

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PROPAGATING A CONGREGATIONAL HOLINESS IDENTITY THROUGH
BAPTISMAL CONFIRMATION

A Project Submitted to the Seminary
Faculty In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement For the Degree of

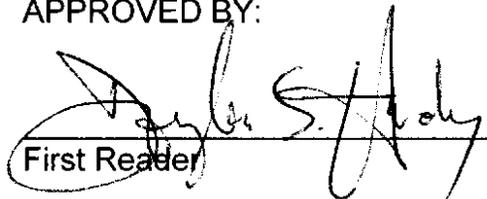
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By
John Victor Megyesi

Kansas City, Missouri
May 1, 2010

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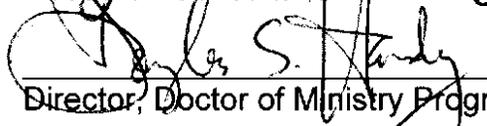
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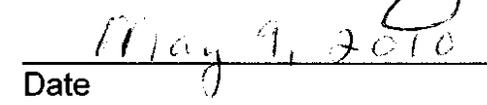
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Research Consultant



Director, Doctor of Ministry Program



Date

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ABSTRACT

Engaging both the sacramental commitment and diversity of baptismal practices within the Church of the Nazarene, this study pursues the development of a local congregation's receptivity of a further ritual of confirmation. Through the experience of Lowell First Church of the Nazarene, this study offers a proactive methodology for determining the potential and need for introducing

such a further worship practice. Offering educational opportunities and practical resources for bridging Nazarene practices and ecclesiological understandings, this project communicates the possibility that a pastoral opportunity for education in worship preparation and practices can combine with the congregation's personal understandings and experiences to nurture a healthy congregational holiness identity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LFC	-	Lowell First Church
RC	-	Roman Catholicism
UCC	-	United Church of Christ
UMC	-	United Methodist Church

GLOSSARY

Body of Christ: Using Robert Jenson's definition: "That the church is the body of Christ, in Paul's and our sense, means that she is the object in the world as which the risen Christ is an object for the world, an available something as which Christ is there to be addressed and grasped."¹ Simply put, the body of Christ is the people of God living the narrative of God's eternal love story.

Community of Faith: The gathered body of believers, both the not-yet baptized and the already baptized, ranging in Christian experience from all extremes, particularly gathered as one congregation in one location.

Infant Baptism: As distinct from the tradition and ritual of infant dedication. A sacramental experience of God's grace offered and celebrated within the life of a young child (often including children up until age 5). The place of such a sacrament within the life of the community will be discussed in detail later.

Catechism: The preparatory process of introducing one to the Christian life and doctrine.

Catholic/catholic: The distinction of those who either participate in the Roman Catholic Church, and those who belong by virtue of any Christian faith, to the larger universal Church of Jesus Christ. The word "universal" may be employed exclusively by some Christian groups to reference all Christians worldwide to avoid using the language of catholicity.

Confirmation: To be defined in this study and reviewed as having had many meanings, however used in the context of Lowell First Church to reference a ritual offered to a believer confirming their personal faith following their corporate reception in faith through baptism (predominantly through infant baptism).

¹ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology. V. 2. The Works of God* (New York: Oxford Univ Pr, 1999), 213.

Congregational (family) System: The larger dynamics of a local congregation that replicates the structure of a single family in regard to traditions, beliefs, and approaches to daily living.

Holiness Identity: A particular corporate understanding and its evidences of spiritual maturity and process flowing from the theological understandings of the Church of the Nazarene.

Holiness Theology: A similar view of God, likewise flowing from the theological understandings of the Church of the Nazarene.

Liturgy: The sustained expression and life of the Church from which doctrine flows.²

Rebaptism: A Reformational and pastorally pragmatic practice of rebaptizing a believer who was baptized as an infant or child.

Ritual: Organized social event that marks various social and spiritual changes.³

Narrative Theology: A particular way of knowing God relationally through present, historical and biblical narratives; in this case with special care to remain keenly within the narrative established by orthodox biblical interpretation, creedal statements, doctrinal practices and a Wesleyan-Arminian systematic theology of the Church.

Nazarene Ecclesiology: A developing understanding within the Church of the Nazarene of our nature and purpose as the Church.

² Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), 7.

³ Jean Holm and John Bowker, eds., *Rites of Passage, Themes in Religious Studies* (London: Pinter, 1994), 2.

Traditions: The practices established by a previous group or person that influence the way we believe or approach our current practices.

CHAPTER 1

CELEBRATING 106 YEARS WITHOUT A CONFIRMATION RITUAL: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Project Introduction

Often our struggle is not discerning the right course of action at the present moment; it is learning to connect the present with our past. I am currently blessed to serve as pastor of Lowell First Church of the Nazarene, a beautiful New England church with a rich history. In fact, this congregation predates the consummation of our denomination at Pilot Point, Texas in 1908. Having formed a temporary Board on January 6, 1903, the First Pentecostal Mission of Lowell, Massachusetts became within only two weeks the First Pentecostal Church of Lowell with Rev. A. B. Riggs serving as its first pastor with approximately 80 members. What an honor to step into such a rich, historical stream!

Between that monumental month of January 1903, and our current time, much history has been written. While a historical study of these many years of the transition from being the First Pentecostal Church of Lowell to our present existence as the Lowell First Church of the Nazarene, more commonly known as Lowell First Church (LFC), would be of great interest, the focus in this study is rather how one might approach the next 106 years as a local congregation.

Believing that a look at our congregational history informs this

study, it is the purpose of this project to determine a specific course of action in our congregational future. Therefore, this project is developed upon the consideration that any future course of action flows from Lowell First Church's congregational, denominational and personal histories.

I studied the introduction of a confirmation ritual into the spiritual life of the congregation. Confirmation was introduced as a potential worship ritual to complement the sacrament of infant baptism. Confirmation was not further defined initially for the participants in this study to allow for their responses to help define it and determine how it might be understood and presented.

Throughout the history of Christianity, the Church sought to assist humans in marking time as it was rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of the many liturgical practices, none seems to connect the biblical narrative with personal narrative more than the Sacrament of Baptism. It is an extremely helpful opportunity to experience within the Community of Faith the convergence of sin soaked lives with the ever cleansing love of God.

Within Christian history, however, baptismal practices have become diverse and at times divisive. Some preach their approach to baptism as the only way. Some insist the old way shall be the only way. Others view the old ways as compromised while only new forms are authentic. Taking a Wesleyan view of the Sacraments, the Church of the Nazarene has assumed a more missionally-

oriented view that allows a certain extent of liberty in particular baptismal practices. Such liberty comes as this denomination holds the message of God's sanctifying grace as the ultimate spiritual narrative accessible through a multitude

of backgrounds, practices and experiences.

The two baptismal practices employed in the Church of the Nazarene are infant baptism and believer's baptism. For a multitude of reasons, parents and pastors choose either to prepare a child for a life of Christian service through the sacrament of infant baptism, or to present a child through infant dedication that they might someday proclaim faith personally in believer's baptism. From the beginning of the denomination, liberty was given as to which particular approach to this sacrament was taken. Both practices desire to connect individual persons by a common faith and mission to go into the world with the message of God's saving and sanctifying love. For this reason, local Nazarene congregations have repeatedly sung, "This is our watchword and song!"⁴

⁴ Lelia N. Morris, "Holiness Unto The Lord," *Church of the Nazarene, in hymnal Sing To The Lord* (Kansas City: Lillenas, 1993), 503.

When these various practices are applied to the development of a congregational narrative, our "watchword and song" that grows from worship, questions are raised about whether one of these particular options, namely infant baptism, has received its full attention in our practices and theology. This project suggests that for persons who have been baptized as infants to fully sense their

part in our future congregational and denominational story, a further ritual must be introduced to celebrate their transition from being held in the faith of the congregation, to accepting that faith in Jesus Christ as their own. Borrowing from other traditions, the word "Confirmation" has been employed as a way of marking that transition. The purpose of this study, then, is to determine if in the

presentation of the language of a "confirmation ritual" there is still such liberty in the Lowell First Church of the Nazarene as it started with 106 years ago in the use and development of its baptismal theology and practices.

The Need

⁵ **Laurence Stookey**, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982),

Having served in Nazarene congregations that have had histories of 'rebaptizing', that is leading all spiritually mature believers to baptism regardless of their previous baptism or dedication as a child or infant, and having this practice as the only means of marking passage into spiritual maturity, the introduction of a confirmation ritual comes as a personal mission of encouraging a deeper pastoral moment of congregational education, participation and experience. While rebaptism may be practiced either predominantly or pragmatically in some Protestant churches, there are some who consider this

form of the sacrament to be a one-time event that negates the theological function and activity of the entire community at each person's baptism.⁵ This is of obvious concern when we try to celebrate baptism in any form, but this is of concern especially when many traditions have identified confirmation to be a community event, whereby everyone must reaffirm their common faith expressed from their own baptism. The baptism of Jesus was not just a moment of inauguration for Jesus' ministry- it was an important day for the entire community

of disciples ⁶ By the telling of that day in the Jordan river, we do not simply remember our baptism, we are all changed by God's grace as the words transcend time and space. Together each Christian hears the voice of God, "This is my Child, in whom I am well pleased." For the sake of the reaffirmation of personal encounters with Christ and the restoration of a deepening congregational mission, this is a very important understanding for both the Lowell

First Church community and the Church of the Nazarene at large.

⁶ **Matthew 3:11-15.**

⁷ **Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 44.**

Some Church of the Nazarene congregations have become influenced by rites and rituals of membership organizations in such a way that Baptism simply becomes a box to be checked. In a world that claims the loss of a metanarrative, a grand storyline for all human life that connects each individual

personally, this is a great moment for the Church to declare the Story of God that makes life less propositional and more transformational in even the simplest of moments.⁷ In other words, a work of God among His people through Baptism can teach the entire Community that God is with everyone, filling each person with His loving, Holy Spirit at all points throughout the journey of our lives. A further ritual or rituals of personal confirmation or corporate reaffirmation of that faith, defined collectively by a congregation, can serve as an ongoing reminder and possible means of grace by which God's sanctifying Spirit is sought and experienced. While Robert Webber encourages confirmation as an essential sequence in the formational process of an individual and congregation utilizing

the practice of infant baptism, the two different practices of baptism commonly used in the Church of the Nazarene may also include ongoing participation in some form of a covenanting service.⁸ John Wesley's Covenant Service would be an excellent example of this option.⁹

Robert E. Webber, *Ancient Future Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 175.

⁹ *Wesley Center Online, "Covenant Service,"*

http://www.wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/covenant/index.htm. (accessed January 25, 2010).

The problem or need encountered within my ministry at Lowell First Church of the Nazarene in this matter is rooted in two fundamental issues. The first and primary issue for us denominationally is that our tradition does not

currently offer a further ritual beyond the Lord's Supper that relates directly to the sacrament of Baptism and our daily and regular, or intentional confirmation of death for and life in Christ. The second issue that may or may not be more unique at Lowell First Church than with other congregations is how such a suggestion of the word "confirmation" reacts or blends with personal traditions, both those formally appreciated and those rejected, and how ultimately the congregation finds itself receiving this additional ritual. Particular pastoral attention is given in this second issue to identifying those with previous experience of a confirmation ritual (such as the strong number of former Roman-Catholics in this congregation), and those who function psychologically better or worse in the community when any new practice is presented in the manner in which this project employs. At the least, this project opens dialogue regarding diverse understandings of baptism. For the young Nazarene denomination, Stan

Ingersol notes, "the early pluralism of baptismal practice generated a flow of questions to the *Herald of Holiness*, the leading denominational paper, and this became an opportunity for instructing the church."¹⁰ In those early days, Nazarene church membership would have been the instructive ritual that bridged the two practices rather than baptismal confirmation.¹¹ This project suggests that current church membership is not understood to have the same function today

as many persons joining the Church of the Nazarene may have entered into membership without ever having been baptized.

Project Intentions

Stan Ingersol, *Christian Baptism and the Early Nazarenes: The Sources that Shaped a Pluralistic Baptismal Tradition*, ed. **Michael Mattei** (Nampa: **Wesley Center for Applied Theology**, 2000), 9, http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrn/26-30/27.7.htm. (accessed June 14, 2007).

¹¹ **Association of the Pentecostal Churches of America**, *Manual of the First Pentecostal Church of Lowell* (Providence: **Pentecostal Printing**, 1904), 25.

It is then the ultimate purpose of this project to draw an entire congregation together around the waters of Baptism, and together into the corporate memories of what God has been and is doing. If church membership cannot currently serve to collect an individual from their personal baptism to the deeper life of corporate discipleship, it may be that the introduction of a worship ritual of confirmation will help the Lowell First Church congregation to accomplish this task. I believe the unifying power of the Holy Spirit to be one of the hopeful marks of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition that offers the local congregation the celebration of a person's own personal pursuit and experience of holiness while

simultaneously experiencing collectively a common mission and vision. In this project, confirmation was introduced with the intention of discovering if it was truly a unifying agent of that Spirit. The intention of this project resonates with

John Wesley as he said in his pamphlet "The Character of a Methodist,"

By these marks, by these fruits of a living faith, do we labour to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world from all those whose minds or lives are not according to the Gospel of Christ. But from real Christians, of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all, not from any who sincerely follow after what they know they have not yet attained. No: 'Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'¹²

Theological Implications

¹² Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 42.

¹³ Rob Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1991),
¹⁴ John 11:35

According to Wesley, for Baptism to be a sacrament, it must be for the people of God more than a memorial event.¹³ God's grace is imparted around the waters and the life that previously had rejoiced in its own salvation, finds new orientation in the Savior. Likewise, for the congregation gathered, this becomes an opportunity for the experience of the one to become the experience of the whole. I recall the weeping that Jesus did for Lazarus.¹⁴ The death of another is not only their problem it is ours. So too the life giving work of God in salvation is not just another's benefit, it is ours as well. Upon the mighty declaration that Lazarus should come forth from the tomb, the people did not comment "Oh, lucky

guy!" The wonder of God's resurrection power impacted those who that day lived as if they had been raised from the dead themselves. Could the same thing happen for the Church? Could Baptism and the confirmation of our baptismal waters become more of a community event that personally transitions that community into a deeper experience of the Story and work of God?

Practical Aspects

A confirmation ritual, developed with adequate congregational input, may be a helpful move toward developing Christians into mature Christian disciples. Far too many spiritually immature Christians have grown away from the life of the Church. Considering that many of these young Christians are represented by the young people of the church, a congregationally developed confirmation ritual may be the piece that helps to establish a nurturing community whereby they are offered, whether they accept it or not, the opportunity to establish personal roots in the life of a local congregation as well as in the wider Christian community. The introduction of this type of confirmation ritual may also be the piece that drives the adults of our congregations from a life of servant living to the free life of being a son or daughter of the Holy God. For all

ages, the introduction of a confirmation ritual may have the potential to nurture a greater congregational narrative as this type of ritual complements other forms of congregational discipleship and formational opportunities. One such opportunity might include a more commonly used catechetical process for persons of all ages who express a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Though it was not a practical intention of this project to develop such a catechetical process, it may be that the project's conclusions clarify the interrelated nature of catechism with congregational experience and understanding of worship sacraments and rituals

Key Terms

Presented in the glossary are several terms of importance in understanding this project. Two of these terms of key significance to this study are "infant baptism" and "confirmation." To understand better these words, one must also discuss the words, "believer's baptism" and "infant dedication." As opposed to the seven sacraments celebrated in Roman Catholicism (RC), Protestant churches recognize the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These two sacraments express the authority of the Lord among our practices as means by which God's grace is imparted to all worshipping participants.¹⁵ How these sacraments will be celebrated differs greatly among Protestant churches. In the Church of the Nazarene, it has been our collective historical understanding that how one is baptized and when is not nearly as

important as the reality of what God's Spirit does in us by God's grace when we are baptized to bear fruit of a life set apart for the things of God. In practical ways, our baptism by water is only substantiated by our surrender to an inner baptism by God's Spirit.
¹⁵ Staples, 172.

In the Church of the Nazarene, two specific traditions have been

recognized as manners in which a person may be baptized. The first tradition is that of infant baptism. This practice suggests that by the grace of God, a child's family, along with the larger faith family, may hold that child before the Lord that again by God's grace the child may grow to declare in the future nothing less than a personal reality of the faith in which she or he was born. Baptism in this practice becomes a sign of God's prevenient grace that reaches each of us in our sin before any one of us knew of our need for salvation.

The second baptismal tradition to be recognized in the Church of the Nazarene is believer's baptism. The Church of the Nazarene declares that this practice is likewise an affirmation of God's grace. In this instance, however, the grace is recalled within the life of one who has already met that salvation and wishes to express that inner work through an outward symbol. Conversely, infant baptism celebrates the gift of grace that leads us to salvation, whereas believer's baptism declares that grace has already led us to that point. Believer's baptism is

complemented by the congregational ritual of infant dedication whereby a child is able to be given to God, with the sacrament itself reserved for the child's own choosing later on as she or he matures.

Much reaction to believer's baptism has come from those who believe too much weight is placed upon the individual's response to God's grace. Similarly, much reaction to infant baptism has come from those who believe that too little weight is placed upon the repentant response of the individual to God's grace. For much the same reason proponents of infant baptism have believed that infant dedication places too much emphasis on the parent's, and thus the community's choosing of a child's life in Christ. It may be assumed then that a further ritual of confirmation would dismiss a child that was baptized from owning her or his faith personally, for it would be the ritual that declares the change rather than the heart.

In the Church of the Nazarene, conversations about "confirmation" are merely speculative as we do not presently have a prescribed ritual for this moment in the life of a believer who was previously baptized. This is true for one who was baptized as an infant as it is also true for someone who has returned to faith having been baptized in their past at any age. Though the Church of the Nazarene does not officially prescribe a practice of "rebaptism" whereby these persons would be baptized again, as if for the first time, pastoral sensitivity is observed with one whom a pastor feels this practice to be necessary to their

experience of God's grace.

Though it has been defined quite generally, this project will not be leading with a more specific definition of confirmation, nor a particular prescription for how it should be presented. Instead, this project will utilize the term generally to discern from the research the various presuppositions that exist about this word and practice. By the end of this project confirmation will be defined as a ritual process of affirming one's personal faith in Christ, and as a ritual process for a congregation of reaffirming again one's personal faith and connection to the larger Community of Faith.

Project Methodology

Research Intentions

Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 13.

¹⁷ **Jeffrey Mahan, Barbara Troxell and Carol Allen, eds., *Shared Wisdom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 116.**

¹⁸ **William Myers, *Research in Ministry* (Chicago: Exploration, 2000), 29.**

This project was developed by combining several methodologies from the pastoral handbook, *Studying Congregations*.™ The methods chosen for this project included: a survey looking for quantitative results; a sermon series presenting a more substantive expression of our congregation's direction in the use of confirmation to reference our worshipping life together; video interviews seeking more qualitative reactions to the introduction of developing a confirmation ritual; developing case studies from those interviews whereby each person's religious story could complement his or her reactions to the interview

questions;¹⁷ and a worship event where an example of a confirmation ritual could be presented and the reactions observed. While this collection of methodologies was convenient to the ongoing calendar of congregational life at Lowell First Church, this collection also gathered clear data that represented Lowell First Church's current and future need for understanding baptism better. Collectively these methods were pro-active in gathering qualitative data while working toward congregational transformation.¹⁸ Rather than this project being done through generic observations of a local congregation, this project was approached through the relationship of a pastor and people who are seeking to grow together

in the Lord.

Summary of Project Methodology

Employing this "pro-active" research method, this project was designed to present a congregational survey to those gathered for morning worship services one Sunday during the month of February 2009. While results were compiled for a presentation of sermons in the month of March 2009,¹ I gathered my In-Parish Committee to determine how the survey itself was received, and what potential discussions had arisen from the survey.¹⁹ Following the series of sermons and further dialogue, I invited a small cross-sample of three individuals

to articulate (in a video-taped interview) the story of their faith journey with this particular congregation in regards to baptism and the consideration of a confirmation ritual. A transcript of those interviews was edited together, with each story resulting in case-study reports. Within two weeks, following the sermon series, opportunity for Baptism and baptismal confirmation was offered during Easter services. Participants were to prepare for this event through an informal training session on Saturday morning, April 4, a week before Easter.

¹⁹ The In-Parish Committee serving in this project was a group of lay leaders from the Lowell First Church of the Nazarene whose love for the Lord and this congregation greatly benefitted this project through assistance in designing the congregational survey and in the regular review of the presenting data throughout this study.

From the surveys and interviews it was anticipated that there would be a collection of questions and affirmations from the congregation about the form of confirmation and our future plans for its use. The questions raised identified

possible hesitations of the congregation to automatically include this in our tradition outside of my own particular articulation or pastoral connection to the life of the congregation and congregants. In other words, some question exists about what we did here and the ease of transferability to other Nazarene believers in other services and locations. This project anticipated that many would be found who appreciated confirmation as a complementary means of grace to infant baptism as dedication has served in the Church of the Nazarene to be a

complementary means of grace preparing one for believer's baptism. I likewise anticipated further opportunities for discovery, development, articulation and implementation arising from the interviews themselves, both within the corporate worship event and in discipleship and formational ministries.

From a pastoral perspective, I believe this was an opportunity for great success in connecting the Lowell First Church story with the grand narratives of God, both those within the Church of the Nazarene and with other believers around the world. I also am fully expecting this research to provide support for those asking the same question within other Nazarene congregations, and within the denomination at large. It is hoped that engagement in this sensitive subject will provide many more congregations with healthy discussions centered on our worship practices and understandings within the Church of the Nazarene. Even still, the limits to the chosen methodology must be observed.

Method Limitations

There are four predominant methodological limitations that must be understood in this project. The first limitation comes in this study by the sheer absence of prior results for Lowell First Church of any form of self-study relating to worship practices and understandings. While this in and of itself may not serve as a limitation of this project's methodology, the limitation may instead come in my own subjective interpretation of the data in the absence of these prior results.

Certainly Lowell First Church has statistical reports and Church Board observations noted in monthly meetings, but there is not a decisive collection of results expressing any ideas, beliefs and interests of the congregation as a whole. What this meant was that the survey had to ask many different questions relating to varied topics of congregational life, participation, understanding and agreement. While this design helped to mask the project's real interest, namely how this local congregation would respond to the introduction of a further confirmation ritual to complement the sacrament of infant baptism, it also served to offer too much information that could feed a subjective view of this congregation's reception of a confirmation ritual.

A second limitation is discovered in the design of the survey. While each question was focused on a specific piece of data, each question had the potential to be understood as asking something different than its designed purpose. As chapter 4 will note in the data resulting from the question regarding participation in church missions or compassionate ministries, some persons answered in a different way because of their perception of what was being asked.

A third limitation of the chosen methodology was that a specific understanding of confirmation was not presented. Though this vague presentation was intentional in trying to raise hidden preconceptions about the subject, it also succeeded in causing a small amount of anxiety for some who

were worried about what we meant by the word "confirmation." As will be seen in more detail in the following chapter, Bob Sitze suggests that such a potential fear or confusion from some in the congregation may ultimately limit complete acceptance, participation or approval of the subject.²⁰

A fourth limitation of the methodology was in not connecting this ritual with a standard form of catechesis. For a people who were already asking questions about what a "confirmation" ritual would look like, it made sense that others were asking about how we would make its presentation to those wishing to be confirmed. Before such a definition could be given for a defined catechetical practice or process, the congregation needed to be approached and interviewed regarding their collective worship understandings, personal practices and interests.

Project Implications for Ministry

Bob Sitze, *Your Brain Goes To Church* (Herndon: Alban, 2005), 113.

In subsequent chapters this project will be seen as having presented data that suggests a new way for approaching not only the development of a ritual practice, but a process by which that ritual's effectiveness can be assessed. Thus a major implication of this project extends beyond the ritual development

itself into the concern for how the development process helps to lead individuals to transformation in the congregation's collective understanding of God's Story among us. Considering Spirited worship and its intentionally prayed and prepared-for sacraments and rituals to be a means of grace for spiritual formation, I believe this to be an opportunity for deep meaning and life change. Likewise, I believe this to be an opportunity for multiple entry points for the greater Lowell community to join us in this 'Story of God' as many come from traditions of infant baptism only. For those who have come from no formal religious background or tradition, this may be an opportunity to connect new believers to a life-long practice of discipleship and daily confirmation of the need for the Lord in our lives.

Though I believe that other churches with similar congregations and communities may find this material to be helpful, I know that the approach to dialogue will need to change in other places within the denomination. Some Nazarene congregations will need to drive this conversation with the possibilities of celebrating stories of spiritual heritage and the making of new stories. In these places a conversation that leads with sacramental theology and the institution of ritual will not be accepted nor appreciated. Likewise, in such places as within our Hispanic congregations, there may be such strong concern for rejecting previous religious traditions that this language must be reinvented for equal benefit.

At the same time, I believe that with the broader audience in mind, this may be the start of a resource development project for a multitude of Christian congregations to consider Christian instruction and worship liturgy as a post modern opportunity for spiritual formation. According to church history, worship itself is an educational event.²¹ One of the key lessons to learn comes as the Holy Spirit orients our different backgrounds into a common and renewed interest of regularly rehearsing personal and corporate experiences of God's grace in worship. From my particular tradition as a Wesleyan-Holiness minister, this study comes as a great opportunity to further celebrate the movements of God's Spirit in each of our lives.

Subsequent Chapters

Chapter 2: Listening to our Methodist Heritage: Precedents in Literature

²¹ **Robert Webber, ed.**, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship, vol. 5, The Services of the Christian Year* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 93.

Building upon the Church of the Nazarene's sacramental theology and practices of baptism, the focus of this chapter will be on discovering the origins, usage and development of these beliefs and practices in the larger history of Christianity and to definitively look beyond our history to Christianity's understood meaning of the word "confirmation" and its subsequent practices. Recognizing that many in our congregations have ideas of confirmation's practice rooted in Roman Catholicism, this chapter will see if there is a different source for defining

this practice and process. The second portion of this chapter will observe several important considerations for introducing a fresh understanding of confirmation to the Church of the Nazarene from one of its local congregations.

Chapter 3: Pro-Active Implementation within the Congregational Worship System: Research Design

Breaking the flow of this congregation's worship system through baptism, discussion of a further ritual of confirmation was introduced. With the help of qualitative analysis, the suggestion of such a ritual was presented as a possible way to transform our worship life together. Responses and feedback were received by the larger congregation, a series of small groups and through personal interviews. Videos were recorded to narratively cast both the pros and cons of this particular answer to the stated problem. Further personal narratives were drawn into case studies to serve as a means of developing or redefining this ritual and the understanding or lack of understanding regarding the sacrament of Baptism within our tradition.

Chapter 4: Charting our Spiritual Story: Research Data and Results

Considering 'story' to be as much about 'telling' as it is about 'being heard,' this chapter will provide a summary of the various voices of the congregation, giving ear to their needs and reception of this introduction.

Qualitative research will offer a particular charting of responses while personal narratives will also brighten or disclose the reality of this intervention. In this chapter, attention will be given to focusing on the data itself, allowing prescriptive conclusions to be specifically drawn in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Growing into our Identity: Summary and Conclusions

The final chapter of this project will express four major conclusions that have arisen from this project. These conclusions will be expressed as they were created or influenced by each of the particular tools of this research project. Critical evaluation of this project will be given for the sake of future projects, and the speculative impact upon future generations of Lowell First Church and to the Church of the Nazarene as a whole will be observed.

CHAPTER 2

CONFIRMATION'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR ITS INTRODUCTION INTO THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE: PRECEDENTS IN LITERATURE

As John Wesley's Methodism was structured and developed in his day from a careful observation of biblical and historical Christian practices and understandings, so must the present story of the Church of the Nazarene, a denomination rooted in the theology that arose from Wesley's observations, flow from the same biblical and historical influences. John Wesley's Methodism wisely teaches a practical pattern for developing theology and worship practices from a conversation between the Biblical narrative of God's love, the ecclesiastical

expressions of that love among the Early Church and the relevant needs revealed by one's contemporaries. The purpose of this chapter will be to trace a precedent for this project from Nazarene commitments and concerns back through history's engagement and resulting relationships between two particular church practices, namely, baptism and confirmation. History's combined engagement with these two practices will show the contemporary Christian Church that one clear understanding has not existed of how these two practices relate. Current relationships and understandings of baptism and confirmation will generally clarify the necessity of finding at least one clear understanding of the relationship between baptism and confirmation in present Christian practices. Specifically, it will be observed from the experience of a local congregation engaging the further addition of a ritual of confirmation if this necessity is also valid within the Church of the Nazarene.

The Christian Mission of the Church of the Nazarene

Baptismal Belief and Practice in the Church of the Nazarene

Church of the Nazarene, *Core Values* (Kansas City: Nazarene, 2001), 2.

²³ **Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 218.**

²⁴ **Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee* (Kansas City: Beacon, 1995), 187.**

²⁵ **Church of the Nazarene, *Core Values*, 2.**

In recent years, the Church of the Nazarene has been intentional in its regularly published and proclaimed declaration that "We Are a Christian

People."²² This statement implies solidarity with other Christians around the world. This statement also implies solidarity with other Christians throughout time. Two historical figures who have greatly impressed this understanding on the Church of the Nazarene were John Wesley and Phineas Bresee. Wesley, in his affirmation of the Methodist Movement's development into a denominational entity,²³ and Bresee, in his development of the Church of the Nazarene out of Methodism,²⁴ were both committed to the ongoing relationship of Christians throughout time and across the miles. Still following that pattern, the Church of the Nazarene declares that rather than existing as an independent religious offshoot, this denomination is a part of historical Christianity.²⁵ The particular practices and theological commitments of the Church of the Nazarene evidence

the significance of this declaration.

One such commitment that has both theological and practical implications is the Church of the Nazarene's commitment to the predominant Sacraments of the early church: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.²⁶ Baptism in particular has been regarded by the Church of the Nazarene as an important means by which individuals either are presented into the Christian Faith or make public declaration of a personal faith in Jesus Christ. In Baptism, the Church of the Nazarene has been less concerned with varying approaches to that practice.

These various approaches could be characterized as 'infant baptism' and 'believer's baptism.' According to Stan Ingersol, the Church of the Nazarene in its earliest days was committed to "essentials" (beliefs necessary to salvation), and allowed non-essentials, such as particular baptismal views, or traditions, to be removed from contention among this new denomination by allowing each view a place of liberty among the personal conscience of each participant.²⁷ The result of this liberty was the development of various ritual options for celebrating Baptism.²⁸

Church of the Nazarene, 2005-2009 Manual (Kansas City: Nazarene, 2005), 36.

²⁷ Stan Ingersol, 1.

²⁸ Mark Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon, 2004),

²⁹ Staples, 25.

Eventually, Early Nazarene agreement regarding non-essentials led to very strong feelings and opinions about both of these approaches.²⁹ For some people infant baptism seemed to be an inappropriate tradition carried over from

Roman Catholicism.³⁰ For others, believer's baptism seemed to theologically undercut the historic understanding of a baptism wrought by God's choosing of us rather than our personal choice of faith. From either perspective, a greater concern rises today about how these two views may be reconciled in one particular congregation.³¹

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

³² "Minutes," p. 4-5, March 17-20, 1908 Pennsylvania Holiness Christian Church Collection, Nazarene Archives, Kansas City, MO.

³³

Association of the Pentecostal Churches of America, 25. ³⁴ *Ibid.*,

25.

