. Who enters?
2. Who leaves?

F: Follow-up Questions (Lapan et al., 2012)
1. Ask during the unstructured interview or focus group.
2. Ask during the unstructured interview or focus group.
3. Ask during the unstructured interview or focus group.

Appendix F

Individual Interview Protocol and Questions

A: Dos
1. Create a larger grand question to ask first
2. Ask "how" questions rather than "why"
3. Consider the logical flow of the interview with all questions and probes
4. The last question can be "is there anything else you would like to add?"

B: Don'ts
1. Do not ask more than one question at a time
2. Do not ask questions that can be answered with a "yes," "no," or one word
3. Do not ask for hearsay on behalf of the group they are a part of
4. Do not ask for their analysis about the phenomenon

C: Questions
1. You mentioned in the diary prompts some of the challenges about leading a house church, can you elaborate more about that?
2. Can you give some examples of the ways you and your team have addressed these challenges?
3. Can you share more about how your leadership team functions?
4. Describe your interactions and relationship with house church members / attenders.
5. Tell me about a time people in your congregation supported a leadership decision.
6. Can you share about a time when people in your congregation did not support a decision?
7. During the observations I noticed _____ can you explain why you do this?

D: Probes
1. Could you say more about that?
2. What did you mean by that?
3. Could you give me some concrete examples?
4. Do you mean that _____?
5. What I am hearing is _____?

Appendix G

Focus Group Protocol

A.   Welcome: Hello, my name is Lance Croy *(Moderator with adequate knowledge of the topic)*.

B.   Overview of topic: The purpose of this focus group is to explore the challenges experienced by U.S. house church leaders in adapting their ecclesiastical model to meet the needs of church members within the context of their home or other tenement settings. Early church history provides three typologies of house church settings: Oikos, Domus, and Aula, and the research questions explore how the three types of house churches compare and contrast with one another. The results will help me complete my doctoral dissertation in the field of Organizational Leadership.

C.   Participants: All of you were chosen because you are active attendees in one of the three types of house churches *(Try to create a warm and friendly environment while observing participant seating arrangements)*.

D.   Guidelines:
1. Each of you has received an Informed Consent form that must be signed and returned to me. The top page is to keep explaining your rights as a participant in this study.
2. All participants will be given pseudonyms, and any personal details will be kept confidential in the final publication of this study.
3. This focus group will be audio-recorded and transcribed to analyze the data. Please silence all cell phones because the recording starts now.

E.   Procedural:
1. I will ask a question and go around the room to ensure everyone responds.
2. It will be beneficial if only one person talks at a time.
3. You do not need to agree with others, but please listen respectfully as others share their views.
4. After we have gone around the room, please feel free to direct questions toward each other or respond to what someone else has said.
5. My role is to facilitate a conversation *(using 5-second pauses; probes like "Would you explain further?" or "Would you give me an example?" while avoiding short verbal responses like "That's good" or "Excellent")* as well as guide the study *(Exercising group controls with ramblers, dominant talkers, or shy participants)*.
6. To keep this interview to just one hour, I will interject and state that we are moving on to the next question where this sequence repeats.

F.   Questions
1. Grand question: What motivated you to attend and participate in a house church?
2. How would you describe the leadership dynamic in this house church?
3. What do you see as the greatest challenge of a house church?
4. How are those challenges addressed by leaders?
5. What is your experience of interacting with other congregants of this house church?
6. How does that experience differ from a non-house church context?

G.   Conclusion:
1. Summarize.
2. Ask if there is anything else someone would like to share.
3. Thanks and dismissal.

Appendix H

First Cycle of Coding for *Oikos* Alphabetized

1	A place where we can make them a meal, play card games, talk about life, and open up about meaningful topics.
2	a potluck and we want you to invite everybody you know, and we're not going to do anything Christianese
3	accountability partners.
4	accountability, preparation
5	all of us leaders have an accountability partner
6	always so busy, but lacked true intimate relationships
7	an environment where when the church becomes comfortable and healthy
8	any leader in any setting has a job description.
9	appointing a leader who is going to lead this group
10	are you sharing the tasks?
11	Are you trying to do it all yourself?
12	as a home church, there's more accountability.
13	be inclusive of everyone that you have.
14	be respectful of people's time, but we don't try to put a time constraint.
15	Being obedient when it is Holy Spirit led
16	big churches
17	Christ in the Christian setting was there with them at that table around that table
18	commit in two ways, one just regularly coming and second to commit to help.
19	commitments are very, very difficult.
20	confess it to another
21	confessed to one another.

22	cross-pollination
23	Definitely a time to prayer
24	Discipled and Discipling
25	eat, argue, fight, forgive
26	encouraging people, praying for them.
27	encouraging them
28	enhance your leadership skills to learn more about maybe something that you're lacking
29	Equipped Disciple-makers
30	equipping them relationally and transactionally, leading a home church, or any in any capacity.
31	every time we confessed to each other, something beautiful came out of that
32	every time you take the bread and every time you take the cup, I'm with you Spiritually.
33	everybody has a part in home church
34	everybody helps one another lifts another
35	everybody picking up and picking up a conversation where they left off
36	everybody's here for a purpose
37	Everyone Exercises Their Gifts
38	everything is different over a meal.
39	expand your knowledge.
40	first challenge is commitment.
41	free to have our own relationship with God.
42	Genuine, personal, family oriented, Spirit-led, growth mindset.
43	getting people to invite people to our group.
44	getting people to really commit to inviting other people

