

**CHURCH MIGRATION -  
AN INVESTIGATION AT GODFIRST CITY CHURCH**

BY

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A research report submitted in partial fulfillment of the academic requirement for the Master of Theology in Integrated Theology at the South African Theological Seminary.

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## DECLARATION

I, Francis Cloete, hereby declare that this research report, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, represents my original work. I also declare that I have not submitted this report in any form for any degree purpose or examination to any other university, college or seminary.

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Date: 6 December 2018

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As supervisor, I, Dr Vincent Atterbury, agree to the submission of this research report.

Signature: ..... Date: .....

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## **ABSTRACT**

The quantitative research looks at reasons for church migration amongst respondents recruited from GodFirst City Church, Johannesburg. (GFCC), recording the push factors that caused respondents to leave their congregation of origin and identifying the pull factors that drew them to their destination congregation. The quantitative research also looks at respondents' understanding of the essence of the church. An attempt is then made to determine whether their reasons for church migration are related to their understanding of the essence of the church.

To add to a better understanding of the quantitative research question this report also draws on the integrated master course done by the author on the essence of the church as seen through the lens of Pauline theology, and on the historical nature of the church as seen through the views of the church fathers, until the Great Reformation of 1564.

The quantitative research findings reveal the predominant reasons for respondents to move from their "congregation of origin" to GFCC (pull factors), to be leadership, worship and preaching. The "push" factors that caused respondents to leave their "congregation of origin" are the same as the pull factors that drew them to GFCC. Strong agreement was found between how respondents understand the essence of the church today and how it was described in Pauline theology and by the historical church.

Recommendations based on these findings have been made to the leadership of GFCC to take into consideration for further growth and development of their community.

## **KEY WORDS**

Church migration

Push and pull factors

Essence of the Church

Pauline theology

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## **ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

GFCC – GodFirst City Church, Johannesburg

SATS – South African Theological Seminary

## PREFACE

I am a well-travelled church migrant, having moved from a Reformed to an Evangelical to a Pentecostal view over the last 28 years. My experience and interactions with people during that journey, as an ordinary member or in service and in ministry, have given me a broad understanding of what the church is in practice in various communities, from deepest rural to affluent urban. As my understanding of the essence of church evolved I was compelled time and time again to move to a congregation or denomination where I thought proper regard was given to the essence of the church as I came to see it, and where the congregation was trying to maintain its relevance to the current reality.

Every move was motivated by partial disappointment with my congregation of origin and the ever-declining hope that my receiving congregation would be better at understanding the essence of church and be stronger in its conviction that the church is relevant, even in a challenging post-Christian epoch. Over time, however, I came to doubt my periodic discontent, and wondered whether my personal views should not be judged against a steadier standard than prevailing circumstances. I also needed to find out whether there were others like me looking for a spiritual home, and if so, against which standards such a home would be judged. I could learn from these migrants, and maybe they could benefit from my studies.

It was therefore almost inevitable that I would use the major part of my integrated masters studies to explore how the church, over the first 1600 years of the Christian era, defined the essence of church. Subsequently, this research report would be used to quantify church migration and to explore reasons for moving. Amongst the push and pull factors that gave rise to migration I would look to see whether respondents' understanding of the essence of the church was as important to them as it is to me when I had to decide whether to stay or to go.

The primary purpose of this research study is thus to identify the theological understanding of the respondents from GFCC about what the essence of church is. No attempt was made to understand why they believed their definitions to be true, as that would have exceeded the scope of this study. The secondary purpose of this study is to look at the push and pull factors that influenced respondents to migrate from their congregation of origin to GFCC.

In analyzing the findings I would look for any possible link between “understanding of essence” and “reasons for moving”. The focus is therefore not on the absolute decline or growth of GFCC congregation numbers.

To establish a base line for evaluation of the understanding of the essence of the church by respondents, I looked at two theological modules: firstly, the Pauline understanding of the nature of “church” as revealed within his writings and secondly, the church’s historical perspective on the essence of church over the first 1600 years of the Christian era and what the heroes of faith believed about it, looking only at those who questioned the status quo of what “church” was during their time.

With the permission of the leadership of GFCC, a questionnaire was sent to the database of 950 GFCC members of whom 600 were regular attendees over the three services on a Sunday. The 81 people that responded to this questionnaire are therefore members of GFCC, and anonymity of personally identifiable data was guaranteed, especially as it was agreed that the findings would be shared with GFCC leadership, who provided input on which questions to include in the survey. The data was verified with a spot check during which 10% of respondents were contacted. Duplicated information was removed from the results.

# CHAPTER 1

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1. Background

In 2005 I returned from a five-year church planting and HIV/AIDS prevention ministry within rural Transkei. Moving from an informal congregation in a rural area to an institutional congregation in a metropolitan area was a major culture shock. From 2005 to 2014, when I started my master's studies, I moved from a small, local Baptist congregation (Grace Baptist, with fewer than 50 weekend attendees) to a large congregation (Liberty Church, with up to 2000 weekend attendees) to a mega congregation (Mosaïek, with more than 2000 weekend attendees). In this time, I heard many people promoting "church growth" strategies. In the few cases where numerical growth happened many voices in the echo chamber of the wider church community would repeat the "reasons for success", but I was not convinced. Why were so many congregations that followed these "recipes" still losing members, and even closing down?

As a student of the church and congregations and their nuances I have a desire to unravel the reasons for church growth, or the lack thereof, in South Africa. I wanted to explore whether a possible misunderstanding and misuse of the term "church" contributed to church growth in some instances and hindered it in other cases. In the major part of my integrated masters I focused on the understanding of the essence of "church" by non-theologically trained congregants, and whether they considered church, as defined by them, to be still relevant. It emerged that such lay people defined church in functional and institutional terms. These non-theologically trained minds had no idea of what a biblical understanding of church is, and even less of how it was understood throughout the ages. This came about through mentorship of members of the congregation at which this research was conducted.

If the essence or nature of the church is to be defined it needs to be done from a biblical perspective. I therefore explored the concept of church within the limitations of Pauline writings and I also investigated the historical view by the church of its essence over the preceding 1600 years. Paul's understanding of the church is especially relevant because he

was predominantly an apostle to the Gentiles, describing a version of the church that is possibly closer to our own experience of the church.

The study will not deal with the role, governance, mission or ordinances of the church, but solely with the essence of the church. The essence of the church, as discussed by Hans Kung (1986:4-7), is also called the nature of the church (Erickson 1998:1026-1049; Grudem 1994:853-872).

During literature studies in the first two years of my masters I found that most church growth authors talked about numerical growth and how to draw people into the fold, but when I read an unpublished paper in draft form in 2016 (published online in 2015 in article edited form) by Dr. I.M. Bredenkamp it impacted significantly on how I saw church migration and the research question (Bredenkamp 2014). When I started my studies in 2014 I could find no research that had been done or published in South Africa on church migration and how it affects church growth. This paper made me jump with excitement because I had discovered someone else who had the same quest as me. I subsequently discovered a paper on “church hopping” in a rural black community in Rustenburg (Ndimande 2007) but declined to use it as I adjudged it to have low relevance to church migration in the suburban multicultural community that I was investigating.

Much contemporary research has been done on church growth and church growth strategies. Multiple volumes have been written on the matter and it has become a sure-fire theme for “church bestsellers” that are widely read in the churches that I interact with. However, in deciding what literature I would consider for this study I decided that each paper, article or book had to deliver real answers or open new questions about the research objectives. Selected historical sources and modern writers all shared my quest to understand what is happening to the church. Many of the selected authors are not standard evangelical authors, but rather those that questioned the status quo, in the tradition of the heroes of the Reformation who asked what was wrong with the church. I read many sources, but I limited myself within this report to those who brought new insights and influenced my understanding significantly.

Voila Franks and George Barna deserve special mention as major influences on my thinking. The Barna Groups books and research platform with its up-to-date research was an immensely valuable source.

Two books that deeply challenged the traditional understanding of the essence of church are *Pagan Christianity* Viola:2012 and *Reimagining Church* Voila:2008. **Franks and Viola** share a critical approach that challenges out-dated mind-sets that assume a culture dominated by a Christian worldview, when we know that the world is moving towards a humanistic worldview. They stretch the limits, asking and researching the difficult question that most conventional authors avoid. These authors presented some ideas that I thought relevant to why the congregation I was part of was growing, whilst others were not. They showed me that what we traditionally viewed as truth about the church was just institutional dogma.

As a result of all this reading and my personal interest in the question I decided to investigate church migration at GodFirst City Church, the local congregation where I worshipped from 2015 till 2018. In debate with church leaders it became clear to me that what is proudly claimed as church growth may simply be existing believers migrating from one congregation to another. Church leaders assumed that new members were drawn to the successful congregations because of their better manifestation of the essence of the church. For me “church growth” implied an increase in numbers of the greater Christian community across denominations, a richer manifestation of the essence of church by congregants, and a deepening of their walk with God. This manifestation could draw new people to become believers in Christ Jesus and therefore the church would grow. Numeric growth in specific successful congregations may be hiding the problem of a decline in total numbers of the faithful at a macro level, and, based on my rather disappointing discoveries about the superficial understanding of new members about the essence of the church, I suspected that members were joining the church for reasons other than having been attracted to the theological integrity of the specific congregation. I also wondered how many new members were new adherents to the faith, a desirable phenomenon for a “seeker sensitive” congregation like GFCC, as opposed to existing believers who were simply migrating from one congregation to another.

## **1.2. Research Problem**

The research problem can be stated as: What influence, if any, did a theological understanding of the essence of the church have on the migration of respondents to GFCC? The proposition is that church growth is driven by church migration, which is driven by many factors, only one of which may be the theological understanding/matching of migrants about the destination church.

Sub research problems

1. What do congregants perceive the essence of church to be?
2. What “push” and “pull” factors play a role in people moving from other congregations to GFCC?

### **1.3. Objectives**

GFCC is a growing congregation. The objective is to measure whether new congregants were drawn to the congregation by theological factors (the extent to which they assumed GFCC embodied their understanding of the essence of church) or whether they were drawn to the congregation by non-theological factors.

### **1.4. The value of the study**

These research findings could guide leaders and members of declining congregations in stemming or even reversing the trend by managing push and pull factors, with special focus on whether a clearer manifestation of the essence of the church will be helpful in attracting new members to the congregation.

It could also guide the leaders and members of growing churches in a realistic assessment of their own theological stance and its role in attracting new members. It can also be used to assess the level of understanding of the essence of church by new congregants. Such data could influence the nature of church advertising, induction, training and disciple-making in the attempt to create a desirable consensus of faith in the congregation.

A descriptive survey will provide data regarding respondents’ understanding of the essence of the church. This survey can be modified for each congregation to get a better understanding



or overview of what people believe within their theological tradition. The value of customisation lies in congregants being able to provide their views without fear of judgment, and it allows for denominational quirks.

Within this study, I look at what previous generations of church fathers thought about what the essence of church should be. This would allow the congregation to critically compare their contemporary understanding with the battle-tested ideas of the historical church. If this comparison reveals shortcomings and deviations in the contemporary church they can be addressed, and as the functioning of congregations align themselves to this restored understanding, the appeal of congregations to seekers may be improved, leading to numeric growth.

## **1.5. Key definition and concepts**

### 1.5.1 Migration

Migration is the movement of members of a denomination or congregation to another denomination or congregation. This includes the permanent establishment of the member in another denomination or attending congregational activities at another denomination or congregation on a reasonably permanent basis (Bredenkamp 2014:8).

### 1.5.2 Church Growth

A definition by Thom Rainer of church growth as a qualitative and quantitative measure is preferred:

“Church growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting, multiplication, function and health of Christian churches as they related to the effective implementation of God’s commission to make disciples of all people” (1989:25)

Donald A. McGavran and Winfield also combine quantitative and qualitative measures when they describe church growth and emphasise the adding of new members to the greater Church rather than adding migrants to the local congregation:

“[...] where the numbers of the members are increasing, and new congregations are being born, and where men and women are introduced to Jesus Christ, commit their lives to him, and become responsibly members of his church” (1977:15-16).