In the early days of the Church of the Nazarene, agreements were made regarding the young denomination's acceptance of diverse approaches. Phineas Bresee was often the one to ask joining congregations if they would either agree to the practice of infant baptism or if they would object to someone else practicing it.³² The denominational ritual during these days that reconciled baptismal practices for those who agreed to Bresee's merger was full church membership.³³ At that time, individuals were brought into a deeper experience of

participation in the story of a congregation when they were able to confirm their baptism by the acceptance of church membership. For the early Nazarenes in Lowell, the essential piece of the membership ritual that collected individuals from various traditions, practices, and upbringings around the grace of God was the *Christian Covenant*.³⁴ For those baptized as infants in those days, a confirmation ritual was not necessary. What was necessary was a commitment

to covenant with the Church through membership; a membership that charged individuals to be baptized as infants or as believers, so long as the practice chosen by the candidate agreed with the conscience of the minister.³⁵

While this ritual of membership and covenant sufficed in those early days of the Church of the Nazarene in Lowell to connect growing Christians to the Christian story, something changed denominationally whereby the confirmation of baptism was removed from the membership covenant. This removal happened as early as the 1908 Nazarene merger at Pilot Point, where the Manual deletes the full creedal language of the covenant from the membership ritual.³⁶ It is not until 2001 that covenant language is reintroduced into the Manual, and this time it is referenced as a subject heading rather than a further portion of the membership ritual.³⁷

Quanstrom, 198.

Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, *Manual* (Los Angeles: Nazarene, 1908), 67. Church of the Nazarene, *2001-2005 Manual* (Kansas City: Nazarene, 2001), 44. Staples, 24.

While the Pilot Point Nazarenes cannot be accused of neglecting the covenant language, a definite transition occurred to disconnect the covenant entrance of baptized Christians to the fellowship of church membership. The predominant view of this transition suggests that over the course of time the Sacraments were themselves devalued.³⁸ Rob Staples states that within many Wesleyan/holiness churches there exists the dilemma of "experience" oriented

worship, rather than liturgically formal worship.³⁹ According to Staples, baptism has been understood as not as important as a spiritually charismatic connectedness of an individual to the congregation.

^{3a} *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁰ **Paul Bassett, *The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement, 1914-1940 The Church of the Nazarene: A Case Study* (Nampa: Wesley Center Online), Wesley Center for Applied Theology, 1, http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/11-15/13-5.htm. (Accessed May 24, 2007).**

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴³ **Staples, 165.**

While agreement may be found in the statement that the sacraments have been devalued, the reason held by Paul Bassett for the shift within the Church of the Nazarene does not lie within charismatic influences. For Bassett, the shift of Nazarene theology and practice lies in the influence of

fundamentalism.⁴⁰ While Bassett's evidence for this assertion is in his discussion related to biblical theology rather than sacramental theology, he does note that during the late 1920's the denomination entered a battle over the relationship of the Church to the Bible.⁴¹ Bassett notes that for many, the authority of the Church had become contrary to the Word of God.⁴² If this was truly the case for the leadership of the Church of the Nazarene it would make sense that church ritual and practices would become secondary to the biblical connection of God's people through membership. This is true especially for the practice of infant baptism which fundamentalism argued to be disconnected from biblical precedent.⁴³

While the Church of the Nazarene has not discontinued its affirmation of infant baptism, it has never recalled the confirmation of baptized infants into the ritual of membership. The reason for this may be as simple as missing a note from our own history. At the same time, the reason may be that uniformed views of history have emotionally eclipsed the design of the early story of the Church of the Nazarene. In neglecting the connection of baptism with congregational covenant and participation, the sacraments have nonetheless been devalued and doors have been opened for inappropriate and premature views of theology and church history.⁴⁴

In a recent article from the website "Catholic Answers" that provocatively addresses what may be our root problem, namely how each tradition views orthodox Christian practices throughout history, the following interpretation is made by those who reject infant baptism as deviant:

According to modern Fundamentalists, the original Christian Church was doctrinally the same as today's Fundamentalist churches. When Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in A.D. 313, pagans flocked to the Church in hopes of secular preferment, but the Church could not assimilate so many. It soon compromised its principles and became paganized by adopting pagan beliefs and practices. It developed the doctrines with which the Catholic Church is identified today. Simply put, it apostatized and became the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, true Christians [Fundamentalists] did not change their beliefs but were forced to remain in hiding until the Reformation.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ **Bruce Shelley**, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), xv.

⁴⁵ **Anon.**, "Fundamentalist or Catholic," *Catholic Answers* (August 10, 2004),

Certainly the premise of this article will be argued by many, and rightly so.

However, the matter of truth in this article, and possibly the argument against the

article's argument, is that we may not be viewing history correctly.⁴⁶ Could it be that errant or conflicting historical views are the issue behind disagreements with various baptismal practices within the Church of the Nazarene? Moreover, could it be that one such historical view, namely that infant baptism is rooted too strongly in Roman Catholicism, would also mean that any introduction of a complementary ritual of confirmation would also be too strongly rooted in Roman

Catholicism?

[http://www.catholic.com/library/Fundamentalist_or_Catholic.asp/](http://www.catholic.com/library/Fundamentalist_or_Catholic.asp) (Accessed June 7, 2007).

⁴⁶ Shelley, xv.

⁴⁷ Staples, 23.

To talk about baptism in the Church of the Nazarene presently is to find ourselves in reformational practices of defining theologically who we are and what we will do more from the rejection of certain things, than from the adoption of new practices.⁴⁷ In the case of Lowell First Church, and many other congregations and believers within the Church of the Nazarene, this may be the issue for those who establish our beliefs specifically upon a rejection of Roman Catholicism. Due to this reality for many congregations in the Church of the Nazarene, any considerations of a ritual of confirmation within the Church of the Nazarene may find theological contention as a Nazarene practice. The reason for this may be directly related to the Roman Catholic practice of confirmation which focuses on the declaration of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual regardless of their faith in Jesus Christ. Regardless of the intention of focusing a potential Nazarene ritual on confirming the personal faith of someone who is

baptized as an infant, the Roman Catholic influence is substantial. The clarifying perspective on the appropriateness of a confirmation ritual may come as history reveals that what has always been seen as a Roman Catholic practice has

broader meaning and applications within the life of Christianity over time.

Historical Relationship of Baptism and Confirmation

The First Century Church

Thomas E. Dipko, *My Confirmation: A Guide for Confirmation Instruction* (Cleveland: United Church, 1954), 2.

⁴⁹ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: Pueblo, 2007), 180.

In the United Church of Christ, confirmands, or candidates for confirmation, are told that confirmation dates back to the first-century church.⁴⁸ But is that really true? In an exhaustively beneficial resource, *The Rites of Christian Tradition*, Maxwell Johnson invites us to consider that even the word "confirmation" (*confirmare* or *perficere*) is not seen until the fourth or fifth century.⁴⁹ And when such a word is introduced it is not done so in the Alexandrian or Antioch Churches, the predominant voices of creedal development in the first two centuries of the Early Church, but rather Spain and Gaul, the seat of further theological reflection growing from church development and debate surrounding popular heresies in the fifth and sixth century. When confirmation is used there in the councils of these later centuries, it is in reference to particular rites or even extraordinary cases associated with the ministry of the bishops rather than the practice of a worshipping believer, priest,

or congregation. In other words, what we may have theoretically rooted in the Early Church as a Catholic apostasy or as an appropriately modeled and orthodox liturgical practice may not be either. In fact, to adopt confirmation on the grounds that the early church did it, or to reject it because it had its origins in some sort of politically-influenced Catholicism is on both accounts a false understanding.⁵⁰

Certainly baptism is evidenced in elaborate practices and theological structures in the early church, but our distinction here is in regards to confirmation. It must also be noted, that many Christian practices, such as baptism itself, are often borrowed and "sanctified" from other traditions - some even beyond Judaism. Caution is before us in regards to influence and pragmatism, but precedent is set in John 8:1-11 with Jesus who is willing to redeem the world excluded by the law.

⁵¹ Daniel T. Benedict, Jr, *Come to the Waters* (Nashville: Discipleship, 1996), 34-35.

For the early church the predominant concern of baptism was the process by which a new believer approached life in Christ and participation in the life of the Church. This process of initiation was called the catechumenate. Much like more modern catechetical processes, a catechumen would find themselves preparing for an event that publicly recalled one's adoption into the Church fellowship. In his book, *Come to the Waters*, Daniel Benedict offers a four-stage process that echoes the history of the catechumen in the early church.⁵¹

Benedict's four stages are centered on welcoming the inquiring person, engaging them in spiritual formation, calling them to baptism through intensive preparation, and initiating them into congregational life. The strength of this process is two-fold: first, in combining both personal and congregational spirituality and discipleship; and secondly, in the liturgy and process that completely moves the

seeker through a period of transition to a new life within

the Church.

While Benedict is introducing this process from his own tradition in the United Methodist Church that focuses on baptizing infants, it is worth noting that he has related this four-stage process through baptismal preparation for those who were not baptized as infants. In his model, once again, much like the early catechumens, one enters first into "inquiry," then "formation," then "intensive preparation," and finally "integration." It is between the first and third stages that the seeker is caught up with those who were baptized as infants, now seeking personal integration. The assumption is that one baptized as an infant will have had the benefit of years of Christian education within the church, while the one seeking Christ later on will have to learn more quickly. After the third stage the individual joins the Body in Baptism and then, together with the confirmands, is integrated in the final stage during the liturgy for Pentecost.

**The Sixth Century - The Council of Orange
Johnson, 182.**

Prior to the Council of Orange in 529 AD, the predominant issue at hand surrounding post-baptismal rituals was the authority of those who might

anoint the baptized with chrism, the blessed oil and matter of the sacraments. In Spain, for example, even deacons were known to perform the anointing.⁵² It wasn't until this council was convened in France that the matter was recognized as problematic since a bishop was not always available. According to Johnson's

citation of writings by Gabriele Winkler,⁵³ Aidan Kavanagh⁵⁴ and Gerard Austin,⁵⁵ the Council's solution and resulting phrase *in confirmatione*, meaning "at confirmation," refers primarily to a "visit of the bishop to the parishes of the diocese, which on those occasions 'confirmed' or ratified what had already been done by the presbyter or deacon." That is, it is not the newly baptized but the *sacramental ministry* of the local presbyter or deacon, which is confirmed by the bishop's visit.⁵⁶ This is a much different issue than the development or establishment of a ritual of confirmation as might be assumed from current confirmation rituals within any tradition from Roman Catholicism to each corner of Protestantism.

Gabriele Winkler, "Confirmation or Chrismation?," in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings On Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: Pueblo, 1995).

⁵⁴ **Aidan Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform* (New York: Pueblo, 1988), 69.**

⁵⁵ **Gerard Austin, *Anointing with the Spirit: The Rite of Confirmation: The Use of Oil and Chrism* (New York: Pueblo, 1985), 13.**

⁵⁶ **Ibid., 183.**

⁵⁷ **Eugene M. Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation in the Western Church: A Liturgical-Dogmatic Study of the Development of the Separate Sacrament of Confirmation in the**

Western Church Prior to the Fourteenth Century" (STD thesis, Theological Faculty of the University of Trier, Trier, Germany., 1970), 28.

Even still the very purpose for the Council of Orange being convened may have more to do with correcting the understanding of confirmation than even illuminating the understanding of the bishop's sacramental history.⁵⁷ The Council of Orange, in its entirety, was called to deal with the controversy that had arisen between Augustine and Pelagius. Pelagianism, very simply put, is a belief stating that each person is born innocently of our parents' sin, denouncing any concept

of original sin or a sinful nature.⁵⁸ Pelagianism declares that regardless of human sin history and the human inability over time to save ourselves from that sin, human effort can still bring about salvation.⁵⁹ Modern rejections of confirmation due to the rejection of infant baptism may possibly be built upon the same Pelagian-style error. The error in this rejection is in believing that salvation lies within the responsibility of the individual who believes. While this statement oversimplifies a mature declaration of faith, it does at least express the danger of completely disregarding any theological value to baptizing the very young.

Augustine, for example, especially celebrated the baptism of infants on the basis that baptism is the "prescribed way of washing away original sin."⁶⁰ He believed that such a sacrament and the eventual mature participation of a

believer in the Lord's Supper were all necessary for their salvation. On the other hand, for Augustine there was to be, at this point, no "confirmation" that such an activity would automatically provide for us a place in the "number of the predestined."⁶¹

The Thirteenth Century - Aquinas' Influence

Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity, ed., Beginnings to 1500* (Peabody: Prince, 1997), 181.

⁵⁹ **Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 89.**

⁶⁰ **Latourette, 179.**

⁶¹ **Ibid., 179.**

E.C. Whittaker recalls Christianity's engagement with the subject of

confirmation again in the thirteenth century with the record of Thomas Aquinas who clearly defined confirmation as being the formula of the anointed prayer of the episcopacy, and the anointing itself.⁶² The Council of Trent in the sixteenth century shows that it may have been the Protestant tradition that reinforced this understanding instead of countered it in the development of its practices. But it was truly in Trent, after dialoguing with reformational protests that the Council offers for the first time confirmation as more than the rite of the episcopacy, but as a Sacrament along with and in connection to Baptism.⁶³

The Sixteenth Century - The Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent

Protestant Influence

E C Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003),
⁶³ Holm, 44.

History suggests to us then that depending on which side of the Protestant Reformation one worships on, be it the side of Roman Catholicism or the Reformer's side, the Council of Trent was either an affirmation of the true teachings of the Church, or a frantic attempt to deal with Protestant doctrines. On the side of the Reformers during this time confidence was swelling over the new-found freedom of worship disconnected from Roman Catholicism's slip into profitable religion and disconnected personal faith in Christ. While clarity was found in regard to key matters of biblical faith, these Reformers may have been accused of throwing away the "baby with the bath water." While seeking to

sanctify compromised patterns of Christianity many of the Reformers dismissed key theological teachings and practices that predated their current issues within Roman Catholicism. The Reformation's general disregard for the full scope of Church history greatly affected the practice of baptism. Some groups, such as

the Anabaptists, rejected the Roman Catholic practice of baptism and created their own version of baptism. In this instance, it may be debated whether the greater heresy was Roman Catholicism's disconnection of the believer to personal faith, or the Reformer's disconnection of present worship and sacramental theology from the history of Christianity.

Roman Catholic Concerns

Convening in Trent in 1545, and at the least, nodding to Luther's protests of 1517, this Council of Trent was concerned with the issue of understanding how confirmation should be defined or connected to baptism at three different levels. First, the Council wanted to clarify that the "confirmation of those who have been baptized" is not an idle ceremony or anything less than a sacrament. Where does this come from? As has been discovered in this chapter, "confirmation" at this point in history has only referred to the work of the bishop over and above a certain ceremony or sacrament. Why should this Council in this way defend confirmation now? Shelley contends that these days

were certainly defined by internal events running back to forces of Catholic Reformation instituted long before Luther's time, but a counter reformation within the Catholic Church influenced by external Reformational ideas also defined them.⁶⁷ It is fair to say that a casually held belief can become grasped with clenched fists if it is ever threatened - which we see was happening as the

Roman Catholic doctrine was shored up amid the Reformers rejection of the christening-style baptism of believers known previously in Roman Catholicism. It made sense that in this theological climate, the Roman Catholic Church must also further stabilize any subsequent sacrament, ritual or ceremony attached to baptism - especially confirmation.

1848), 58, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct07.html>. (Accessed October 15, 2009).

⁶⁷ Shelley, 272.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 246.

The second Canon on confirmation from this Council dealt specifically with those who reject the virtue of the sacred chrism of confirmation. As it appears from the Canon, the Reformers concern was that such a practice is an outrage to the Holy Spirit. The Protestant Reformation was clear in saying that religious authority did not lie "in the visible institution of the Roman church but in the Word of God found in the Bible."⁶⁸ The Reformers concern lay within the declaration by any member of Roman Catholicism that just because a service of confirmation has taken place, the authority of the minister or church has directed the Holy Spirit in such a way as to proclaim a person's filling with that Spirit. To many Protestants this was an outrageous claim of human power over the

mystery of God's power and presence within a person. At the same time, it may then seem a bit odd that any Protestant later on would be able to identify, as if it

were a possession, the Holy Spirit in their life. Though biblical tradition may suggest more acceptance of a mature declaration of one's own experience of the infilling with the Holy Spirit, caution must still be given to the fine line that exists in any human claims over the mystery of God's power and presence within a person, including themselves.

Mark 9:14-29.

The third Canon from Trent is just as problematic in that it can easily be seen as humans trying to grasp even more authority over God's movements among us, as in this case, the declaration is made that the bishop is the necessary piece to the ministry of confirmation. Grasping at orthodox views of apostolic authority, the Roman Catholic Church may be simply trying to set up a "fail-safe" by saying that the declaration of the Spirit is not simply offered without due ministerial authority and purpose. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus was trying to teach the disciples this same lesson.⁶⁹ While the disciples thought that they had enough personal authority to heal the demon-possessed boy, healing was only able to occur as they daily realized the contingency of that authority upon the Holy Spirit's final authority. While this third Canon may be debated as to the legitimacy of declaring the Spirit's authority as equivalent to the bishop's authority, it is here that we find what history might note as a major source of our confusion and disagreement on confirmation today.

Further Protestant Fractures

The subsequent fracturing of the Protestants in the next several years makes confirmational understanding even more confusing. While Luther continued to hold the position that confirmation was not a Sacrament, others such as Martin Bucer began to focus on its place in worship as a ritual practice to examine the faith of the children. Luther's predominant concern was with the salvific and sanctifying authority of the bishop in Roman Catholicism's sacramental practice of confirmation. As long as confirmation only recognized successful catechesis and conferred blessing, Luther does not appear to have a problem with this practice.⁷⁰ This approval was not offered by those from the Anabaptist tradition, not because they were afraid of its use, but rather found no need for it as they rejected infant baptism altogether.

James F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 48.

⁷¹ Heitzenrater, 22.

In the epic of the Church, confirmation transitions from priestly baptismal blessing to responsibility of the bishop, to a source of angst over Church authority, to Sacrament, to rite and now, all at once, to be an unnecessary history for those who have found baptism to be only for those who are already believers. Some sense of historical connection to Christian history is

regained in the practices of John Wesley, an Anglican minister, whose interest in perfecting Anglicanism led him to systematic or methodical practices of declaring the possibilities of God's Spirit in people's lives.⁷¹ From this methodical pursuit

came what was later to be known as the Methodist societies, a group of people gathered on a spiritual quest for holiness.⁷² At no point in Methodism did Wesley want to reject his roots for the sake of his personal understanding and experience of the deeper work of God's grace in people's lives, but he did discover ways of celebrating his Anglican tradition in light of this new hope. For him, Methodism and its societies became the vehicle by which he was able to arrive at celebrating church tradition and personal experience all at the same time.⁷³

The Eighteenth Century - John Wesley's Methodism Heitzenrater, 36.

⁷³ Rupert Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, *The Methodist Societies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 3, 32.

⁷⁴ White, 49.

John Wesley stands in history and within the tradition of the Church of the Nazarene as a faithful historian, theologically-orthodox churchman, and conduit of the Spirit of God at work among the masses of people to whom he

was called. Though Anglicanism itself continued with the general practice of confirmation as an act of the bishops, it was generally rejected as an act necessary for salvation.⁷⁴ Because Wesley agreed with this point, he had little problem continuing this practice in Anglican style. As pragmatics pressed the matter even further, Wesley later removed confirmation from his service book of 1784, because as James White notes, Wesley "did insist on a 'new birth' through

a conscious conversion experience."⁷⁵ To Wesley this was the key piece - the effectual change of heart within a believer. Certainly Wesley was concerned with how that change was nurtured by the means of grace offered to all persons through the Church, but it was not enough for the Church to declare salvation. Wesley was instead looking for those who themselves could articulate a "desire to flee the wrath to come, to be saved from [one's] sins."⁷⁶

In the end, confirmation within Wesley's Methodism was not to be connected with a particular event.⁷⁷ For Wesley, confirmation was the complementary maturation of a believer to a transformed, spirit-filled life leading to the disciplines that flow from the means of grace, particularly as Wesley articulated them.⁷⁸ As Henry Knight notes, Wesley was not long on discussion about baptism as a means of grace because Wesley believed it to be a "onetime initiatory event."⁷⁹ For Wesley it was the Lord's Supper, as opposed to

confirmation, which truly "preserves and develops the Christian life."⁸⁰

⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶ Mark W. Stamm, *Sacraments & Discipleship* (Nashville: Discipleship, 2001), 20.

⁷ White, 49.

⁸ Henry H. III Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1992), 2-5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁰ *Ibid.*, 178, 190.

¹ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 227.

As Randy Maddox notes, Wesley's real problem with the practice of confirmation came from his experience of the ritual as a very impersonal event.⁸¹

Herein Maddox notes that Wesley's deepest concern may have been as much theological as practical since the ritual implied that the Holy Spirit would be guaranteed in an individual's confirmation. Regardless of Wesley's concerns surrounding confirmation, he was clear to express his desire for catechesis of the Christian, particularly the catechesis of children. From Wesley's childhood, catechesis had been clearly understood as the necessary spiritual training of a young Christian. It was here in catechesis that Wesley was believed to see hope for the baptized infant in responsibly appropriating the gracious "regenerating presence of the Holy Spirit."

Between Wesley's time and the present many varieties of Wesleyan baptismal practices have been created and observed. While not one of these practices, including the current practices of the Church of the Nazarene, reflects the full scope of historical traditions and understandings about baptism or confirmation, it is true to say that their diversity assists current Church history in developing a more informed option for the future. An example of this diversity comes in the comparison of the practices of the Church of the Nazarene with the practices of the United Methodist Church. As has already been seen, Nazarene history has transitioned from the confirmation of baptism in the membership ritual to a general appropriation of the sacrament of baptism for either infants or mature believers. In the Nazarene structure, the anticipation of believer's baptism can be initiated in a ritual of infant dedication. In this instance, infant dedication becomes a hopeful intention of the parents to surrender a child to the Lord in the hope that the child will one day personally accept the Lord's saving grace. On the other hand, within the United Methodist Church there is currently no option in baptismal practices for infant dedication. The United Methodist's General Board of Discipleship states on their website, "Paragraph 331.1b of the 2000 Book of Discipline makes no provision for 'infant dedication' as an alternative to the sacrament of baptism, nor for what pastors are to administer or prepare parents for."⁸⁴ While these two views may seem irreconcilable, Wesleyan patterns for theological development would suggest that out of

dialogue between these two standards, the Church, specifically in this case the Church of the Nazarene may find helpful information that will lead to the introduction of a further ritual of confirmation among current practices. The bridge from historical understandings, namely Wesley's expressions about confirmation and current considerations for introducing a confirmation ritual in the Church of the Nazarene can be found in the United Methodist Church's development of the catechism.

Considerations of a Confirmation Ritual for Introduction into the Church of the Nazarene

Connecting Confirmation to Catechesis

Daniel Benedict, "What About Infant Dedication," *The UMC General Board Of Discipleship* (March 25, 2002), http://www.gbod.org/worship/default_body.asp?act=reader&item_id=4502/ (accessed October 22, 2009).

Having had little liturgical practice to cling to, the Church of the

The Church of the Nazarene, *Discovering My Faith* (Kansas City: WordAction, 1999).

⁸⁶ United Methodist, General Board of Discipleship, *Claim the Name* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2000).

Nazarene developed in the late-1990's a very beneficial piece called *Discovering My Faith*.⁸⁵ This teaching program was offered as a way of providing basic Christian beliefs to preteens with the intention of ushering them into productive

Christian mission and discipleship. What became unclear in this program was the purpose of Christian discipleship and liturgical worship practices that would make this necessary or helpful. In other words, this was a great idea but the connection to worship practices and congregational stories was not completed. This problem did not arise, however, in the United Methodist Church as they used the material, *Claim the Name*,⁸⁶ as it was directly connected to a process of education leading to a well-established ritual of confirmation. As compared with the Church of the Nazarene material that included a teaching packet and pupil book, the United Methodist Church material includes a handbook for parents regarding their questions and participation in the process. This book for parents is ripe with thoughtful answers for the preparation and process of faith development and implementation of a young believer into the faith. The greatest success of *Claim the Name* was in the recognition and thorough handling of the realization that a child may still proceed through this process and not own faith personally. While this is a heart-breaking prospect, the pastoral piece of this is invaluable as this is a conversation that is both fair to the hope of the Church and kind to the real fears of a parent or guardian. Further telling our story as

Christians, *Claim the Name* states, "However, if the answer is truly no at this time [to faith, or being confirmed in the faith], don't forget that God's grace is still at

work." Many Nazarenes will resonate with this declaration of the optimism of grace, for it is generally the same statement made in infant dedication.

Baptism and Confirmation as a Ritual Process

Based upon that statement, as it relates to baptism, there are certainly theological considerations for connecting baptismal confirmation with catechesis. It is a way of intentionally orienting our future lives with the Lord. But what about the potential of confirmation to not just position a Christian, but to transition that Christian for a transformational experience as a mature believer? *Rites of Passage* contributor, Douglas Davies recalls the 1908 published study of Belgian anthropologist Arnold van Gennep that suggests that any movement or change in social status must fall "into three phases which mirrored leaving one room, whereby people are separated from their original status, then being in no room at all while in transit which, is a period apart from normal status, before finally being received into the new room where a new status is conferred. This middle status of transit, which van Gennep terms as the "liminal" period, is the concern for a practical use of the ritual of confirmation particularly as a "reaffirmation of the Christian faith" where a person is able to transition to a new state of being in the Faith.

As Victor Turner suggested in 1969 that this middle phase of "liminality," as he called it is a period in which individuals experience

"communitas, or intense awareness of being bound together in a community of shared experience." An example of this phase can be recalled from chapter one in the 1904 Manual usage of covenant language in the membership ritual. In the early days of the Church of the Nazarene, this formational community experience was a central part of developing a common bond around the Church's mission. So then, whether this project's definitive purpose at this time for a confirmation ritual in the Church of the Nazarene is historical, theological or educational, it must in any case consider the social value for such an event. This value will be specifically defined personally, as will be seen in the video testimonials in this study, and corporately as Lowell First Church translates its predominant story of worship practices and rituals.

Introducing Confirmation to the Church of the Nazarene from the Experience of a Local Congregation

One of the great theological concerns of baptism is the awareness that it is not human response that effects change, but rather the grace of God. Life in the Community of Faith, particularly centered in baptism and then recalled regularly in the Covenant-ratifying meal of the Lord's Supper shared within local congregations, can at once be the act of God's Spirit among us as well as the grand movement of God's people globally with the Lord, receiving, but also making change happen. As an institutional body, it would be very easy to one day report that the Church of the Nazarene has heard from the Lord and it will do

or not do, or be this or not be that - such a divine revelation would be of great help in regard to a number of practices and pursuits of which confirmation conversations are only one. Nonetheless, such reception of ecclesial direction and change within our institutional or organizational life doesn't always work that way, even amidst the Spirit's leading. This project suggests that the Spirit's voice of change, growth and transformation is often received and heard as the local congregation gathers inclusively with each person finding an opportunity to express his or her emotional, physical, and mental engagement with the Lord among that community.

Approaching Change

In his book, *Your Brain Goes to Church*, Bob Sitze expresses the need for us to recognize that matters of personal biology and intellect are intertwined with matter of emotions in the larger gathering of any people. Within the worship context, Sitze suggests we will know where to go, especially in regard to liturgical development so long as all our senses are engaged in the worship

event. He says that in such an experience the "Spirit moves...and fills worshippers with assurance and courage for life's work." Sitze reminds the local congregation of the potential of the church for picking up a diverse collection of individual encounters and understandings of the Spirit's presence among that congregation, and for that congregation to gather that diversity collectively

around what everyone experiences together - namely in this instance the introduction of a new way of understanding and experiencing baptism and a confirmation ritual.

Is the faithful collection of people who are going to graciously share all levels of life together, particularly for the development of a ritual process that enables or celebrates spiritual maturation simply the substance of wishful thinking? Does the very nature of our differences, particularly in this instance relating to personal understandings or rejections of Roman Catholicism, leave us far from hoping to find commonality around something so tethered to the past? Jeff Patton describes a "divine intersection" at which transformational worship really happens, suggesting common ground can be found. For some, it is the liturgy itself that fosters this experience, which would work well for pressing the thesis of this project in the affirmative. However, for others it is the collection of our personal encounters of Christ that draw us together as the people of God, living intimately for and with God in worship. In the latter, less expectation is placed upon the worship liturgy.

Fowler's use of the phrase "Practical theology" may very well be the bridge between connecting the events of worship liturgy and the lives of the people who enter that liturgy. Though his predominant concern is connecting practical theology with both theological and non-theological fields, the answer may lie in his principle rather than his assumption. The lesson for the Church of

the Nazarene here is that it can build ecclesial practices upon Scripture and tradition, but that person's present situations, challenges and experiences can healthily inform those practices. Fowler's concern may resonate with the larger mission of the Church as it is drawn from the local congregation's concern for pastoral care growing out of the congregation that exists as a balanced "ecology of care and ecology of vocation." Here it is learned that a congregation's collection calls its people out of a "god-less" life-story and into the grand story of God among His people. This liminal transition occurs in confirmation as it becomes, as Benedict says, an "in-between place [for] persons who have been upended by the grace of conversion." To see confirmation in this way requires a paradigm shift in the way liturgy is developed and engaged in Nazarene worship.

Gathering for Change

A priceless resource in shifting the paradigm of what confirmation may be, and what is involved in gathering a congregation for a change in practices, or what is involved in resolutely solidifying what is unnecessary to change comes in the general discussion of transition in the church by Tim Conder. In his discussion of the congregational narrative, Conder talks about gathering the congregation around the desire of persons to experience Christ in Community. Of particular interest is his understanding that currently, "the church has a unique opportunity to confront the prejudices and predispositions of community formation that took root during modernity and the long Constantinian dominance of the church in culture." In regard to the Church of the Nazarene's engagement

with a local Christian through a prescribed ritual of confirmation the local congregation has the ability to transcend historic preconceptions, both those of Christians toward the meaning of confirmation and those of non-Christians who view the Christian life from the bullet points of Christian do's and don'ts. Conder's view suggests that the local Community of Faith, by its participation together with the Holy Spirit, is able to establish a fresh way of being a Christian in the Church. As the biblical writer of Hebrews would affirm, there is formational strength in the spiritual life of a believer that connects with other believers.

Robert Webber, often known for his concern for worship liturgy and worship theology, has written on the role of Christian formation in the future establishment of the Church. His book, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, deals specifically with drafting for us various "sequences" for stages and rites of passage as they work to develop and form Christian disciples. He believes that confirmation benefits the covenant focus of a congregation's development together as it reaffirms personal faith stories and develops a life of discipleship within each believer. This is a very high consideration that echoes much of what we considered earlier from van Gennepe, that confirmation or any ritual of its type should actually serve to move one through to a new state of being in Christ. According to Webber, whether it is Lowell First Church of the Nazarene or any other local congregation, denominational if not global transformation is possible when worship practices are informed by biblical patterns and Church history,

intentionally designed by congregational reflection and inclusively practiced with God's mission to the current world in mind.

Conclusion: the Influence of Collecting Personally Historic Understandings of Baptism and Confirmation in the Lowell First Church Congregation

While John Wesley's practice may not clearly validate the use of a confirmation ritual with those baptized as infants, it can still be assumed that the full flavor of Wesley's intention clarifies varying historical understandings and finds a place within the development of a further ritual associated with infant baptism in the Church of the Nazarene. Once disapproved theology is abandoned, and once catechesis is applied, it may be assumed that Wesley would join the Church of the Nazarene in celebrating the opportunity to see this ritual as a means of grace for the growing Christian and the worshipping community. A predominant concern of this study is if in a local Nazarene congregation the language of confirmation is today removed far enough from the current practices and theology of Roman Catholicism and churches with similar understandings of their traditions. While the United Methodist Church may serve as a model for the development of a new way of understanding confirmation, the baptismal understanding from which that confirmation practice arises may be problematic to the Church of the Nazarene.