45	getting people to stay committed
46	getting people to stay committed at the internal level.
47	give it a try, and throw out the fleece and see what happens
48	going to go to different rooms
49	going to pray together.
50	great fellowship.
51	have meetings to encourage each other to love on each other to pray for each other.
52	have these deep relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ
53	he confessed that he just didn't want to do Christian things.
54	hear the kids crying and stuff
55	helping them do something they couldn't do on their own or that they didn't see in themselves that they could do.
56	his desire with his disciples, I think, he was pointing to this table fellowship
57	how can we effectively incorporate the babies, kids during the gathering?
58	humility, patience, action, and change.
59	Humility, teachable, godly character, Spirit-filled
60	I always involve others
61	I ask people all the time that I lead to help us kind of define if you're heading in the right direction
62	I believe every person, especially the leader of the church, has a responsibility to love, encourage, and equip.
63	I can commit to this for six months. I can commit this for a year.
64	I felt pressure to look my best, act my best
65	I need your opinion and I need the data to back it up.
66	I'm always next to you
67	I'm modeling to him

68	I'm never going to leave you in these moments,
69	if I'm going to equip you to do what you're supposed to do, I need to give you the tools to do it.
70	If I'm not loving like Jesus loves, I'm not leading well.
71	if we didn't have that, that home church environment, where it was small and intimate.
72	If you want to learn, if you want to be here with like-minded people, we're here.
73	if you're hungry to be a leader, you're gonna be it
74	in leadership, specifically of a church, somebody needs to be in charge.
75	in your face
76	infusing courage into their soul
77	it doesn't feel disjointed.
78	it goes all the way back to the Lord's Supper.
79	it starts with like ground rules, okay, what's our purpose?
80	it was great to hear us encourage him
81	it's a lot of single people and they don't have family
82	It's always intimate with you in small group and a small group like this.
83	It's great to share responsibilities
84	it's hard to get people to come in and to stay
85	it's important to have one person be in charge.
86	It's more intimate.
87	it's not one size fits all, but it does scare folks.
88	it's very hard to get people to invite people into the home group
89	it's wonderful when they encourage you to do something that's been ministering in your heart in

90	It's ironic because we were so involved in church, but at the same time were felt disconnected to the people.
91	It's more one-on-one, and there is less room to hide.
92	Jesus broke bread with his apostles
93	Jesus is right there with us.
94	Jesus modeled this for us. He modeled it with the Lord's supper with the bread in the cup.
95	just going to have a potluck
96	just take a fateful step out and do it.
97	keeping folks accountable
98	Leadership is a life-long journey
99	Leading in a house church is much more intimate.
100	leaned back and enjoyed that fellowship
101	learning and teaching
102	Let's get them involved and make it a day.
103	long-term commitment is a struggle
104	love them
105	Loving families
106	mega churches
107	more intimate setting
108	need to equip you relationally
109	not specifically, okay, we got to follow this by the book
110	one big family.
111	one big, huge family
112	one full conversation
113	opening up in a place where they feel comfortable

114	pastors are looking for people that want to step up.
115	Pastors are more of facilitators during gatherings and guide the discussion.
116	people are still holding back on how to fully operate under their God-given gifts.
117	people stepping up and becoming leaders
118	people to stay involved, just to stay self-driven
119	people will come in and they'll be like, oh, wait, y'all go too long.
120	prayer and trusting God
121	prayer walk
122	preach the Word of God.
123	Regular Multiplication of Churches
124	rotation
125	saw people we would ask them if we could pray for them
126	Simple Gatherings
127	six months for one person or a year for one person, then you rotate to another person.
128	so that nobody falls through the cracks
129	solid teaching in the time we meet.
130	some people don't like the accountability.
131	some people had enough responsibility
132	something special happened in that fellowship,
133	Spirit-Filled
134	study with each other to learn with each other
135	that person will lead us for a season
136	That's what prophecy is designed for, to encourage.
137	the ability to be versatile

138	the charge of leadership is that you're always training a replacement.
139	the gift of prophecy, it has two purposes. One of them is to encourage people and to build up the church.
140	the Jesus model. I'll show you, then you try it. I'll show you again, you try it again
141	the leadership encourages me to do these things that I've been praying for
142	the meal component helps really hold that.
143	the meal, it's the glue that holds it all together.
144	the pastor was communicative with us and caring
145	there's a way we all facilitated.
146	there's always a second, you know, second chair that you're getting ready to influence
147	there's people that can stay three hours at church
148	there's still something that comes with leadership
149	They didn't want to lose the intimate moments with him.
150	they didn't want to lose their fellowship with Him.
151	they do have the help that's needed to become those leaders
152	they miss some of the traditional stuff
153	They tried to get off at a certain time because they still have the kids
154	they trusted each other
155	they were my pastors, and now their elders
156	things are different over a meal.
157	things are different when everybody's feet are under one table.
158	this is where the men share the most intimate moments and details of their lives with each other
159	those kinds of conversations happen.
160	traditional, non-house church setting

161	trusting God that if he's called you to this
162	very hard to confess something that's deep and personal.
163	very intimate, you know, like closer relationships
164	we could spend 45 minutes on one Scripture, it was no, there was no time constraint
165	we do a potluck, often
166	we feel the Holy Spirit.
167	We introduce them to our mess versus the non-house church context pressure of showing your best.
168	we just felt encouraged.
169	we prayed over our meal, a good deep prayer
170	we separated again, the guys and the gals, for one evening
171	We share responsibilities amongst everyone so that not one person is doing all the heavy lifting.
172	We should train up people to replace us for leadership.
173	We talked, ate, played games, shared the Word, prayed, and ate again.
174	we want to check on our members and check on our leadership
175	We'd get together as a group or a couple of gals and get together, a couple of guys or a couple of couples
176	We're going to fellowship, have a barbecue
177	we're going to pick together who this person should be.
178	we're gonna promise that we're going to coach up that next leader
179	we're here and not one person, per se, is always the one facilitating
180	we've always tried to raise up a couple alongside us
181	weeping, sobbing. Those are special moments.
182	what do you have to keep doing?
183	what have you started doing?