From these definitions it is clear that church growth should be evaluated based on the addition of new congregations to the greater church and new believers to congregations, and not in terms of church migration where new members (existing believers) may have been acquired from another congregations for reasons that may even exclude any theological merit of the receiving congregation.

One should however analyze growing congregations to learn from them what may be attracting people to them, so that the decline of attendance at other congregations can be arrested and even reversed. Popularity also has its dangers and numerical growth may be due to a theological compromise that has to be evaluated against an objective measure such as the biblical and historical standards explored in this study.

### 1.5.3 Denominations

Sociologists define a “denomination” as "a hierarchical religious organisation in a society in which church and state remain separate; it is led by professionally trained clergy." (Ferrante 2014:302). Membership is voluntary and many members are born in the denomination. This definition of denomination includes world denominations such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism.

### 1.5.4 Christian denominations

“Christian denominations” are defined as those denominations that accept the authority of the Bible, confess the Triune God, believe in the creation, fall and redemption, and confess beliefs that are true to the Bible (Bredenkamp 2014:17).

### 1.5.5 Congregation

A “congregation” is defined as a group of people assembled for religious worship that abide in common religious rules and rites (Bredenkamp 2014:16).

### 1.5.6 Unchurched

The “unchurched” are defined as people that “have not attended a Christian church service, other than a special event such as a wedding or funeral, at any time during the past six months” (Barna & Kinnaman 2014:6).

### 1.5.7 De-churched

The “de-churched” are people that have a history of “church attendance patterns, going through a phase when they are involved, followed by a phase when they aren’t, and so forth” (Barna & Kinnaman 2014:7).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: DUAL FOCUS ON THE PAULINE UNDERSTANDING OF THE ESSENCE OF CHURCH, AND THE HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH FATHERS ON THE ESSENCE OF CHURCH

#### 2.1. Pauline understanding of the essence of “church”

The quest to understand the phenomenon of “church growth” and church decline led me to an investigation of a biblical understanding of these concepts. I focused my biblical exegesis on Acts 2:42-47 and focused on the understanding of the first initiated church. I then focused on the three concentric circles approach to text, namely; the church, the world and the Theology of Church that Paul invoked.

This exploration was guided by *Text, Church and the World, Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Watson 1994). Paul’s understanding of *ekklēsia* was reviewed and dissected within this module. Francis Watson’s approach to biblical exegesis is not what the evangelical mind-set would call exegesis, but his approach alerted me to the possibility that there may be many congregants who simply attend church on a Sunday but do not think theologically as a trained theological mind would. The Sunday attendee has a practical approach and not a critical thinking one, not asking the question ‘why?’ but rather ‘how do I apply it?’. Watson inspired me to not only look at what theological minds write but to also ask those within my congregation what they understand and believe.

A further aspect that was evaluated was the perspective of the historical heroes of the faith on the essence of church. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Allison 2011), *Church Dogmatics: Volume 4* (Barth 1958), *Renaissance and Reformation* (Estep 1986) and *Christian Community in History: Volume 1: Historical Ecclesiology* (Haight 2004) were major influences on this aspect. Reading these volumes throughout my studies guided me to an understanding of what those who came before us understood by the concept of the church and what it should look like. Most of these authors wanted to restructure the church practice to be relevant to the people in their new community. They were driven to change their communities to conform to the image of what they thought church should be. Most theological changes throughout history came about when people started to question the relevance of

accepted beliefs to the people within their communities. From the Reformation to the charismatic movement, those who made the biggest impact on the church were those who challenged the theology of the day.

Next in my journey was to look at a systematic understanding of the essence of the church, and *The Church according to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ* (Thompson 2014) helped me to develop an understanding of the Pauline view on the essence of the church. Paul was an apostle primarily to the Gentiles. As a Gentile I could relate to Paul's view on the essence of the church. *Systematic Theology, A Pentecostal Perspective* (Horton 1994) and *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Wayne 1994) by two of my lifelong mentors on systematics affected my understanding of many theological aspects over my twenty-seven years of service to God. These systematic theologians helped me to define the essence of church, or as they called it: "the nature of church". The questionnaire that was issued to the GFCC community was based on their key ideas.

In establishing a systematic approach to the essence of the church, key ideas are connected to one another to form a coherent model, delivering an integrated understanding of the issue. These key ideas are drawn from the historical understanding of what the heroes of the faith deemed the church to be, the biblical understanding from Paul's view and the images of church that are described within the biblical text.

The unpublished work of Bredenkamp (2014) was another influence on the questionnaire that was issued to the GFCC community. His work helped me to better understand church growth. He inspired me to ask what the reasons are for the migration of members from one congregation to another. His paper revealed some of the factors that caused people to migrate between congregations and I wanted to know if these reasons were also true for GFCC migrants. The Bredenkamp paper is limited to a specific denomination and their leadership's influence on this migration. I therefore approached my study at GFCC in the same way, evaluating the respondents' theological understanding of the essence of church and identifying what push and pull factors caused them to move from one congregation to another.

## **2.2. Pauline theological perspective of the essence of church**

The church is one of the only aspects of the theological realm that can be observed. It is not something that needs only be dealt with by faith, because a person can actually experience and interact with it. Their observations create within individuals a sense of God's character and purpose, and they can see what people who share their faith are doing. The church is a living witness to Christ; visual evidence that He exists. The church embodies Christ and answers some of the many questions people have about God. It is a theatre in which the joys and sorrows of people from all walks of life play out. Everyone can be a member. Paul specifically calls on the church to be inclusive of all, with no regard to people's origin or station in life, just as Jesus had no regard for such arbitrary matters.

Theological or clerical trained minds within the Christian faith and have created great confusion with the indiscriminate use of the term "church" by those outside the Christian faith. Many have understood it to be an institution or architectural structure or, most of the time, as a grouping of people. The term church can be defined within a geographical or even denominational realm. In the Christian world, the term church has become a cliché, a word without true meaning; a term that does not convey its essence any more.

As seen, Macquarries (1996:346) confirms that the discussion of the term church is in relation to other entities seen in secular society. The focus is on the change in these societies and how we want to apply the message of Christ to it. As mentioned, people are becoming post-Christian in their world-view and therefore the reality of God has changed in people's minds. The church's focus has shifted to its practical mission, and what God can do, away from the pursuit of emulating His essence.

### **2.2.1 Community**

Thompson explains that "Paul offers the first reflection on the nature of church" (2014: Location 553). But what and who is this church that Paul addresses in his letters? Is it only the specific congregation or did he have a more universal church in mind as he guided and advised? We will look at several metaphors and imagery that Paul uses throughout his letters

to describe “church” to derive some idea of what he considered to be the essence of the church.

Other scriptural writers may have mentioned the concept of church before him, but Paul was the first to offer a sustained reflection on the identity or nature of the essence of the church (Ascough 1998:50-70). Paul tasks himself to develop this concept and has alternative versions in mind of what this Christian grouping might be. They had to be in this world but not of it, establishing themselves as a different community.

He begins constructing a theology by using the word *ekklēsia*. The word *ekklēsia* is thus established as the technical and theological term for church. The word *kuriakonis* was, however, the original word translated into English as ‘church’. It means ‘belonging to the Lord’, and Paul uses *kuriakonis* to reflect on the Lord’s Supper as a function of the church, rather than describing the nature or essence of the church. Alan Knox (2007), in his article ‘*Ekklēsia* and the *kuriakon*’, explains that it does not matter what word we use for church, but how we use it. We must therefore explain what is meant by the term *ekklēsia*. This word will be looked at further, as most English translations translate it as ‘church’.

Phan (2000:13) comments that the word was used in early Greek literature to identify a free man that could vote. Chudasama (2013:30-36) says it was an assembly that was characterised as a political phenomenon; the assembled people had full citizenship, with the right to make political and judicial decisions, but for the Greek and Jewish people of the first century there was no religious meaning implied by the term.

Ditzel (2011) gives a clear and concise rendering of the Greek word:

“*Ekklēsia* is a compound word. The first part is *ek*. It is a preposition which means "out of," "out from," or "from." The second part of *ekklēsia*—*klēsia*—is a derivative of the Greek word *kaleō*. *Kaleō* is a verb that means "to call". So, *ekklēsia* is a compound of a preposition and a verb, but *ekklēsia* itself is a noun. In its most basic form, *ekklēsia* means "the called out from" or "those called out from." In other words, it refers to people called out from or out of something”

They were the “called out from”, an assembly of “converts from different social classes and ethnic groups, and this assembly of people created a community that had no parallel in the ancient world” (Thompson 2014: Locations 618-619). Metzger (1993:121) affirms that the term implies being ‘called out, to assemble for political purposes’ and therefore denotes a group of citizens. This indicates that the group of believers in Jesus became a new community. In classical Greek, *ekklēsia* meant “an assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly” (Scott 1935:206), or “an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating” (Thayer 1996:196).

#### 2.2.1.1. Pauline perspective on *ekklēsia*

Paul uses the root word *ekklēsia* to address specific church communities in Romans 16:1 as ‘the church (*ekklēsia*) of Cenchreae’; in Galatians 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 16:1 where he mentions the churches (*ekklēsiai*) of Galatia; the churches (*ekklēsiai*) of Judea in Galatians 1:22 (NIV); the churches (*ekklēsiai*) of Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8:1; and in 1 Corinthians 16:19 to the (*ekklēsias*) of Asia. In his writing he also refers generally to

all the churches – 2 Corinthians 8:18; 11:28  
all the churches of the Gentiles – Romans 16:4  
all the churches in Christ – Romans 16:16  
all the churches of the saints – 1 Corinthians 14:33  
churches of God – 2 Thessalonians 1:4

These communities of ‘called out ones’ give us a larger picture of what *ekklēsia* is, including Paul’s reference to the groupings in individual houses in Romans 16:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 16:19, where he deals with Priscilla and Aquila’s house. These houses formed part of this grouping in their city. Paul creates this assembly of ‘called out ones’ as basis for community where he ascribes particular characteristics to this community and calls them the church.

Thessalonians gives us an understanding of Pauline synthesis on community. His first writing, 1 Thessalonians, is based on the first church he planted (Acts 17:4) and therefore gives us a starting point to understand his synthesis of *ekklēsia* (called out ones that assemble as community). Paul uses the word *ekklēsia*: twice in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:14, and then also twice in 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 4. The community we see in Thessalonians originated in the synagogue, but it was comprised predominantly of devoted Greek and leading women



(Acts 17:12). “They understood their identity as an *ekklēsia*, separated from the synagogue and other communities” (Thompson 2014: Locations 693-695).

1 Thessalonians 1:1 gives them their community identity, different from the political assembly or other associations. Ascough (1998:324-325) remarks that this community “was formed as a professional association of ‘hand workers’”— people that work with their hands - according to 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:12. He also assumed this association had no women or children. This is an assumption or an interpretation, but Scripture showed that in other books where Paul wrote about these communities there were entire families (1 Corinthians 1:16) even slaves (1 Corinthians 7:17-24).

## 2.2.2 Pauline metaphors for church

### 2.2.2.1 A Family

The Bible never gives a specific, neat little definition of *ekklēsia*. Instead, it allows us to develop an understanding of it through the presentation of a number of metaphors (Viola 2012: Locations 1188). One of the metaphors used by Paul presents *ekklēsia* as family. In 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 and Galatians 3:28, he shows that the community is comprised of entire families. Paul also refers to slaves, people who typically belonged to families as a family asset, evidence of his family-oriented mind-set.

### 2.2.2.2. Brothers

Paul uses the word *adelphoi*, translated as ‘brother’, thirteen times in 1 Thessalonians, as well as 130 times in his other letters. Paul therefore establishes the idea of a fellow believer as someone close to him, a member of a family. In 2 Corinthians, he uses the word *adelphos* to refer to individuals (1:1; 2:13; 8:18, 22), and urges them to see each other as brothers.