According to the literature of this project's review, the Church of the Nazarene must consider if solving this problem of confirmation in the local

congregation will be a synthesis of such things as biblical, historical, educational, formational and worship opportunities as well as a matter of pastoral care and teaching in each of the aforementioned areas. Each local congregation must consider if the future of confirmation in the Church of the Nazarene will grow first from worship into the life of a local congregation, or from the life of the congregation into worship. Pursuing this question is a key focus of this project.

The next chapter of this project will present a particular methodological design intended on studying how one local congregation of the Church of the Nazarene, Lowell First Church, will likely receive the introduction of a

confirmation ritual. The following chapters will determine whether worship can introduce such a practice, or if the life of a congregation must make the introduction. Much attention will be given in the next chapter to expressing the particular makeup of Lowell First Church in order to clarify the need that any ritual consideration or development must flow from a clear awareness of what defines the gathered community. It is a clear presupposition of the next chapter that gathering each week for worship centralizes the Community of Faith.

CHAPTER 3

PRO-ACTIVE IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN THE CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP SYSTEM: RESEARCH DESIGN

Beginning what I believe are the very best days of the Church of the Nazarene, this denomination transitions into its second century with a pressing

conversation rooted in worship practices and theology. In an age of cultural prerogatives and debates of style, preference and audience, worship conversation can be either engaging or explosive. It is the purpose of this study to discover if, rooted in the congregational story of one local Body within the Church of the Nazarene, there are some clues to how this discussion might be received and from that reception, how worship liturgy may develop from that reaction or response. It is the intention of this research that those denominational directions pursued in the future can find great clarification and focus from this project. It must be clear that this study was carefully focused on the issue of developing that conversation around confirmation and its reception in a local community of faith, however. In other words, rather than focusing on implementing confirmation into denominational structures, this project considered a local congregation's reception of this subject which included further engagement with the established local Nazarene traditions of Infant Baptism and Infant Dedication.

The purpose of this chapter is to express the design of this project as it pursues our intended data surrounding one local congregation's reception of a further ritual of confirmation in its worship practices. Therefore, this chapter will communicate an ethnographic view of the Lowell First Church of the Nazarene, establish the particular methodology developed for objectifying that view of the congregation, and communicate how that methodology was further developed to

pursue data resulting from the introduction of confirmation as a potential ritual. This chapter will conclude with critical reflection on that methodology.

Observing the Lowell First Church Congregation

Being a mid-sized congregation, housed in a 40 year-old building nestled into an ethnically diverse, affluent suburban community, this 106 year-old congregation serves as a veritable university for this study. Predating the denominational origins of the Church of the Nazarene, Lowell First Church is given an opportunity to recall history independently and beside our global family of Nazarenes. What makes this study unique is that in this time period, and in this particular location in North America, this congregation is an excellent mixture of those whose lives rise out of that Nazarene history as well as those who have virtually no Nazarene background. To make this mixture more unique is the reality that the last two pastors have served for ten and eighteen years, respectively, which is much longer than the average tenure of pastors in the denomination. This detail makes a great difference in regards to the congregation's long-term corporate understandings of the Church of the Nazarene that flowed from the view and vision of but two of its ministers. Over the course of time, and even globally, it may become clear that many congregations know the Church of the Nazarene by its representatives rather than its mission. Strangely enough, that sounds a lot like the Church and Christ's

mission. Oh that the world would know God's mission through us!

Lowell First Church's current membership is 331, with an average Sunday morning Worship attendance of 200. Of those 200, roughly 40 are participants in a Cambodian congregation's worship service held simultaneous to the English-speaking service. It must be noted that Lowell First Church's Cambodian congregation did not participate in the survey portion of this research. As many of these members are recent converts to Christianity with little to no Christian background, further catechetical training will be very important for this group especially. Likewise, their demographic will be important for expressing the story of Lowell First Church and our special fellowship when life and worship are shared.¹⁰³

Within the Lowell community we do have another Nazarene congregation, our Hispanic congregation. Opportunities for collaboration have thus far been difficult, although the Lowell First Church congregation contains many English-speaking Hispanics and Latinos. As a simple point of interest, the worship location of the Hispanic congregation is Lowell First Church's original location.

As mentioned earlier, our facility is located in an affluent suburban neighborhood. This affluence may be debated as our immediate community is quickly being comprised of households where from an individual residence it is possible to have upwards of 5 adults working full-time jobs. This is especially true as our community welcomes large family units from India. The local population is mixed in regards to race, economy, faith, occupations, and

dwellings, though the balance leans toward Caucasian, lower-middle class, historical Catholic, educated professionals who live in single family dwellings. Based upon the city of Lowell's design, it is further separated into this type of community as the Merrimack River runs between Lowell First Church and the urban center of the city. Like many suburbs, it is also nicely situated away from the center of city life in downtown Boston. This distance of 32 miles from the city of Boston allows Lowell an opportunity to offer its own local flavor, events, and mixture of culture. Beyond the regional assets of mountains to the north and beaches to the east, it is worth noting that even the church property sits at the base of one of Massachusetts' massive state forests.

Lowell First Church is blessed with a three-million dollar facility that includes a gorgeous 400 person sanctuary, staff and pastoral office space, a dozen classrooms, 3 nursery rooms, spacious foyer, recrearium (gymnasium and fellowship auditorium), two-story teen house, choir room, formal parlor, 3 preschool classrooms and office for our church-connected day school, kitchen, 4 public restrooms with 3 more shared between nurseries and classrooms, spacious parking lot, and a beautiful four-bedroom colonial home for a parsonage. The facilities are aging, and income has seen a decrease due to the United States economy, however, this facility continues to be a beautiful location to worship and serve in and from.

Much more will be revealed in the research process itself; however, a few basic items can be introduced here about the people of Lowell First Church.

Having a fair mix of well-educated professionals, this fellowship is balanced with those with some to no higher education. Very few among this congregation have no high-school diploma. Many in the congregation live on middle class incomes, while there are extremes on both sides. Likewise, the median age is 45 with extremes on both sides. The congregation is predominantly female, Caucasian, and married with children. Of the congregation gathered for worship, nearly as many "twenty-year-old +" members are present as there are those who are not members. One final note at this point is that beyond religious backgrounds that connected with the Church of the Nazarene, the people come from either a Roman Catholic or varied Protestant background (as time moves on, even in my pastoral tenure here, the number of former Roman Catholics is being eclipsed by others joining worship from various evangelical Protestant groups).

Studying Lowell First Church

Considering the need to glean more information and expression of this congregation's understandings, as well as involve the congregation in utilizing and benefitting from its finds, the design of this research project was formed around a "pro-active" methodology. What this meant for the Lowell First Church was that this project was intentionally designed to find qualitative means of understanding the problem of how each person in worship received or might

receive confirmation in this congregation's corporate baptismal worship liturgy. This project also allowed the congregation's responses to guide the narrative of who it would be in the future, how it will receive such a change, what practices and understandings need clarified, and how to unite Lowell First Church worship around pastoral education in the worship event. These desired results were achieved by the following: the development and presentation of a survey to collect statistical data of the congregation and the congregation's personal responses to various questions related to baptism and confirmation; the presentation of the survey data and results through a sermon series that reorganized the data around three predominant biblical themes; the preparation of confirmation candidates and the presentation of a sample confirmation ritual in a worship event; the interview of three individuals seeking more personal dialogue around the subject of this project; and the development of case studies from those interviews.

Congregational Survey

This congregational study process began with a survey presented to those gathered for morning worship one Sunday morning. The chosen time for presenting this survey was February 15, 2009. This date is significant as it was a crucial teaching point in my preaching schedule and the liturgical calendar. Liturgically, we were about to enter into a "slow thaw" from the New England winter as we moved towards Easter by way of the season of Lent. It was the

consideration of this process that the survey should be given at a time when it could be contemplated in the congregation's hearts and minds as spiritual reflection long after the event. Within my preaching calendar, this survey came at the conclusion of a series on various folk religions. The idea behind such a placement was the need to transition to Lent from a thoughtful time of knowing what we do not believe to what we actually do believe.¹⁰⁶

As hoped, following the service in which the survey was presented a parishioner noted that these sermons and this survey made them wonder if their former Roman Catholic practices could be considered a folk religion. Before I could respond, this person then commented with curiosity wondering if it is likewise possible that there may be Nazarene practices and beliefs that reflected folk religions versus vital Christianity.

There was difficulty in the process of design to determine the correct moment at which this survey was to be presented within that specific service. Was the survey to be given at the beginning so that individuals could fill it out independently? Would it only be a distraction? Would people feel guilty for filling it out during other parts of the service? If we were to take it after, would we get the full participation of the congregation or would some simply go home? Would it be better to send people home with it for the week? Could sending it home limit personal responses and cause groups for or against to form? Yet, if we took a set time in worship, would people feel as if we were busying ourselves with something disconnected from corporate worship? These questions were presented to my In-Parish Committee for discussion, and I spoke with various leaders about their opinion. More than a few responded with trust in my leadership and offered that even if there was frustration with my decision it would

evidence our receptivity to not only the presentation of a confirmation ritual, but

its development and the slow, hard work to develop or avoid such a ritual, whatever the case may be.

The decision was made to introduce the survey mid-service, having it distributed with adequate writing utensils by the ushers, and then after fifteen minutes for it to be collected by the same ushers. To add to the intended 'worshipfulness' of the event a video was placed on the front projection screen displaying soothing images of nature with quiet, reflective hymns played on the piano as its audio track. This was designed to calm those who became anxious that this survey was either a difficult "task" or "test," or for the benefit of those who exempted themselves from participation in the survey. A final component of placing this survey in a worshipful event was that this moment was designed to begin with a brief, extemporaneous corporate prayer.

There was also difficulty in the design to determine what questions needed to be added to the survey and which ones should be left out. Through informal discussions Advisors in this doctoral program offered helpful input in both of these areas, as did my In-Parish Committee. Formal assistance in the development of this survey came from the handbook *Studying Congregations*.^{TM7}
¹⁰⁷ Ammerman, 248-253.

The survey was organized into six sections. The first section was a collection of demographic questions. The second section focused on an individual's religious involvement. The third section probed one's agreement with the specific practices and doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene. The fourth section determined congregational relational ties. The fifth section collected frequencies of religious practices. And the sixth section asked about specific worship practices. As was seen in chapter two of this project, various elements of the early Lowell First Church membership covenant included aspects of each of these sections as a means of confirming the waters of an individual's baptism.

The first section on demographics provided an opportunity to see where the extremes and medians were in regards to gender, race, marital status, education, employment and children. I anticipated that this information would provide helpful data regarding this congregation's present and future understandings of who we are or wish to be. This information also gave this project an understanding of the responses that were soon to follow.

The intention of the second section was that we would begin to sense how each person connected religiously to the Lowell First Church congregational family. Having had previous experience and knowledge that those who attend less frequently can sometimes have less interest in formal rituals or liturgies, this

area was designed to find out who is and who is not involved religiously. At the same time, this section also hoped to reveal backgrounds that might lead to an awareness of who comes to us with either a liturgical, free or otherwise religious background, and whether they attend regularly or not.

The third section, the smallest section of the entire survey, intended to probe the personal belief connections to the Church of the Nazarene. It was hoped that this information along with the responses from the last section could help us to determine how we would craft our future story; namely, whether we would lead with Church of the Nazarene initiatives, or complement religious pursuits with the language of the Church of the Nazarene. At this point in the survey, a write-in question was presented so that each person could describe the effect of a Nazarene identity on one's participation in worship, however it was perceived.

The fourth section on congregational relation ties was introduced to the survey for the sole purpose of preparing future worship out of the collection of a congregational narrative. As we intend on collecting each week towards that "divine intersection" that Patton speaks about from a narrative theological viewpoint, we must be clear to gather our personal narratives as each person becomes a vital part of the congregational story of God. As Rick Warren taught in his book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, it is the Church's responsibility and calling to: "turn attenders into members;" "develop mature members;" and "turn

members into ministers."

The fifth section focused on recalling our relational connections not in the corporate worship community but rather in personal worship. The design of this section considered the necessity of each person's need in developing a healthy and/or clear spiritual journey through classic disciplines. It was also the design of this section that any previous spiritual practices or processes of catechism would be assessed, particularly as to how much current practices have led to lives of spiritual rituals in everyday life. It was understood that this would be clearly based upon assumptions of one's participation or understanding of current practices. Until a standard form of assessment in each area of ministry and study is designed or offered, this may tell much about where we must go, and what we will be working with in regards to formational practices.¹¹³

¹¹³ The term 'religious' was chosen here in the survey instead of 'formational' because the intention was not to introduce a new term (however beneficial), but to work with current and generally understood congregational language of how we move as Christians, namely as 'religious' people.

The sixth section of this survey was designed to reconnect personal lives of spiritual development and formation with the present and possible worship experiences. This section contained questions about personal understandings, opinions, what has been taught, speculation about other people's opinions in the congregation, and a closing emotive question about one's favorite part of worship. Each of these questions were designed to allow expressions of what the congregation currently knows, how they feel, and how others feel which could possibly lead to angst and concern. To counter that

concern of considering other people's opinions (the liability of speculation) the final question was introduced as a pleasant opportunity to ask about something that each person considered their favorite part of worship.

A cover letter was drafted for the printed survey itself. This cover was presented as an informational piece to set the survey in a conversation that not everyone was aware of previously, or involved in prior to this event. In other words, it served to collect the congregation around a common purpose for this project. The cover letter's writing in collaboration with the In-Parish Committee, and its subsequent reading to the congregation (in this case, by me) before prayer and then survey participation was intended on more than pragmatics as we gathered. The real design of this letter was to align our congregational thinking and understanding in this process. This deeper intention flows from the belief that collecting people intellectually is especially crucial to community development within a congregation.¹¹⁴ One must wonder how a congregation might receive the casting of a biblical, spiritual or corporate vision, let alone progress together out of that experience, if congregational language and understandings are not intentionally drawn together. While it may be doubtful that the cover letter was able to perfectly collect the congregation for this study, its place in this process matched the intention of the project.

¹¹⁴ Bob Sitze, 113.

Following the process of receiving the surveys back from the congregation in worship, I met with my In-Parish Committee to collect their personal observations of the survey presentation, and to collect from each of them congregational expressions of how this was received. From an educational perspective, this is one of the most enjoyable moments of research as both positive and negative feedback began to come back. However, from an

organizational perspective, especially from a church family perspective, this is one of those tense moments that had to be planned for and designed as a "freedom" for speech during this meeting. The intention was that this information would complement the survey results and in some ways help to translate them into the next piece in this project.

Confirmation Sermon Series

Allowing two weeks for the collection of data from the survey, while expecting more qualitative than quantitative information, a sermon series was designed to run for three weeks on the subject of confirmation. It was during these sermons that the responses from the survey were to be presented and framed into an opportunity for understanding, action, and congregational experience. It was not the expectation of these sermons to convince or persuade

toward a particular practice or ritual, and it was not the expectation that these sermons would give all the history or perspectives of confirmation through history and traditions explained in chapter two of this project. Instead, the intention of these sermons was to draft the results into a narrative of congregational life and our "confirmation" that we, as citizens of God's Kingdom living in this world, are clearly a certain people in need of God's leading.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix B.

Each sermon was designed to be presented without handouts, using PowerPoint slides around particular biblical themes.¹¹⁵ Though the sections of

the survey were designed in a certain order, the presentation of these responses was reordered differently so that they could correlate with the sermon series order. The predominant reason for this new ordering of the data was to communicate more easily in a sermon series a broader understanding of the word "confirmation." While the survey itself considered preconceptions of a confirmation ritual, the sermons were designed to begin laying a new foundation for understanding confirmation at Lowell First Church.

The first of these sermons began by expressing "confirmation" as a personal pursuit. The design of this sermon was to express how our different backgrounds (including our personal demographics) are collected in worship, and how the Lord is enabling our differences to color and confirm the Spirit's

work as we personally pursue our corporate experience. The baptismal narrative of the Ethiopian and Philip in Acts chapter eight, verses twenty-six through thirty-five was chosen for its purpose of communicating the collection of individuals from diverse backgrounds around a common purpose and vision of faith.

The design of the second sermon was to consider "confirmation" as a public charge. This sermon was crafted to relay from the survey information about our religious backgrounds, our participation in this place of religious pursuit, and how our collection affirms the Holy Spirit's presence and subsequent charge to grow together. The summary of Wesley's quote from Second Kings chapter ten, verses fifteen through seventeen was used that "God has given us to each other!" This passage was chosen because of its ability to relate the necessity for Godly individuals to gather and confirm a corporate commitment to being Godly people. How this message was received, and the further connection of this reality to the introduction of a ritual of confirmation will be best seen in the responses received during the individual interviews shared later.

The design of the third and final sermon in this series was to assess how "confirmation" draws us into corporate and personal risk. In a congregation where confirmation comes as a foreign, undefined or misunderstood word and experience, it was necessary to express the risk in even approaching this subject of confirmation at all. The plan for this sermon was to continue with presenting the slides and survey results, however, the design was that it would also allow

me to express my pastoral risk in this study, and our corporate risk as we possibly learn and create new words, and as we possibly allow this experience to grow us together. A final connection to risk was designed around the reality that through this research together we might be a part of a global conversation around this subject in the Church of the Nazarene, which is something that a congregation that predates the Church of the Nazarene understands very well, if even only in history. Acts chapter six, verses eight through fifteen were chosen to exemplify this risk through the Holy Spirit's power and presence in Stephen's life and death. Stephen's story has the power of encouraging the Church to see new hope for those who confirm their faith and love for the Lord.

Following the last sermon in this series, the congregation's reception of this material was processed through informal conversations with the In-Parish Committee members and with various leaders among the congregation. While it was not a design of this project that the sermon series would present an opportunity for a secondary survey, this series was designed into the project as a means of educating the congregation based upon the information received in the first survey. Any further evaluation of the effectiveness of this series and information regarding the reception of this series was left to pastoral observations throughout and following each worship event.

Easter Baptisms and Confirmations

Following this sermon series, opportunity was provided within in our worship calendar to gather around the waters of baptism on Easter Sunday (2009). It was hoped that this date would be a perfect opportunity to consider a "new day" for our congregation in understanding and practice. Likewise, I hoped that this "new day" would carry an evangelistic component for Easter visitors. During this day it was planned that we would celebrate both the baptism of believers and the baptism of those little one's whose families wished to present them, and that we would confirm those of any age who wished to reaffirm their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Liturgical language was to be used that expressed this second opportunity as a chance to "confirm the waters of our baptism" for those embracing liturgical backgrounds, while casual language was to be used to offer this as a personal "confirmation of our faith in God and love for Jesus Christ." Whether candidates were presented or not, these two approaches to communicating confirmation to the congregation would also serve to lead the larger congregation in reaffirming prior participation in baptism and the ongoing confirmation of personal lives rooted in Christ.

In designing this sermon series and service of baptism and confirmation into this project, I also considered developing a series of catechetical classes to train each person for their confirmation. Though this may be something the research data will show may have been necessary or is yet needed, it was my belief that it would be outside the scope of my current desire

to determine the receptivity of a ritual without excessive training.¹¹⁶

Consequently, I developed an informal, yet educational training session to follow our sermon series as a means of preparing candidates for both baptism and confirmation.¹¹⁷ From this session they (and/or their parents) were to have enough basic understandings of these two events and basic Christian beliefs that they could approach this day with their experience of Christ's real presence, their commitment to enter into a life of nurture and Christian education and into life and specific practices of discipleship, especially for those baptized as infants.

It could easily be argued that the average congregation will not have as much participation in this conversation as we have had already before instituting a new ritual, but it will be tested here to see if even this is enough.

¹¹⁷ See Appendix C.

¹¹⁸ See Appendix D, E and F.

A further tool designed into our Easter service was the Baptism and Confirmation certificates. Having typically used the certificates available from the Nazarene Publishing House, it was the consideration of my staff that new certificates, specific to our celebrations, would be helpful in carrying the theme of our service home. These certificates were to be prepared ahead of time and then presented during the service to each person or family.¹¹⁸

Like the sermon series, the Easter worship event became an educational opportunity for presenting gradually received data in a

congregational narrative. The Easter events specifically assisted this project in providing a feedback loop for the congregation to determine its own satisfaction in aiding the presentation of a confirmation ritual into this congregation's liturgical practices. While the sermon series and this worship event were finally processed through informal conversations with the In-Parish Committee members and other key leaders in the congregation, the final determination of results in this event would be in the ongoing practice and participation of the congregation in future confirmation events.

Personal Narratives and Responses

The final element of study in this project was the interview of three individuals from within the congregation. Each person interviewed was chosen as representative of three main groups within this congregation: those who grew up in the Lowell First Church from birth; those who came to Lowell First Church from Roman Catholicism; and those who came to Lowell First Church from other backgrounds. Previous pastoral connections informed me of which persons to choose as representatives of these three groups. These interviews were designed to consider their stories of faith in this particular congregation. As a final extension of this project's research, these interviews were also designed to consider how these individual spiritual stories affected the receptivity of a confirmation ritual in their personal life and how they speculated it might be

received in the personal lives of the larger congregation.

These interviews were directed by way of a set interview protocol and videotaped for historical record. The interview protocol was designed to extrapolate the spiritual narrative of each person interviewed and the extent to which worship, education and sacramental activities, both previously and currently, shape their understanding of faith. The interview protocol concluded by requesting the person interviewed determine: the validity of confirmation as a complementary ritual to infant baptism; whether they believed their determination would be shared by the larger congregation or not; and whether the addition of a ritual of confirmation would be needed after all. While these interviews were later considered beyond the interview protocol through a "case-study" approach, when combined with the survey material, sermon series, and worship event, the collection of these personal narratives were more "pro-active" in presenting a confirmational narrative as necessary to the series of one-time events.

Summary

The design of this project was for a denominationally historic local congregation with the educational interest of discovering a solution to a problem that exists in its ecclesial and worship structures. Additionally, it was designed from a pastoral interest of helping a diverse congregation find liturgical unity in a common, congregational narrative. While a particular ritual of confirmation was

not defined in this project, the pro-active methodological tools employed in this project were able to successfully collect this congregation's current understandings and express how a further ritual of confirmation will be received. The focus of the next chapter of this project will be on expressing the data found in the survey, and expressing the results of the sermon series, interviews and worship event.

CHAPTER 4

CHARTING LOWELL FIRST CHURCH'S SPIRITUAL STORY: RESEARCH DATA AND RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present descriptively relevant data from this project's research. As the third chapter expressed the particular methodologies employed in that research, this chapter will now describe the results of its application. This presentation will be accomplished by first expressing the worship event in which the survey was presented. The survey data will be presented next as it was organized for the sermon series. As was noted in the previous chapter, this reorganization of the survey data in the sermon series occurred for the primary purpose of reframing congregational understandings of confirmation. Later in this chapter, additional data collected during the interviews will be presented. This chapter will conclude with the results of this project's introduction of a confirmational process to this congregation's worship liturgy.

Survey

The primary and yet initial piece of this study, a congregational survey, was presented on February 15, 2009 during Lowell First Church's corporate, morning worship service. However, the church calendar printed in the monthly newsletter and weekly bulletin had noted that we would be participating in a congregational survey; there was little discussion as to what it was, or what it would entail. This reality, however planned by the In-Parish Committee, or not planned as many at Lowell First Church are often very willing to follow the lead of our worship staff, became a great opportunity to receive fresh, personal and candid responses.

Before I share the data from those responses, it is worth noting that despite the congregation's ease in entering the service where there would be a "survey" taken, there was, however, a raised level of anxiety following the event - at least initially. Some of the conversation was related to questions about how much time the survey took. Some spoke about how strange it was to take a survey in the middle of worship. Some wished for more time to take it. Some talked about hoping that they "got a good score." Others wanted copies to send to others who could not be there that day. In addition, some were simply anxious to see how everyone responded.

The data was compiled over the next two weeks by my staff and me, noting both statistical calculations and variances among certain groups in those statistics. With foresight to the sermon series that would flow from this research

the results were gathered into three main outlines as can be seen in the sermon slides in Appendix B. Each of these sermons revealed the data as it related to both our congregational and biblical stories.

Sermon Series I of III

Demographics, Part I of II

The first sermon slides in this series focused on who we were personally in our congregational makeup. It was noted first that Lowell First Church is predominantly female (76 females; 43 males). Of those 119 who responded to the first question of gender, 118 responded with the following ages: 16 persons under age 18 (14%); 1 person age 18 (1%); 6 persons age 19-25 (5%); 14 persons age 26-34 (12%); 22 persons age 35-44 (19%); 23 persons age 45-54 (19%); 17 persons age 55-64 (14%); 12 persons age 65-74 (10%); 7 persons age 70 and over (6%). These age results showed that comparatively to other North American Church of the Nazarene congregations, this is a relatively young congregation. This is especially so, since the children grade 6 and younger were not present during this survey. These younger children not represented in the survey totaled 36 (5 in the nursery; 13 in preschool worship; and 18 in children's church worship).

These first sermon slides also noted important demographic facts about this congregation's racial and marital makeup. 120 responses were broken down

to reveal the following racial distinctions: 1 would rather not say what their race was (1%); 104 were Caucasian/White (86%); 6 were African American (5%); 4 were Asian/Pacific Islander (3%); 1 was Hispanic (1%); 1 Latino (with another written in as a Latina) (2%); 1 was Multiracial (1%); and 1 who was African (1%).

Within the Lowell First Church facility that day, there were another 43 of Asian descent, specifically Cambodian, who did not participate in the survey, but who often join us in worship and fellowship. It is clear to say that we are a mixed congregation, but predominantly Caucasian/White. Furthermore, this is

predominantly a married congregation; however, having many single, never married persons among us, which is due possibly to the large percentage of minors participating in the survey. Statistically, of the 119 who participated: 38 were single, never married (32%); 12 were separated or divorced (10%); 10 were widowed (8%); and 59 were married (50%). Of those participants that were married, statistical data was not requested to determine whether their partner has also participated in this survey. This is an important consideration as many in this congregation attend without the full partnership of a spouse in their congregational participation.

Frequency of Religious Practices

Transitioning from demographic information, our interest for presentation became the frequency of religious practices. Again, this information

was intended on revealing who we were personally in our congregational makeup, and then how each of us practices Christian living in everyday life. When asked how often each participant participates in or does private prayer or meditation, the following responses were given: 83 participate daily (69%); 17 participate weekly or more (14%); 5 participate 2-3 times a month (4%); 2 participate once a month (2%); 5 participate a few times a year (4%); 1 participates never (1%); 4 don't know how to pray (3%); and 4 wrote in that they participate 1-2 times a week/sometimes (3%). These responses show that the majority of congregational participants have a daily practice of prayer and meditation.

Following the pattern of the previous question, the next question was concerning how often persons participate in or do Bible reading. The following responses were given: 40 participate daily (35%); 47 participate weekly or more (41%); 8 participate 2-3 times a month (7%); 4 participate once a month (3%); 6 participate a few times a year (5%); 7 never participate (6%); 2 have difficulty reading the Bible (2%); and 1 wrote in that they read the Bible 1-2 times a week (1%). Differing from the previous question, daily practice of Bible reading is not Lowell First Church's predominant group. Here at Lowell First Church, it was noted that more of our congregation participates weekly or more.

The next question asked how often each person participates in or serves in church missions and compassionate ministries. The following

responses were given: 4 participate daily (4%); 12 participate weekly or more (11%); 9 participate 2-3 times a month (8%); 18 participate once a month (16%); 29 participate a few times a year (27%); and 37 never participate (34%). Following my sermon presentation of these results, which suggest that the predominance of Lowell First Church participants do not serve in church missions or compassionate ministries, a few persons suggested that they answered never because they were not formally serving on a mission's council or participating in the compassionate ministries that this congregation organizes. They were, however, regularly involved in global concerns and care of their neighbors. This admission was unfortunately not quantifiable by this question.

The final question in this section asked how often each person participates in evangelistic ministries or seeks converts and new owners (the local designation of Church of the Nazarene members). The following responses were given: 8 participate daily (7%); 7 participate weekly or more (6%); 8 participate 2-3 times a month (7%); 6 participate once a month (6%); 38 participate a few times a year (35%); and 43 never participate (39%). This information shows that predominantly, the Lowell First Church congregation never participates in evangelistic ministries or seeks converts and new owners. As with the previous questions, this may need further study to clarify if this was due to someone's work apart from an organized ministry, or whether it was truly because individuals did not participate at all. It may be seen that these results

offer potential for further development of religious practices among this local congregation.

Combined with the Scriptural text for the day, this information was woven together as a possible view of the congregational narrative, particularly as it could be set against the template of the scriptural narrative for the day. The text chosen for the first sermon, entitled "Confirmation As Personal Pursuit," was Acts chapter eight, verse twenty-six through thirty-five. This passage is the narrative of Philip and the Ethiopian. My pastoral conclusion and the conclusion of the survey data in its entirety was that like these two biblical characters, the Lord has brought the congregation together beautifully in unity from our diversity, but that we must personally have daily ears and eyes for the Spirit's movement. As such, we shared that our personal hunger for spiritual food might help us to connect to others around us as they also hunger for God. In other words, these results were brought together around the Ethiopian's passion for God as we also might connect our passions for God in worship together. Whether on this day one saw this message as convicting or encouraging because of our statistical information; our hope for the future might be in our focus on our hunger and collection in worship, not on our lacking or division in this conversation.

Sermon Series II of III

The second sermon presented around the topic of "confirmation"

organized the data from the survey around "religious involvement," "Church of the Nazarene agreement," and the first of two parts on "congregational relationships." The text for this sermon was Second Kings chapter ten, verses fifteen through seventeen. The theme and title of this sermon was "Confirmation As Public Charge."

Religious Involvement

The first question in this section asked how long each person had been an owner (member) of this particular congregation. The responses were as follows: 34 were not an owner (28%); 6 for 1 year or less (5%); 12 for 2-4 years (10%); 13 for 5-9 years (11%); 14 for 10-19 years (12%); and 40 for 20 or more years (34%). The results show that though we are predominantly long-time owners (members), there are nearly as many who are not owners (members) at all. This question is important in suggesting diverse historical points of reference among the congregational story as well as suggesting a need to plan ways to share future understandings.

The next question in this section was regarding the frequency of Sunday morning worship attendance. The following responses were given: 100 attend weekly (87%); 5 attend every other week (4%); 4 attend 3 weeks/month (4%); 4 attend as much as their physical condition allows (3%); and 2 attend as much as their work responsibilities allow (2%). Overwhelmingly, this

congregation attends regularly each week. This question reveals that Sunday morning worship may very well be one of the best places to accomplish the development of a congregational narrative, let alone nurture a healthy Holiness identity. To confirm this reality, the third question in this section asked a similar question relating to worship attendance. The question asked was, "On average, how many times have you attended worship services during the past year?" Once again, 94 out of 118 (80%) responded that they attend four or more times a month. The data from both questions reports this congregation is faithful in its attendance at Sunday morning worship services. The assumption of this data is that Sunday morning worship services are central to the weekly life of this congregation.

These other Protestant groups included (as received and written): Baptist; Assembly of God; Methodist; Salvation Army; Christian; Evangelical Baptist; Evangelical; Pentecostal; Presbyterian; Independent; Disciples of Christ; United Church of Christ; Church of the Brethren; and Congregational.