184	what have you stopped doing?
185	when we invite someone to share a meal or plan kid's play dates, it's much more meaningful
186	where there's intimate conversations about confessing to one another
187	Where we could peel off into sexes.
188	who knows maybe down the road, I can start a new home church
189	Why do we exist and how and how are we going to make it happen?
190	worship God
191	You are who you are behind closed doors
192	you can have shared leadership in which four couples equally share the responsibility.
193	You equip people relationally
194	you equip people transactionally
195	you feel like you can trust everybody with the secret where you wouldn't trust your neighbor or even your sister or your brother.
196	You got to have somebody that you're going to be coaching up into that spot.
197	you have comments, you have ideas, you have things that you want to share
198	you need to do your part for the home church to be successful.
199	you rotate leadership
200	you saw the fellowship, it was fun
201	you're praying and you feel God leading

Appendix I

First Cycle of Coding for *Domus* Alphabetized

1	a little over overwhelmed with the intensity.
2	A lot of people are uncomfortable with house church because it is invasive.
3	accountability
4	all are co-dependent.
5	And we're co-equal
6	are we in it as a group, then we can break up into more specific groups?
7	At a service model church, a very large degree of resources: money, time, and energy is pointed toward events.
8	baptism
9	be a person of submission and try to replicate that in other people.
10	befriend people and they know Jesus really well.
11	being a person of submission, with a heart of submission
12	being a small group
13	being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did.
14	being with the church throughout his, her daily life.
15	breaking bread like Jesus did with the disciples, and knowing what's going on in your life.
16	but then even breaking out from even smaller groups
17	childcare with the little ones, like, how's that going to happen?
18	co-pastor
19	communion is central to what the church is
20	core leadership here is making disciples, and that's something that I feel, like, is a fresh perspective.
21	create good hardware for the software of the gospel

22	create relationships with people that people want to hang out with you
23	cultural challenge
24	culturally how it's done, and it's structurally how it's done.
25	deeper meaning and build stronger relationships
26	deeper relationship with a brothers and sisters in Christ as well.
27	dialogue is so important in a church.
28	Do we know each other's life?
29	doesn't have to be super Spiritual
30	even church homes can be monologues.
31	everybody was responsible for sharing meals together.
32	everyone is connected.
33	everyone sees you and expects a commitment from you
34	expect the things that we read in Scripture
35	facilitating everyone into the presence of the Lord.
36	for daycares or a school system, they're already divided.
37	forced back on the path due to everyone else ensuring that they do
38	get deep in the reading plan and get deep in other ways.
39	Gifts are being utilized from all.
40	God wants me to make disciples.
41	godly sincerity and simplicity
42	have the absolute minimal hardware to run the gospel on.
43	have them be a part of the discussion and ask their questions.
44	have voiced their opinion, and just really learn from them.
45	having the kids in there, and then watching it and seeing that.
46	He broke every traditional role
47	he disciples me and I disciple him

48	Home Church, to me, as a union, it is just one family
49	how to incorporate the children
50	humble, submitted plurality
51	I believe it is a beautiful, Biblical tension to be held in the body of Christ.
52	I can approach them as a friend, and they are the ones submitting to my authority.
53	I care what my brother or sister had to say
54	I don't need to find some charismatic guy to be a priest.
55	I don't need to make me a High Priest.
56	I don't really want to go to your thing, is it's a little too much for me
57	I don't think house church is the solution to everything.
58	I fail to be on the reading plan
59	I had to get used to hearing the Words like, elder
60	I just wanted intimacy
61	I never have to assert authority or positional authority
62	I never want to be the model [person].
63	I prefer serving an elder
64	I remember confessing something
65	I think it's a really good hardware for the software that Jesus gives us.
66	I want to be all about Jesus, not just all about the model of church.
67	I want to labor towards making a bride that's worthy of Jesus
68	I wanted personally to dive deeper into the Word.
69	I would describe the leadership dynamic to be guided through the Holy Spirit.
70	I would rather someone have too much freedom to speak and say something wrong
71	I would understructure the gathering

72	I'm so used to hearing you know, pastors, associate pastor, deacons, you know, just your traditional words
73	if the church is people, then it changes everything.
74	in the center is the Word of God.
75	In the traditional church.
76	involving our kids more
77	It is a potluck for the glory
78	it isn't from, like, bottom of the ladder to the top of the ladder. It's, like, from that chair to this chair in the same house.
79	it's almost like it's just happening without really given it like, you know, a form, like a formal, form to it.
80	it's been really difficult in the West to convey what the church is to people.
81	it's easy with a smaller group
82	it's important that our kids feel just as equally valuable as the adults do.
83	It's not even a theological position, but rather like a methodological opinion.
84	It's not like it's not a pyramid scheme, it's just a beautiful circle of broken people all under Jesus.
85	It's nothing too crazy. It's just the women, and then the men in the whole group.
86	it's on the way.
87	it's relational evangelism
88	It's up to the leadership to make sure that everyone's being heard.
89	Jesus is the high priest.
90	Jesus, to me, was like a rebel
91	just need to hear them out when they just need to vent
92	just the nature of it being in my home, there's kind of this assumed thing