In Romans 14:10, Paul furthermore rebukes a brother not to stand in judgment of another brother, continuing the image of brotherhood in the text. In his commentary on the text, Ritenbaugh (2016) comments that Paul “confronts a problem, namely judging and scorn that was dividing the church”. Sibling rivalry so common in our modern families is not too different from Paul’s description of this family dynamic in the ancient world.

### 2.2.2.3. Boundaries

The admonishment to not rely on secular systems of justice in dealing with conflicts between brothers (1 Corinthians 6:1-6) provides another building block for the theological metaphor of family. There are boundaries between the way we are supposed to behave, and the way the world behaves.

Paul also confirms this boundary between the family and the world in Galatians 5:13-21, saying that we are not to partake of the flesh but rather serve each other in love. Within these boundaries Paul encourages unity amongst members of the community.

In 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 Paul makes a clear division between the marriage of believers and non-believers. Paul uses boundaries to paint a picture of the ideal family, which has to be part of the Bride of Christ and not conform to the ways of the world.

### 2.2.2.4. Children of Abraham

Paul uses Galatians 3:1-9 to develop the concept in the minds of the Galatian community that those in Christ are the children of Abraham. Thompson (2014: Locations 1202-1203) comments, “those who believe in Jesus Christ are the real children of Abraham and God’s heirs”, whereas Grabbe (2014) disputes this by explaining that Paul says that the “true children of Abraham are the ones who have the same faith that Abraham had”.

Williams (1996:49-58) describes how the Old and New Testament combine their essence to create children of Abraham and Israel; not the nation, but the covenant. “Israel was God’s people not because they decided to call themselves so [...], it was wholly a matter of God’s own doing.” In essence they are a chosen people, and for him the church is composed of both

Jew and Gentile. In Romans 9:24-26 Paul confirms this by saying they all are “sons of the living God”. In Romans 11:1, 5, 25, 26, he brings all the aspects of Israel and its issues to the church and moulds them as the people of God. Therefore, the church is comprised of children of Abraham, for they are redeemed, purified and changed people. As God did in the Old, He does now in the New.

#### 2.2.2.5. Oneness

In 1 Thessalonians, we see that Paul creates the idea of oneness by using terms that show a commitment or unity within the community and uses the terms ‘love one another’ (1 Thessalonians 4:9, NIV); ‘encourage one another’ (5:11, NIV); ‘build up each other’ (5:11, NIV); and ‘seek the good of one another’ (5:15, NIV), to create an idea of family – “a true family takes care of its own” (Viola 2012:Locations 1233). “The term indicates the community’s primary focus on the care for siblings in the new family rather than the care for others outside the group” (Thompson 2014: Locations 1128-1129).

#### 2.2.2.6. God’s household

Paul uses familiar terms like “family of believers” (Galatians 6:10, NIV), “firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29, NIV), and “members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19). He echoes this in Galatians 3:26 with the statement that we are sons of God through faith in Jesus. Therefore, Paul calls us heirs due to the fact that we are children (Romans 8:17-19). In Galatians 6:2, Paul says that the law of Christ is fulfilled if they carry each other’s burdens.

#### 2.2.2.7. As the Body of Christ

Paul invokes a powerful metaphor for the church: ‘The body of Christ’ (Williams 1996:65; Grudem 1994:853-855). In his article, Clowney (2015:25) remarks that within the time of Paul, the Hellenistic world spoke of any organisation as a body of people, a legal faction. Hultgren (2011:692) comments that the term ‘body’ has been used to refer to a community in Greco-Roman literature prior to Paul’s time. Paul wants the reading community to see how unique each one is within the community of believers. Clowney (2015:25) defines this

community of people as the body of Christ; the body of one person. Paul to the Romans declares, “one Body in Christ” (12:5 NIV).

#### 2.2.2.7.1. The Head

In Ephesians 1:21-22 and Colossians 2:19, Paul introduces Christ as the head of this body “and the church is like the rest of the body, as distinguished from the head” (Grudem 1994:857). Erickson (1998:439) says that “the church is Christ’s body, by which He fulfils His earthly mission”. For him we relate to each other (Romans 12:5) and he uses the text to play on the physiological function of a normal human body and its relation to itself.

Ridderbos (1975:378) said about the "head" (*κεφαλή*) in Paul's writings (e.g., Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19), that it was not intended physiologically but had a political meaning.

Williams (1996:66-67) said that without Christ there could be no church, and therefore no life. He also notes that we must avoid the idea that the church is the bodily extension of Christ, because the headship of Christ is over everything, even the church, and therefore we must avoid the notion that “Christ cannot exist without the church ... the church does not exist organically to Christ”. Christ is the authority of this body, the one that directs. Christ is the head of the *ekklesia* (Ephesians 5:23). Just as the Roman Emperor was the political head of the Empire, Christ is the head of the church. The hearer of this could place Paul’s explanation of Christ as the head of the body into an understandable reality of the time.

#### 2.2.2.7.2. One into all membership

In Romans 12:5 Paul brings the aspect of “we are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (ESV). Here there is a focus on equality and everyone being part of each other. Paul emphasises it in Ephesians 4:12-15 that they are being built up together into Christ. The body has many members (1 Corinthians 12:14) and all belong to one body; we suffer together. Williams (1996:69) says “there is no opinion where to join or not to join”; we are part of each other through Christ no matter where you are situated. It is not in function but in essence that we are related to each other.

#### 2.2.2.8. As the Bride of Christ

In the writing of Paul to the Ephesians he brings the picture of a bride into the minds of the first century community (Ephesians 5:25) when he demonstrates the sacrifice that Christ made, even to death. He gave Himself up for her. This imagery spoke to those in Ephesus, for some of them could have been Jewish converts that understood the Old Testament reference Paul is alluding to. Williams (1996:72) references Isaiah 54:5 and Jeremiah 2:2; 3:20 and Hosea 2:16, 19-20 as the base texts for this image of the church as Bride of Christ.

Erickson (1998:453) references 1 Corinthians 11:2 within this section under 'church as Bride of Christ', but says that the text does not relate to the church, but to the relationship between man and woman, and he applies his own presuppositions towards this text. He adds value to the point by reflecting on the attitude of a husband towards a wife and therefore creates a contemporary image of the bridal picture. The image of a bride is showing the submission of the church to Christ and shows the love Christ has for the church. His imagery is all about love between the bride and the groom (Williams 1996:75). Both Erickson and Williams agree that this imagery is a pattern for human relationship. Grudem (1994:748) reflects on 2 Corinthians 11:2 as Paul looking forward to the return of Christ and the church presented as the bride.

### 2.2.3. Conclusion

Through the filter of Paul's writings to the different people that he interacted with we see a clearer picture of what the essence of church should be. It is an *ekklesia*, a community of called out ones who stood for Christ within their daily circumstances. It is a local and global *ekklesia*, gathering wherever there were co-believers who were equal to each other. They were a community that was called to be different from the ones around them and they identified with each other to become that.

They were a community that appreciated oral storytelling and with relevant examples that drew on their real experiences. Paul created images of the church as a set-apart family with boundaries, as the body of Christ directed by Him as head, and as the Bride of Christ. After all my reading I have come to realise that what Christ established, visible and invisible, can be described in many legitimate ways, as long as the headship of Christ over a community with the common purpose of love is declared in such a metaphor or image.



## **2.3. The essence of the church in church history**

The history of the church is filled with people who undertook a quest to understand the phenomenon that is called church. These quests explored both the visible and invisible church. These heroes of the faith shared their quests to help us understand the essence of church in their time and setting.

### **2.3.1. Irenaeus as representative of the Greek Church fathers (AD 130-202)**

In his writings, Lightner 1995, shows that the universal church concept was expressed by Irenaeus in the early second century (AD 130-202), and was one of the first church fathers that took the aspect of the invisible God and visible Christ to the realm of the church. He was the main mind in the orthodox theology and stood strong against any form of heresy. In his writing "Against Heresies", Lightner says that there was an "emphasis on the need for the organic unity of the visible universal church" (1995:219) as Irenaeus expounded: "We are in a position to reckon up those who were by the Apostles instituted bishops in the churches, and (demonstrate) the subsection of these men to our own time" (St. Irenaeus 2016). Irenaeus established a system of the visible church that recognised headship over the church, and in later years, became the dominant aspect in the institutional church. He stood for one visible church which is the essence of the Christian faith (Barnes 2016:1). The church was a visible expression for Irenaeus.

### **2.3.2. Origen as representative of the Greek Church fathers (AD 184-253)**

In the time of Origen, there was a major focus on the teachings of Plato, and it was a major influence on the mind of the father at the time. Origen "distinguished between a church on earth and 'the church on high'" (McKim 1989:50). McKim (1989) also states that for Origen, the observable church is based on ministry that flows from the apostolic succession, and the church is the 'congregation of Christian people', the assembly of believers. It is a visible reflection that people can see, a visible church, or an observed assembly of the body of Christ. Origen also believed that the church existed before creation and therefore it was invisible in its creation.

According to Torrance (2000:35), Origen developed a dualistic understanding of visible and corporeal things on earth, and things invisible and incorporeal in heaven. In another one of his writings, Torrance (2000:275-276) accuses Origen of producing two churches, a visible earthly church and an invisible heavenly church. Origen sees the world as physical and spiritual and therefore it cannot be dualistic, for they operate coherently in Origen's theology (Kei Ho Man 2008:48). Origen therefore opened a debate for the church fathers to come that perhaps the church is visible and invisible, but he never stated it or alluded to it or had ever been acknowledged for it. For Origen it was all about a visible or observed church, a community of the people on earth and in heaven, but in his writings, as Vahan Hovhannessian (2009:28) explains, Origen's ecclesiology consisted of a spiritual and invisible church. Patrick Barnes (n.d.:19-25), an orthodox writer, commented on Origen's dichotomy between the heavenly and earthly church as possibly being a precursor for the Reformation writers to focus on the visible and invisible church. Origen however, still believed in only one earthly church, which consisted of the sacramental and hierarchical institution.

### 2.3.3. Cyprian as representative of the Latin Church Fathers (AD 210-258)

Cyprian is used within this paper because as a church father, he saw the church of Carthage in disarray and started to question the status of the church. He wrote a book on the Unity of Church around 251 due to the Novatianists and his opposition towards them, for he believed in one episcopate, and they believed in their own episcopate. MscKim (1989) says that this allowed for Cyprian's basic principle, "no bishop, and no church". Cyprian was also accredited to the statement that "there is no salvation outside the church" (Cyprian of Carthage Epistle 72 2016:n.p). The church is therefore dependant on the purity of members and united through its bishops. Cyprian brought the aspect of structure, hierarchy and institutional aspects into the church, and made the church totally visible (Cyprian 200 to 258 A.D 2016:n.p). He can be acknowledged as the father of the institutionalised church that progressed through church history. For him there was no distinction between visible and invisible church in this world as per Clarke 1983:350. This developed an essence of the church as an institutional system with power and authority granted to the clergy.

### 2.3.4. Augustine as representative of the Latin Church fathers (AD 345-430)



Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo, and as most church fathers, he looked at other beliefs to identify heresy, but the deceit and immorality in the church led him to question what the church is. This enabled him to see that there was in fact fault in the visible church amongst its members, whereas the church of the time believed that it was holy. McGrath (2001:479) says that for Augustine, “the church is not meant to be a society of saints, but a “mixed body””.

For Augustine, there had to be something else, something only God can see. This was for him the “true people of God”, and they were the invisible church. These “true people” can exist both in the visible and the spiritual church (Gamman 1989: Locations 532-533). The holiness of these “true people of God” is not of themselves, but of Christ (McGrath 2001:480). The church does not make people holy, rather Christ makes the Church holy. They are the unknown and invisible grouping within the visible church (Gamman 1989: Locations 532-540). Augustine was the father of the theology of the invisible church for “the invisible union of love” (Kelly 1997:145; McKim 1988:58).