The next question in this section requested previous religious background. Of those who responded, the following backgrounds were noted: 55 were previously Nazarene (47%); 23 were previously Roman Catholic (19%); 34 were from other Protestant backgrounds (29%)¹²¹; 4 had no background

(3%)¹²²; 1 wrote in that they were Born Again (1%); and 1 wrote in that they had a non-denominational background (1%). This data shows that this congregation

is predominantly Nazarene in background with its next majority being those from various other Protestant backgrounds. Though it is the third group in this question, coming in at less than half of the first group of historical Nazarenes, it is significant to note that Lowell First Church does have quite a few from a Roman Catholic background.

The next question from this section asked at which age each person was first introduced to religious practices. The results were as follows: 76 were first introduced to religious practices under 3 years of age (63%); 26 were introduced between ages 4-6 (19%); 6 between ages 7-9 (5%); 3 between ages 10-12 (2%); 5 between 13-15 (4%); 2 between 16-18 (1%); 2 between 19-25 (2%); 2 between 26-30 (2%); and 2 between 41-50 (2%). This data suggests that no matter what the tradition from which one comes into the Lowell First Church worshipping community, there is common ground for a majority of the congregation around a lifetime of religious practices. The question will be whether different practices will be reconcilable.

Though "no background" was answered by these four persons, three of them wrote in the following backgrounds: Free-Will Baptist; United Methodist; and Episcopal.

Whether the age of introduction to religious practices equates with the age at which one first considers her or himself to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ may prove a different matter. The next question requests help in making that distinction. The results to this question regarding the age at which

a first consideration of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior was made is as follows: 4 consider that time to be before age 3 (3%); 14 between ages 4-6 (12%); 28 between ages 7-9 (24%); 26 between ages 10-12 (22%); 11 between ages 13-15 (9%); 6 between ages 16-18 (5%); 10 between ages 19-25 (8%); 9 between ages 26-30 (8%); 4 between ages 31-40 (3%); 5 between ages 41-50 (4%); 1 age 61 or older (1%); and 1 who does not consider Jesus to be his or her personal Lord and Savior (1%). This data shows that though religious practices come early for most of Lowell First Church, the predominant point of consideration of Jesus as Lord and Savior was spread through the years following ages 4 through 15.

Church of the Nazarene Agreement

The next section of questions discussed in this sermon regarded personal agreement with the Church of the Nazarene's doctrine. When asked whether participants were in full agreement with the doctrines of the Church of the Nazarene, the following answers were given: 51 answered yes, completely (42%); 41 answered mostly (34%); 9 answered that they were unaware of the doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene (8%); 10 answered that there are few differences for them (8%); and 9 answered that this doesn't matter to them in their spiritual experience (8%). This data shows that a majority of the participants

are in agreement with the doctrines of the Church of the Nazarene. These results also show that there are subsequently a large percentage of people who are "mostly" in agreement.

Following the previous question, participants were asked to what extent their agreement affects their participation in worship. The following answers were given: 39 were affected greatly (35%); 20 were affected minimally (18%); and 53 were not at all affected (47%). Though the clear majority of responses were not affected by agreement with the Church of the Nazarene, the percentage is considerable of those whose agreement with the Church of the Nazarene does greatly affect their participation in worship. When asked to explain these diverse feelings, the following responses were written in: "If I were not in agreement I could not attend here"; "Guidelines, understanding of why we do things and the way we can become personal with God"; "Enhances me - keeps me focused"; "It doesn't really affect me, it's just strange"; "I am free to worship and not be inhibited by details that might separate people"; and "Nazarene worship and polity resonates with who I am." The correlation between these last two questions is identified in the difference of those who believe the denominational connection to be secondary to the Christian fellowship, and those who believe that the Christian fellowship is built upon the congregation's connection as Nazarenes. Whether it is by liberty that someone finds association in this congregation, or by essentials, it is true that many find this place to be a viable

option for congregational worship.

Congregational Relation Ties, Part I of II

The focus of the next five questions presented in this sermon was on discerning what actually kept individuals connected to this congregation. Was it the beliefs and practices of the Church of the Nazarene, or was it the people and our congregational story, which may very well include the story of the Church of the Nazarene? This next series of questions asked about whom each individual knew here, how many of their closest friends were here and active participants of this community, and how they did or do see themselves in the story of this congregation.

The first of these questions asked how many members of their household and extended family regularly attend Lowell First Church. The responses were as follows: 3 reported they do not attend regularly (3%); 18 reported they attend by themselves alone (16%); 22 reported attending with 2 other family members (19%); 19 reported 3 (16%); 19 reported 4 (16%); 9 reported 5 (8%); 5 reported 6 (4%); 10 reported 7 (9%); 6 reported 8 (5%); 1 reported 9 (1%); 4 reported 10 or more (3%). It would appear from the elevated percentages of low numbers that few have large numbers of family members in the congregation while a majority have at least some family members in the congregation.

The next question moves beyond family connections and towards the consideration of friends. This question asks, of one's five closest friends outside of family, how many are owners of this church? The responses were as follows: 47 responded that none of their closest friends are owners (42%); 7 responded that 1 was (6%); 13 responded that 2 were (11%); 10 responded that 3 were (9%); 8 responded that 4 were (7%); and 28 responded that all five are owners of this church (25%). These results evidence the reality that major portions of this congregation have deep friendships with others outside of the membership of Lowell First Church. It is also true that the majority of those participating in the survey do have at least one friend who belongs to this membership.

Considering the qualification that this previous question may have had with membership versus those who participate regularly, a similar question was asked related to how many of an individual's closest friends participate regularly in the life of this church. The responses were as follows: 38 responded that none of their closest friends are attend this church regularly (32%); 10 responded that 1 is (9%); 17 responded that 2 are (14%); 10 responded that 3 are (9%); 15 responded that 4 are (13%); and 27 responded that all five of their closest friends are regular participants in the life of this church (23%). Relatively little change is seen in these numbers from the previous question, however there may be some significance to the change that does occur as less people have no friends who do not participate. Likewise, the transition from regular participation

to ownership may be significant for a large population of the congregation. It may be of interest at this point to do a further study regarding those who regularly participate and are not members.

Returning to survey participant's own experience of life here at Lowell First Church, and employing narrative language, the next two questions requested a feeling or sense of each individual's participation in the "life" of Lowell First Church as a main character. The first of these questions referenced one's feelings of participation in the historical story of Lowell First Church, and the second question referenced the present story of Lowell First Church. The

results of the first question were as follows: 16 feel greatly like main characters in the historical Lowell First Church story (14%); 31 feel moderately to be main characters (27%); 42 feel minimally like main characters (37%); and 25 do not feel like main characters at all (22%). Statistically, these responses show that a majority of the people feel minimally like main characters, while most of the survey participants do feel like main characters even somewhat. It is possible to ask if this question may have false assumptions as some people may feel like valued characters, just not main characters. Likewise, there was some concern that here and in the next question the words "historically" and "presently" may have carried different assumptions for different individuals.

The second of these questions has a changed majority. When asked about participant's feelings in the present story together, the following responses

were given: 14 felt greatly to be main characters (12%); 48 felt moderately like main characters (42%); 43 felt minimally like main characters (38%); and 9 did not feel like main characters at all (8%). This data shows that in the present story of congregational life, more persons are beginning to feel like they are at least minimally engaged in that life as main characters.

The conclusion of this sermon presentation focused on the congregation's partnership together. This sermon intertwined Jehu's relationship with Jehonadab, John Wesley's call to community and the survey results. The message of this combination was for the congregation to remember its need for each other. The thrust of this sermon was that from the Biblical, historical and congregational narratives the Church is called to confirm personal pursuits of God corporately.

Sermon Series III of III

The final sermon, expressing the responses of the survey, drew together Acts chapter six, verses eight through fifteen around the theme, "Confirmation as Corporate and Personal Risk." It was the intention of this sermon to complete the collection of the data received from the surveys and to begin a review process of how this congregation might live a new life together. This sermon considered the possibility that confirmation, in whatever form it will take linguistically, ritualistically or otherwise, may not be the best solution to

evidence all people's interests in personal life or corporate worship.

Demographics, Part II of II

The focus of the opening three questions from the survey used in this third sermon were on questions of demographics, particularly the questions of demographics that separate the congregation in areas of education and occupation. The first question asked for the highest level of formal education for each participant. The responses were as follows: 6 had completed grammar school (5%); 39 had completed high school or equivalent (31%); 19 had some college or a year of technical training (16%); 11 had received an associate's degree (9%); 22 had received a bachelor's degree (18%); 11 had some graduate education, but no degree (9%); 10 had masters degrees (8%); 2 had doctoral degrees (2%); and 2 had done post-doctoral studies (2%). Most survey participants had a high school degree, with even more having some education beyond high school.

The second demographics question was regarding participant's employment status. The following responses were given: 15 were retired (12%); 16 were unemployed (12%); 16 were full-time students (13%); 5 were self-employed (4%); 8 were homemakers (6%); 1 was a full-time volunteer (1%); 16 were employed part time (13%); and 50 were employed full time (39%). The results show that more people than otherwise are employed full-time, with a

small majority in any other status. The results to this question raised a number of concerns for people in the congregation. These concerns were casually presented over the next two weeks following this presentation as some felt quite bad that they were not employed, while others felt bad that they had the opportunity to be retired, students and volunteers or to have full-time employment. The implications for such personal realities speak loudly to this congregation's corporate life together. The question must be raised of what spiritual engagement (or lack thereof) might occur when this congregation starts to get revelatory in corporate worship about even these types of personal stories.

The final question in regards to demographics requested personal information about children. Though this question did not specifically ask how many children a person had, it did ask about the age ranges of one's children.

The following responses were given: 8 participants had children between the ages of birth to 4 years old (7%); 25 had children between the ages of 5-12 years of age (21%); 20 had children between the ages of 13-17 years of age (17%); 25 had children 18-25 years of age (21%); and 41 had children 26 or older (34%). For a relatively young congregation, it is surprising to find the majority response to be for those with children 26 or older, however this does not automatically equate with older parents. Likewise, it is also important to note that of those participants with children 78 of them had children under the age of 25, and possibly several children in those age ranges.

Congregational Relation Ties, Part II of II

In an intentionally open-ended section of this survey, each person was asked what their least and most favorite parts of this congregation's story were (both historical and/or present). Though the responses were too numerous to note in both categories, they were generally able to be classified into one of four categories for each question. Regarding participant's least favorite part of this congregation's story, 34 total responses were given. The first category identified in this question regarded person's sadness in the transition of previous pastoral staff (21%). An example from this category of one individual's least favorite part of Lowell First Church's congregational story was, "When Pastor Vicki Clark and family left." A second category was related to doctrinal or theological concerns

individual who does not have children and so desires them, thus allowing only positive results to be presented.

(12%). An example of a response in this category was, "Changes in the doctrine over time." A third category of responses regarded concerns over corporate worship (24%). This category could further be broken down to concerns about the sacraments and concerns about worship. An example of sacramental worship concerns was, "I respect Communion but over the years it has become, I feel, not respected because we can "stand" for the Word to be read but not to accept the Sacrament." An example of the music concern was, "Music - need more mix." The focus in the final category of responses was on participant's least

favorite aspects of community life, both within the congregation and in connections to the local community (38%). An example of this was, "Know change is a must, but am concerned we've moved away from Holiness as emphasis. Church used to be a greater part of our social center. Miss the opportunity to know and share lives together." Based upon this structure of qualitative analysis, the data shows that the least favorite part of Lowell First Church's congregational story has been its congregational life.

This data from the least favorite part of this congregation's story does find a balance in the responses to the next question regarding participant's favorite parts of this congregation's story. To this next question, 52 responses were given. The first category was in regards to pastoral care (4%). A humbling example of this was, "I thank God for our great pastor who has the heart of Jesus displayed and lived out to his whole congregation." The second category identified from the responses to this question regarded the community life of this congregation (48%). An example of this was, "Genuine love and concern among the congregation; the choice to put Christ first." The third category identified in this question's responses was on preaching and worship (27%). An example of this was, "The number of persons called to, trained and serving in full time ministry." The final category of responses to this question was regarding this congregation's rich history (15%). An example of this favorite part of this congregation's story was, "A long, strong history of love and compassion, [as

well as] strong morals and values." While the previous question revealed concerns about congregational life, based upon further qualitative analysis on the second question, this data shows that the community life of this congregation is more often a favorite part of Lowell First Church's congregational story.

Worship Practices

Further study may direct this congregation to a conversation about other aspects of worship together in the future, namely fellowship and music, but at this time, the focus was on the sacraments and rituals of Lowell First Church worship.

The final section of this survey dealing with worship practices was expressed next. After evaluating what was liked or not liked about this congregation's story, it was suggested that this section focus attention on that which was liked, disliked, understood or not understand about Lowell First Church's corporate worship practices.¹²⁶ The first question in this section asked if participants had ever wondered about the Church of the Nazarene's use of the ritual of infant dedication. The responses were as follows: 30 said they initially wondered (28%); 6 have wondered repeatedly (5%); 1 has wondered sometimes

(1%), and 72 have never wondered about the ritual of infant dedication (66%).

Though this information is inconclusive as to what any person wondered it is significant that the majority of this survey's participants have never wondered

about the use of this particular practice. A smaller, yet significant number of people at least initially raised some question about this ritual.

In a further effort to discern survey participant's perspectives, the next question was asked regarding their agreement with its use. The following responses were given: 89 agreed with its use (82%); 12 agreed, but with some reservation (11%); 2 did not agree with its use (2%); and 5 stated that its use was of no importance to them (5%). Of those who previously who had not wondered about its use, an additional 17 people were in full agreement with its use.

The next two questions asked the same thing about the sacrament of infant baptism rather than the ritual of infant dedication. Of those who responded to the first question, the following responses were given: 28 initially wondered about the Church of the Nazarene's use of the sacrament of infant baptism (27%); 20 have repeatedly wondered about its use (20%); and 54 have never wondered about its use (53%). As before, the majority of persons have never wondered about its use. Delving deeper into participant's agreement with its use, the following responses were given: 52 agree with its use (46%); 28 agree, but with some reservation (25%); 20 do not agree with its use (18%); and 12 stated that its use is of no importance to them (11%). While it appears that a majority of participants agree with its use, this number is a two person drop from those who previously never wondered about its use. The conclusion can be drawn either

that two people did not wonder about it, but simply disagreed with it, or that they did not begin to have reservations until this survey was presented. These are both important implications for the conclusions drawn later.

Probing the relationship of infant baptism and infant dedication, the next questions requested information regarding participant's reception of training or teaching on the connection of these two practices. The first question asked about the connection between infant dedication and the baptism of a mature believer. The responses were as follows: 53 believed they had received complete education and training on the connection between these two practices (47%); 10 believed they had received training, but still had some questions (9%); 33 had never received any training or teaching on this connection (29%); and 17 did not recall (15%). While those who felt they had received complete training made the majority of responses, an even greater number still had questions, were not trained, or could not recall. The implications of these results for this project's conclusions will be significant.

This same question was asked, only this time in regards to the connection between infant baptism and the future responsibility of the believer or church community. The following responses were given: 32 had received what they believed to be complete training or teaching on this connection (29%); 11 had received training but still had some questions (10%); 42 had never received training (38%); and 25 did not recall (23%). Clearly, the major response to this question was from those who had never received any training in this area

however, many others may not have felt the need to learn more than was already

known.

The survey stepped back a bit from the subject of particular rituals or sacraments and asked participants next if they had received training or teaching on the sacraments in general. The following responses were given: 44 believed they had received complete training on the sacraments (41%); 19 believed they had but still had some questions (18%); 31 had never received training on the sacraments (29%); and 13 did not recall (12%). The major response in this section was from those who believed they had received complete training. Compared with the previous questions, it is worth noting that the number of persons who have been trained, but still have some questions is beginning to grow at this point.

The focus of the next question in regards to participant's understandings of their reception of adequate training or teaching was on worship rituals in general, including both sacramental and non-sacramental rituals. The following responses were given: 28 believed they had received complete training (28%); 25 believed they had received training, but still had some questions (25%); 35 had never been trained (34%); and 21 did not recall (13%). Contrary to training about the sacraments, these responses suggest that many have never been trained or taught about worship rituals. This discovery is

of great importance as worship rituals are often the most misunderstood part of a church's conversation when it begins to talk about worship practices.

From here, the survey asked the question of greatest importance. The question was, "How receptive would you be to a further ritual of confirmation to be offered for those who were baptized as infants?" The responses were as follows: 34 believed that would be very well received by themselves and by this congregation (32%); 8 believed it would be very well received by themselves, but not this congregation (7%); 28 believed that further explanation of its necessity would be needed (26%); 14 stated they would have difficulty with this ritual (13%); and 23 did not have an opinion on this matter (22%). While the clear majority of responses came from those who believed a confirmation ritual would be very well received, those who had questions about the congregation's response, and those who would have difficulty with this ritual were significant. Even still, the significance of these two groups do not equal the other group not mentioned, namely those persons who were looking for further explanation of its necessity. The question would then be, with further explanation of such a ritual would the undecided group add to the majority group, or would they overcome that majority with those who had either personal or corporate concern.

The final question of the survey asked about a participant's favorite portion of Sunday worship. The top five responses were given: 40 liked congregational singing (28%); 36 liked the preaching (25%); 17 liked special

music and programs (12%); 12 liked other items than what was listed (such as these examples: "all of the above;" "baptisms;" "it is not having to worship alone;" and "they all work together" (8%); and equal responses were made as 8 persons liked Scripture readings the most, and another 8 liked prayer the most (5% each). The majority response in this final question displayed an interest in congregational singing (28%) that stands in stark contrast to the three individuals

who said their favorite portion of the service was the celebration of the sacraments (2%). Though this reality leaves a large gap in regards to the liturgical practices that would necessitate the development of a confirmation ritual, it may also be an opportunity for such a practice to find an introduction through congregational singing as it relates personal story individually and corporately as the people come together. Such a possibility draws to memory Israel's singing of their spiritual story in the songs of ascent.

The third sermon concluded by collecting the data around the biblical account of Stephen in Acts as he risked himself for the sake of the Lord. We discussed the risk in presenting ourselves (personally and corporately) to a community, as we are all different, with different opinions, and different experiences. Based upon the collection of results in this sermon, we considered that there might be times in which we must have touchy conversations and ask tough questions. We observed that this congregation must feel safe enough not to assume the intentions or agenda of our conversation partners. Likewise, we

discussed being thoughtful and prayerful when another member of the Faith Community invites us to a deeper experience of Kingdom Community, and then holds us accountable in love to that Kingdom perspective and attitude. The data revealed that certain words in the Lowell First Church community, like 'confirmation' or 'ritual' carry with them personal and religiously historical concerns, but those concerns may be assets in our collection and conversation around a common Kingdom vision built upon individuals distinct personal histories.

Via email, following this final sermon, my In-Parish Committee began communicating with me regarding the various comments they were aware of on the subject. Responses were as follows, however roughly quoted as I received them second and sometimes third hand: "how interesting;" "way too deep for people who just want to grow in the Lord;" "good sermon;" "a great way to see ourselves;" and "we do need some way to celebrate what is happening to us spiritually." These responses showed that more work needed to be done to fully establish such a ritual in this congregation, but that the foundation may have been laid by both the personal responses, and the pastoral proclamation of how these responses might fit Lowell First Church's current biblical theology and holiness identity. Complementary data resulting from the interviews that followed became just as helpful in laying this foundation.

Interviews

Joining me after this sermon series were three persons chosen to follow the set interval protocol of this project. This protocol inquired about personal spiritual stories and each individual's connection to this local congregation. Each person interviewed was asked about the value of worship to his or her spiritual story and everyday life. Each person was then asked the same thing in regards

to the sacraments of communion and baptism. Following this, each person was asked about their belief and agreement with the statement that "if infant dedication and believers baptism went hand in hand, then so should confirmation go hand in hand with infant baptism." Following their responses, each person was asked about their speculation of the congregation's consideration of that question, and then if there is even a need to present it to this community. The final question was whether such a practice would promote spiritual growth among the congregation.

Interview Case Study #1

The first interviewee was a 58-year-old, married, woman who had grown up in Roman Catholicism with an understanding of herself as a corporate Christian from the time she was first Christened. Using the description "of being a Christian personally," she noted that she had become a Christian, as she now

understands it, when she was 27 years old. This woman also stated that she had belonged to this local congregation for 31 years. When asked to what extent Sunday worship here had formed her spiritually she noted that it had affected her tremendously through education and participation, and she did not know where she would be without it. When asked about Sunday School's impact on her formation, she stated that she had her eyes opened to the free message of the Gospel (something she almost felt like she should be paying for), and she found like minded believers to dialogue with, and found that she could also be challenged by different views of God in those same sessions. This woman also noted that her experience, God's care of her through her own life story and her Roman Catholic education all have been just as important in her spiritual formation.

Focusing on the value of worship in her spiritual formation and development, this woman was asked about the value of Communion. Her response was that Communion was a time to reflect on what Christ had done for us personally, but not only to keep to ourselves but also to use that in our relationships to others. In response to the question regarding the value not only to her spiritual development, but also to her daily life this woman responded that she is driven daily to understand the gift that was given her, and the need to share it with others.

This woman was then asked if she had been baptized. She responded

by saying that she had been baptized in both the Roman Catholic Church as an infant, and then as an adult when she came to faith in Christ. When asked about the value of baptism in her spiritual development she stated that she was privileged to declare her commitment to Christ in baptism. When asked about the value of Baptism in her daily life she stated that it is another step of faith that brings her deeper and makes her grateful for who she is in Christ.

Focusing on Baptism, the suggestion was presented to her that as infant dedication and believers Baptism go hand in hand, so should Infant Baptism and confirmation go hand in hand. When asked if she agreed, and why or why not, she stated that her own experience was an affirmation that both events in her life confirmed that she was given to God and then that she gave herself to God. When asked how the larger Lowell First Church congregation might feel about that suggestion, she noted that she saw how crucial it was to tell both stories (our being given, and our giving ourselves), but that she wasn't sure how others might respond from their own backgrounds. Next, this woman was asked whether there might be a need for Lowell First Church to add such a ritual of confirmation to complement the current option of infant Baptism into this community and whether it would help to promote spiritual growth among the congregation. Her response was that it would be very beneficial, but she was not sure how easy it would be to bring it to the congregation. This woman noted that a key factor in this would be the way in which it was presented and the depth and

clarity of education given to the congregation. She was very clear to point out that such an understanding and identity would have to develop over the course of time.

Discovered in this first case study, was a woman with a considerable religious background, and a considerable spiritual connection to this local congregation. Her experience recalls a ritual and sacrament history that includes infant Baptism and rebaptism as an adult. No information was offered about the process of her confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church but noted the significance of her rebaptism in recalling her first chance to be received in grace by the Lord. She believed that this moment had great value for her and that she believed similar benefit could be found by someone who would make the connection by the hand of the community as a child, and then among the community by their own heart later on. She was unsure about others'

acceptance or agreement with this suggestion since she was aware that not all people in this congregation's tradition would receive confirmation as it appears to be a doctrine within Roman Catholicism, and many readily reject anything from that tradition.

Interview Case Study #2

The second interviewee was a 30-year-old, married, woman who had grown up in the Lowell First Church congregation with an understanding of

herself as a Christian from the time she was born. This woman said it was her parents that introduced her to Christ, while she was being introduced to this congregation. When asked to what extent Sunday worship here had formed her spiritually she noted how valuable all the parts of worship were, especially prayer as it becomes a more solemn and free time where she is able to communicate more clearly with the Lord. She noted that the message was helpful in "smoothing out the kinks" of her understanding, and helps each person to live more clearly the way Christ has called them to live. When asked about Sunday School's impact on her formation, she stated that she had a little trouble answering that as she happens to teach children and has not attended a class for herself in a long time. This woman was able to recall that as a child, it was the foundation for her spiritual growth and as a teen and young adult, it was the place for discerning life's decisions. This woman also noted that the choir ministry has been a blessing as it gives her an opportunity to join in worship leadership and to observe the congregation's expressions of how God is touching them. Beyond the choir, it has especially been important, she noted, that serving with the children has been of great value to her spiritual development as she invests herself in each child's life.

Focusing on the value of worship in her spiritual formation and development, this woman was asked about the value of Communion. Her response was that Communion was a reminder that God gave up his Son, and if

we could only do half that much we would be making a difference. With tears in her eyes she said, "Communion helps me to say thank you to God." In response to the question regarding the value not only to her spiritual development but to her daily life this woman responded that she doesn't normally think about Communion in her daily life, but that participating in it regularly hopefully helps her to be more Christ-like and to hopefully treat others better than a person's feelings might dictate.

This woman was then asked if she had been baptized. She responded by saying that she had been baptized when she was in Junior High. When asked about the value of Baptism in her spiritual development she recalled the value of the sacrament in cleansing her and helping her to be born again. She noted that it changed the way that she makes decisions and faces temptations. She recalled thinking during her baptism of the accountability that the sacrament held her in, as she was now to live a different life; to be Christ-like. When asked about the value of Baptism in her daily life she recalled that the event of submersion was helpful in reminding her daily of the cleansing that comes in Baptism, and that every day she is able to live differently because of that

cleansing power [grace] given in the sacrament. "Because of Baptism" she said, "I have the possibility of being more Christ-like."

Focusing on Baptism, the suggestion was made to her that as infant dedication and believers Baptism go hand in hand, so should Infant Baptism and

confirmation go hand in hand. When asked if she agreed, and why or why not, she stated that she struggled to answer that question because she had always seen Baptism as a personal choice and not something that the parents choose. She was quick to note that she did not have any problem with others baptizing infants, but that it was not her preference. So, she said, if there was a need for any "confirmation" (which seemed to her to be a Roman Catholic tradition and not the tradition of the Church of the Nazarene), "why shouldn't we simply baptize again someone who accepts Christ as they mature in faith?" The issue of confirmation, she replied, was for her friend (whom she went to see Confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church) a terminal point of salvation, and she understood that every person is to be daily striving to be better in Christ. This, she then concluded, raises questions again about the validity of infant baptism as it separates human responsibility from the act in worship. When asked how the larger Lowell First Church congregation might feel about that suggestion, she quickly said that the word 'confirmation' conjures images of Roman Catholicism, and that would not be easily accepted. She confessed that she is a bit set in her ways, but that she considers herself open-minded in this discussion. She, however, was not so sure that "set-in-their-way" Nazarenes would be so open-minded. Pressing the issue a bit further, this woman was then asked whether there might be a need for us to add such a ritual of confirmation to complement the current option of infant baptism into this community (since some had already

been baptized as infants) and whether it would help to promote spiritual growth among the congregation at large. In response, this woman asked if the church could just baptize the believer anyhow. She noted that she was open to their personal preference of being confirmed if they wished, but wondered if it was completely necessary.

The data gleaned from this interview was quite intriguing. On the one hand, this was a person who had lifetime roots in this congregation, and yet one who considered themselves a lifetime Christian. Though there was a date for her Baptism, a time in which she declared her own faith in Jesus, she was very happy to live with her own conversion growing up out of the life of her parents and church family from birth. Again, language was used to connect the word 'confirmation' to the practices of Roman Catholicism. This woman was very clear to note that she was willing to allow others to pursue God in their way in worship practices, but simply wondered if the church might offer a different way for declaring a personal faith in Jesus.

Interview Case Study #3

The third interviewee was a 52-year-old, married, man who had grown up in the Congregational Church, though he had only been a Christian for the last 37 years. He had gone to Sunday School and said bedtime prayers, but realized as a teenager that something was missing from his life as he began to attend

youth group meetings. It was there that he accepted Christ. His introduction to the Church of the Nazarene came as he later married into the tradition. This man has been a part of the Lowell First Church family for the last 32 years. When asked to what extent Sunday worship here had formed him spiritually he noted that early on, the preaching was important in growing him in faith. When asked about Sunday School's impact on his formation, he stated that it teaches you the foundations and makes you literate in the matters of the Bible. Personally, he has been developed in the process of being a student but also in the process of being a teacher and director of Christian Education in the local church and preschool that this congregation offers. Beyond Sunday School, this man also noted the value of Sunday Evening worship as an opportunity to gather and feed him as a children's teacher and to unite his family around a common time of worship.

Focusing on the value of worship in his spiritual formation and development, this man was asked about the value of Communion. His response was that Communion was important because it causes a person to "examine your heart before God." In response to the question regarding the value of Communion in his daily life, he reported that he doesn't think about it until he gathers back at the meal again each month.

This man was then asked if he had been baptized. He responded by saying that he had been baptized twice, once as a teen and then when he joined

this church. He noted that his first Baptism was the result of following the tradition of his church, which was that most boys his age were baptized, but that later he connected the event to his personal relationship to Jesus Christ. When asked about the value of Baptism in his spiritual development he confessed that he rarely thinks about it, though he does remember the significance of the event as the time when he made a public acknowledgement. He was very clear to note that in Baptism individuals are given an opportunity for identification and acknowledgement in Christ as they have been washed clean from their sins.

Focusing on Baptism, the suggestion was presented to him that as infant dedication and believers Baptism go hand in hand, so should Infant Baptism and confirmation go hand in hand. When asked if he agreed, and why or why not, he focused on the two infant traditions and wondered about the validity of Infant Baptism as "Baptism," as far as he was concerned, was centered in an individual's personal proclamation of faith in Jesus. He wondered if it would not be better to simply lean in the direction of dedication and believers Baptism. When asked how the larger Lowell First Church congregation might feel about my suggestion, he noted that many may not be concerned as they are not as aware of what Baptism is really about, but that others may recognize the influence of traditions that are not our own. Even still, he suggested that confirmation might have a place among the congregation, as it becomes a public "confirmation" of one's relationship with Jesus Christ, adding that to do so would

require throwing out any preconceptions of the word. In hope of such a possibility, he noted that the Lowell First Church community could "grab hold of such a ritual through regular celebrations of confirming Christ in our lives together.

This third interview presented an educator with a preconceived view of the meaning and value of the Sacrament of Baptism. This view dictates how well he believes confirmation will be accepted personally, but also in the larger Lowell First Church community. Yet, from an educational background, he was open to the validity of redefining the term and using it in worship as a way of reinforcing growth in the congregations' spiritual lives. Throughout the interview he began to envision a new form of confirmation as being quite helpful, in fact, believing it could very well reignite the congregation's passion for the Lord each time it celebrated spiritual anniversaries.

Worship Service

Confirmation Preparation Conversation

Following the collection of this data received from the survey, sermons, conversations and interviews, as was noted in the previous chapter, it was important to test the research with the presentation of a confirmation ritual in worship. Easter Sunday was chosen as the perfect setting for this event and preparations ensued. Having previously confirmed two other individuals during

the last service of Baptism, I assumed it would be rather easy to find others wanting to confirm the waters of their Baptism. Finding several who were interested in Baptism itself, and having them note that their interest grew out of corporate conversations regarding confirming one's commitment to Christ in the Community of Faith, I was not completely concerned that the process or design of this project had somehow backfired to scare away any confirmation

candidates, but even still, none could be found. Though a protocol had been designed for preparation with an individual, the material would need to be reworked and used in the overall baptismal conversation and worship event as a means of leading everyone gathered that Easter Sunday in confirmation, rather than having the confirmands lead the congregation in reaffirming personal relationships with Christ. This was not ideal, however, a great way to test how the congregation gathered around this subject in its collective narrative.