93	kids are always pushed to the side because, you know, they're kind of unpredictable
94	Leadership is being a trellis maker.
95	leadership is like having people by your side
96	lifestyle of worship
97	Like a divergent cow in a heard.
98	living lifestyle of worship
99	local oversight, I don't think that looks like dominating
100	localities that have a plurality of eldership that are mutually submitted to the other localities
101	locally overseeing a handful of churches, then submitting to people that are locally overseeing other handfuls of churches
102	maintains a healthy amount of accountability amongst one another.
103	marrying the mission and dating the model.
104	Messy community.
105	messy stuff when no one's in charge
106	minimal gatherings
107	more depth and intimacy
108	more friendly and relatable and approachable than any pastor I've ever seen.
109	network of house churches.
110	nobody feels forgotten, nobody falls by the wayside.
111	not involving our older kids, you know, in our conversation
112	opening up in prayer, and then explaining the posture that we're going to be taking during the time
113	Others outside that box, it's just like, unthinkable, unfathomable and we just laugh
114	our elder is connected to all the other elders

115	our focus is to make sure that everybody is around the same table
116	our leaders do a great job of always welcoming us
117	our yearning to turn a monologue into a dialogue that changed everything
118	overseeing, it's a Biblical word, so I feel comfortable using it.
119	parents prefer to have them sit in their own class
120	people can be really sharing their story or something personal.
121	people do not have a paradigm for a church being in a home or being people
122	people know everything, like, you can't hide it all.
123	people want to have dinner with you
124	People would pick up and drop off kids.
125	pouring into me, speaking to me, and discipling me
126	praying
127	purpose of it, is multiplication
128	really dive deeper into the Word
129	relational connection
130	revivalist in the midst of lukewarmness.
131	Scripture study
132	seeker-focused model.
133	service-oriented church
134	share the load
135	sharpening each other
136	solution forward is just bearing with one another in relationship.
137	some do a traditional church in a house
138	something that I shared and I asked her for forgiveness
139	split into two smaller group for the majority of the gatherings can be hard.
140	structural challenge

141	Structurally, the greatest challenge that I see would be multiplication.
142	super simple, basic things that you already do, you know, the table, right?
143	take the pressure off of the leader to have to be the High Priest
144	takes me with him
145	that elder was approved by all the church home pastors.
146	that requires intimate relationships.
147	That was his most Spiritual part was a prayer, but it was meaningful
148	the adults participate in whenever we are together.
149	the average American Christian, or churched non-believer, is speaking a completely different language when it comes to church.
150	the church gathers similar to family.
151	the church is a people.
152	The conversations between the adults are not interrupted or less interrupted when everybody's separate.
153	the disconnect between what we read about in Scripture and what we see in our gathering becomes non-existent.
154	the early church is definitely a challenge, but once people get there, it's beautiful.
155	The focus is spending time with one another,
156	the intention of not only leading them to Christ, but inviting them into his body.
157	the kids will go outside for a little bit, and then we'll bring them back in and then incorporate them
158	The largest cultural challenge would be that it is so different, and oftentimes, at odds with American church
159	the leadership of the house church spends his, her energy pouring into people.
160	the life of the house church leader is primarily filled with personal interaction

161	the more blood, sweat, and tears together, the more we felt like we were united.
162	the need for deeper, more meaningful relationships with people and with God.
163	the need for greater and deeper relationships with people and with God
164	the pastor has a lot of relational equity
165	the potluck metaphor
166	The role of the leader is, then, not to force growth or be domineering
167	the simplicity
168	the traditional church was becoming more of just an every Sunday kind of thing.
169	the way that the leadership functions would be to facilitate the movement of the Spirit.
170	the way they pray.
171	the women are texting each other.
172	the Word is the center of everything
173	the worship leaders and I got together, and we just prayed that we would die in Christ and he would rise in us.
174	then we'll rotate
175	there are quite, you know, quite a few kids.
176	there's a lot of respect and honor and trust that I feel, like, is quite rare.
177	there's a shared responsibility
178	there's an intentionality that I feel like we've been doing
179	there's no hierarchy
180	there's some things I just imitate because of mentors of mine.
181	There's two church home pastors.
182	they do it on the way

183	they have an authority over the group, and yet all of the group feels as if they're just their friend.
184	they've encouraged me instead of trying to, like, assert authority
185	Those with authority in my life, to mentor me
186	to grow in my Spiritual life with the Lord.
187	to interact with other leaders
188	Too much structure and the vine is overcrowded. Too little and the vine can't reach its full potential.
189	trust of leadership.
190	trying to actually distribute authority
191	trying to get me not to call them mentors, and just affirming me as a friend
192	We are being discipled and we are discipling.
193	we are closer.
194	we are just one family
195	we are united when we help each other
196	we can be even more united than we already are.
197	we can have a discussion
198	we can have a we have the opportunity to speak what's on our mind
199	we can rotate
200	we do dialogue
201	We don't want to under structure
202	we had some, like, really powerful leaders there, and so we just kind of let them do their thing.
203	We have a pastor in training,
204	we have house church pastors,
205	We kind of share that responsibility.

206	we want the kids of the church to be involved
207	we will hang out with our church every day.
208	we would evangelize together.
209	we're just having a potluck, and the host's job is to make sure no one brings any bad food.
210	we're like the rebels,
211	What did Jesus do? He got baptized and told us to get baptized
212	when I say evangelism and I talked about church planting, I'm talking about disciple-making
213	when I say evangelism, I mean disciple-making
214	Where we can grow together
215	Why not have a place where God says, no, I want some time for the adults and the children, and everyone in between to be one.
216	You can't, you can't, disguise anything.
217	you can't slip-in and out,
218	you're opening your home, your heart, your family,
219	your possessions are communal

Appendix J

First Cycle of Coding for Aula Alphabetized

1	A communal expression of church becomes much healthier, more organic, more multiplying
2	a family environment.
3	a network is intending to provide the organic decentralized construct or association,
4	an infrastructure of pastoral care
5	an opportunity for us to pray for one another
6	as soon as a movement becomes an institution, that deadening effect of bureaucracy and decision making, and all of that, falls into play.
7	base-level ecclesiology, what comprises a church?
8	because of the relational investment, deep trust has been instituted.
9	because we're so intimate in a family
10	being a leader is a lot like being a parent.
11	being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, doing what he does
12	beyond phenomenal
13	big churches
14	blessed that the Lord led me to a homebase church
15	board to whom I'm accountable
16	build and pour into others, into leaders
17	busy lives
18	buy into the heartbeat of where we're going
19	checking in with one another, hearing what God is doing.
20	churches that are on mission actually grow deeper in community, and serve the purposes of God more readily.