#### 2.3.5. John Wycliffe (AD 1328-1384)

Wycliffe, in 1378, completed his *De Ecclesia* (On the Church). In this work, he brought the differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the true church into the view of history. In this writing, Wycliffe claimed that the visible church was the institutional church with all the saints and sinners. According to him only God knew the invisible church and, as Augustine believed, they were predestined to be saved. Buck (2014:79) confirms this by saying that for Wycliffe, the true church is a “congregation of the predestinate” as he expounds within the “*De Ecclesia*” tract.

Wycliffe (Farr W 1974:1110-1136) also saw that the visible church was not necessarily built on the pope and the clerical hierarchy anymore, for only God knew the true church. This was the result of the Great Schism that broke the church into two with separate popes and two sets of understanding, which in turn made it difficult for Christians to decide which one of the antagonistic bodies was correct. Additionally, he saw the universal church just as Augustine did, for there was the triumphant church, saints in heaven, the church militant, predestined ones, the sleeping church, and those in purgatory (Estep 1986:65). For him, *ecclesia* was

always a large 'convocation' of people being called together for a formal gathering and not a small congregation or simple gathering (Farr 1974:20-21).

Wycliffe was adamant that a believer's salvation is not dependant on the visible institutional church that Cyprian believed in (Buck 2014:79; Workman 2001:12), but it was God's predestination of believers that made them part of the visible and invisible church.

### 2.3.6. The Reformation: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

In his book, Bradbury (2013:30-37) says that Luther's theological position leaned more towards that of a champion of the invisible church due to a statement in his lectures on Psalms, where he said of the church that "her entire structure is inward in the presence of God ... Christ's mystical body, that is, hidden body" For him, there was a spiritual, internal Christendom, and a physical, external Christendom (Avis 2008:110; Spencer 2007:119). Additionally, Luther saw it as an assembly of those that believed in Christ on earth, an assembly of the heart that is not made by unity of physical location with the Roman Church (Estes 2005:15-18).

For Luther, the visible church was not based on the authority of the "papal Antichrist" (Buck 2014:111). To him The Roman Catholic Church was the false church that had turned man away from God. The true or hidden church will only appear when the present church passes away in the present world. This world holds the church in its visible form due to the sacraments and its rituals. Luther wanted the church reformed due to his belief in the invisible and visible church, spurred on by the fact that there is salvation outside the church, justification by grace through faith, and not by the Roman Catholic Church. The visible church was only a reflection of the inward status of man; therefore, the true church is invisible.

### 2.3.7. The Reformation: John Calvin (1509-1564)

Calvin wanted to reform the church through his theology of predestination, where some are elected for salvation, and some are not, to counter the Catholic view on good works and their assumed contribution towards salvation. This flowed through into his ecclesiological view, for God used the preaching of the word within the visible church to bring the elect to salvation (Selderhuis H J 2009:430-480).

He believed that the church could exist without any visible appearance (Bradbury 2013:20-60). He saw the true church as invisible, but McGrath (2001:483) says that he brought a distinction between the visible and invisible church. Calvin saw the church as a community of Christians, the visible grouping and the invisible entity, the company of the elect visible only to God. Therefore, even Abraham and the Jewish people belong to the church (Selderhuis 2009:325).

The true church will only be reflected at the end of time, and for now, all believers must be committed to the visible church, for Christ is the head of the church, visible or invisible. Calvin quoted Cyprian, who made the church visible; “You cannot have God as the father unless you have the church as your mother [...]. Outside the church there is no hope of remission of sins nor salvation” (McGrath 2001:484). He therefore made an argument that attendance of the visible church was a necessity, but only God knew the truly elect.

The visible church is only known by the presence of its marks, the proclamation of the Word and the sacraments, and it is not possible to state who the true church is. But for Calvin, the visible church was essential, for it is the “mother of all believers” (Bradbury 2013:38). He held the two poles in tension with each other.

#### 2.3.8. Conclusion

Each of these heroic figures in church history has focused on an aspect of the essence of the church. They have looked at the church in visible and invisible form and thus have given form to it throughout history. Even today’s systematic theologians like Grudem (1994:853-855) will say that the church is invisible, yet visible.

From my understanding of the concept I tend to agree with Grudem that the church is invisible, yet visible. As Erickson (1998:1029) states, the church is not a “fix[ed] form, but a project, a continuing task”. It is a dynamic organism that modern theologians tend to neglect due to its invisible essence. The visible church was always spoken about in history, and rules and structure were created to make it accessible to people. But the invisible church, the essence of what these few years of research have shown, is still questioned.



## CHAPTER 3

### FINDINGS

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of the quantitative research done for this study.

The four tasks of Osmer's model were used as a guide for my studies (Smith 2010:99,100):

The descriptive-empirical task asks, 'What is going on?'

The interpretive task asks, 'Why is it going on?'

The normative task asks, 'What ought to be going on?'

The pragmatic task asks, 'How might we respond?'

As Osmer's model requires a narrative pull-through between the tasks, a difficult task in a quantitative research tool, the tasks were explored in a discipleship group setting during 2017 and 2018. The quantitative research design was influenced by insights gained during these discipleship group discussions with GFCC members whom I coached and taught in a disciple-making relationship. These members were given access to the Biblical Theology section of my academic master's work. Their interaction with relevant parts of Scripture informed my findings about what a layperson's views might be on issues surrounding the research question.

The GFCC community's identity was based on a turning away from their idols (1 Thessalonians 1:9), the belief that Jesus died and rose again (4:14) and that His death was for them (5:10). The discipleship group interpreted these passages as relevant to the corporate body of the church that is at the centre of their idea of community, and not with an individualistic perspective. Their sense of identity was based on 1 Thessalonians 1.1. Instead of seeing their membership of the church as an individual choice, these members described their membership as a common goal, deed or conviction.

The disciple group commented that their identity as believers made them distinct from other communities in the city, in contrast to those who do not know God (1 Thessalonians 4:5). Being a believing community gave them the same sense of identity as observed amongst the church of the Thessalonians.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul describes a community with a particular identity and characteristics that made them different from the larger community and social groupings within which they existed. They are identified as believers in a risen Christ who undergo things together and strengthen each other. Viola (2012: Locations 397) says “the first-century churches were locatable, identifiable, visible communities that met regularly in a particular locale”. The discipleship group agreed with these descriptions as goals to strive towards in shaping their community. Input from members of the discipleship group was used to guide the content and format of the online questionnaire that was subsequently sent to the broader church congregation.

The object of the resulting online questionnaire was to get insight into the respondents’ understanding of what the essence of church is, as measured against the ideal image of such essence as reflected in Pauline theology and church history. The online questionnaire was built in a way that would allow both the researcher and the church leadership to use the data to meet their specific needs. The three main sections covered in the questionnaire are: a) personal information, b) the respondent’s history within the church, including pull and push factors, and c) their beliefs of what “church” is. Each question was set in a manner to determine the respondents’ theological stance on aspects covered in the research. I investigated some specific beliefs that I thought would cast light on the discussion and analysis part of this report.

An e-mail invitation to participate in the research was sent to the 950 nominal members on the church membership database with the help of the GFCC church office. The population is estimated to be 600, being the average number of active members who regularly attended any one of the three available church services on a Sunday. In line with ethical research guidelines respondents were guaranteed anonymity up front, especially as the findings would be shared with the church leadership and one would not have wanted a “chilling effect” on the

responses. Respondents entered their data on a cloud service website from which the main database of results was drawn down.

84 responses were received, of which three were duplicates, leaving 81 responses that were processed. Telephonic check back was done on the data via telephone with 10% of the sample. The final data was exported to an Excel spreadsheet. Data analysis was done with the help of Excel pivot tables that allowed for easy comparison and charting of relevant data.

The 81 responses to the questionnaire form a sample of about 8.2% when measured against the nominal membership of 950 on the congregation's database but constitute a sample of about 13% if measured against the average of active 600 attendees of Sunday services. These 81 responses therefore serve as a representative sample of GFCC and may represent the congregation's view.

### **3.2. Research tool**

The quantitative work was done in November 2016 and April 2017 amongst respondents recruited from the GFCC community who were asked to complete an online questionnaire. 950 invitations to complete the questionnaires were distributed to the congregation of whom 600 members attend services regularly across the 3 services on a Sunday. 84 responses with three removed duplicates were received. The resultant data will be evaluated below, and a conclusion formulated.

### **3.3. Quantitative findings at GFCC**

#### **3.3.1. History**

GodFirst launched on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Since that first Sunday meeting in Bryanston in 2005, the initial group of twenty missionaries has grown into the thousands. GodFirst grew from one congregation to nine sites with many meetings. GFCC was planted as a site of GodFirst at the start of 2010. In 2014, the nine sites transitioned into five autonomous churches that still worked together as part of the Advance movement of churches around Johannesburg, South Africa, Africa and the rest of the world. In 2015, the GFCC congregation was established as an autonomous congregation with the vision to help people get and keep Jesus first in their lives.

The GFCC leadership was prepared to allow access to their members on condition that they could vet the questionnaire, and include questions that were important to them, but were of lesser importance to the study. These conditions were accepted to make the research possible in the allowed time.

After the first wave of responses was received the need to repeat the invitation in order to garner a larger sample became clear. A deeper investigation of which verses respondents felt best exemplified their beliefs was also considered, but as participation by respondents in the research project itself had led to them questioning the leadership about what they considered to be shortcomings in the church, the leadership prevented me from pursuing any follow-up activities. At a meeting with the leadership in late 2017 they asked me to make do with whatever data I had been able to collect up to that point.

### 3.3.2. Respondents' understanding of the essence of church

It was surprising to the researcher to find high levels of agreement on what constituted the essence of church when comparing the Pauline/historical view on the one hand, and the views of the respondents as reflected in the research on the other hand. High levels of agreement were found on aspects such as The Body of Christ (95%), A Community (90%), Family (83%) and Bride of Christ (83%).

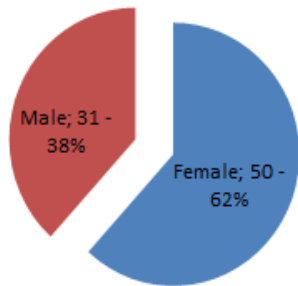
The researcher was not the only one who was surprised by the findings. From discussions with the GFCC leadership about the findings they were astonished to discover the need for respondents to explore the more Pentecostal/Charismatic aspects of their walk with God, such as discovering their spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing and the miraculous. The leadership, who come from a background of evangelical theological training in the Baptist tradition, thought that their congregation would lean more towards a Reformed/Evangelical orientation. To their credit they responded to the revealed needs of their congregation by arranging a spiritual gifts course and a weekend retreat.



### 3.4. Respondents' personal information

#### Gender representation

Figure1: GF.C.C Gender representation



62% (50) of respondents are female and 38% (31) are male.

#### Relationship status

Figure 2.1 and 2.2 show respondents' relationship status.