The Easter worship event flowed smoothly and there were significant baptismal candidate testimonials that paved the way for meaningful reflection and instruction. Following the general protocol for preparing confirmation candidates, I began to lead the congregation in a conversation with themselves asking them to look at their own spiritual story.¹ I invited them to remember the waters of their Baptism, with the water remaining from that day's Baptisms as a visual aid in their reflection. I invited them to remember a few milestones when they had confirmed their love for the Lord, and had identified significant growth

and maturity in their personal and corporate walk. I invited them to consider their desire to confirm that love and desire for the Lord afresh and new that day. I invited them to reflect on the meaning of that moment and to consider what such a decision might mean to the entire congregation. I invited them to consider any follow-up components that would help them to grow and mature even farther as a disciple of Christ. Some examples of these components included joining a Sunday School class or other small group, sharing one's gifts or talents with the congregation, finding an accountability partner and helping another in need. I then asked each person how this congregation, gathered for worship, could help them in their pursuit once we confirm our need for and relationship in the Lord.

Not having planned for the feedback in this way, I was intrigued to find exciting discussions surrounding the topic along with pictures of the baptismal event posted on one of the popular internet social networks. It was not clear if the word "confirmation" had taken root, but it was clear that something of "confirmation" was growing. Not only was this so concerning a basic understanding of confirmation, but also questions began to be raised in those conversations, and since in meetings and Bible Studies, about what level of Christian discipleship and maturity can be confirmed together in this local congregation as all of us prepare for the next time of confirmation. In that way, these responses suggest this event was not only convicting and hopeful, but also celebratory, affirming and reflective. Further conversations with various members

of the In-Parish Committee confirmed these desires and intentions.

⁸ See Appendix F. ¹³⁴ See Appendix I.

Various materials and documents have emerged to assist this congregation in future confirmation events, such as a certificate for confirmation¹³³ and a simple liturgy for personal and corporate confirmation.¹³⁴

These documents do not presently include explicitly the elements of our confirmation preparation protocol; however, it may be that future liturgies will have included these questions for reflection. These documents have also prompted this congregation to revise certificates given for infant and regular Baptisms. Likewise, changes have been made to the local liturgy for Infant Baptism.

Data Summary

The months' following this Easter celebration took on many twists and turns associated with a local and national economy in decline. Even still, during these times, it was evident that soft data was being presented that this congregation had received in part the first wave of a ritual introduction with grace, support and a willingness to broaden its understanding. Each conversation that ensued provided many more conclusions outside the scope of

the anticipated data. Still these conclusions were hopeful that a conversation could happen about anything that would potentially connect a congregation more deeply in Christ, even if those conclusions or practices developed in those conversations were never to be adopted locally or in the Church of the Nazarene. As will be seen in the next chapter, it may have been that the greatest lessons to be learned in this process were rooted in pastoral ministry rather than the ministry of water and table.

CHAPTER 5

GROWING INTO OUR IDENTITY: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As the Church of the Nazarene begins to articulate its mission for its second century, the present is an important time to consider both its corporate story rooted in worship theology as well as the salient ways that the denominational story grows out of the many local stories of each of its congregations. At our denominational centennial, we declared "Out of One, Many; Out of Many, One." It was the purpose of this project to discover how true this missional declaration was in regards to the introduction and receptivity of a confirmation ritual in one local Nazarene congregation's story; something that later may serve the Church of the Nazarene as a suggested missional complement to its current ritual and Sacramental worship practices. To fulfill that purpose, this chapter will focus on developing and stating conclusions from the

data presented in the previous chapter.

Major Conclusions of the Project

Before evaluating and interpreting the many conclusions of this project, it is necessary to draft the four legs upon which this project's various conclusions rest. These four major conclusions hold the key to accessing future action as a congregation and denomination. In each of these conclusions, the predominant concern is to understand, articulate and practice the mission of the Church of the Nazarene in Lowell. Each of these four major conclusions were achieved by considering the predominant observations identified in: the hypothesis that led to this project's design; the considerations offered by the literature consulted in chapter two; the methodological design of chapter three; and the data received in chapter four. The correlation of these four conclusions will become clear as the various data of the fourth chapter is observed more prescriptively throughout this chapter. The first element of this chapter is to introduce the four major conclusions.

First Major Conclusion: Intentional Pastoral Education of the Congregation is Necessary

Gordon D. Harris, "The Question of Infant Baptism in the Church of the Nazarene" (master's thesis, Nazarene Theological Seminary, 2009), 55.

The awareness that a problem existed in the absence of a confirmation ritual to complement the Church of the Nazarene's sacramental practice of Infant

Baptism was only matched by the risk involved in studying how a local congregation might react to its suggested introduction. As others have noted in their research, the conversations that started this Nazarene denomination were focused on liberty in nonessentials.¹³⁷ Among several questions, Nazarenes must ask if that feeling is still true concerning Infant Baptism and its future ritual affirmation or if, alternatively, infant dedication and Believer's Baptism have become our essential practice. It is a major conclusion of this project that such

practices are still non-essentials to our mission, but that pastoral education is sorely needed to express where those practices fit theologically within the Nazarene mission. In this regard, it is also necessary to articulate where worship itself fits in that mission.¹³⁸

Second Major Conclusion: Intentional Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction of the Congregation is Necessary

In a time of changing tides of worship style and preference, it is imperative for our denomination and local churches to clarify our ecclesiological mission flowing from our corporate worship theology.

A second major conclusion of this project is that there must be in place an intentional relationship between pastor and people in the congregation whereby the spiritual stories of each individual can be connected to the larger story of what God is doing among the congregation. This, of course, is beyond

pastoral education of the congregation in corporate worship or small group settings. While, as the first chapter noted, great risk was involved in presenting this study, its success in reception and dialogue came through brief, but intentional periods of faithful pastoral care. With a discerning ear to the spiritual stories of individuals in the Lowell First Church congregation, I was able to join individuals with either extreme of responses, whether they have no concern or have strong reactions to our study, in a process of spiritual direction that assisted them in knowing my agenda for this study. With a conversational forum assured of peaceful and healthy dialogue, it was possible to consider the issues of where God's Spirit might be leading this congregation in worship rituals and practices.

Not to allow this conclusion to be discounted as an observation of personal charisma or diplomacy, it would be helpful to recognize that this intentional care and direction of the congregation could benefit greatly from pastoral involvement in a clearly defined catechetical process that matches the local story and stories present within a local congregation. Popular media, be they books or fifty day programs of some kind are helpful for casual spiritual conversations, but they often do little to develop spiritual disciplines and Christian education. While it may be supposed that catechetical training can be devoid of spiritual fruit as well, it may be that a better way of connecting

catechesis to the Spirit's movement of life among a congregation would be more appropriate and helpful to the Church's overall mission locally and denominationally.

Third Major Conclusion: A Confirmation Ritual is Needed

A third major conclusion of this project is that the introduction of a confirmation ritual is necessary to the full ensemble of worship practices currently in use in the Church of the Nazarene. In its necessity, it is also a conclusion that this ritual be contextualized by pastoral pragmatics to include those having difficulty reclaiming or reaffirming their own previous participation in the practices of the Church. An example of this is a substantive pastoral encounter with one who wishes to return to the baptismal waters upon a mature confession of faith.

Fourth Major Conclusion: New Language may be Needed

A fourth major conclusion of this study is that the language of "confirmation" may not serve Lowell First Church well enough to articulate this ritual experience apart from previous understandings. Despite gleanings from historical studies in chapter two that suggest the use of the word "confirmation" to be historically more Christian than Roman Catholic, it still may be that the use of this word is too great a hurdle to overcome within this particular tradition.

While it would be nice to believe that words can have their definitions redefined in current times and within a particular tradition, and efforts should be made to do so, it is still true that many will struggle to move beyond former definitions. Utilizing phrases like "Believer's Dedication" and "Baptismal Affirmation/Reaffirmation" will require significant study as alternatives, especially in light of the meanings these words elicit or theologically limit. A possible direction may be to follow the "covenant" language of the 1904 Manual. For example, there is a multitude of options for the liturgical phrasing of this word, including "Covenant of Christian Desire" or simply "Baptismal Covenant." Any such usage, however, will require a worshipping, local congregation to participate and enter into an intentional and meaningful union.

Building Upon These Conclusions

Upon these four major conclusions are built a multitude of practical considerations. Looking directly at the methods employed in this project, we will now evaluate and interpret these conclusions in detail using the information recorded in chapter four of this project. It is important to note that many of these considerations will be drawn not only from the results of each method, but also from its presentation.

Evaluating and Interpreting the Conclusions

Having presented in this project the particular method for study based upon a congregational survey, a series of sermons, dialogue with an In-Parish Committee, video interviews, case studies being developed from those videos, as well as a formal worship experience, we are left with some helpful pastoral implications, ecclesiological and theological reflections and suggested prescriptions for each. Though Lowell First Church has been the clinical arena for this study, rich with conclusions, implications and opportunities, the following information offers the consideration that pastors should be trained to implement healthy dialogue as they educate congregations in the Church of the Nazarene about these particular subjects in relation to the denomination's corporate mission. Special attention will be given to how these conclusions are drawn out of the congregational life of Lowell First Church with care to present intentional connections to our denominational interests.

Survey

Presentation

I believe that the survey was an integral part of collecting Lowell First Church's congregational narrative. In general, the length of the survey was a bit overwhelming, though each question could be well defended as necessary to drawing out that narrative. Considering the length of the survey is helpful in evaluation, and thus at the beginning of this section in this project, as the survey

showed that for any local congregation to receive beneficially the consideration of a confirmation ritual a pastoral process of immense undertaking is necessary. This should come as no surprise in pastoral ministries as one considers the exceptional calling to leadership in ecclesial matters, yet this is important to note when reminding pastors of their consistent role as theological educators in the ongoing work of the Church. As many matters were probed in the survey, so are there many matters in each local congregation that demand the teaching pastor's attention.

The length of the survey may have made it more difficult to approach and participate in during a Sunday morning of worship, yet there was a new experience birthed among the congregation that day of balanced, educational dialogue surrounding worship. Though openness to new events had not been an issue previously, this new experience connected a specific event to a particular theory. What may have also helped was that for Lowell First Church, trust of pastoral leadership was often high as it was assumed that the pastor had exegeted the congregation well in preparation for the current service or ministry. The difference following this event was that the congregation was given an opportunity to enter into dialogue from its own observations of itself. For so long, the people of many Nazarene churches have been content to see themselves corporately through the eyes of its leadership. As the product of such leadership I am grateful for God's Spirit that led the way using this corporate ecclesial model. However, as a pastor myself today, I am aware that the way we do

church has changed. This change will require some extra work from those of us engaged in the educational and facilitation leadership of pastoral ministry, however before us is an even greater opportunity for the church to learn by the Holy Spirit's awakening of a hunger in it to view responsively itself in light of God's Holiness.

Results

In the preceding chapter, the results of the survey were communicated in great detail as they combined to create three sermons in a series. That series, pooled with previous and subsequent pastoral revelations gleaned in pastoral care and ministry among this congregation suggest that this congregation's view of itself may not have been completely accurate, particularly as the participants in the survey considered how the larger congregation would consider an added ritual of confirmation. These same conclusions will be evident in the interviews as well.

Demographics

In an extremely diverse city, Lowell First Church represents the community well in its composition. The demographics showed clear majorities in certain groups, ages or genders, however these margins reflect the same in the surrounding communities. What may not have been expected in this study was

that from the groups that presented as the minorities, Lowell First Church was missing strong feelings for or against the solution presented. For example, it might be assumed that an ethnic population with a more prevalent voice might have expressed more clear opinion about avoiding this issue. In the same turn, those of a certain age may have been more hopeful for this issue to be presented. This conclusion would suggest that for the sake of all those currently in the many congregations throughout the Church of the Nazarene, let alone the many individuals that might join in the future, Nazarene Christians would be better served in our worship services by more balanced populations.

The demographic report in this study also indicated a healthy mixture of educational experience. While 39 persons in this congregation, a majority response in the survey, reported high school or equivalent as their highest level of education, Lowell First Church still tends to be a rather well educated congregation. This fact can be seen in the age demographic that 23 of these 39 had previously reported their age as 25 or under. A very important observation drawn from this information, combined with the responses dealing specifically with worship experience and education, show that being educated does not always equal liberal adoption of anything new and seemingly intellectual in nature. This is an important observation and thus conclusion as this suggestion stands as a warning for those who assume that the hurdles one might face in presenting this matter to the larger Church of the Nazarene only will arise due to

ignorance or low levels of education; such an assumption is simply not accurate. At the same time, this observation also stands as an opportunity for appropriate dialogue and liturgical education as our people will engage this subject

thoughtfully and with great care.

As the previous chapter noted, the survey responses were best understood following the event as individuals began to share how the questions of employment made them aware of how bad they felt that they were now unemployed, or that it made them feel guilty that they had employment when so many in our current economic situation do not. The significance of this finding, and thus the conclusion itself, is that there exists a need for finding safe ways to share personal realities in worship. In a postmodern culture that sometimes fears the overt, spiritual self-expression of an altar call because it appears to reveal so much of those personal realities and personal needs, one must ask how liturgy and ritual can help to overcome this fear as it expresses personal patterns of spiritual development in corporate worship. From a liminal perspective, it may be that the development of a missionally-oriented liturgy which includes more clear connections between Sacrament and ritual celebrations can help individuals to sense the shift in emphasis from what is wrong with us to what is going right with us. This is the liminal issue; one that focuses on ritual and rites of passage as not just one more opportunity for declaring our situation, but instead as a means of declaring our transition from one reality to another.

The final demographic question was in regards to the ages of participant's children. The primary intention for this question was to determine how many children an individual happened to have. From the responses, a trend was seen concerning a certain range of ages that most participants had. It might then be assumed that if left unaltered, the same trend would shift with the years in which the question was asked again. For example, a decade between asking this question at the beginning may find most of the congregation dealing with preteens, who may be asking deep questions of faith exploration, while later it finds parents of young adults who are transitioning to some personal enrichment and faith exploration themselves. The importance of this difference is in the way a parent looks to congregational worship for the sake of children, or for their own sake. In the second instance, individuals are often more willing to take a longer, and sometimes more casual view of the process, whereas in the first they are sensing the urgency of their child's question and the need for detailed processes for meeting that faith interest. One conclusion drawn from this assumption is that there is a certain time to focus on particular congregational connections to worship liturgy, ritual and response. A greater conclusion, however, may be that that if these conditions exist at one specific point in time, then there is potential for them to exist in an ongoing process of intergenerational spiritual development. As this project's first major conclusion suggested, the Church must find a way to transcend sporadic pastoral education opportunities with consistent

pastoral education that connects all priorities into one consistent congregational narrative of spiritual pursuit, disciplined development, and ongoing transformation.

Religious Involvement

From the next section of questions relating to one's religious involvement it was discovered that a majority of those participating in the survey had been owners (members) for 20 years or more. Combining this information with the awareness that two particular pastors had led the last 20 years themselves, it is a conclusion of this study that longstanding pastoral lessons and subsequent understanding exist among the congregation. This information has the potential to be of concern for trying to create new understanding in areas that had already been established or taught a certain way. At the same time, this information also has the potential to demonstrate a strong commitment held by this congregation to traditional values and understanding. At a time in which the matter of this study could be seen as a new trend that seeks to undermine traditional denominational commitments, it is also possible that long-time Nazarenes will know that these are helpful questions drawn from a desire for presently refining a Nazarene Holiness vision. The latter view of this conclusion tells me as a pastor that this is an appropriate time to introduce pastoral dialogue about this and other issues that may help to clarify the Church's mission.

This survey also revealed that this congregation is not only connected

over the years, but in each given year, they are generally faithful in attendance each week. This information leads to the conclusion that Sunday worship holds a very high place in the life of each participant. Combining the results of this question with the final question in the survey, the section on worship practices, it is discovered that for this group of people worship is a great place to sing and teach about their view of God and their view of themselves in sacramental partnership with God. The survey shows that the Lowell First Church

congregation predominantly finds congregational singing and preaching to be their favorite parts of the worship experience. Much pastoral education of the congregation can happen in the small group setting, and through individual conversations of spiritual direction, but the Sunday worship experience continues to be a more consistent opportunity for such lessons. For a pastor who lives life among the people who gather each week, there is great opportunity for connecting the congregation intentionally and liturgically.

Another interesting discovery in this survey was about the ages at which individuals were introduced to religious practices compared with the age at which they declared a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In the Lowell First Church congregation, it was noted that most individuals were first introduced to religious practices early on in life, specifically below the age of 3. The survey then noted that it was between the ages of 4 and 15 that individuals began to consider themselves in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Though it is possible to

suggest that this reality for Lowell First Church has arisen from a traditional practice of discipleship and conversion framed within infant dedication and then believer's Baptism, it is also possible to suggest that this information is not related to a particular procedure or age requirement for Baptism at all. A major conclusion of this survey is that education of the congregation is necessary. This information may show that such education must begin from the beginning of one's life, moving them to an intentional opportunity for transitioning to a personal engagement with the God whom each person has been taught about and then for that teaching to come full circle as a child becomes themselves the parents

who must teach the next generation. Even for the one who may not have their own children, but who exists in the congregational family, opportunity should be presented for recalling the cycle of ongoing congregational education to the larger faith family. Past generations have blessed this current church with the intergenerational language of an "Aunt" or "Uncle" in the "Faith" whereby individuals are able to join as mentors to those growing up in the traditions of the church. This project would then suggest complementing this family connection educationally through an intentional catechism program. Children cannot be educated in the biblical narratives of God and God's people only to be abandoned at the point of translating those stories to one's own life and the life of the congregation. Where better than in the life of the worshipping community

can those lessons be taught by a larger Family?

Church of the Nazarene Agreement

The next section on agreement with the Church of the Nazarene presented very interesting results. At once, clear majorities of individuals were in agreement with the Church of the Nazarene, but likewise a clear majority did not feel that such agreement affected their participation in worship. The conclusion drawn from this information is that based upon Lowell First Church's representation of the Church of the Nazarene, these are days of overwhelming support for the denominational presence in a local congregation's life, while not completely affecting how each congregation worships. This reality has helped this project to discern how in local traditions we have been able to give liberty to those choosing either Baptism or dedication as an infant. This reality suggests that particular paths or patterns within a congregation for presenting a child to the Lord have been more about worship experience rather than denominational affiliation or mandate. This is true even if these paths or patterns are tendencies encouraged by a particular pastor or leader. Since such tendencies can change with pastoral or leadership transitions, it is a major conclusion of this project that a confirmation ritual is necessary to offer a balanced worship opportunity to those whose traditions follow the pattern of Infant Baptism. Such a presentation would allow for some in this congregation to find a place following Infant Baptism that connects what is happening in our lives in worship, with who we are as

Nazarenes.

Congregational Relation Ties

When asked about participant's ties to the congregation through friends or family, it was discovered that they maintain most of their close relationships outside of the congregation. At the same time, it was noted that most participants do have at least one close friend that is a part of this local congregation. These specific questions were not asked comparatively with questions regarding a previous time, however narrative language was employed in two separate questions about one's connection to the congregation as a main character about either one's connection to the congregation as a main character either in this congregation's historical story and their connection in the present story. What these questions revealed was that there is today a growing sense of friendship, fellowship, participation and appreciation among the congregation. People who once felt marginalized are now beginning to feel central to the life of

this Body. This present reality suggests that the fourth major conclusion may also be broadened in that for such an atmosphere to be nurtured, common ground is to be found in the way the Church defines and understands certain words and practices. Consensus may not always be the focus, especially around the language or practice of confirmation, but rather acceptance and opportunity. For those who were dedicated as an infant, confirmation will not be their need personally, but theirs corporately as they embrace those birthed into Christ

through Infant Baptism. New relationships and appreciation for how wonderfully built the local congregation is in Christ stem from new language and new understanding.

In this section, the survey was also able to glean from each participant his or her least and most favorite portion of Lowell First Church's worship experiences. As this question sought to find some samples of where congregational ties existed for the participants, it also revealed a shifted center from denominational beliefs to pastoral care and congregational life in worship. This shift may help to relieve some of the tension in this area of concern about confirmation in Nazarene practices as the local congregation begins to place more concern upon the congregation's personal relationships to the Nazarene mission as it relates to each other throughout the entirety of the worship experience.

Frequency of Worship Practices

The brief section on frequency of religious practices in this survey showed some weakness in participant's private prayer and meditation, Bible reading, participation in church missions and compassionate ministries, and participation in evangelistic ministries or seeking converts or new members for the congregation. Though it may be a large leap to suggest that the introduction of a confirmation ritual will change this reality, it is a conclusion of this project that such an introduction combined with significant and intentional pastoral care

and education of the congregation will make such a change. It is for this reason that the preaching moment has held for the Church of the Nazarene such strong historical and theological significance. It is also for this reason that ordained Nazarene Elders are invited to watchful care as "shepherds" among the "flock" to which they have been called. With such faithfulness and intentionality in worship, these ecclesiological understandings will develop formational practices under the tutelage of God's Spirit that will nurture daily participation in a life rule of Christian discipleship.

Worship Practices

The final section of this survey has provided some of the most direct expressions of the Lowell First Church congregation's feelings and opinions. In light of this project's presenting problem of the absence of a confirmation ritual in the Church of the Nazarene, it was this project's intention to intervene in the process by testing the receptivity of this local congregation to the consideration of a confirmation ritual as an added practice and storyline of its worship narrative. As participants were asked about their previous understandings and agreement with the Church of the Nazarene's use of Infant Dedication and Infant Baptism, it was discovered that while many did not have strong feelings against the use of

either practice, neither did many individuals ever think much about it. Though this project is working in regards to the popular response in this assumption, those

who had wondered about either practice and may still not agree with them show that there is still a problem with the collective understanding and engagement of the entire congregation with this subject. Simply put, it appears that the congregation is not on the same page with each other in understanding who it is, or who it is not in the arena of sacramental theology and practices. Due to this data, it is imperative that proper education and opportunity be given to collect this congregation.

A response to the previous conclusion may come in the critique that such practices and the consideration therein are an elitism of either the clergy or some religious tradition, and that as such not everyone needs to occupy him or herself with this matter. This may seem a valid response to this conclusion, were it not for the data resulting from the next questions. When asked about whether individuals had received training or teaching on the connection between Infant Baptism and future responsibility of the believer, and the connection between infant dedication and the Baptism of a mature believer a confidence was seen for many in the training or teaching they had received. Nevertheless, for so many more, responses favored either "I still have more questions" or that they "never" or "do not recall" receiving such training. Beyond a clerical or traditional interest it is a conclusion of this project that the people of Lowell First Church themselves do want to know about what the Church of the Nazarene believes in regard to the sacraments and worship rituals, and be trained on how they each connect.

The most clarity in this section comes as participants were asked how receptive they would be to a further ritual of confirmation to be offered for those who were baptized as infants. While a mixture of responses were given, with the majority being receptive, it was unclear whether those who were unsure of their receptivity would be supporters following further training. At this point, it might be realized that training may not be a complete solution. This suggestion may support the conclusion that intentional pastoral care and spiritual direction are needed. Once again, this conclusion is not built upon charismatic influence over the people, but rather that proper education of the congregation will come as the pastor exegetes the movements of God's Spirit among the people, learning to trust them as well as be trusted by them to introduce this or any other practice.

Sermon Series Survey Re-

Presentation

Exegeting the life of a congregation as well as exegeting the more subtle ways in which a congregation responds to life is an important part of any sermon preparation. For the sake of translating what was gleaned from the survey's responses as well as my own personal reflections of this local congregation, in this instance, a series of sermons was crafted around the subject of confirmation. The purpose was to introduce the results of the survey to the congregation, to begin dialogue about this subject, and to connect this congregation to a potential practice among us.

The sermon series employed three different biblical texts as a means of connecting the congregational reality to a greater biblical narrative and narratives. During these sermons, responses were relayed and elemental prescriptions for this congregation's future were presented. The first of these prescriptions suggested that we, like the Ethiopian who met Philip, must each confirm a personal connection and pursuit for the Lord each day. The second prescription suggested that it is the congregation's public charge, like Jehu and Jehonadab, to affirm a connection to each other within this local congregation and as partners in and with the larger Church of Jesus Christ. The third prescription suggested that each Christian must, like Stephen, risk themselves personally and corporately to grow in any way possible. The framework for each of these prescriptions was the conclusion that confirmation is more than a ritual practice, but an affirmation of what God is doing in and through the church as Christ's Body in this world.

Sermon Results

The true test of these sermons was how the congregation would react to the conclusions presented. Throughout each message, the congregation remained completely engaged. This may have been due in part to the curiosity of people who wanted to know what the survey itself suggested. The immediate response to the sermons was that individuals became a bit confused about what

version of "confirmation" they were being given. This confusion was expected as the survey revealed that the people of Lowell First Church carried with them a previous understanding and expectation about what confirmation was really all about. In trying to suggest that confirmation was initially a broad and acceptable term to describe a necessary affirmation of individual spiritual pursuits as well as a corporate reaffirmation of baptismal vows, the conclusion was drawn that however arduous the task, new language must be created for a common understanding of confirmation. As each sermon coupled results with the biblical narratives, I was able to suggest a new way for this conversation to begin. Without a formal opportunity for response from the congregation to these messages, a potential limitation to the design of this project, great help then came from the In-Parish Committee as its members shared what they had heard from others.

In-Parish Committee Dialogue

Through emails and informal conversations with this project's In-Parish Committee it became increasingly evident that support for a new definition and understanding of confirmation was present in the Lowell First Church community, but that there was also a growing hunger for spiritual growth all together. What became clear in this conclusion was that this experience was possible because the people understood the pastoral commitment to the Lord, God's Word, and

commitment to Christ's Church and this local congregation in particular. Though these sound so admirable for a congregation's reflection on their pastor, it is a conclusion of this project that every pastor is called to this life. Certainly, each pastor will have gifts and graces that equip them for different expressions of that commitment, but these are days in which Christians need to grow through

training and education and these are days in which they must know that their pastor loves them. Such love expresses the commitment of a pastor who is willing to reflect God to the people as she or he raises the congregational participants to an encounter with God's deep, holy movements of the Holy Spirit. In the Lowell First Church congregation, a sense of our partnership together, and the divine stirrings of new life among us were reported as evidence that Lowell First Church may continue to receive well the process and practice of confirmation.

Video Interviews

Event

Easily finding conversation partners for this subject, three persons were collected to talk further about personal stories of faith, personal connections in everyday life with worship practices such as participation in the sacraments, and to probe their personal opinion about how well received it would be in the Lowell First Church congregation. This was intended to suggest a more definitive ritual

of confirmation into the Church of the Nazarene. As each person was interviewed separately, it became clear that though each person had a different experience of Christ in their faith story and that they had different experiences of life in general, there was between them all a hesitancy to assume that others would receive the suggestion of a ritual of confirmation as well as they might. Though these interviews only contained three perspectives, it would be fair to combine this assumption with the survey results that showed that many persons were unsure about others' feelings around the introduction of this ritual. Again, noting the survey results, this assumption was less founded in the reality of participant's responses and more on something that may have either been said or left unsaid among the congregation. With pastoral care this fear can be addressed and new language developed that would redirect concerns for the congregation. The proof of this came immediately when the camera was turned off each of the interview participants began to ask similar questions of me as their pastor, rather than interviewer. These questions ranged from what opportunities lay before us to talk more about this as a congregation, and what opportunities lay before the congregation to grow in worship practices that might celebrate significant, regular and ongoing highlights of personal reaffirmations of collective faith stories.

Case Study Development

Where the interviews told about what three individuals believed, the case studies expressed who these three were, and what influences in their lives had shaped them to be who they are now. As each individual looked back with appreciation on their past, they all recognized places at which they were blessed to grow deeper in their faith. For one this deepening experience came as she transitioned from Roman Catholicism to the Church of the Nazarene. For another this deepening experience happened as she grew up in the Church of the Nazarene and began to consider a personal relationship with Christ. For the third interviewee this deepening experience happened as he transitioned to this local congregation and began to find Christ more personal.

In each of these case studies, there was a significant encounter with the maturing Christian fellowship of this congregation. It is inconclusive as to whether this opportunity for growth came through a specific pastor's care or not, but one of the major conclusions of this chapter could be broadened to suggest that beyond intentional pastoral care and spiritual direction it is also necessary for the care and spiritual direction to come from the whole of a congregation. In each of these case studies, names of previous pastors were not mentioned as much as the Lowell First Church community was celebrated. This conclusion helps to emphasize the imperative of congregational fellowship in the life of each congregant. For each of these case studies this fellowship was clearly defined through congregational worship. In a worship setting where training and care has

gone into the development of the liturgy, particularly a confirmational liturgy, and as that liturgy reflects and influences the experiences of the people gathered, significant spiritual development is possible for each congregant.

Worship Service

Confirmation Presentation Conversation

Not having any confirmation candidates in the anticipated baptismal service to test the congregation's receptivity to such a ritual, the conversation protocol was employed more generally as the framework for this project's presentation of confirmation-style questions were shared with the entire congregation during our Easter service. Into the design of this conversation, great care was given to focus the congregation's attention away from the ritual event, and onto the theological framework by which we might each reaffirm and develop this congregation's present story of faith and love in Christ. Though the need for such a process is the very heart of this congregation's purpose for gathering each week, rather than the ritual that presents one to that need, the ritual cannot be discounted. The confirmation conversation that day was the piece that opened the way for spiritual dialogue and spiritual encounter in our worship together. Had this conversation taken place in a classroom or study, with an individual or individuals, the results could be the same as long as the focus remained not on the event or ritual, but upon the One to whom individuals

confirm personal and corporate life and love.

Worship Event

As this particular event was balanced between the Baptism of mature and maturing believers, and this confirmational conversation of reaffirmation presented above, the greatest conclusion did not arise from the event itself but rather from the informal feedback from online responses, photos and comments that came afterwards. It was clear that the worship event continued not only in spirit through this media, but also as a mandate for this particular pastor to remain engaged with the people. In any given worship service it is easy for the focus and attention of the pastor or minister, or any other worship leader to be upon the task, presentation, or ritual before them instead of on the people. This reminds us of the ancient church that understood that pastoral care was not the responsibility of the bishop or the response of his authority, but that the bishop collaborated with the local priest to confirm the ongoing local work that God was doing in all areas of life, not just the function of a traditional Christian ritual. The structure of the Church of the Nazarene complements this well as within denominational polity District Superintendents are partnered with local pastors who are each week teaching Holiness theology from the pulpit, baptismal pool and font as well as over the Lord's Table, and with the pastors who are living such expressions in life among God's people. As both a structure of this tradition

in the Church of the Nazarene and as an outflow of life lived among a people in corporate and daily worship the experience of confirmation can be a wonderful way for a congregation to grow.

As with the sermon series, the lack of a formal opportunity or tool for studying this worship event, such as in the form of another survey, becomes a possible limitation of this study. Moreover, while a clear way of gaining feedback from the congregation at this point in the project would have been helpful, the conclusions of this chapter were collected satisfactorily by the media responses found online, and through conversations with several members of the In-Parish Committee.

Study Implications Resulting in Revisions to Lowell First Church's Ongoing Practice of Ministry

As each day, week and Sunday are new opportunities for the family of God to experience the fullness of the Lord's love, so are there further implications for growing in the expressions of that love following this project. Within this

project, there is no place for conclusions to be drawn as a task list, something to be simply checked off and never reworked. Instead, these conclusions are to be worked and reworked as a model or feedback loop of ongoing life together. This life is one of constant growth and transformation. Even in regards to the introduction of a confirmation ritual, there is opportunity and mandate for a fresh

encounter and expression of all that this ritual might mean among a people who are regularly being engaged by a God who draws them closer.