21	closeness with family
22	coachings towards that
23	come together as the body behind the scenes
24	common identity.
25	common liturgy across our house churches
26	conventional church
27	creative thoughts of how we can continually convene, or keep connected to one another, even as we would multiply.
28	deep study, rather than a broad study of the Word
29	deliverables in a different way
30	differentiated love at a supernatural level
31	dismantle some of those unhealthy expectations
32	dismantling that takes clarity: clarity of understanding, clarity of teaching
33	distinctives of our network
34	distributed model of ministry.
35	distribution of storytelling
36	doing life together in a very intentional way.
37	Encourage and uplift each other.
38	encouragement towards it, but then engagement
39	engaging them at every level of life
40	especially those that have prior church backgrounds or biases as a result of being raised in a different construct.
41	Even as I lead a traditional church for 30 years I did so in team, even sharing the pulpit
42	every person is cared for by someone, but no one is caring for a number beyond their span of care ability.
43	everybody gets to know each other

44	everyone comes read and prepared, and eager to discuss
45	everyone gets to participate.
46	everyone gets to play
47	everyone has a voice
48	everyone has input.
49	evidences they've married that mission
50	expectations comes both from within and beyond the house church
51	expectations from beyond might be, what is this?
52	expectations is one of the core challenges.
53	family-like.
54	feel so much more there in the Spirit
55	Gather together and learn from each other.
56	Getting people committed and involved.
57	guard against institutions, so you don't want hierarchy in place and power structures
58	healthy accountability.
59	healthy robust leadership pipeline
60	help me understand that all this is really more of a blessed story
61	helped us drive into deeper expressions of love in our context.
62	historic model
63	holding one another to our core mission
64	holistic involvement is engendered within the context of the decentralized ideal.
65	homebase
66	homebase church is more close-knit
67	house church pastors,

68	how are we seeing discipleship played out or disciple-making played out through the ranks of our effort
69	how do I do a distributed measure of leadership development or disciple-making development, and not have it fall completely on my shoulders?
70	how do we go about that in tangible and practical ways?
71	I believe in accountability.
72	I believe in holistic development.
73	I can feel the Holy Spirit
74	I cannot go over 12, and it became a discipline for me to think about leadership multiplication, expansion
75	I see a distributed model as a means by which we can pursue that Spiritual care, Spiritual formation
76	I want accountability all around,
77	I want to keep that at the very heartbeat of what we do
78	I will walk to hell and back with someone and still be there at the end
79	I would be there for them
80	I would cap it at 12
81	I would identify this as a disciple-making cohort methodology
82	I'm less about the model, to be honest with you, then I am about disciple-making.
83	I'm not a fair-weathered disciple-maker.
84	I'm not a fair-weathered friend
85	I'm not settling for a shallowed-out relational expression.
86	I'm pretty deferential to house church pastors on what they're reading through in a particular moment and what liturgies they employ
87	I'm starting to use disciple-making cohorts because I want to keep disciple-making at the very heart of it.

88	I've always been a shared leadership [person].
89	I've grown so much in the Word, been so filled in the Spirit
90	identify leaders among leaders and leaders
91	If I got beyond 12, I wasn't giving my best
92	in a decentralized type of a deal, you don't have similar draws or pooling of resources
93	In my mind, edification and mission are the core of a house church expression.
94	in this type of construct, the demands of a hierarchical structure are lessened
95	infrastructure is important
96	institute different thinking about what was to happen in the context of the church
97	institutionalization of a movement
98	intentional engagement
99	It isn't just reporting of numbers and stats, it's storytelling
100	it leads to actually a multiplication of the church in a healthier manner
101	it was so intimate, it was so, I mean, the Holy Spirit was there.
102	it's hard for a lot of people to make the time and put in the effort.
103	it's important to walk together, journey together.
104	it's less about the model, and how we go about doing that and the priority of disciple-making.
105	it's more intimate
106	it's not a power play, it's a how can I help?
107	It's not just the pastor preaching and that's it.
108	Jesus modeled a different way.
109	just going and letting the Spirit lead
110	just having the accountability

111	just, like, more like this family.
112	keeping each other in check
113	keeping in the forefront of our minds who it is that we're reaching with the gospel of Jesus,
114	lead by example
115	lead by fruit production
116	leadership level as a mechanism of resourcing and connectivity
117	leadership needs leadership development
118	leadership, that sort of thing, is always a touted as a difficulty or challenge by most models
119	learning as we're being with Jesus, becoming like him, doing what he does.
120	legally identified both as an as a denomination, technically by the government, as an association of churches and as a church
121	life-on-life
122	lifting each other up
123	limited resources
124	liturgy is fully engaged and fully developing.
125	loving expressions or family expressions
126	Loving, Caring, Involved
127	make disciples to make disciple-makers, if you will
128	make sure that everyone's cared for by someone, and no one's caring for too many.
129	mentoring and or skill-training, what I would argue is the core practice of disciple-making
130	mindset of what gets delivered
131	mission is the kind of calcifying unit of a church
132	my intent isn't to grow this big thing, and that it's about numbers.