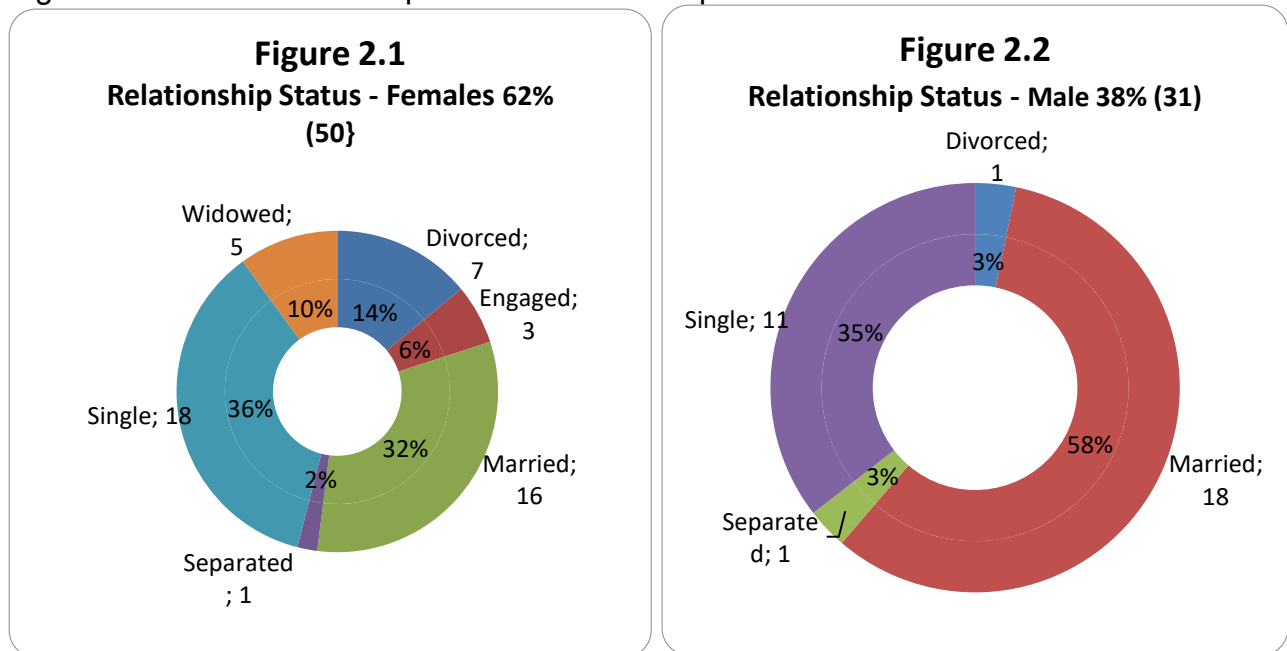


Figure 2.3

Divorced	Engaged	Married	Separated	Single	Widowed
8	3	34	2	29	5
10%	4%	42%	2%	36%	6%

42% (34) of the respondents are married, 10% (8) are divorced and 36% (29) are single.

## Generational makeup (I was born between ... and ...)

**Figure 3: GF.C.C Generational makeup**

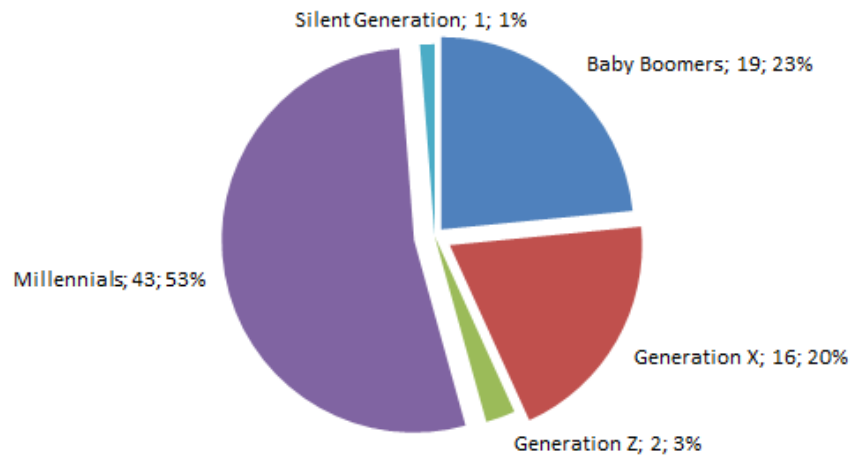


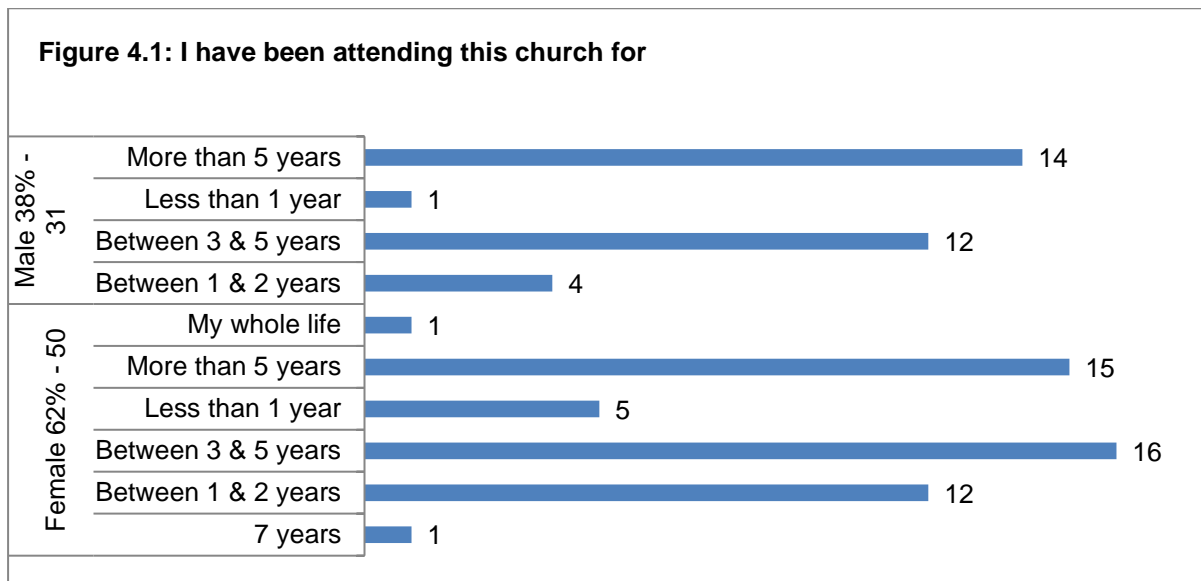
Figure 3.1, we can see that the majority of respondents, 53% (43) are Millennials, 23% (19) Baby Boomers and 20% (16) is made up of Generation X. 75% of respondents were therefore born after 1964, a sample that indicates a relatively young congregation.

Figure 3.2: Generational table

1923 - 1944	Silent Generation
1945 - 1964	Baby Boomers
1965 - 1980	Generation X
1981-1995	Millennials
1996-2009	Generation Z

### 3.5. History of church attendance

I have been attending this church for ...



**Figure 4.2 Duration of attendance – all respondents**

Year	Total	%
7 years	1	1%
Between 1 & 2 years	16	20%
Between 3 & 5 years	28	35%
Less than 1 year	6	7%
More than 5 years	29	36%
My whole life	1	1%

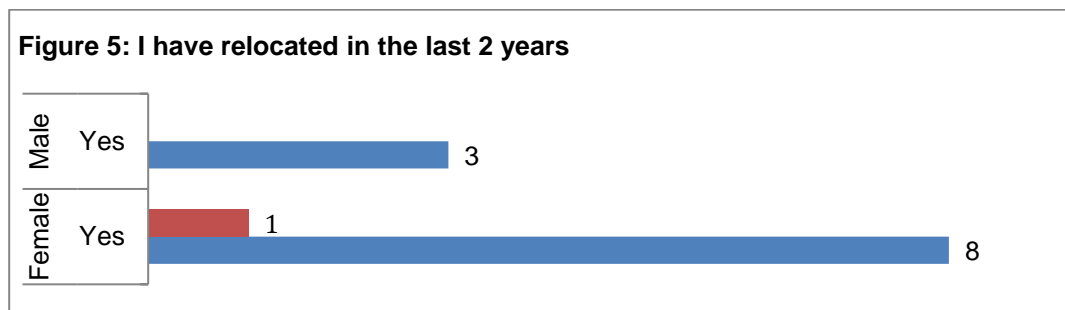
Autonomous churches	22	27%
Multisite church	28	35%
Started	30	38%

Figure 4.2 shows that 27% (22) of respondents have been attending the church “between 1 & 2 years” and “less than 1 year”. These people are part of the autonomous congregation grouping (2015 to 2017) as per figure 4.3, showing the move within the GodFirst movement that happened in 2015. 35% (28) of respondents represent the “between 3 & 5 year” group that comes from the multisite church within the GodFirst movement to autonomous congregations. Within the GodFirst movement, 38% (30) come from the start of the church in 2005. The church was a plant from 4 different congregations that wanted to create an authentic place of worship.

Fig 4.3 Historical information of church founding

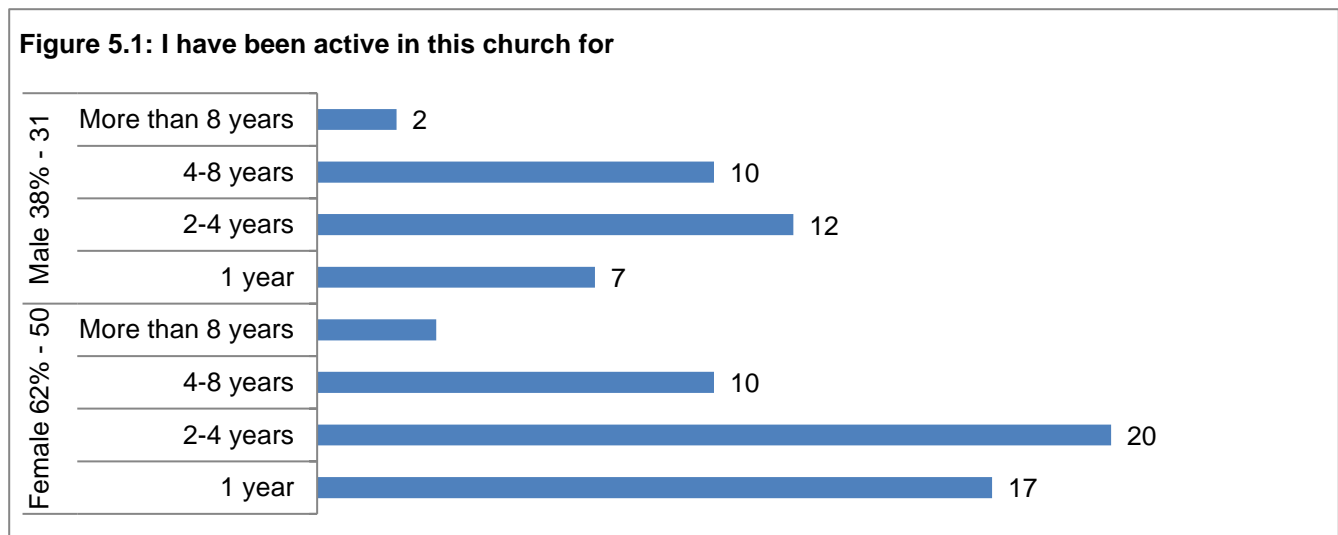
2005	1st year	13th year	Started
2006	2nd year	12th year	
2007	3rd year	11th year	
2008	4th year	10th year	
2009	5th year	9th year	
2010	6th year	8th year	multisite church
2011	7th year	7th year	
2012	8th year	6th year	
2013	9th year	5th year	
2014	10th year	4th year	
2015	11th year	3rd year	autonomous churches
2016	12th year	2nd year	
2017	13th year	1st year	

**I have moved from another church to GFCC within the last 2 years**



15% (12) of the 81 respondents said that they moved from another church to GFCC within the two year period. Of those people that indicated that they have moved from another church within the last two years, 6% (5) have indicated it was due to relocation or work.