Theological Reflections

The first place to look in regard to some of these ongoing implications for the Lowell First Church community is in the theological reflections that arise out of this project. Believing God to constantly be at work in people's lives, this project reflects the church's need to be obedient, open and faithful in giving room to the work of the Holy Spirit in everyday confirmations of God's grace. Before looking at future visions of these implications among the Lowell First Church community, let us look back on this project and see what it has already presented.

The very problem that inspired this project was more than a mere legal issue of getting a certain practice authorized by a local congregation. The problem of not having a ritual to complement the tradition of Infant Baptism reflected many congregations' often-haphazard process of discipleship. From the very beginning, the Lord has been faithful in pursuing each of us. There has been no question of the Lord's faithfulness. On each person's account, there is question, however, in regards to any ongoing pursuit of the Lord. Generally, human faithfulness is not always revealed in a blatant avoidance or disregard for the Lord but it is instead seen as people settle into their apathy towards God or

become content with their own self-sufficient pursuit of their own solutions in the demands of life. Introducing a confirmation ritual into a local congregation was done so that the worship event would move beyond a spectator sport to an opportunity for individuals to be engaged in finding their place in the story of the Church; a people being daily redeemed, transformed, and living the sanctified life by God's Spirit.

Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 217.

Believing that there is no singular authority kept within the pastor that doesn't exist outside of the ecclesial nature of the Church and its people, it was not possible to approach this project with an awareness of the congregation's need and then to present my own certain mandate.¹³⁹ As God did not forcefully thrust Christ's saving grace upon the shoulders of the world demanding repentance, neither can the clergy in any tradition simply lay another ritual on the congregation and expect that it will be embraced or even effective. Within this project, I recognized that the further development of individual stories into one, grand corporate story, centered in God's Holy love, had to be grown from the faithful care of a people and pastor working through their personal identities and needs. In a strikingly Wesleyan fashion, this project celebrated the blessing that God had given us to each other.

Though this project did not focus on the particular theology of each of the sacraments, especially Infant Baptism, or on traditional Nazarene rituals, such as Infant Dedication, it became increasingly clear that further and possibly more orthodox education of God's people was necessary. The biblical accounts of God's people teach that this need is normative. We, as God's people, have been created to enjoy and need God, as well as daily learn about our divine connection together. The need for ongoing education was made clear as members of the congregation shared their feelings and understandings. Never was there any question that we all have much to learn. In this instance, it is fair to employ the language of the Church of the Nazarene to declare that sanctified persons are also called and blessed by God's Spirit to be living in an ongoing process of sanctifying grace. As this need exists for all people in the Church, this project was designed especially upon the awareness that some, particularly those baptized as infants needed to be connected to a congregational and denominational story that was learning about them and helping them to learn about their further development in the Lord.

These theological reflections tell us that ministry and the practice of ministry in Lowell First Church's future is going to need to include the entire congregation in intentional pursuits and practices of seeking God and celebrating times together in which the Lord has been found. Where this project was built upon the awareness that a particular need existed in this congregation's worship practices, it is the hope that these worship practices will next be developed in

such a way that they will further reveal personal and corporate needs for more evidence of God's Spirit in each person's life. Based upon the Lowell First Church congregation, I believe that the present time is a gift from God to the larger Church of the Nazarene for such a spiritual awakening.

Further Prescriptions

Saying that based upon this project the Lowell First Church of the Nazarene is ready for the development of certain worship practices, is also to say that other Nazarene congregations could benefit from pastors who are faithfully willing to engage their local congregation in pastoral care, preaching and teaching in relation to the development of worship practices. The message that will flow from these pastoral engagements and congregational dialogue will influence local, district, and denominationally global declarations concerning Nazarene theology of worship and the church, as well as conversations about the holiness mission that flows from that ever-growing theology. Specifically, in preparation for those conversations, further work must be done in studying each local Nazarene congregation. Congregations must be known by the denomination, and congregations must be known by themselves. Currently such a process is instructed in the polity of the Church of the Nazarene by way of an annual review, and as such should be given future support through development and resources. These efforts must be given opportunity for study implementation

and ongoing accountable continuing education. In theory, this is not only the responsibility of the local pastor, but of the local congregation as well.

Another part of the preparation for this ritual development and theological conversation is for further study to be done through the denomination on including those marginalized in each of these conversations. At once congregations must be very careful to remember that for so long we have confused those who were brought to faith out of their Infant Baptism by telling them that the only option for declaring their personal declaration of baptismal grace was rebaptism. At the same time, we must also remember those for whom there are such strong feelings and understanding of confirmation that its mere mention confuses them about our holiness doctrine. Not one person should be left behind in this conversation. We must remember that the pastoral task is bigger than pastoral politics, or people pleasing. A Church leader cannot make everyone happy. However, it is a theological conclusion and a resulting ramification of this study that people who are engaged in shared pastoral counsel, intentionally designed Christian education, and narrative worship experiences will be more satisfied and will find a voice that keeps them included. This revelation leads us into great hope for this congregation as we envision future ministry.

The current structure of catechesis will have to undergo transformation if it is to be usable by local congregations in ways that move people into shared

celebrations of the movements of God in their lives. It will not be sufficient to make something general enough to be used in different places. Nor will it be enough to make something that is presented in bullet points and maxims. This is the way of a modern version of political Christianity. Whether the Church of the Nazarene might admit it or not, currently, many in its congregations are

undergoing what might be called a catechesis of popular media and programming. Unless the church grows uncomfortable with this structure for affirming the individual and wishes to nurture more than worship wars among our collected congregations, now is the time to give our people what they desperately desire - a holy way of life together. We get so romantic about the early church, those gathered in Acts who had come together with everything in common, and we act as if that is only a Utopian reality for Heaven. Based upon this project, I believe that such a reality can exist here and now among a people who are willing to engage in the hard work of evaluating Christian worship, theology and practices. It is not enough for believers to simply return to the synagogue, as was the temptation for those early Christians. The center of life must be renewed. Moreover, as any generation of Christians knows, that center of worship must be renewed daily as we constantly engage in knowing the Lord and making the Lord known among us.

Methodological Recommendations

To arrive at these conclusions, and to set our local plans on pursuing further lessons on how to more clearly arrive at deeper experiences and encounters of the congregation in worship and worship practices, we must look critically at this project's method and make recommendations for future study methods. The first recommendation drawn from the limitations of this study is realized in the survey design. Having no previous formal data on the Lowell First Church congregation beyond denominational statistics compiled in pastor's reports and no data at all from the congregation's own responses, the survey was necessarily large to gain a full understanding of who was receiving this intervention and how it might be received. In the future, this local congregation can be surveyed with much more simplicity in the survey design. Since this simplicity is so much more appreciated in the presentation and the participation of a survey, it is recommended that in the future this project's survey would be broken into smaller surveys, possibly one per section, and given over the course of a long-enough periods that the congregation is able to see the full value of each section's questions. In this instance, this value will be seen over the long term, but it will take much more skill and focus to intentionally weave all aspects of the information gleaned into any future practices. Likewise, this may help to satisfy the need for quantifiable collections of results following the sermon series and worship event.

The second recommendation is in regards to the lack of potential

confirmands prepared for the Easter celebration. Though it was noted that confirmation candidates were presented at future baptisms, and that the event was very helpful in testing confirmation around reaffirmation language with those gathered that day, this still was not the complete intention of the design of this service. Finding what was actually practiced to be very beneficial, namely a confirmational process for those reaffirming their baptismal vows, it is recommended that in the future an intermediary liturgy of reaffirmation be developed and practiced. Such a liturgy may set the congregation at ease concerning what confirmation may mean where it is defined as a complement to the sacrament of Infant Baptism and not as a ritual replacement to the personal encounter of and surrender to God's Spirit. From that point, confirmation candidates could be collected and a service planned once such candidates present themselves. In this instance, the service could be made more personal than a liturgy with blank lines where the candidates' names are filled in, and instead be a service where each candidate's story is told and the congregation invited to find the intersection of the candidate's story with their own.

Future Studies Arising From This Study

Of the many studies that could arise from this project, two stand out as the most beneficial. The first study to arise from this project is to design several confirmation rituals and to see how a local congregation would receive them.

This project would allow the Church of the Nazarene to see how certain rituals were tested and what may ultimately be the best received. A second study that would be beneficial is for a group of newly awakening Christians who were already baptized to be gathered for an intentionally designed catechetical process, and for that group to design its own confirmation ritual to be presented in a worship liturgy. For each of these studies the challenge will be in finding ways to reflect the larger, global constituency of the Church of the Nazarene in the ritual's development.

Unexpected Study Conclusions

While conclusions arising from this project have already been communicated, it is worth expressing them as either expected or unexpected outcomes. As expected outcomes, the depth or intensity of feelings associated with that outcome may still have been a surprise. As an unexpected outcome, the results could have either been beneficial or severely detrimental, or that the null curriculum was greater than the intended curriculum.

In the first conclusion, it was an expectation that this study would show a general lack of understanding around the practices of the church in worship. A surprise was how much of this ignorance was due in part to pastoral education of the congregation. As was stated earlier, this statement is not a condemnation of my predecessors at Lowell First Church; in fact, much credit in this finding is due

to their assistance in preparing the people so well for such an educational opportunity. Through the project I arrived at a deeper sensitivity to the pastoral pragmatics surrounding personal desires and the care of their spiritual needs, all the while realizing that sometimes the pragmatics have been employed because deeper training is so difficult and time consuming. This project has reinforced the calling of the pastor to work at the arduous task of educating the people about what we believe and how those beliefs connect in this congregation's practices.

In the second conclusion, it was an expectation that a congregation would be more open to the introduction of any new practice as long as they knew they could trust the one making the presentation to either know what is best or to recall the introduction if necessary. Moving to that place where trust could be gained, intentional time and energy must be given to hearing and leading those whom we are listening to was not an expected conclusion. The time factor itself was not the surprise, as pastoral ministry can be assumed to be time consuming, the surprise came in the awareness that time is necessary for the people to be given a voice in not only sharing problems in their life but a voice that offers solutions to the needs of the congregation. As a researcher, the local pastor is to collect the data, which in this case happens to be the life stories and testimonies of God's Spirit among the people, and to generate that data into the conclusion of the project, which in the pastor and congregation's instance is corporate worship together. From this, it may be said that the doorframe to enter the Lord's

presence is worship, but that the door itself is the encounter of intentional pastoral care, spiritual direction and Spirit led, Christian community and dialogue.

In the third conclusion, it was an expectation that a confirmation ritual would be necessary in some form, but the surprise was found in the vast misunderstandings of what confirmation really was or entailed. Even the history of this ritual's development in Roman Catholicism was a great surprise. Throughout history, confirmation was a discussion about several different things. This is where the fourth conclusion came about. The fourth conclusion was expected only in that there would be a need to discuss our different language around many of our practices, but what was unexpected was the consideration of how confirmation could not be introduced without potentially conflicting understandings behind it. For this reason, it was not surprising to learn that the Church of the Nazarene had successfully avoided the conversation about any confirmational practice for so long. Finding common language is no easy task!

Project Summary

In a tradition where the Church has sought to express liberty in worship practices for the sake of a Holiness mission, now is a time to develop solidarity around that mission as well. Such solidarity, found in the Community of Faith, is both the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of God's people who intentionally learn and grow together, expressing the fruit of that Spirit. In the tradition of the Church of the Nazarene, the open door for various practices of Baptism has now worked to close other doors for those who have chosen one route over another,

namely those who were baptized as infants. Practically and theologically, this has been to the local congregation's detriment. Simply to create a ritual of confirmation to be implemented in worship practices would swing the pendulum too far the other way, seemingly towards a mandated ritual that does not include those with strong feelings about believer's Baptism. In this project, I have tried to find a middle ground. I have suggested the introduction of a confirmation ritual, with limited defining of that ritual, for the express purpose of moving the Lowell First Church congregation towards a widely accepted practice, with opportunity for all to be engaged in the process of its introduction. In this project, I also sought to present an opportunity for the Church of the Nazarene to have a window into a local congregation's process of collecting around our holiness mission in worship through ritual development. Through this project, the Church of the Nazarene will be able to see both the practical and intellectual needs of Lowell First Church's people and the possibility of meeting those needs in healthy, worshipful engagement and discussion. By the means of this project, this experience has helped each story within the Lowell First Church congregation to connect even more clearly with the Story of God being revealed in the worshipping partnership known as the Church of the Nazarene.

APPENDIX A CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Dear LFC Faith Family,

Having a blessed history as a congregation, it is exciting to think of where God will continue to lead us into His future. Not only is this an exciting opportunity for us in this part of the country, but also for the global community to which we belong in *The Church of the Nazarene*.

As we enter the Lord's future for us, our denomination (along with Christ's Church at large) must ask some very difficult questions about morality and ethics, justice and service, compassion and evangelism, and personal and corporate spirituality just to name a few. Our success in this discussion will be our passionate participation in gracious and spirit-filled dialogue. Our backgrounds are different enough that we will all approach this conversation from diverse places; however, it is hoped that our diversity brings us a more rich understanding of Biblical holiness.

One corner of this discussion that LFC has the privilege of introducing a voice is in regards to worship. As a candidate in the Doctor of Ministry program at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Pastor Megyesi is studying the receptivity of a confirmation ritual in

The Church of the Nazarene as a means of continuing to tell our baptismal stories (and congregational "story"). It is *The Church of the Nazarene's*

original story that we sought inclusivity on issues of the sacraments for persons of different backgrounds, so much so that we allowed for children to be either baptized or dedicated, the first of which was seen as a sacrament, the second of which was seen as a ritual that allowed for mature participation in the sacrament of baptism later on. It is then the heart of our study to determine whether after 100 years of history as *The Church of the Nazarene* it is necessary to now prepare a complementary ritual of confirmation for the baptized infant.



1. Honest and thorough participation in this survey will assist Pastor Megyesi in presenting a voice in this conversation that reflects the diversity of each and every one of you. As the results of this study are compiled, the results will be presented in a series of sermons during the month of March. Please be informed that though our congregation may respond in majority to recommend or even resist presenting a confirmation ritual, the purpose of this study is not a change in the Manual (a book of polity and order for *The Church of the Nazarene*), but rather an initiation of dialogue within our global story. But make no mistake this is an important step to our future together!

Thank you for being a key character in this story with us! Gratefully.

The LFC Doctor of Ministry Parish Committee Cheryl Conlin, Chris Knopp; Sharren Hall: Marl; Metcalfe; Ro'Dr. Marl; E Lail (Director of Stewardship Ministries, Church of the Nazarene)

Page 10/8

1. Gender?

Female

Male

2. Age?

Under 18

35-44

65-74

19-25

45-54

75 or over

26-34

55-64

3. Race?

Rather not say

Hispanic

Caucasian/White

Latino

- African American
- Indigenous or Aboriginal Person
- Asian/Pacific Islander -----
- Multiracial
- Other, please specify:

4. Marital Status?

- Single, never married
- Separated or divorced
- Widowed
- Married

5. What is your highest level of formal education?

- Grammar school
- High school or equivalent degree
- Some college or a year of technical training
- Associates degree
- Bachelors degree
- Some graduate education, but no Masters degree
- Doctoral degree
- Post-doctoral studies

6. Employment Status?

- Retired
- Unemployed
- pull time student
- Self-employed
- Homemaker
- Full time volunteer
- Employed part time
- Employed full time

7. Do you have children in any of the following groups? (check (ill rlift apply)

- Birth - 4 years old
- 5-12 years old
- 13 -17 years old
- 18 - 25 years old
- 26 or older

Please continue to next section. You have completed Part I of 6. *Thankyou!*

Page 2 of 8

8. How long have you been an owner (member) of this congregation?

- Not an owner (member)
- 1 year or less
- 2-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-19 years
- <-i 20 or more years

9. Frequency of Sunday morning worship attendance?

- Weekly
- Every other week allows
- , , .
 3 weeks/ month
- As much as my physical condition
- As much as my work responsibilities
 " 7 1
 allow

10. On average, how many times have you attended worship services during the past year?

- None
- About once or twice a year
- Once or twice every three months
- About once a month
- About two or three times a month
- Eour or more times a month

11. Apart from services, about how many hours do you spend in committee, social events, educational and outreach programs of this church in an average month?

- 5 or less hours
- 6 to 10 hours
- 11 to 20 hours
- 21 or more hours

12. Within the last two years have you served on a committee or board within this congregation?

- No
- Yes

13. Has your involvement in the church increased, decreased, or remained the same in recent years?

- Increased
- Remained the same
- Decreased

14. Previous Religious Background?

- Nazarene
- Other Protestant
- Roman Catholic
- Greek Orthodox
- Unitarian/ Universalist
- No background
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Earth Religions
 - Buddhism
 - Hindu
 - other. Please Specify: _____

Page 5a/8

15. Age at which you were first introduced to religious practices?

- Under 3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10-12
- 13-15
- 16-18
- 19-25
- 26-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61 or older

16. Age at which you first considered Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

- Under 3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10-12
- 13-15
- 16-18
- 19-25
- 26-30
- 31-40 Savior
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61 or older
- I do not consider Jesus to be my personal Lord and Savior

Please continue to next section. You have completed Part 2 of 6. Thank you!

17. Are you in full agreement with the doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene?

- Yes, completely
- Mostly
- I am unaware of the doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene
- No, there are major differences for me
- This doesn't matter to me in my spiritual experience
- No, there are a few differences for me

18. To what extent does your agreement affect your participation in worship?

- Greatly
- Minimally
- Not at all

19. Please briefly explain how your agreement affects your participation in worship:

Please continue to next section. You have completed Part 3 of 6. Thankyou!

Page 4 e>8

20. How many members of your household and extended family regularly attend here?
- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> We do not attend regularly | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Myself alone | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 9 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | |
21. Think for a moment of your five closest friends (outside your family), how many are owners (members) of this church?
- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
22. Think for a moment of your five closest friends (outside your family), how many participate regularly in the life of this church?
- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
23. If we were to relay the "life" of LFC historically as a story to be told, to what extent do you feel like a main character?
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greatly | <input type="checkbox"/> Minimally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately | <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all |
24. If we were to relay the "life" of LFC presently as a story to be told, to what extent do you feel like a main character?
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greatly | <input type="checkbox"/> Minimally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moderately | <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all |
25. Please briefly describe your least favorite part of this congregation's story (historical and/or present):

Page 5 of 8

26. Please briefly describe your most favorite part of this congregation's story (historical and/or present):

Phase continue to next section. You have completed Pan 4 of 6. Thank you!

27. How often do you participate in or do private prayer & meditation?
- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily | <input type="checkbox"/> Few times a year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly or more | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> [do not know how to pray |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month | |
28. How often do you participate in or do Bible reading?
- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily | <input type="checkbox"/> Few times a year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly or more | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> I have difficulty reading the Bible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month | |
29. How often do you participate in or serve in church missions and compassionate ministries?
- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily | <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly or more | <input type="checkbox"/> Few times a year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
30. How often do you participate in evangelistic ministries or seek converts Ssr new owners (members)?
- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily | <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly or more | <input type="checkbox"/> Few times a year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |

Please continue to next section. You have completed Part 5 o/ 6. Thank you!

Page 6 o/8

51. Have you ever wondered about the Church of the Nazarene's use of the ritual of infant dedication?
- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Initially | <input type="checkbox"/> Repeatedly | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
32. Do you agree with its use?
- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but with some reservation | <input type="checkbox"/> [ts use is of no importance to me |
33. Have you ever wondered about the Church of the Nazarene's use of the sacrament of infant baptism?
- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Initially | <input type="checkbox"/> Repeatedly | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
34. Do you agree with its use?
- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but with some reservation | <input type="checkbox"/> its use is of no importance to me |
35. Have you ever received training or teaching on the connection between infant dedication and the baptism of a mature believer?
- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, what I believe to be complete | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but I still have some questions | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not recall |
36. Have you ever received training or teaching on the connection between infant baptism and the future responsibility of the

believer or church community?

Yes, what I believe to be complete

Never

Yes, but I still have some questions

Do not recall

37. Have you ever received training or teaching on the sacraments within the Church of the Nazarene?

Yes, what I believe to be complete

Never

Yes, but I still have some questions

Do not recall

38. Have you ever received training or teaching on worship rituals within the Church of the Nazarene?

Yes, what I believe to be complete

Never

Yes, but I still have some questions

Do not recall

39. How receptive would you be to a further ritual of confirmation to be offered for those who were baptized as infants?

That would be very well received by me and this congregation

Further explanation of its necessity would be needed

That would be very well received by myself, but not this congregation

I would have difficulty with this ritual

I do not have an opinion on this matter

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40. What is your favorite portion of our Sunday worship? (Phase choose only one)

Invocation/ Call To Worship

The reception of Church members

Greeting each other (members)

The celebration of the Sacraments

Congregational singing

Dedication of a child Special music/programs

Distribution of special awards

Scripture readings

Benediction

Prayer

Giving of Tithes & Offerings

Other Please Specify

Preaching

This concludes this survey. Please return to any usher at the conclusion of our worship service today. Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX B

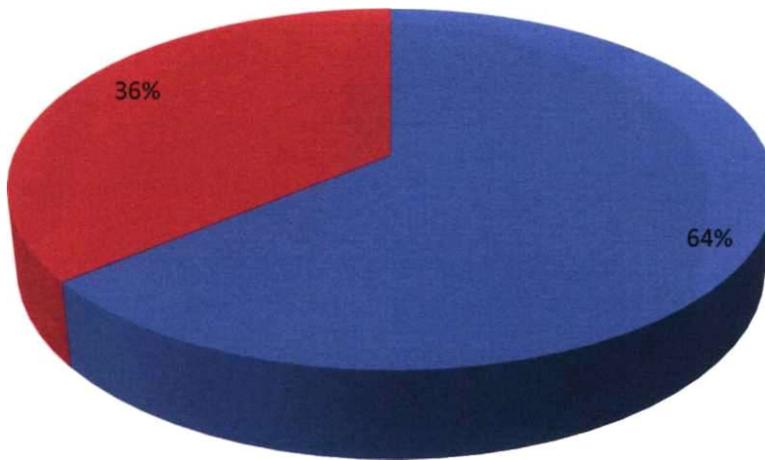
CONFIRMATION SERMON SERIES GRAPHICAL INFORMATION - ORIGINAL
POWERPOINT SLIDES WITH LATER GRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

SERMON SERIES (1 of 3): "Confirmation As Personal Pursuit"

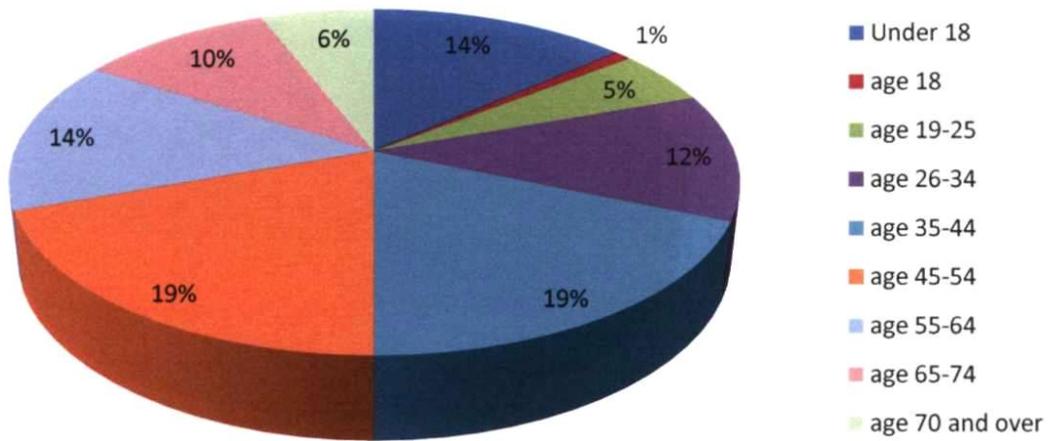
TEXT: Acts 8:26-35

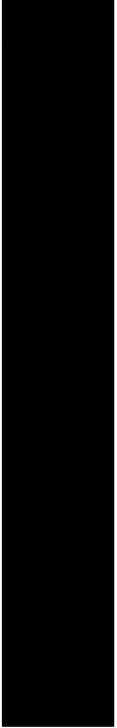


Gender?



m Female ■ Male





16	<i>Under 18;</i>
1	<i>age 18;</i>
6	<i>age 19-25;</i>
14	<i>age 26-34;</i>
22	<i>age 35-44;</i>
23	<i>age 45-54;</i>
17	<i>age 55-64;</i>
12	<i>age 65-74;</i>
7	<i>age 70 and over</i>

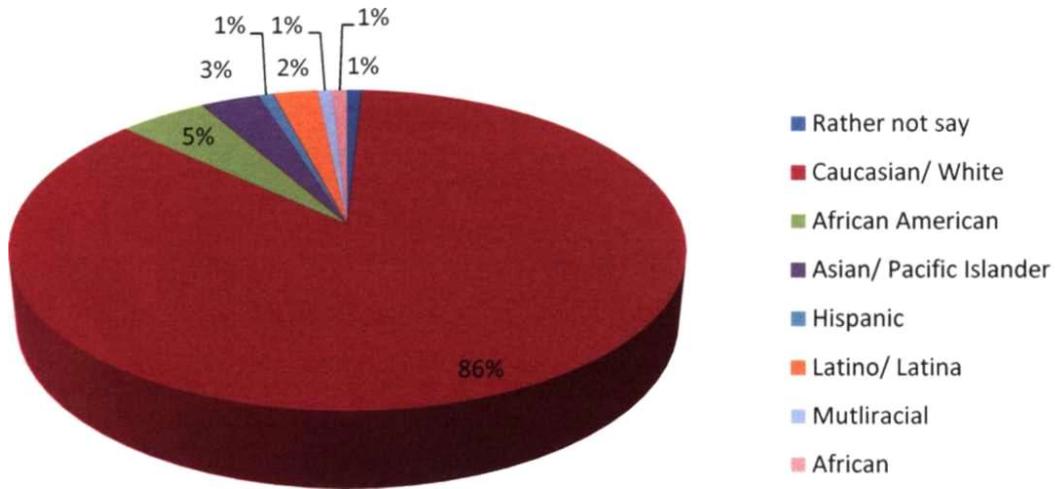
Age?

Congregational Survey Results:

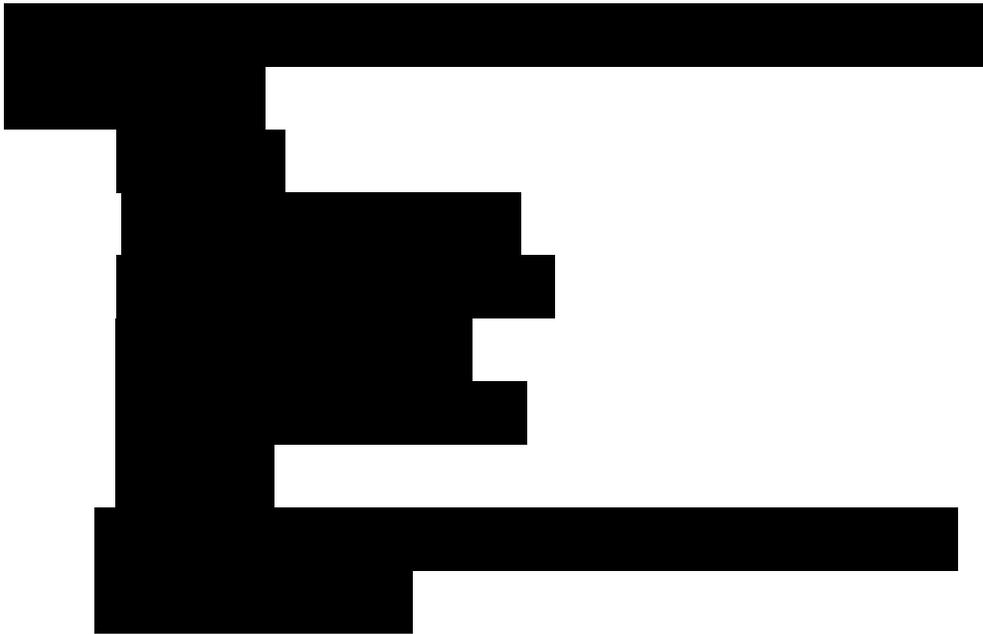
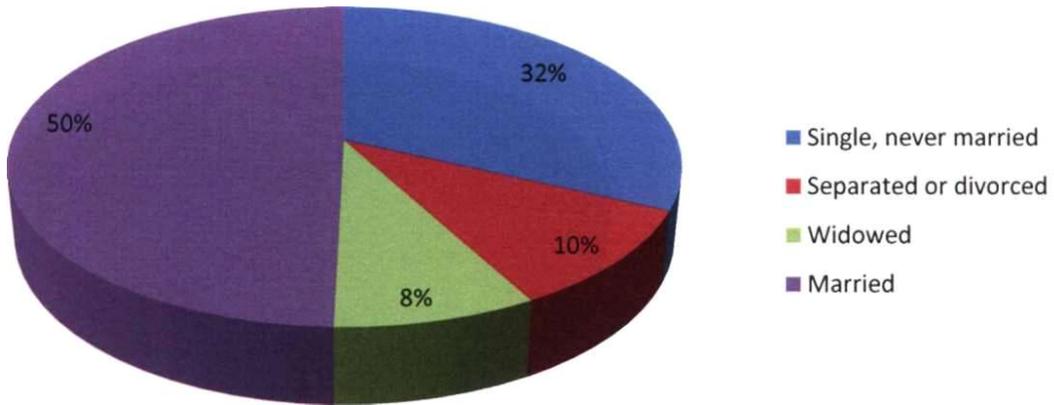
Race?

J	<i>Rather not say:</i>
104	<i>Caucasian/White;</i>
6	<i>African American;</i>
4	<i>Asian/ Pacific Islander;</i>
1	<i>Hispanic;</i>
2	<i>Latino (1 write in: Latina);</i>
1	<i>Multiracial;</i>
1	<i>African</i>

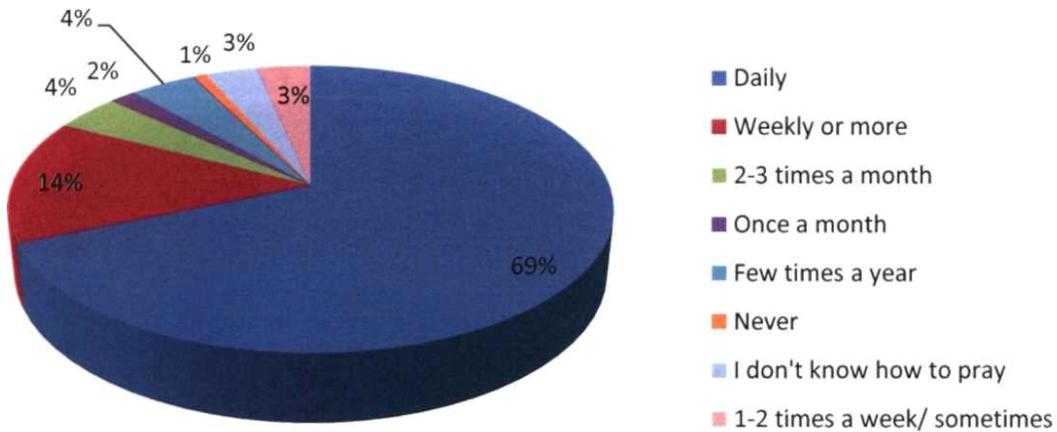
Race?



Marital Status?



How often do you participate in or do private prayer or meditation?



reading?