133	My married mission is I want to want to be about disciple-making
134	my own bias of belief is that the Holy Spirit works uniquely within each family.
135	my relationship with each of my leaders goes far and deep.
136	neighborhood settings so that neighbors are touched by the power and presence of God in their midst
137	not as institution, not as program
138	other views from other people, helps you understand it more
139	ours is a learning posture
140	ownership and accountability
141	People still want to do their own thing
142	prioritization of Scripture
143	provide some shared resources, so as to take away the burden
144	relational disciple-making
145	relationship building gives opportunity for deep disciple-making and therefore, leadership development and emergence
146	reminding me to be humble, loving, and caring
147	Requests and encouragement, and the ongoing life-on-life dialogue
148	reverse emotions in play
149	seeking for leaders to build up leaders
150	serving with the Holy Spirit
151	so much more unified with the Word and the Spirit, and with individuals
152	some are higher liturgies, some are not so much.
153	that concept needs to be healthfully applied to a distributed model to guard against institution
154	that eats into people's thinking as they attend or initially attend
155	That particular meeting actually goes for about nine hours every Sunday.

156	That's family.
157	the ability to fully engage, there isn't a silent party in the midst.
158	the church misunderstands what it means to be a disciple, let alone what it means to be disciple-making.
159	the common commonality
160	the concept of basic ecclesiology is dismantling some of the wrongful notions of what it means to be church.
161	the core of my effort is disciple-making
162	the depth of conversation is so rich
163	the entirety of the network
164	the extent that I would envision
165	the framework of a delivered message, foremost, it's kind of the queenpin of a gathered community.
166	the house church pastor is connected to me, there's a direct follow up, there's a direct mentoring
167	the intensity of or intentionality of it
168	the leaders are reachable.
169	the leaders encourage us
170	the leaders that we have will come back and check on you
171	The model just happens to be the best expression that I know to foster healthy disciple-making
172	the movement is more defined by disciple-making at its core
173	the need of what had been traditional or formal leadership is quite different within the distributed model.
174	the relational dynamic of it
175	the source of said story
176	The spread is too great.

177	The three of us follow up with each other and take turns leading and orchestrating the weekly gatherings.
178	the traditional models
179	the un-health of our traditional structures, I think gives fertile ground for some of those misgivings.
180	there was resistant hearts because of the fear of loss.
181	there's accountability top to bottom, through and through everyone, right together.
182	There's also been clear statement to trust in that leadership decision.
183	There's been a little bit of resistance because anytime you think of multiplication, you always think, this is really hard.
184	there's love and support from your leaders
185	there's no individual here or group over here
186	There's no wrong question.
187	these two values: everyone's cared for by someone, and no one cares for too many that's beyond their spread or the span of care.
188	They come back and check up on you, they don't just forget about you.
189	they make disciples and make disciples.
190	They see more people needing deep community, that need to know the love of Jesus
191	They trust that because of the relational investment and ideologies that we've talked about
192	this more formal gathering, it's largely informal relationships
193	three to six.
194	traditional church
195	trusting that decision

196	us being family, being the body, you know, and the different parts of the same body
197	variant church backgrounds that also lead to different expectations, and needs, or expressions of church
198	very much engaged in the dialogue, which is beautiful.
199	very personal, and very caring, and loving that your pastors, and your elders, will come back and say, hey
200	walked through some pretty hard stuff
201	wanting to be organic and guard against institution
202	we all have the same path and the same thoughts of what we want
203	We all respect each other
204	we always let the Holy Spirit lead it
205	we become so tight-knit
206	We can personalize it a little more.
207	we date a model, we marry a mission.
208	We don't have an organizational structure.
209	we drive by principles, rather than by liturgies, but they impact our liturgies.
210	we go the distance in long-suffering and caregiving
211	we go there in conversation, we go there doing life together.
212	We have more intimate relationships
213	We hold each other accountable.
214	we kind of have this unique setting with the government that were identified as both, that's uncommon
215	we know each other, and we know when something's wrong
216	we often think about me, and very seldomly think about we
217	We support and care about each other.
218	We use the term discipleship and kind of clump into that anything

219	We want to keep it an intimate family
220	we will have this distinctive expression of supernatural love
221	we're all about learning and understanding
222	we're all on the same level, we and our leaders
223	we're called to be the loving presence of Christ
224	we're on mission with God to overcome evil with good
225	we're on the distribution list of prayer.
226	we're unpacking everyday life activities.
227	we've done things together where the Holy Spirit, you saw things happen
228	What are the expectations that come from more of the traditional model?
229	What does it mean to be church?
230	what does it mean to be heaven on earth?
231	What does it mean to be with Jesus?
232	What does it mean to care for those outside of the fold of faith with discerning and tangible loving effort?
233	What does it mean to do what he does?
234	what I would envision would be a better expression of the church, especially in the western context.
235	What is fun for me is to watch those who come to faith through the distributed model
236	What it means to become like him?
237	what the Holy Spirit is speaking to each one
238	where someone in the pew looking at the pulpit would go, I could never do that, and therefore, sits in silence, often not participating
239	wherever it is, this incarnational expression of love that he intends, and that permeates every single corner and aspect of society.
240	you can always reach out to someone

241	you can reach out to your, like, your elders or your pastor
242	you have someone there to support you in anything, whatever it may be
243	You have to comfort and be firm.
244	You have to include everyone and try to treat them equally.
245	your elders and your pastors will come back and check on you

Appendix K

Second Cycle of Coding in Categories (Final)

RQ1: Category 1
base-level ecclesiology, what comprises a church?
Cultural / Culturally (x 3)
dismantling that takes clarity: clarity of understanding, clarity of teaching
especially those that have prior church backgrounds or biases as a result of being raised in a different construct.
Expectations (x 6)
it's not one size fits all, but it does scare folks.
people do not have a paradigm for a church being in a home or being people
structural challenge
the concept of basic ecclesiology is dismantling some of the wrongful notions of what it means to be church.
the early church is definitely a challenge, but once people get there, it's beautiful.
the framework of a delivered message, foremost, it's kind of the queenpin of a gathered community.
they miss some of the traditional stuff
West / Western / American (x 3)
What does it mean to be church?