**I have been active in this church for ...**

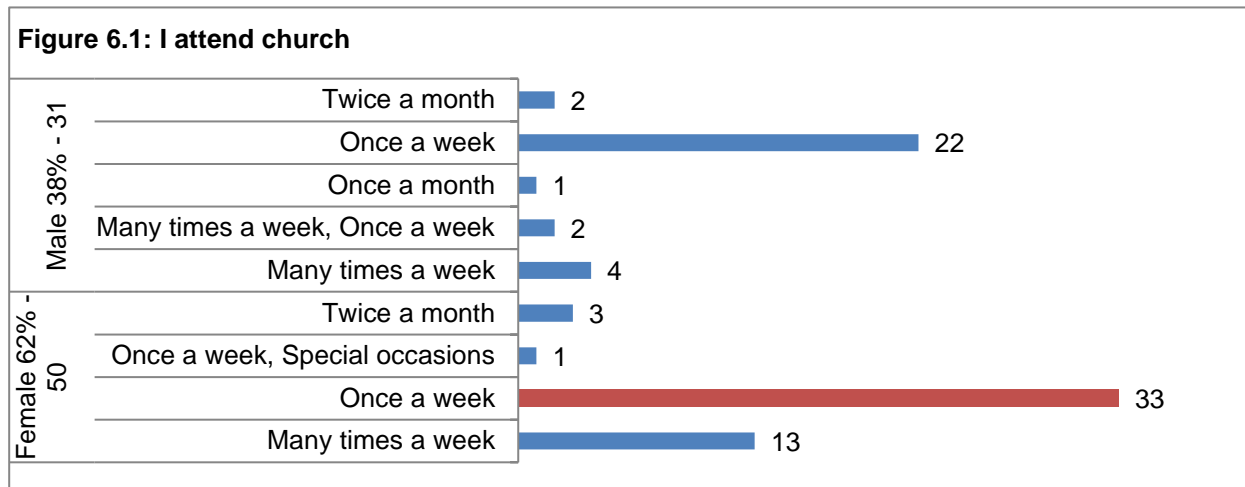


**Figure 5.3 Duration of attendance – all respondents**

1 year	24	29.6%
2-4 years	32	39.5%
4-8 years	20	24.7%
More than 8 years	5	6.2%

As per figure 5.1 it seems that females are more involved within the 2-4 years that they've attended the church, 40% (20), and the majority of males, 39% (12), are also active between 2-4 years. It can be seen that those who came over from the multisite church (Figure 4.3) are more involved within GFCC than those that have been in the church for two to four years, 40% (32).

**Frequency of attendance (I attend church...)**



**Figure 6.2 Frequency of attendance – all respondents**

Many times a week	17	21%
Many times a week, Once a week	2	2%
Once a month	1	1%
Once a week	55	68%
Twice a month	5	6%
Once a week, Special occasions	1	1%

Figure 6.1 shows that 66% (33) female and 7% (22) male attend GFCC once a week. The majority of respondent attendees 68% (55) attend the congregation once a week as per figure 6.2.

### 3.6. Respondents' belief of what the essence of church is

To establish if the respondents' belief systems are affecting their migration to other churches they were asked the following questions:

#### I believe the church to be [The Body of Christ]

As per figure 7.1, 95 % (77) of the respondent attendees of GFCC “believe that the church is the body of Christ”. 5% (5) of respondent attendees of GFCC as per figure 10.1 do not believe that this is true.

Figure 7.1: I believe the church to be [The Body of Christ] - 81 respondents

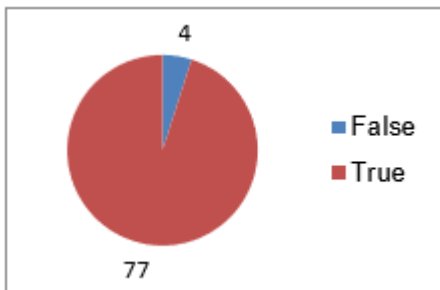


Figure 7.2: I believe the church to be [The Body of Christ] – 50 female respondents

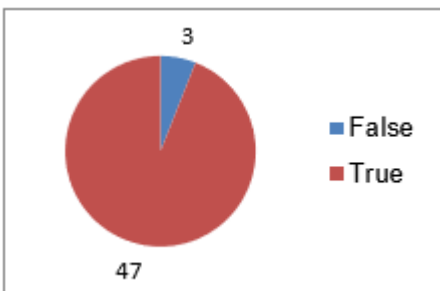
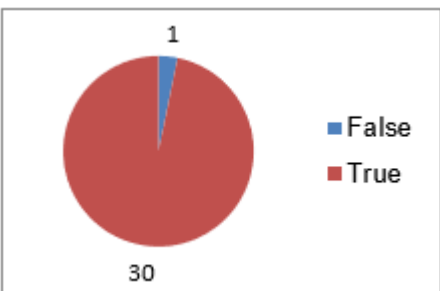


Figure 7.2: I believe the church to be [The Body of Christ] - male respondents



94% (47) of females and 97% (30) males have it as part of their belief system.

The third pillar of Paul’s reflection of what church is, is the imagery of the body - the body of Christ. In point 4.3.3.1 and 4.3.3.2 we see what he defines it to be. Origen and Augustine also noted in their theology the aspect of church to be the body.

From the data collected from GFCC, the three pull factors to analyse the respondents’ answers to what they believe related to the church to be the Body of Christ: Personal Discipleship, Outreach ministries and Leadership.

**Figure 8.1 Pull factors - 64 respondents**

I am (Gender)	(All)
---------------	-------

Personal Discipleship	Outreach ministries	Leadership
20	10	34
25%	12%	42%

**Figure 8.2: Pull factors – 50 female respondents**

I am (Gender)	Female
---------------	--------

Personal Discipleship	Outreach ministries	Leadership
15	9	26
30%	18%	52%

**Figure 8.3: Pull factors – 31 male respondents**

I am (Gender)	Male
---------------	------

Personal Discipleship	Outreach ministries	Leadership
5	1	8
16%	3%	26%

For the 81 respondents as per figure 8.1, the aspect of leadership is the highest pull factor at 42% (34). They hold personal discipleship at 25% (20). It shows that leadership and discipleship are important for them for they are focused on developing themselves. Female respondents believe that leadership is a pull factor for them 52% (26), figure 8.2, whereas only 26% (8) in figure 8.3 men hold that view. Personal Discipleship is for females a 30% (15) as per figure 8.2 and for males as per figure 8.3 it is a 16% (5).

## I believe the church to be [A Building]

Figure 9.1: I believe the church to be [A Building] - 81 respondents

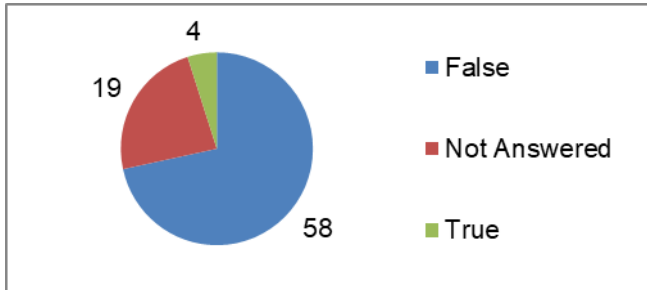


Figure 9.2: I believe the church to be [A Building] - 50 female respondents

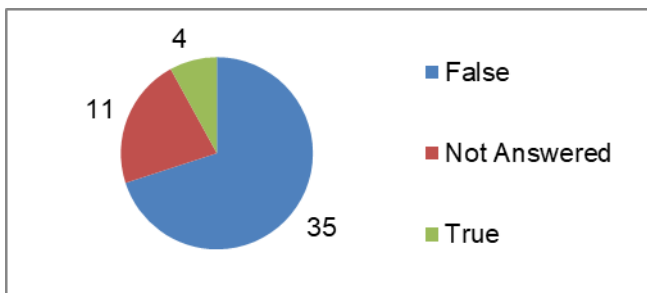
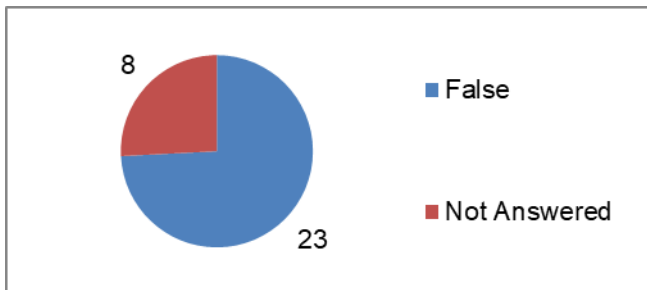


Figure 9.3: I believe the church to be [A Building] – 31 male respondents



The majority of respondents, 72% (58) as per figure 9.1, believe that the church is not a building, while 23% (19) are unsure. The majority also do not believe the church to be physical. Within these females hold to a 43% (35) as per figure 9.2 and males to a 28% (23) as per figure 9.3 that the church is not a building. Females hold a better understanding that the church is not a brick and mortar place.



## I believe the church to be [Jesus]

Figure 10.1: I believe the church to be [Jesus] - 81 respondents

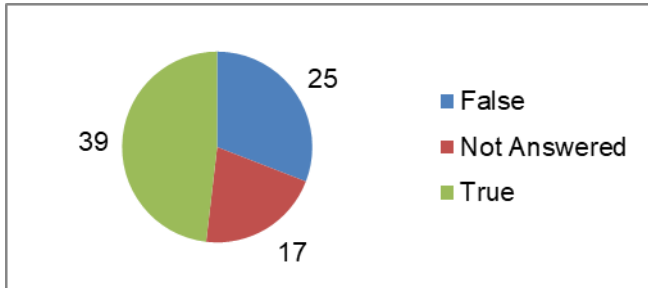


Figure 10.2: I believe the church to be [Jesus] – 50 female respondents

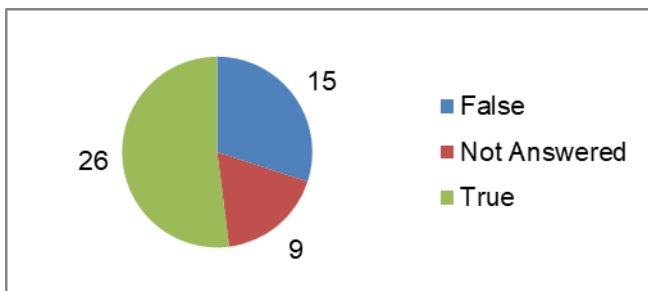


Figure 10.3: I believe the church to be [Jesus] – 31 male respondents

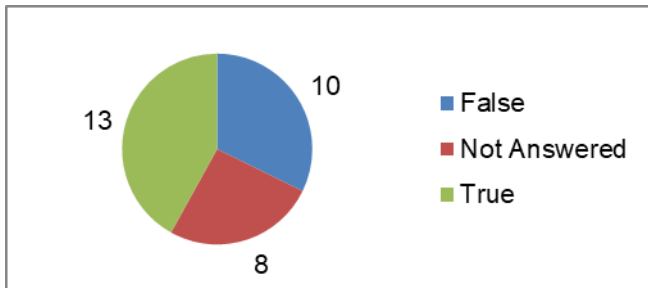


Figure 10.1 shows that 48% (39) of respondents do believe Jesus to be the church. A large proportion of respondents, 31% (25) figure 10.1, do not believe in this statement, with an additional 21% (17) that did not answer the question, possibly showing poor understanding of and low engagement with this question. A greater proportion of females than males agreed with this attribute, because it may be easier for females to relate to Jesus as the Groom and the head of the church.