40 Da?7y;

47 Weefe/y or wore;

8 **2-3 times a month;**

4 **Once a month;**

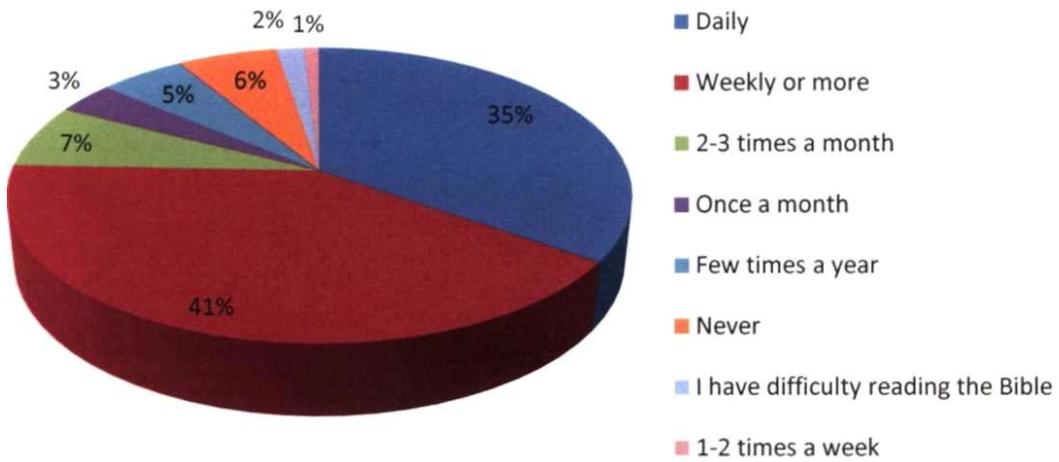
6 Few f imes a year;

7 Never;

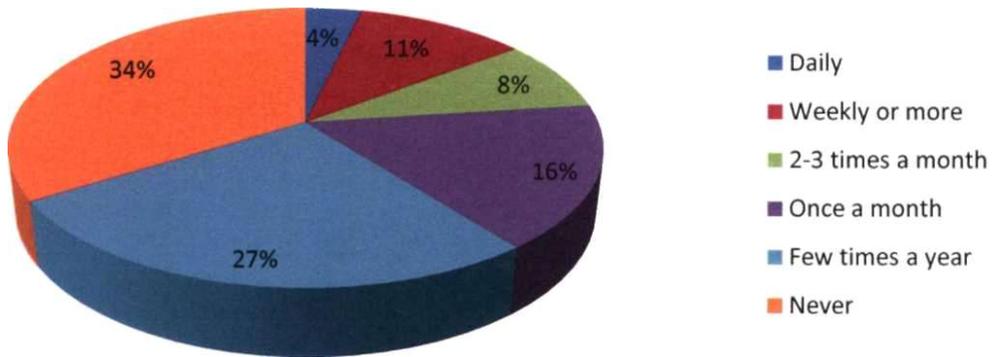
H / have **difficulty reading the Bible;**

1-2 time a week

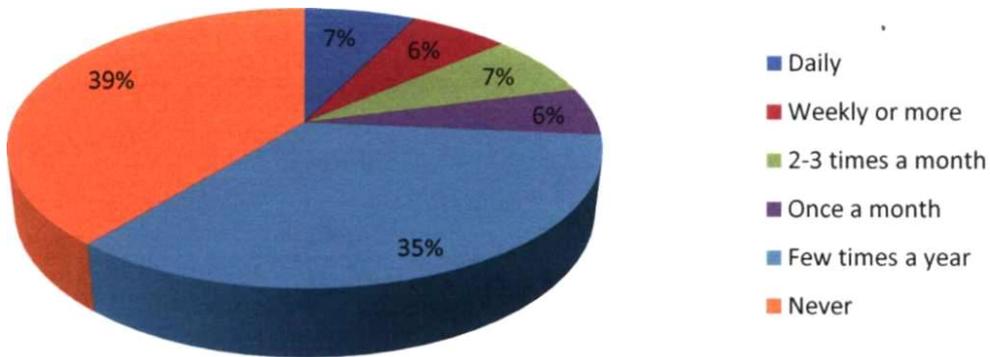
How often do you participate in or do Bible reading?



How often do you participate in or serve in church missions and compassionate ministries?



How often do you participate in evangelistic ministries or seek converts and new owners (members)?



Philip & The Ethiopian?

The statement “The Spirit Leads the Church” is a consideration that:

#1: The Lord has brought us together in unity beautifully from our diversity, but...

#2: We must personally have daily ears and eyes for the Spirit's movement that the hunger for God in people around us might be connected to the spiritual food we feast on regularly.

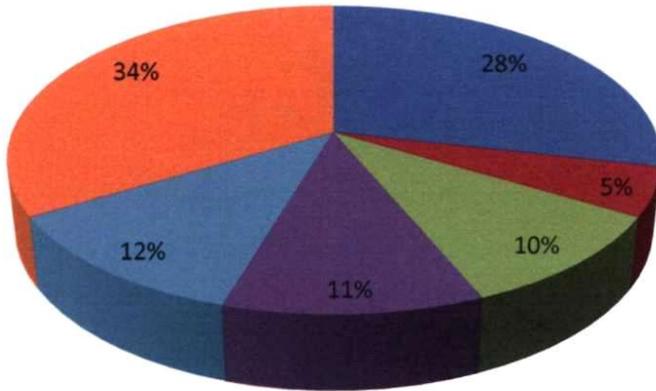


SERMON SERIES (2 of 3): "Confirmation As Public Charge"

TEXT: 2 Kings 10:15-17

"I Am Grateful For God's Church In Lowell..."



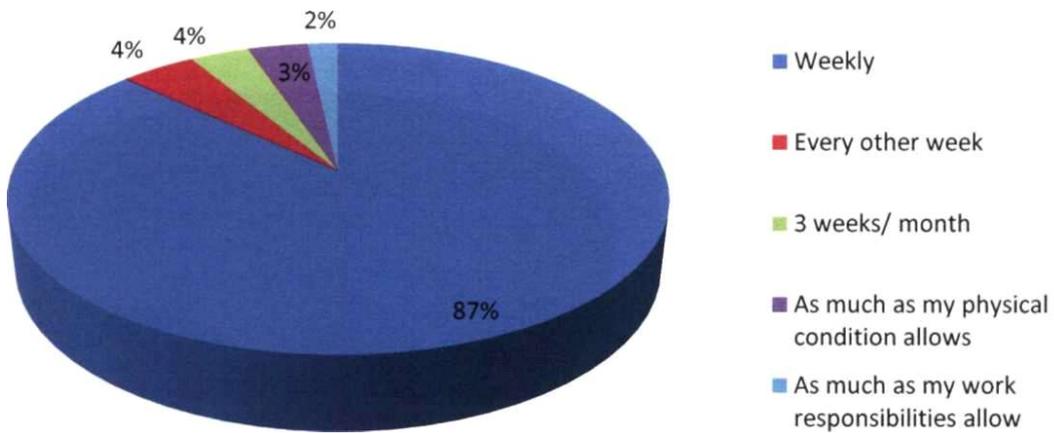


How long have you been an owner (member) of this congregation?

- Not an owner (member)
- 1 year or less « 2-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-19 years a 20 or more years
-

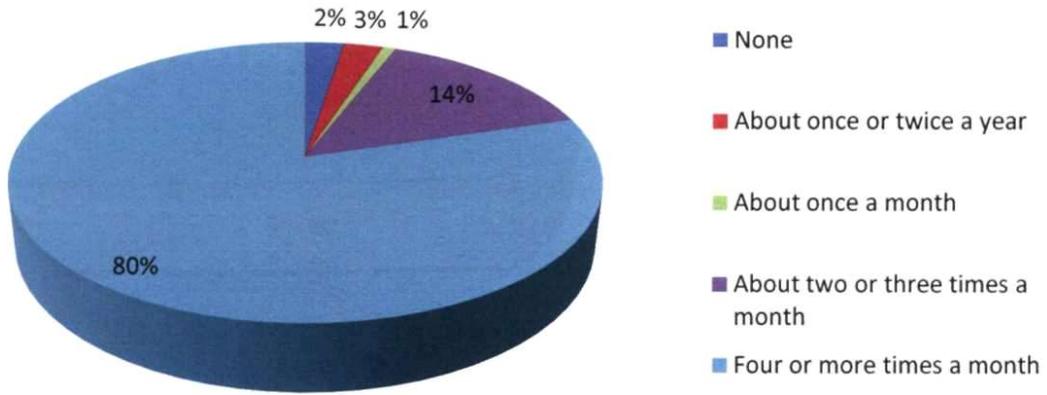


Frequency of Sunday morning worship attendance



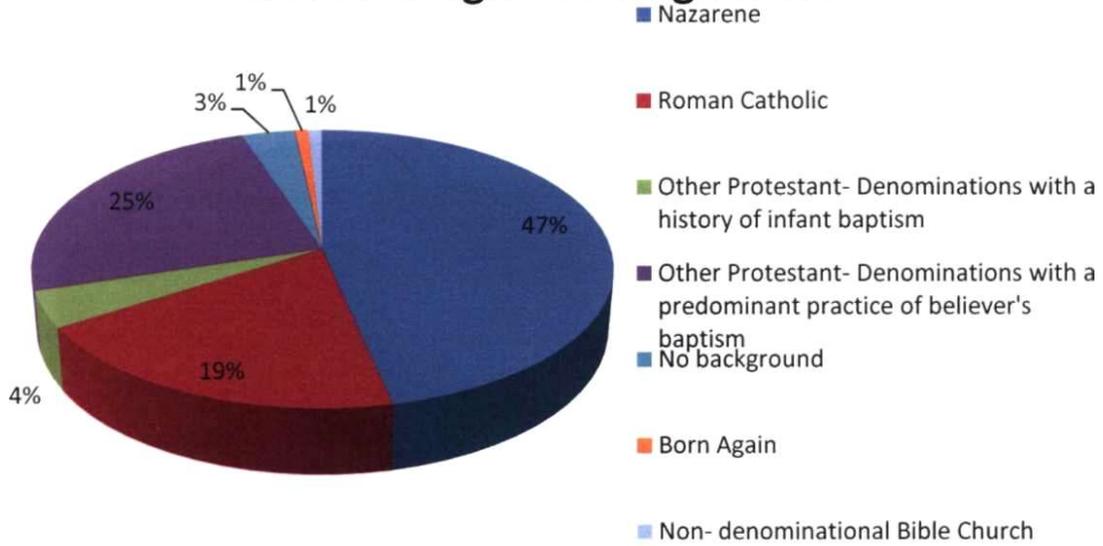
[REDACTED]

On average, how many times have you attended worship services during the past year?



[REDACTED]

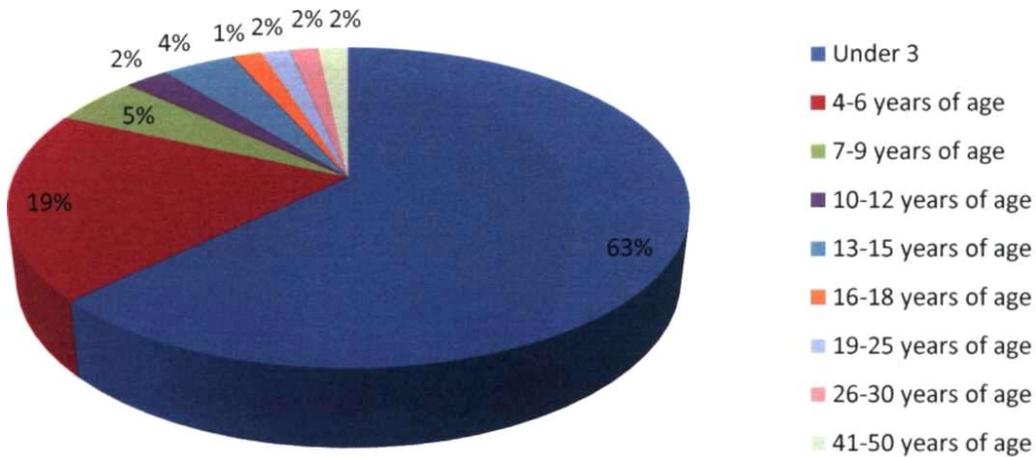
Previous religious background?



76	Under 3;
23	4-6;
6	7-9;
3	10-12;
5	13-15;
2	16-18;
2	19-25;

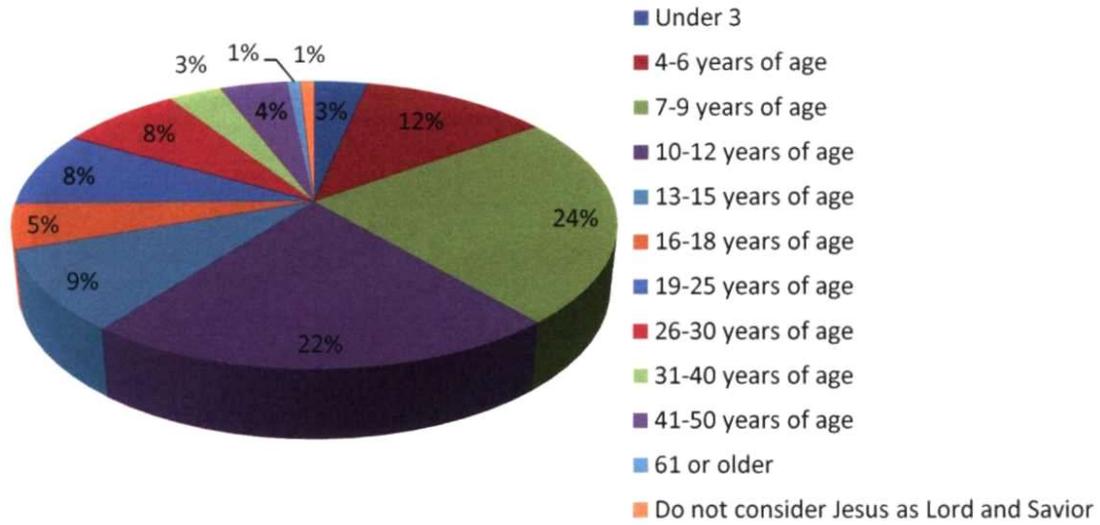
2 26-30;
2 41-50

Age at which you were first introduced to religious practices?



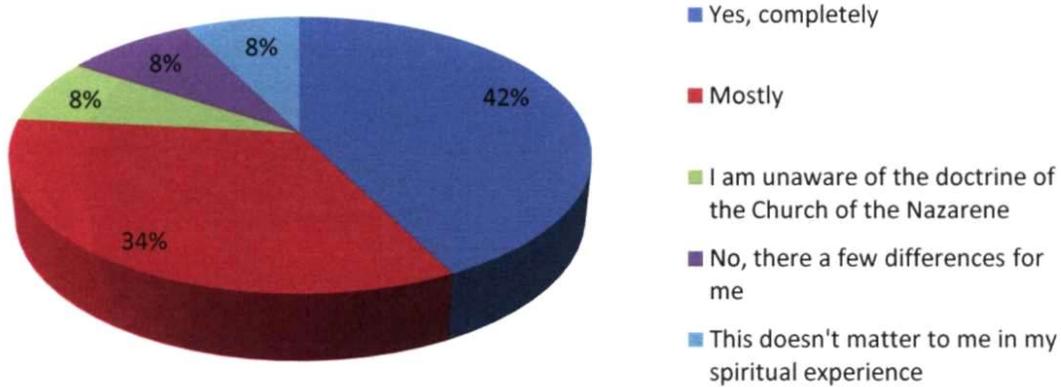
4 Under 3; 6 16-18;
14 4-6; /() 19 25;
28 7^9; 9 26-30;
26 10-12; 4 31-40;
11 13-15; D 41-50

Age at which you first considered Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

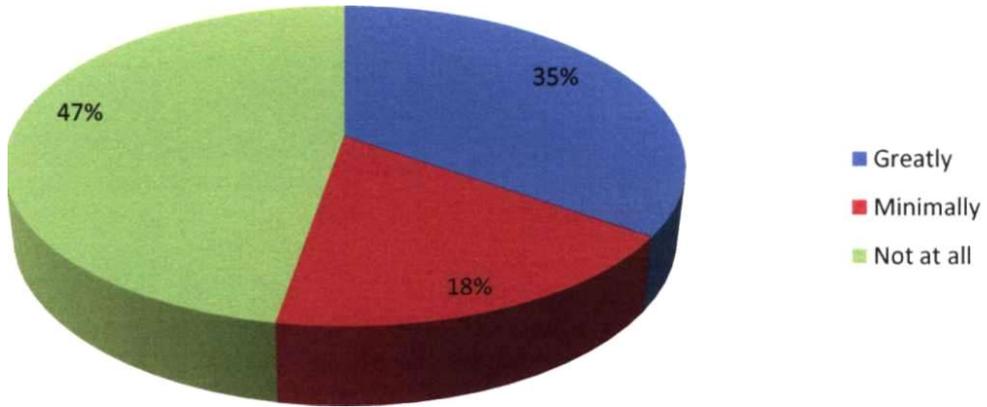


[REDACTED]

Are you in full agreement with the doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene?



To what extent does your agreement affect your participation in worship?

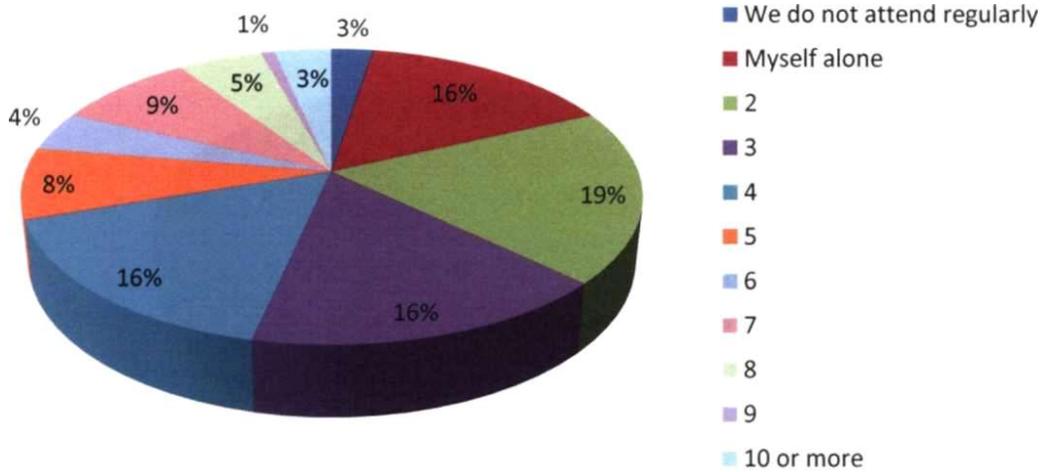


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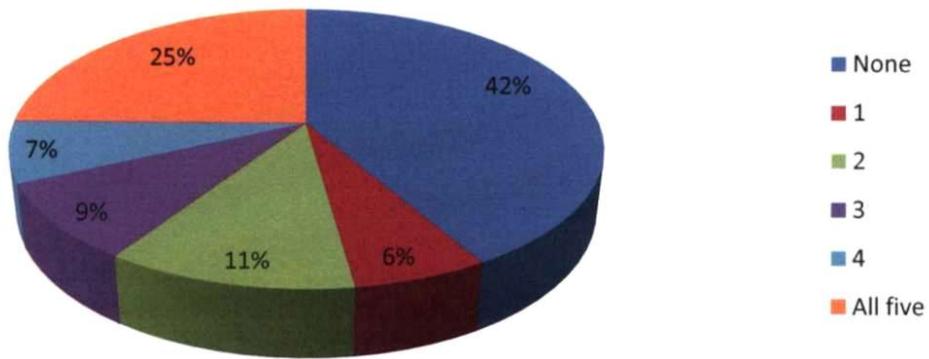
[REDACTED] [larly](#)



How many members of your household and extended family regularly attend here?



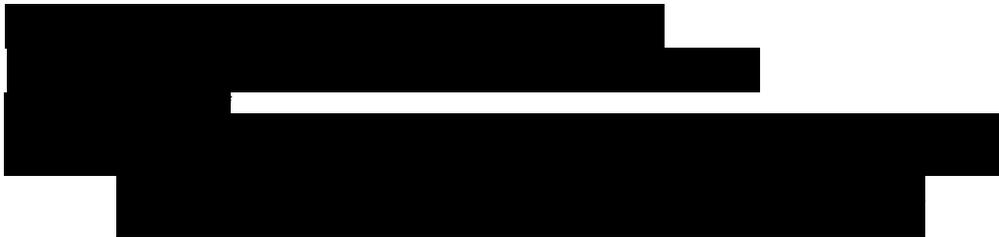
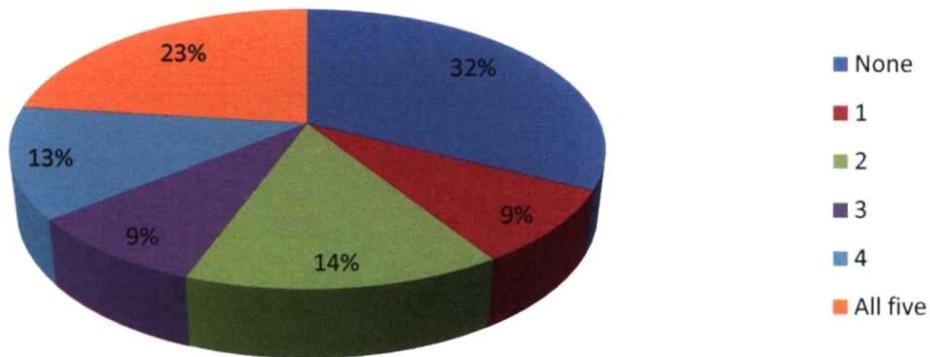
Think of your five closest friends (outside your family), how many are owners (members) of this church?



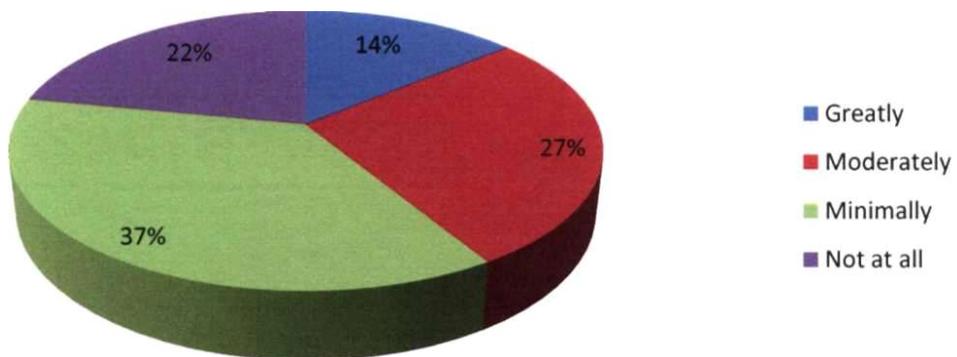
182



Think of your five closest friends (outside your family), how many participate regularly in the life of this church?

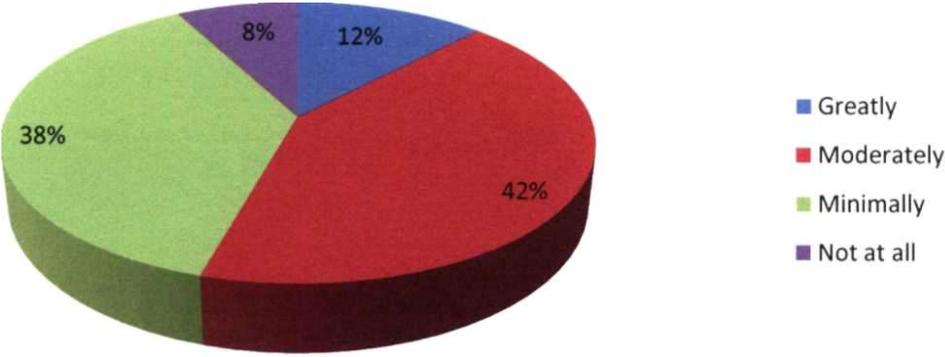


If we were to relay the "life" of LFC historically as a story to be told, to what extent do you feel like a main character?





If we were to relay the "life" of LFC presently as a story to be told, to what extent do you feel like a main character?



Jehu & Jehonadab?

In the battle, we need each other!

Call for clarification on church vs. Church?

The intentional response of the Church is to confirm our personal pursuits of God corporately.

How we do at this is only as clear as 'Community': we must extend the hand of fellowship! (Wesley)

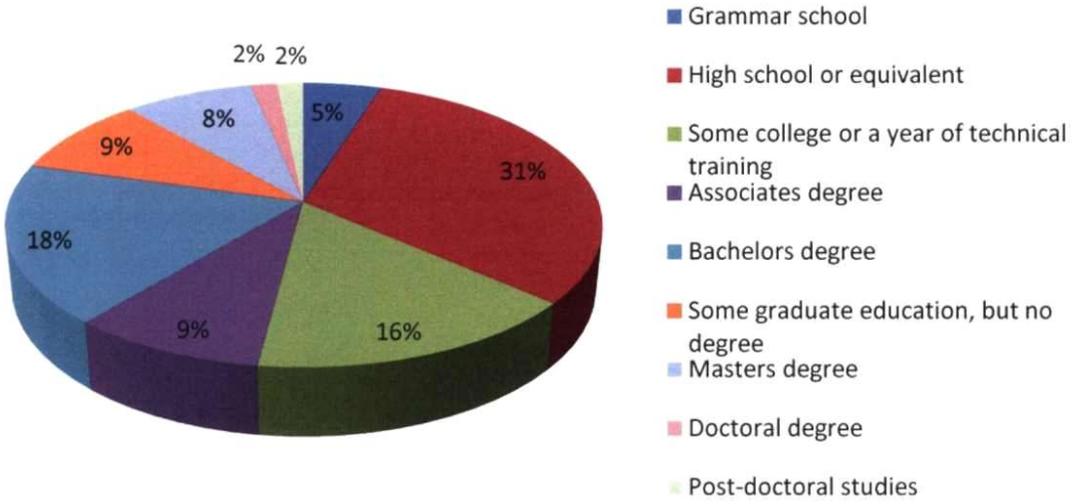
SERMON SERIES (3 of 3): "Confirmation as Corporate & Personal Risk"

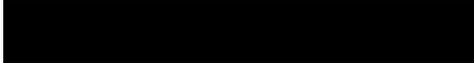
TEXT: Acts 6:8-15



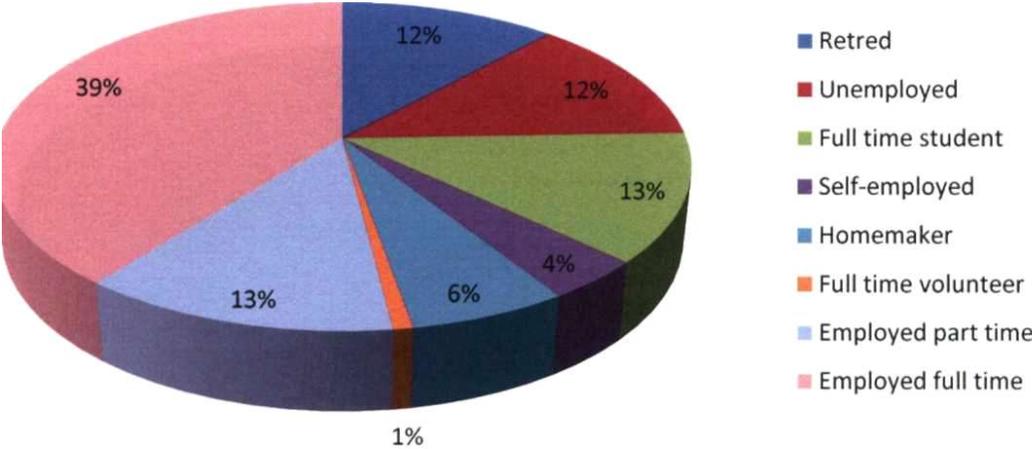


What is your highest level of formal education?



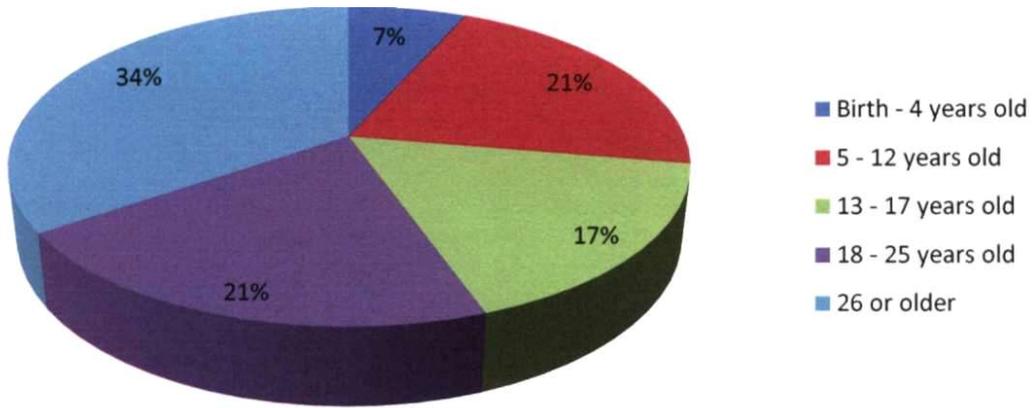


Employment Status?



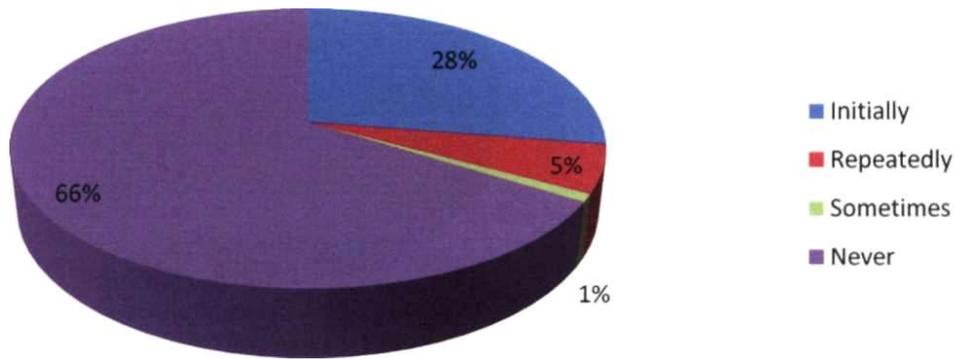
Do you have children in any of the following

groups? (check all that apply)



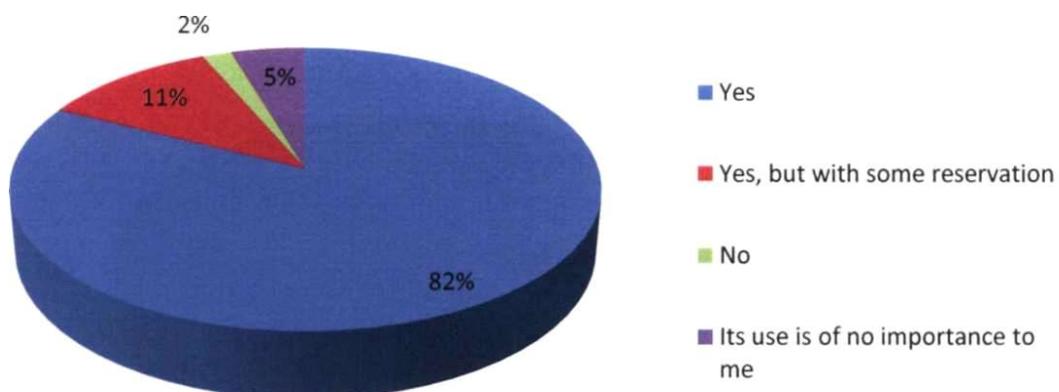
[Redacted text]

Have you ever wondered about the Church of the Nazarene's use of the ritual of infant dedication?