RQ1: Category 2
people will come in and they'll be like, oh, wait, y'all go too long.
That particular meeting actually goes for about nine hours every Sunday.
there's people that can stay three hours at church
Time (x 4)

RQ1: Category 3
a little over overwhelmed with the intensity.
Accountability (x 10)
Commitment (x 9)
I don't really want to go to your thing, is it's a little too much for me
in your face
it's hard to get people to come in and to stay
It's more one-on-one, and there is less room to hide.
keeping each other in check
people know everything, like, you can't hide it all.
People still want to do their own thing
people to stay involved, just to stay self-driven
some people had enough responsibility
You can't, you can't, disguise anything.
you can't slip-in and out,
you need to do your part for the home church to be successful.

RQ1: Category 4
Children / Kids (x 12)
parents prefer to have them sit in their own class
the adults participate in whenever we are together.
The conversations between the adults are not interrupted or less interrupted when everybody's separate.

RQ2: Category 5
any leader in any setting has a job description.

buy into the heartbeat of where we're going
deliverables in a different way
Disciple / Discipleship / Disciple-making (x 20)
I ask people all the time that I lead to help us kind of define if you're heading in the right direction
I believe every person, especially the leader of the church, has a responsibility to love, encourage, and equip.
I believe in holistic development.
I can approach them as a friend, and they are the ones submitting to my authority.
I never want to be the model [person].
I want to be all about Jesus, not just all about the model of church.
I want to keep that at the very heartbeat of what we do
I want to labor towards making a bride that's worthy of Jesus
if the church is people, then it changes everything.
institute different thinking about what was to happen in the context of the church
leadership, that sort of thing, is always a touted as a difficulty or challenge by most models
They trust that because of the relational investment and ideologies that we've talked about

RQ2: Category 6
befriend people and they know Jesus really well.
Being / Becoming / Doing (x 3)
Example / Model / Modeled (x 5)
If I'm not loving like Jesus loves, I'm not leading well.

RQ2: Category 7

Do we know each other's life?
I would be there for them
I'm always next to you
I'm never going to leave you in these moments,
I'm not a fair-weathered friend
I'm not settling for a shallowed-out relational expression.
Intention / Intentional / Intentionality (x 5)
Involve / Involved (x 3)
it's important to walk together, journey together.
it's on the way.
it's relational evangelism
Leadership is a life-long journey
the leaders are reachable.
With (x 3)

RQ2: Category 8
Check On / Up (x 3)
Encourage / Encouraging / Encouragement (x 13)
infusing courage into their soul
lifting each other up
more friendly and relatable and approachable than any pastor I've ever seen.
my relationship with each of my leaders goes far and deep.
there's love and support from your leaders
trying to get me not to call them mentors, and just affirming me as a friend

RQ2: Category 9

build and pour into others, into leaders
Coach / Coaching (x 3)
engaging them at every level of life
enhance your leadership skills to learn more about maybe something that you're lacking
Equip / Equipping (x 6)
Gifts (x 3)
healthy robust leadership pipeline
helping them do something they couldn't do on their own or that they didn't see in themselves that they could do.
identify leaders among leaders and leaders
if you're hungry to be a leader, you're gonna be it
just take a fateful step out and do it.
leadership level as a mechanism of resourcing and connectivity
leadership needs leadership development
make disciples to make disciple-makers, if you will
Mentor / Train / Training (x 6)
pastors are looking for people that want to step up.
people stepping up and becoming leaders
seeking for leaders to build up leaders
they do have the help that's needed to become those leaders
they make disciples and make disciples.
We are being discipled and we are discipling.
who knows maybe down the road, I can start a new home church
you have someone there to support you in anything, whatever it may be
You have to comfort and be firm.

RQ3: Category 10
being a leader is a lot like being a parent.
Confess / Confessed (x 6)
Deep / Deeper (x 7)
Each Other / One Another (x 4)
eat, argue, fight, forgive
Family (x 18)
homebase church is more close-knit
Intimate / Intimacy (x 14)
it doesn't feel disjointed.
It's ironic because we were so involved in church, but at the same time were felt disconnected to the people.
Messy community.
something that I shared and I asked her for forgiveness
the more blood, sweat, and tears together, the more we felt like we were united.
we are closer.
we become so tight-knit
we can be even more united than we already are.
weeping, sobbing. Those are special moments.
you feel like you can trust everybody with the secret where you wouldn't trust your neighbor or even your sister or your brother.

RQ4: Category 11
appointing a leader who is going to lead this group
be a person of submission and try to replicate that in other people.
being a person of submission, with a heart of submission

board to whom I'm accountable
Elder(s) / Eldership / Overseeing / Oversight (x 7)
everyone is connected.
going to go to different rooms
Group (x 5)
humble, submitted plurality
I believe it is a beautiful, Biblical tension to be held in the body of Christ.
legally identified both as an as a denomination, technically by the government, as an association of churches and as a church
Multiply / Multiplication (7)
Network (x 4)
Small / Smaller (x 5)
The spread is too great.
the women are texting each other.
there's accountability top to bottom, through and through everyone, right together.
to interact with other leaders
we kind of have this unique setting with the government that were identified as both, that's uncommon
we separated again, the guys and the gals, for one evening
we want to check on our members and check on our leadership
we're going to pick together who this person should be.
Where we could peel off into sexes.
you can always reach out to someone