## I believe the church to be [Me]

Figure 11.1: I believe the church to be [Me] - 81 respondents

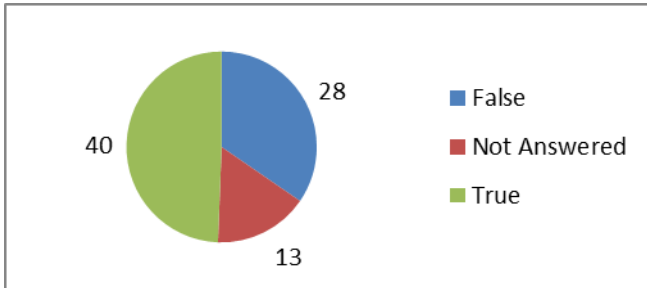


Figure 11.2: I believe the church to be [Me] – 50 female respondents

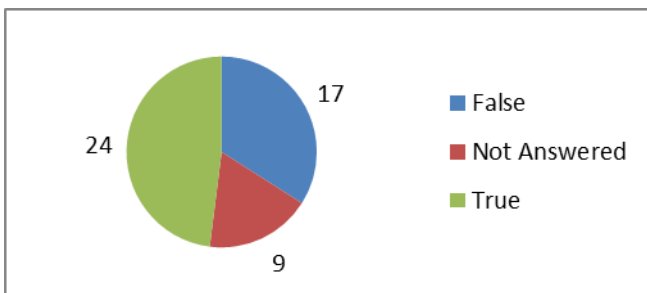


Figure 11.3: I believe the church to be [Me] – 31 male respondents

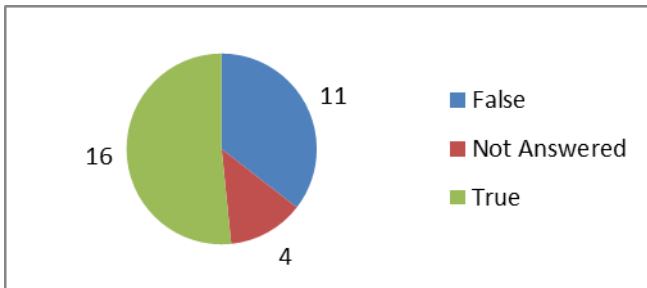


Figure 11.1 shows that 49% (40) of respondents believe the church to be “me”. There is no significant difference between males and females on their view of this attribute.

## I believe the church to be [Family]

Figure 12.1: I believe the church to be [Family] - 81 respondents

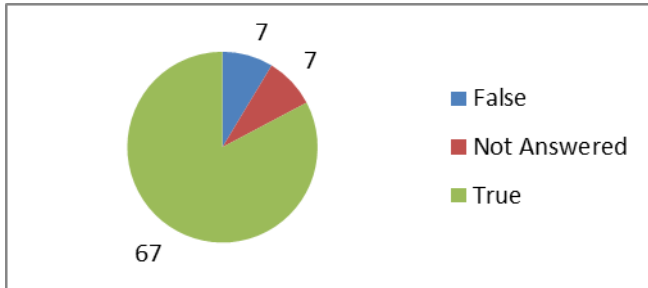


Figure 12.2: I believe the church to be [Family] – 50 female respondents

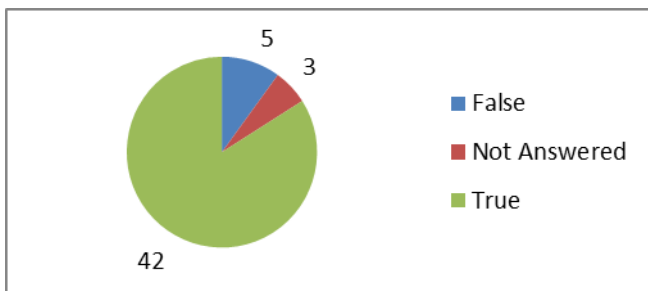


Figure 12.3: I believe the church to be [Family]- 31 male respondents

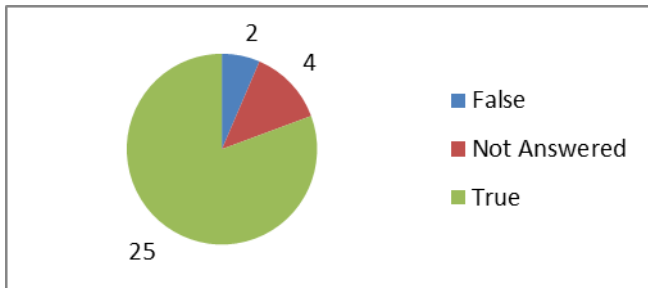


Figure 12.1 shows that 83% (67) figure 13.1 of the 81 respondents agreed with this attribute, with only 9% (7) not providing an answer. 8% (7) figure 12.1 do not hold this belief.

The second aspect of the Pauline understanding of what the essence of church is explored in this report is “Church as family”. Within the questionnaire, I have selected the four aspects that relate best to what can pull people to the congregation if they believe that church is family. These four factors are Caring, Friendly people, Youth ministry, and Children Ministry.

**Figure 13.1: Pull factors – 81 respondents**

I am	(All)
------	-------

Caring	Friendly people	Youth ministry	Children Ministry
31	48	7	12
38%	59%	9%	15%

**Figure 13.2: Pull factors 50 female respondents**

I am	Female
------	--------

Caring	Friendly people	Youth ministry	Children Ministry
22	32	5	8
44%	64%	10%	16%

**Figure 13.3: Pull factors 31 male respondents**

I am	Male
------	------

Caring	Friendly people	Youth ministry	Children Ministry
9	16	2	4
29%	52%	6%	13%

“Friendly people” is a large pull factor and forms a basis for them to see church as a family. Figure 13.1 shows 59% (48) value the aspect of people that are friendly and church as a place where family can function. Their responses show that children 15% (12) and youth ministry 9% (7) as per figure 13.1 are important aspects of family. For the attendees “caring” as per figure 13.1 is at 38% (31) and is a major pull factor towards a congregation. For females, “friendly” 62% (32) and “caring” 44% (22) as per figure 13.2 are very important factors. For the males it is “friendly people” as per figure 13.3 at 52% (16). For males “caring” is not a high pull factor as seen in figure 13.3 at only 29% (9).

## I believe the church to be [A Community]

Figure 14.1: I believe the church to be [A Community] – 81 respondents

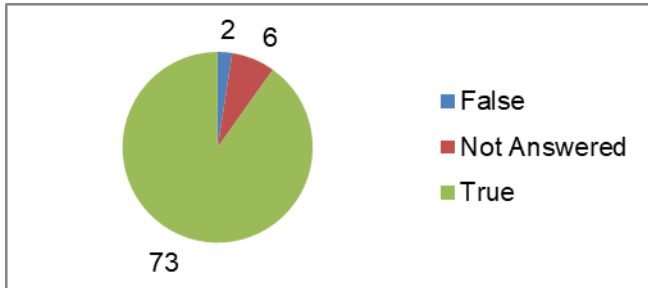


Figure 14.2: I believe the church to be [A Community] – 50 female respondents

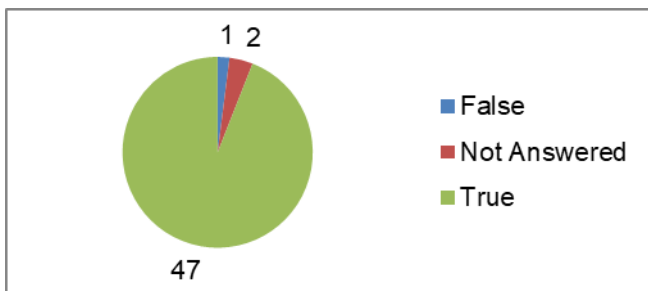


Figure 14.3: I believe the church to be [A Community] – 31 male respondents

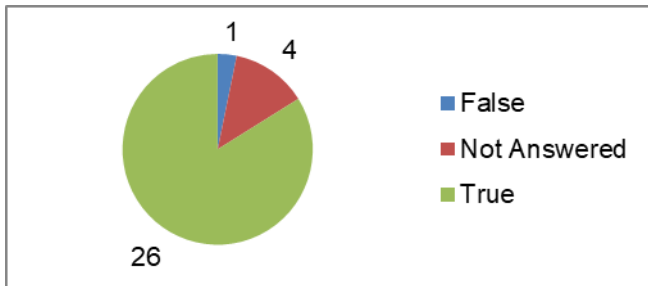


Figure 14.1 shows that 90% (70) as per figure 15.1 of respondents hold the belief that the church is “a community” and only 3% (2) disagree with it.

As per figure 14.2 we see that 94% (47) of females and 84% (26) of males (figure 14.3) hold to this belief.

Within the Pauline understanding of the essence of church there are four main aspects. One of them is the understanding of community. For Paul, the “church” was and has to be a community. A community of ones called out, a community that was for each other; a

community that was different to the community that existed. It was something in the society that was different, a place of belonging. So how does the data reflect this amongst respondents? I used four of the pull factors as a framework for analysing the importance of community: My spiritual growth, Leadership, Worship, and Preaching.

**Figure 15.1: Pull factors – 81 respondents**

I am	(All)
------	-------

Preaching	Worship	My spiritual growth	Leadership
66	58	47	34
81%	72%	58%	42%

**Figure 15.2: Pull factors – 50 female respondents**

I am	Female
------	--------

Preaching	Worship	My spiritual growth	Leadership
43	42	35	26
86%	84%	70%	52%

**Figure 15.3: Pull factors – 31 male respondents**

I am	Male
------	------

Preaching	Worship	My spiritual growth	Leadership
23	16	12	8
74%	52%	39%	26%

The pull factors defined as the parameter for community above are showing that the respondents hold preaching at 81% (66) as per figure 16.1 as a pull factor and worship at 72% (58). Their spiritual growth is very important for them at 58% (47). As per figure 15.2, females hold preaching at 86% (43) and worship at 84% (42) as high pull factors. Males hold preaching as the largest pull factor at 74% (23).

## I believe the church to be [Bride of Christ]

Figure 16.1: I believe the church to be [Bride of Christ] - 81 respondents

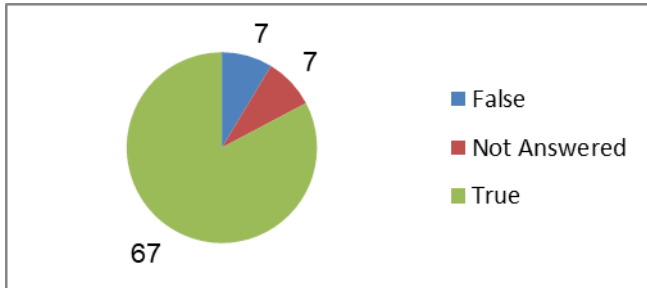


Figure 16.2: I believe the church to be [Bride of Christ] – 50 female respondents

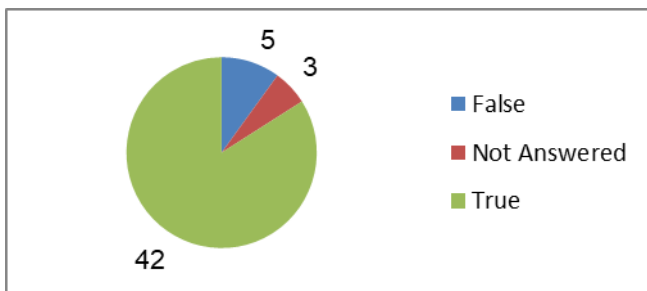
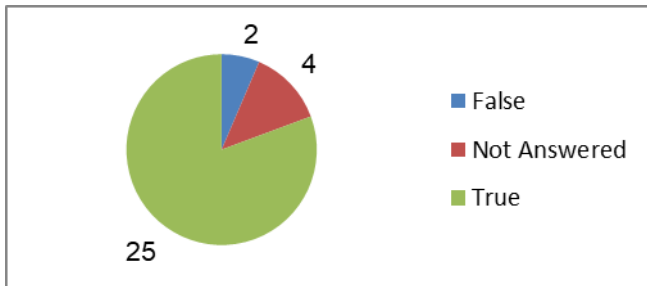


Figure 16.3: I believe the church to be [Bride of Christ]- 31 male respondents



83% (67) of respondents agree that the church is the Bride of Christ. There is no significant difference between the male and female response.

Paul presented the image to the first century church of the relationship between man and woman within the union of marriage. He uses this to show that they are married to Christ and therefore the church is the Bride. As per figure 2.3 data 64% (52) of the 81 participants were or are in a marriage.

A bride is a person that is preparing for union. Two pull factors were therefore selected to represent this attribute: personal discipleship and outreach ministry.

Personal discipleship was a factor selected for its echo in Ephesians 5:25-27 where it is an act for the bride. Personal discipleship is an act of sanctification and a cleansing of the saints and 25% (20) of 81 participants agree with it. A small number of 12% (10) agree with outreach. The bride reaching out to the world was the biblical basis for selecting this question.