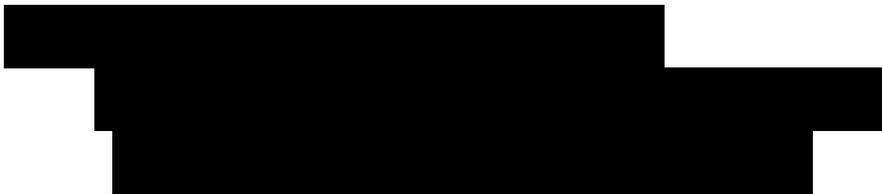
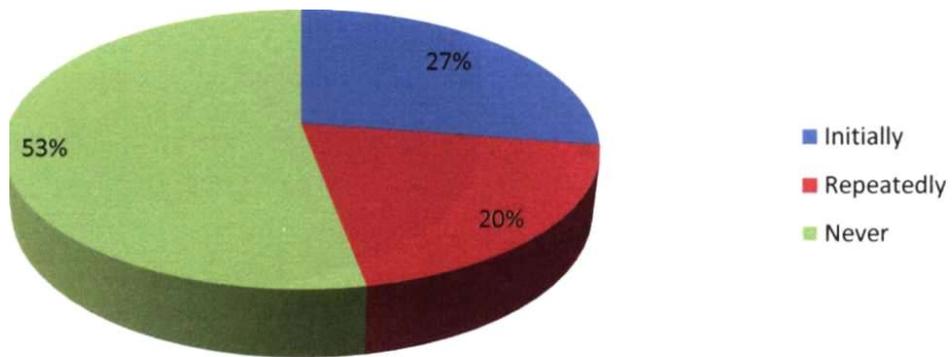


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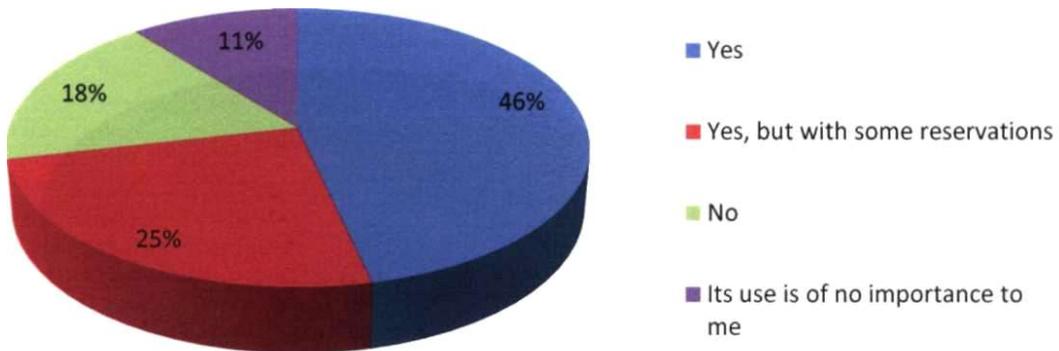
Do you agree with its use?



Have you ever wondered about the Church of the Nazarene's use of the sacrament of infant baptism?

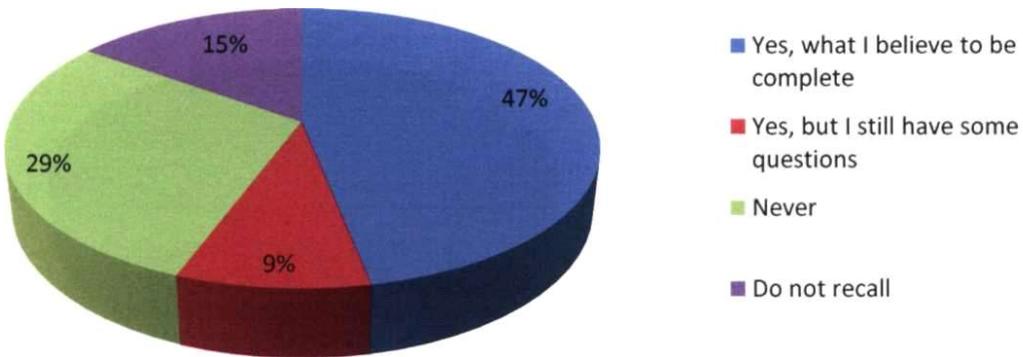


Do you agree with its use?



[Redacted text]

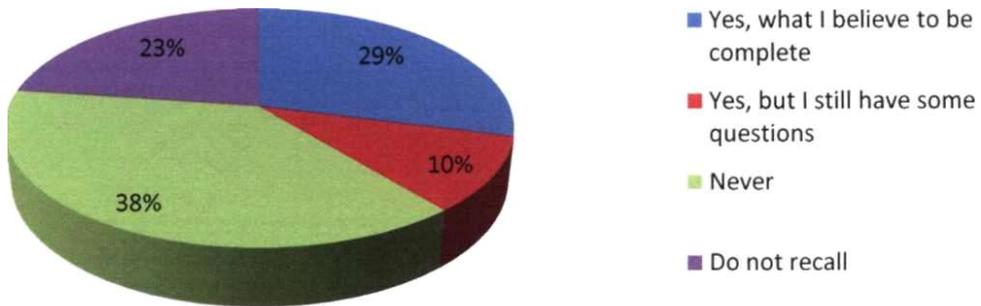
Have you ever received training or teaching on the connection between infant dedication and the baptism of a mature believer?



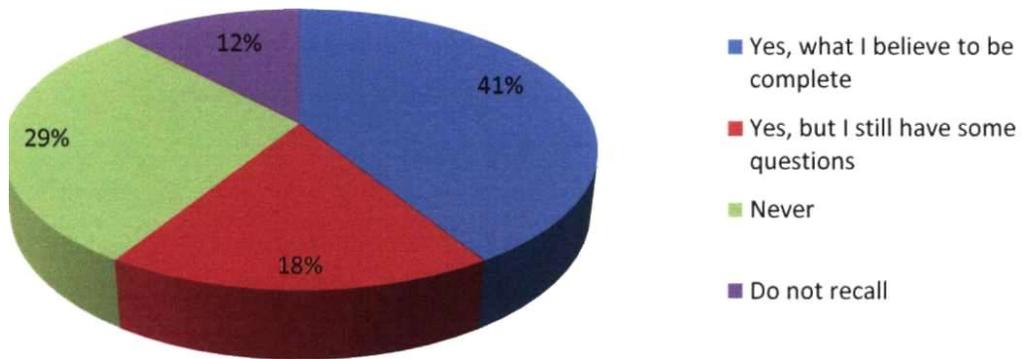
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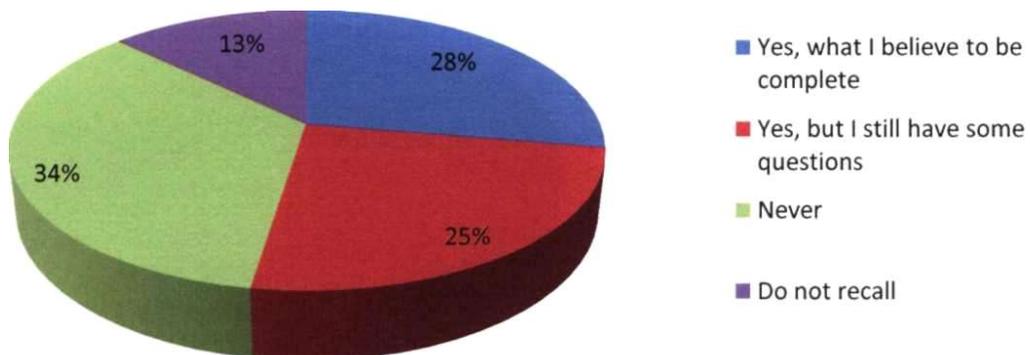
Have you ever received training or teaching on the connection between infant baptism and the future responsibility of the believer or church community?



Have you ever received training or teaching on the sacraments within the Church of the Nazarene?

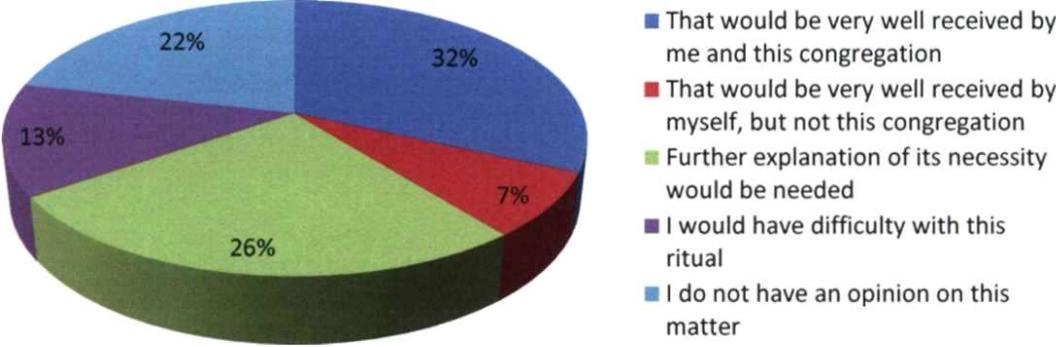


Have you ever received training or teaching on the worship rituals within the Church of the Nazarene?



[REDACTED]

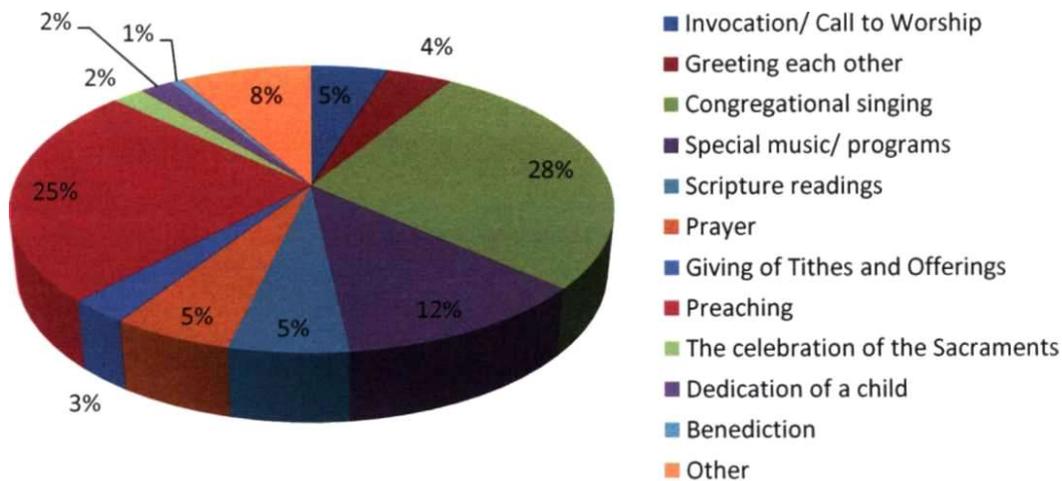
How receptive would you be to a further ritual of confirmation to be offered for those who were baptized as infants?



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**What is your favorite portion of our Sunday
worship?**



Stephen?

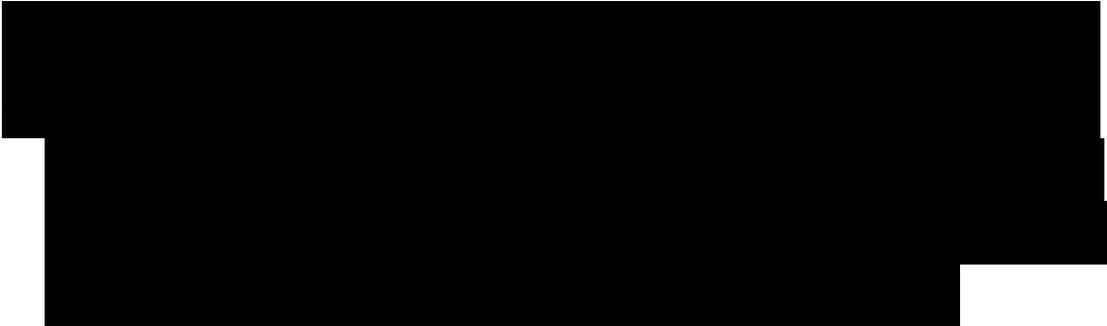
It is risky presenting ourselves (personally) to a Community .

- *We may be different*
- *We may have different opinions*
- *We may not be alike*

It is risky presenting ourselves (corporately) to a Community.

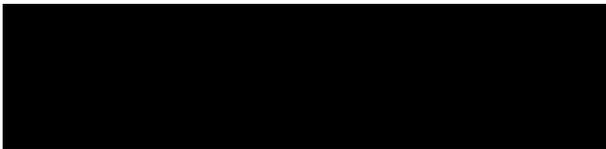
- *same as above*

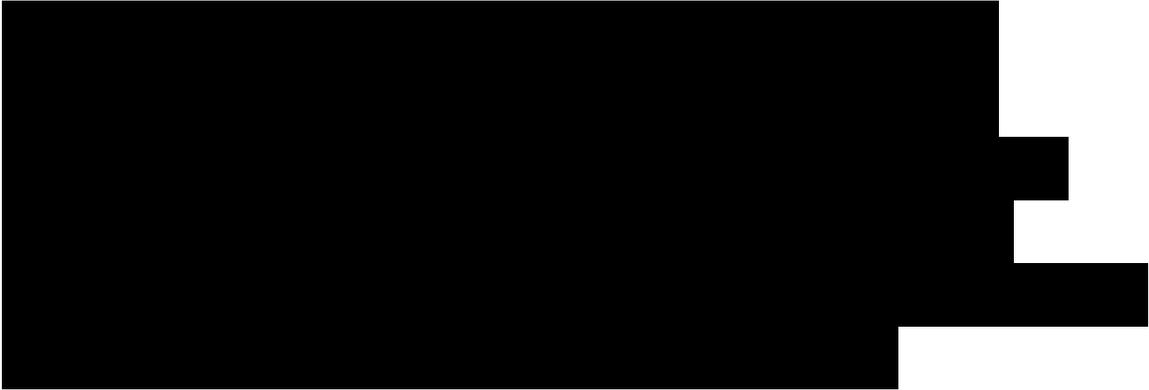
But like Stephen, where the Holy Spirit leads us there is nothing less than victorious love, and living and dying grace- by the power of God's Spirit that dwells within and among us!











PROTOCOL FOR CONFIRMATION PREPARATION CONVERSATION

Participant's Name: _____

1. Please tell us a little about your spiritual story.
2. Have you been baptized before?

3. Have you ever been confirmed?
4. Are you interested in being confirmed?
5. Why?
6. What would confirmation mean to you?
7. What might your confirmation mean to this congregation?
8. What do you sense is a necessary follow-up component to your confirmation to keep you growing spiritually?
9. How can this group and congregation help in that pursuit once you are confirmed?

The conversation will conclude with prayer following detailed instructions about the confirmation ritual itself and the responsibilities of the one being confirmed leading up to, during, and after the ritual.

LOWELL FIRST CHURCH SAMPLE INFANT BAPTISM CERTIFICATE

Certificate Of Infant Baptism

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE



*The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make His face to shine upon you.
and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.*
Numbers 6:24-26 (RSV)

*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out
of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a
voice from heaven said, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*
Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV)

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves
with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If
you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Certificate Of Infant Baptism

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE This certifies that

Was born on _____

at _____ and was

Presented to the Lord In
Infant Baptism at

Lowell First Church Of the Nazarene

Lowell, Massachusetts

By _____

on this ____ day of _____

in the year of our Lord, _____.

John V. Megyesi, Senior Pastor

LOWELL FIRST CHURCH SAMPLE BELIEVER'S BAPTISM CERTIFICATE

Certificate Of Baptism

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE



*The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make His face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.*
Numbers 6:24-26 (RSV)

*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was
opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son,
whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'*
Matthew 16:17 (NIV)

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God
through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile,
neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's
seed, and heirs according to the promise.*
Galatians 3:26-29 (TNIV)

Certificate Of Baptism

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE This certifies that

Was baptized in Lowell *First Church Of the Nazarene*
Lowell, *Muuachuetli*

on this _____ day of _____
in the year of our Lord, _____,
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

John V. Megycsi, Senior Pastor Mentor In Tfo Faith

LOWELL FIRST CHURCH SAMPLE CONFIRMATION CERTIFICATE

Certificate Of

Confirmation

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE



Now *faith* is king *sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Hebrews 11:1,11,12:1-3 (NIV)

The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26 (RSV)

Certificate Of Confirmation

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE This certifies that

Has publicly confirmed a personal faith and relationship with Jesus Christ at

Lowell First Church Of the Nazarene

on this _____ day of _____

in the year of our Lord, _____,

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

John V. Megyesi, Senior Pastor Mentor In The Faith

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant's Name: _____

1. How long have you been a Christian?

2. Who first introduced you to Jesus Christ?
3. How long have you been a part of this local congregation?
4. To what extent has Sunday worship here formed you spiritually?
5. To what extent has Sunday School formed you spiritually?
6. What other factors, events, programs or ministries have helped to form you spiritually?
7. Of what value is Communion to you in your spiritual development?
8. Of what value is Communion to you in your daily life?
9. Have you ever been baptized?
10. What value is Baptism to you in your spiritual development?
11. What value is Baptism to you in your daily life?
12. If I was to suggest that infant dedication and Baptism go hand-in-hand, would you agree that likewise Infant Baptism and confirmation go hand-in-hand?
13. Why?/ Why not?

14. How do you perceive the larger Lowell First Church of the Nazarene congregation would feel about that previous suggestion about Infant Baptism and confirmation?

15. Do you believe there to be a need for the addition of a ritual of confirmation to our current worship practices?

16. Would it help promote spiritual growth among our congregation?

This concludes this interview.

Thank you so much for your participation!

LOWELL FIRST CHURCH SERVICE OF INFANT BAPTISM

THE DEDICATION & BAPTISM OF CHILDREN (printed/ not read in liturgy)

The dedication and baptism of children at Lowell First Church of the Nazarene is a precious opportunity for our church family. It is in this act where we recall God's choosing of us as recipients of His precious love. And it is in this act where we recall our privilege of returning that love as an act of faithful devotion. To this end, our tradition allows for parents to choose a service of dedication or the sacrament of Baptism for their young child. Dedication like confirmation becomes the partner to the sacrament whereby we declare the work of God to be hope-filled and personal.

It must be remembered that our service today is not merely an insurance ritual to guarantee a heavenly future for a child, but a service of assurance to declare that God is in control of all that child's little life may entail. This is especially a time of trusting that each child's heart will awaken to God's

love very early and very easily through the life he or she knows among us. Scripture reminds us that from the moment we are conceived we are divinely chosen to receive God's mercy and in order that we might accept His mercy, the Holy Spirit pursues us with the Lord's matchless love and grace. It is His design, not ours, that we one day awaken to His fullness.

Parents are reminded in this process of deciding their child's spiritual path that the only real choice they have to consider is whether they will give their child back to God, recognizing that the child is the Lord's gift to them. And though we recognize that not all of us will be given children of our own, we find joy and hope in the privilege and responsibility of waiting together upon the Lord's blessings, finding love and grace as we live together as a family of faith.

As an act of blessing God's children today and always, may each one of us fulfill our individual responsibility to grow in God's Holy love, and may we together fulfill our community responsibility to declare among our children the loving power and presence of the Lord. To that end, we leave Shayla and Micah to God's love and daily dedicate each of them through hearts and homes committed to Christ's work.

SAMPLE LITURGY:¹⁴⁰

THE BAPTISM (LITURGY) OF [CHILD'S FULL NAME],

SUNDAY, [DATE] - BLESSING GOD'S CHILDREN

WELCOME

Pastor: My friends, not only am I pleased that you are here today in worship, but these parents are deeply appreciative and the Lord is blessed by your presence and support in our covenant-making together. It is truly a good thing when we offer God's children to Him in worship!
Adapted from Rob Staples liturgy for infant baptism.

SACRAMENTAL HISTORY & UNDERSTANDINGS

In the history of Christianity, there have been two different traditions regarding the appropriateness of baptism for infant children.

We do not know if young children were baptized in the NT, but there is some reason for believing they were, since on numerous occasions in the Book of Acts whole families were baptized upon the conversion of the head of the household. At least we know that in the early centuries, there was widespread practice of infant baptism.

A more recent tradition, namely infant dedication, influential since the 16th century, has insisted that baptism is for adults only, since only adults are able to understand its implications and exercise saving faith.

The Church of the Nazarene, from its beginning days, was composed of persons having roots in both these traditions, and therefore from our earliest

days as a denomination we have allowed Christian parents to choose whether they will have their babies baptized, or opt for the alternative of infant dedication. Our Church Manual provides rituals for each option.

These parents today have chosen to have their child baptized, in the conviction that we are saved by God's grace which precedes all human action or decision, and that it is only secondarily and consequentially that baptism is a testimony to our human response to God. In infant baptism we bear witness to that truth. Just as the circumcision of infants was a sign and seal of God's grace under the Old Covenant, so baptism is a sign and seal of His grace under the New Covenant. In baptizing babies, the Church proclaims the Gospel truth that long before the child could choose for her or him self, even before she or he existed, God made provision for each little one's salvation and includes her or him in Christ's Body. Baptism is thus a sign of the work of God on our behalf which precedes and makes possible our own response.

When infants are baptized, it is right and necessary that when they come to maturity they make their own confession of faith. It is possible, of course, that they will fail to make such a confession. But this cannot be avoided by denying them baptism. It becomes, then, the responsibility of the parents and the Church to nurture them, teach them, and guide them toward that eventual confession of personal faith.

Believing this, these parents, come now to present their children for

Christian baptism.

TO THE PARENTS

[Officiating/ or visiting pastor]

Pastor: [Parent's first names], in presenting your child, [child's full name] for Baptism, you signify not only your faith in Christ, but you both also declare His saving love expressed through His Church. By this act, we celebrate together Christ's gracious presence among us today and always.

By laying [child's first name] in the Lord's hands today, you also express and make commitment to your desire that [she/he] may early know and follow the will of God, that [she/he] may live and die a Christian, and that [she/he] may faithfully enjoy the blessed presence of Christ forever.

In order to attain this holy end, it will be your duty, each as parents to teach [her/him] early the faithful, covenanting-love of the Lord. You will, in part, achieve this goal by building a home where Christ is central and where you are always discovering the movements of God's Spirit. It is then crucial for you to prayerfully watch over [her/his] education, that [she/he] be not led astray; to direct [her/his] youthful mind to the Holy Scriptures, and [her/his] feet to the sanctuary; to restrain [her/him] from evil associates and habits; and, as much as in you lies, to bring [her/him] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Let me ask you now, will you endeavor to do so by the help of God? If so, answer, "We will." Parents: We will.

COVENANT OF THE FAITH FAMILY

[Officiating pastor]

(Celebrated in different ways including a congregational liturgy; a poem or reading from a children's worker(s); gifts from the church leadership oriented towards the future of our life congregationally (such as a hymnal, a journal, or some other piece of congregational effect that tells our personal story) PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Sacrament of Baptism

[Officiating pastor]

RESPONSIVE READING

Matthew 22:37

Pastor: By God's choosing of us, it is our identity and responsible destiny to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength."¹⁴¹ The Lord admonished His chosen people, "commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up

Church Family: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain."¹⁴³ "Children are a heritage from the Lord."¹⁴⁴

Pastor: "The Lord's love is with those who fear Him and His righteousness with their children's children—with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts."¹⁴⁵

Church Family: "They were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them."¹⁴⁶

Pastor: "He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them: 'Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me.'"¹⁴⁷

Church Family: "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones."¹⁴⁸ "Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² **Deuteronomy 6:4-7**

¹⁴³ **Psalm 127:1**

¹⁴⁴ **Psalm 127:3**

¹⁴⁵ **Psalm 103:17**

¹⁴⁶ **Mark 10:13**

¹⁴⁷ **Matthew 18:5**

¹⁴⁸ **Matthew 18:10**

¹⁴⁹ **Matthew 18:14**

Pastor and Church Family: O God, our Heavenly Father, Maker of all

things and Creator of life, we praise your glorious name. You have blessed [parent's names] with the gift of a child, filling their hearts with joy and gladness. Accept our gratitude and thanksgiving, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LOWELL FIRST CHURCH SAMPLE BAPTISM WITH CONFIRMATION RITUAL

PSALM READING

Psalm 105: 1-9 (NIV)

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name;
make known among the nations what He has done.
- 2 Sing to Him, sing praise to Him;
tell of all His wonderful acts.
- 3 Glory in His holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- 4 Look to the LORD and His strength;
seek His face always.
- 5 Remember the wonders He has done,
His miracles, and the judgments He pronounced,
- 6 O descendants of Abraham His servant,
O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones.
- 7 He is the LORD our God;
His judgments are in all the earth.
- 8 He remembers His covenant forever,
the word He commanded, for a thousand generations,
- 9 the covenant He made with Abraham,
the oath He swore to Isaac.

THE RITE OF BAPTISM [It is preferred that the confirmation service be

coordinated with the Sacrament of Baptism, first celebrating baptisms, then confirming those declaring their personal faith in Jesus Christ. Following the confirmation of individuals, the congregation is called to reaffirmation of its baptismal covenant and declaration. While church membership is not always celebrated with baptism and confirmation, services of baptism and confirmation are often concluded with the reception of new members.]

PASTOR: "Do you now renounce everything that would draw you away from the love of God?"

CANDIDATE: "I do."

PASTOR: "Do you now turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?"

CANDIDATE: "I do. Jesus Christ is Lord."

THE SACRAMENT & CELEBRATION [Baptisms include the sharing of baptismal candidates personal testimony by friends or family members, the baptism itself, and a prayer of anointing (using oil on the head of the baptized) for God's future work of cleansing and healing in anticipation of God's deeper work of grace in the candidates life. Following the baptisms, the congregation is directed to respond as follows]

PASTOR: "Let us welcome the newly baptized."

PEOPLE: "We receive you into the household of God. Confess the

faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood."

THE RITE OF BAPTISMAL CONFIRMATION (If candidates are presented for confirmation. Opportunity is also given at this time for congregational reaffirmation of faith.)

PASTOR: "John Wesley once said that this sacrament is an 'outward sign of inward grace'. For some, baptism is the testimony of a personal salvation, worked by God's realized grace. For others, this sacrament was the community's recognition of the hopeful power of God's prevenient grace. For us all, it is this day a means of responsible grace whereby we confess our continued commitment to follow the Lord in all ways at all times. Today we are led by our [sister(s)/brother(s)], [confirmands' full name(s)], who [were/was] baptized [as an infant(s)/ previously in (his/her/their) (life/lives)], and who now [testify/testifies] to God's saving grace in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Grafted into the work of God in Christ, empowered by His Spirit, we go this journey together."

"Through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, the power of sin was broken and God's Kingdom entered our world. Let us celebrate that freedom and redemption through the renewal of our baptismal waters, confirming our corporate and personal relationship to Christ. Dearest Sisters and Brothers, consider your personal story of faith. Recall with the Church that first moment of

discovery when Jesus became your loving Lord and Savior. Remember with us a few significant milestones of when God's Story of love became your personal story of faith. Remember your baptism. Remember the many times in which you have confirmed your love for the Lord. Remember the many times in which that love has been answered by God's love in growing you to be a mature believer and participant in the work of God's Kingdom. Consider, if today may be one of those moments for confirming your love and faith for Christ Jesus. Consider what that confirmation will mean for you. Consider what it will mean to this congregation. Consider what your confirmation of faith and love in Christ will require of you in the hours, days and months to come. And lastly, consider how this congregation might help you to be such a person of faith in these days.

PASTOR: "Confirming your covenant of faith in Jesus and love for Almighty God, I now ask you, as you each take up your cross and we together proclaim our partnership in the Gospel, to once again reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the Church- the faith in which you were baptized. To each of you I ask, do you now renounce everything that would draw you away from the love of God?" If so, answer, "I do."

CONGREGATION: "I do."

PASTOR: "Do you now turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Do you put your whole trust in God's grace and love? Do you surrender to the comfort and power of His Spirit? Do you promise to follow and obey Jesus

as your Lord? Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word, partnering with other believers in the Church and showing his love, to your life's end?" If so answer, "I do. Jesus Christ is Lord."

CONGREGATION: "I do. Jesus Christ is Lord." [The pastor often

initiates a more recent liturgical response of clapping as a means of celebrating this covenant event. Resume service with reception of new owners.]

THE RITE OF BAPTISMAL CONFIRMATION (no candidates- general congregational reaffirmation)

PASTOR: "John Wesley once said that this sacrament is an 'outward sign of inward grace'. For some, baptism is the testimony of a personal salvation, worked by God's realized grace. For others, this sacrament was the community's recognition of the hopeful power of God's prevenient grace. For us all, it is this day a means of responsible grace whereby we may confess our continued commitment to follow the Lord in all ways at all times. Grafted into the work of God in Christ, empowered by His Spirit, we go this journey together."

"Through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, the power of sin was broken and God's Kingdom entered our world. Let us celebrate that freedom and redemption through the renewal of our baptismal waters, confirming our corporate and personal relationship to Christ. Dearest Sisters and Brothers, consider your personal story of faith. Recall with the Church that first moment of

discovery when Jesus became your loving Lord and Savior. Remember with us a few significant milestones of when God's Story of love became your personal story of faith. Remember your baptism. Remember the many times in which you have confirmed your love for the Lord. Remember the many times in which that love has been answered by God's love in growing you to be a mature believer and participant in the work of God's Kingdom. Consider if today may be one of those moments for confirming your love and faith for Christ Jesus. Consider what that confirmation will mean for you. Consider what it will mean to this congregation. Consider what your confirmation of faith and love in Christ will require of you in the hours, days and months to come. And lastly, consider how this congregation might help you to be such a person of faith in these days.

PASTOR: "Confirming your covenant of faith in Jesus and love for Almighty God, I now ask you, as you each take up your cross and we together proclaim our partnership in the Gospel, to once again reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the Church- the faith in which you were baptized. To each of you I ask, do you now renounce everything that would draw you away from the love of God?" If so, answer, "I do."

CONGREGATION: "I do."

PASTOR: "Do you now turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Do you put your whole trust in God's grace and love? Do you surrender to the comfort and power of His Spirit? Do you promise to follow and obey Jesus

as your Lord? Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word, partnering with other believers in the Church and showing his love, to your life's end?" If so answer, "I do. Jesus Christ is Lord."

CONGREGATION: "I do. Jesus Christ is Lord." [The pastor often initiates a more recent liturgical response of clapping as a means of celebrating this covenant event.]

RECEPTION OF NEW OWNERS ["Owner" is Lowell First Church's current identification of church members who "own the mission" of Christ in and through this congregation. The current Manual ritual for Church membership is inserted at this place in the worship liturgy.]

THE APOSTLES' CREED [With new owners still standing in the front of the Sanctuary, the pastor begins:]

PASTOR: "With the whole Church, all Christians everywhere who celebrate this day and this journey, let us confess our faith..."

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic¹⁵⁰ Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen." [Again, the pastor or congregation responds with clapping as a means of celebrating our growing covenant together]

EPISTLE READING

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

The word 'catholic' denotes the universal Church, all Christians everywhere, rather than a particular portion of Christ's Community (i.e. The Roman Catholic Church).

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a

people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

OUR 'SPIRITED' BLESSING

PASTOR: "The peace of the Lord be always with you."

PEOPLE: "And also with you."

PRAYERS & OFFERINGS

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