RQ5: Category 12
2, 3, 6, 8, 12 (x 7)

| |
|---|
| every person is cared for by someone, but no one is caring for a number beyond their span of care ability. |
| I can commit to this for six months. I can commit this for a year. |
| make sure that everyone's cared for by someone, and no one's caring for too many. |
| nobody feels forgotten, nobody falls by the wayside. |
| Rotate / Rotation (x 5) |
| so that nobody falls through the cracks |
| that person will lead us for a season |
| there's always a second, you know, second chair that you're getting ready to influence |
| these two values: everyone's cared for by someone, and no one cares for too many that's beyond their spread or the span of care. |
| We share responsibilities amongst everyone so that not one person is doing all the heavy lifting. |

RQ5: Category 13
Dialogue / Discussion / Conversation / Voice / Voiced (x 11)
even church homes can be monologues.
Everyone / Everybody (x 14)
Facilitate / Facilitating / Facilitated (x 3)
Gather together and learn from each other.
I need your opinion and I need the data to back it up.
It's not just the pastor preaching and that's it.
just need to hear them out when they just need to vent
other views from other people, helps you understand it more
Speak / Say (x 3)
Story / Storytelling (x 5)

study with each other to learn with each other
the ability to fully engage, there isn't a silent party in the midst.
the pastor was communicative with us and caring
There's no wrong question.
you have comments, you have ideas, you have things that you want to share

RQ5: Category 14
Are you trying to do it all yourself?
Co (x 3)
create good hardware for the software of the gospel
cross-pollination
Decentralized / Distributed (x 9)
differentiated love at a supernatural level
everybody's here for a purpose
have the absolute minimal hardware to run the gospel on.
I don't need to find some charismatic guy to be a priest.
I don't need to make me a High Priest.
I never have to assert authority or positional authority
I think it's a really good hardware for the software that Jesus gives us.
I'm pretty deferential to house church pastors on what they're reading through in a particular moment and what liturgies they employ
Institution / Institutionalization (x 5)
it isn't from, like, bottom of the ladder to the top of the ladder. It's, like, from that chair to this chair in the same house.
it's almost like it's just happening without really given it like, you know, a form, like a formal, form to it.
Jesus is the high priest.

Lead / Leader / Leadership (x 6)
messy stuff when no one's in charge
my intent isn't to grow this big thing, and that it's about numbers.
Share / Sharing / Shared (x 7)
sharpening each other
some do a traditional church in a house
Structure(s) (x 6)
the ability to be versatile
there's no hierarchy
this more formal gathering, it's largely informal relationships
we all have the same path and the same thoughts of what we want
we often think about me, and very seldomly think about we
we've always tried to raise up a couple alongside us

Appendix L

Third-Cycle Leximancer Concept Maps
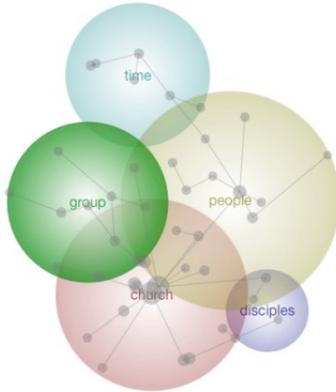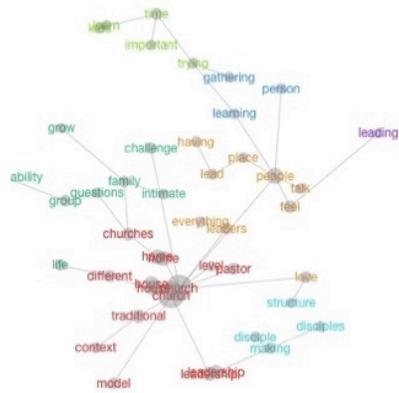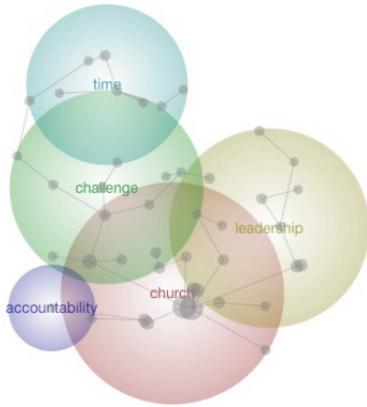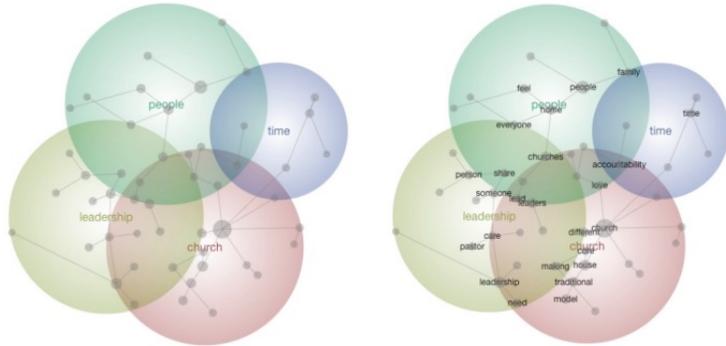
Appendix M

IRB Approval Form

SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: May 4, 2022

TO: Joshua Henson, Lance Croy

FROM: SEU IRB

PROTOCOL TITLE: House Church Leaders: A Multi-Site Case Study

FUNDING SOURCE: NONE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 22 BE 05

APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: May 4, 2022   Expiration Date: May 3, 2022

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, House Church Leaders: A Multi-Site Case Study. The project has been deemed exempt for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol pending the following change:

- Please add IRB contact information to the informed consent.

If your study requires any changes that effect the exempt status, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to include the following:

- Description of proposed revisions;
- *If applicable*, any new or revised materials;
- *If applicable*, updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within 24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB.

This exemption is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Rustin Lloyd
Chair, Institutional Review Board
irb@seu.edu