### **3.7. Respondents' general beliefs**

In this section, we look at respondents' general belief system, as this can affect their theological understanding of what church is and cause them to migrate.

The GFCC leadership's predominantly evangelical belief system was compared to the predominant beliefs held by respondents. Respondents held beliefs that were common to evangelical, neo-Pentecostal and neo-Charismatic congregations. For purposes of this study a belief in speaking in tongues, healing, prophesy, miracles and the importance of being led by the Holy Spirit were taken as markers for neo-Pentecostal beliefs. The leadership was surprised by the prevalence of neo-Pentecostal beliefs amongst respondents and this led to a large Alpha course and a weekend encounter focused on congregants discovering their spiritual gifts.



### I believe [In an all in one God]

In figure 17.1 we see that the majority of the 81 participants believe in a three in one God, 94% (76).

Figure 17.1: I believe [In an all in one God] - 81 respondents

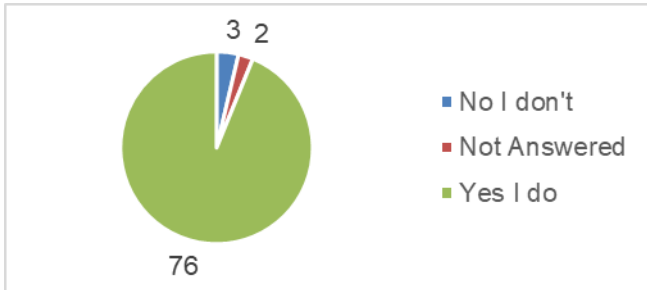


Figure 17.2: I believe [In an all in one God] – 50 female respondents

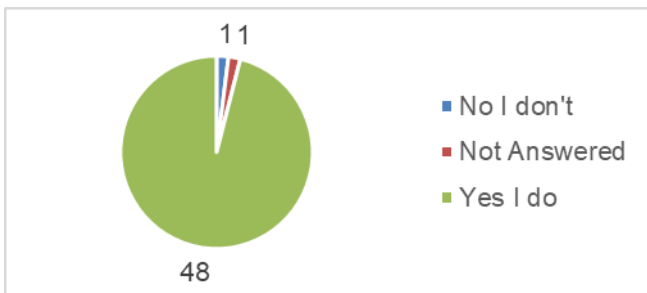
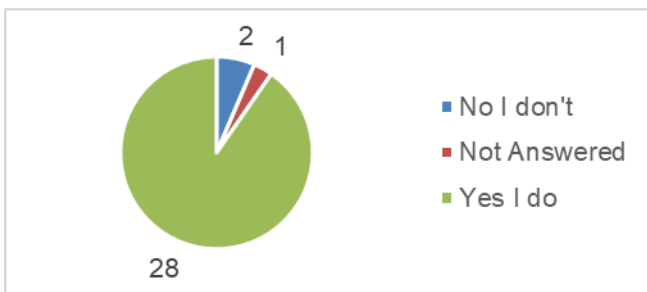


Figure 17.3: I believe [In an all in one God] – 31 male respondents



Females agree strongly that God is an all in one God: 96% (48) as in figure 18.2. At 90% (31) males also agree strongly with this belief, but less so than females.

## I believe [In the whole bible]

In figure 18.1 we see that 95% (77) of the 81 respondents agree with this attribute. The majority of them believe in the whole word of God and therefore the Scripture affects their worldview. This answer does not state or prove that they believe in the inerrancy of the Bible.

As seen in the data of figure 18.2 49 out of 50 female respondents (98%) believe in the whole Bible, whereas only 28 out of 31 male respondents (90%) believe so. 7% (2) of the 31 male respondents claim that they “do not know” compared to 2% (1) of the 50 female respondents.

Figure 18.1: I believe [In the whole bible] - 81 respondents

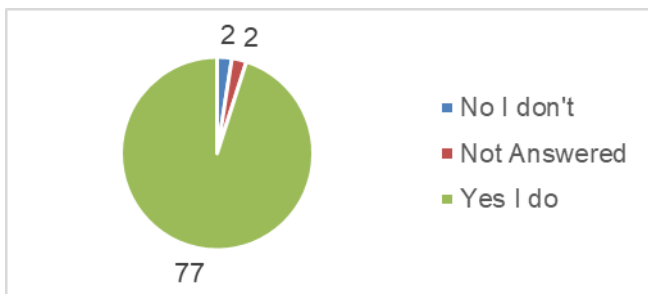


Figure 18.2: I believe [In the whole bible] – 50 female respondents

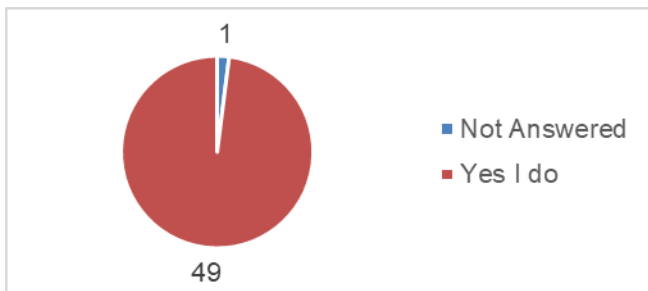
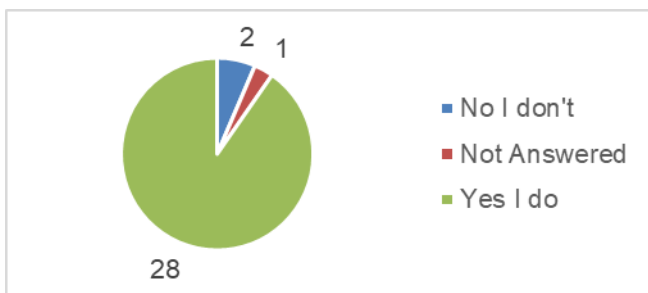


Figure 18.3: I believe [In the whole bible] – 31 male respondents



## I believe [I am born again]

This question to the respondents tried to identify if they hold to an evangelical belief system. In evangelical churches being born again is a core belief.

As seen in figure 19.1 the majority of the 81 respondents believe they are born again. A total of 91% (74) hold this belief.

We see that females at 92% (46) and males at 90% (28) hold to this belief and can therefore be assumed to be evangelical in their faith.

Figure 19.1: I believe [I am born again] - 81 respondents

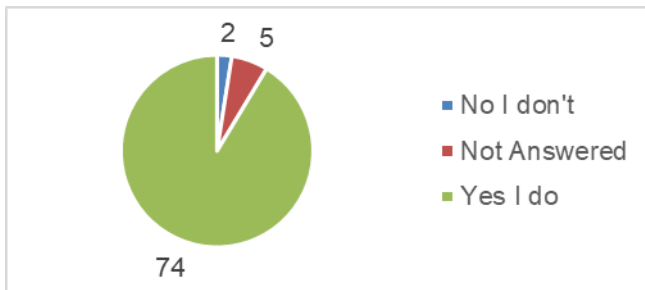


Figure 19.3: I believe [I am born again] – 50 female respondents

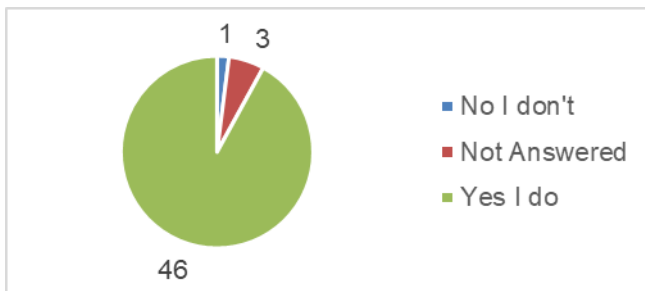
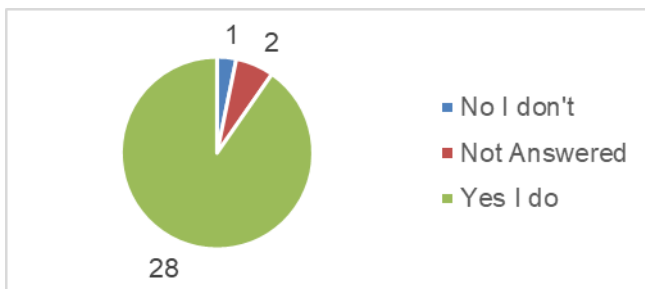


Figure 19.2 I believe [I am born again] – 31 male respondents



## I believe [In praying in tongues]

Figure 20.1: I believe [In praying in tongues] - 81 respondents

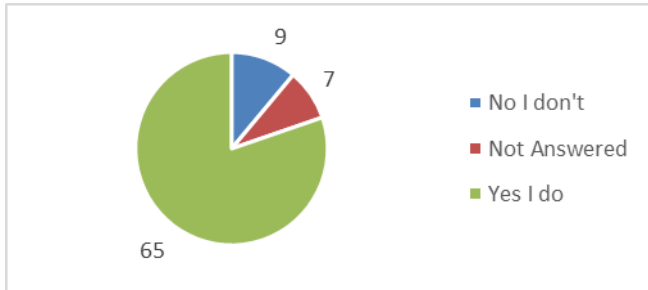


Figure 20.2: I believe [In praying in tongues] – 50 female respondents

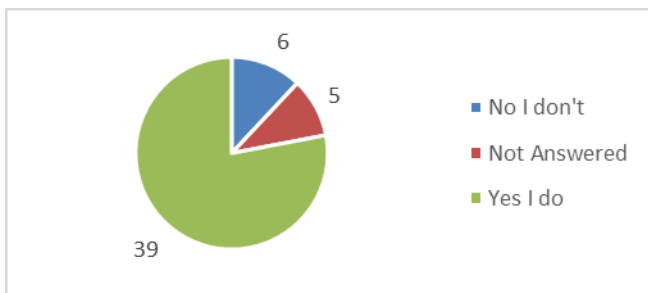


Figure 20.3: I believe [In praying in tongues] – 31 male respondents

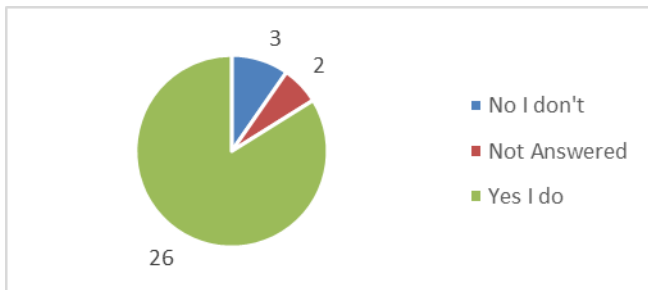


Figure 20.1 shows that 80% (65) of the 81 respondents believe in praying in tongues. This data adds to the evidence in favour of the conclusion that the majority of respondents are neo-Pentecostal in their beliefs. Figures 20.2 and 20.33 show that males hold more strongly to this belief at 84% (26) than females at 78% (39).

An assumption that the members hold more to an Evangelical belief system than a neo-Pentecostal belief system was an erroneous assumption by leadership, because the data showed that they are a diverse group that cannot be forced into a single theological framework.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The SATS integrated Master's program took me on a journey of discovery to try and answer the questions that have plagued me since my return from Transkei in 2005. The process challenged my preconceived ideas and I am inspired to do more research.

I focused my biblical and systematic studies on Paul, the man for the Gentiles. Within the literature review I explored Paul's understanding of the essence of church as expressed in Scripture. I used Francis Watson's method of interpretation, *Text, Church and the World*, as an interpretative measure to evaluate his theology. In addition to this, *The Church according to Paul* (Thompson J W e-book 2014) highlighted Paul's understanding of the church as *ekklēsia*, a community, a place of belonging for those that stand for Christ. His rich expression of the church's essence made me wonder whether people knew what they believed.

I developed a better understanding of the essence of the church in church history by looking at what the church fathers from AD 130 to AD 1564 believed, especially those who challenged the status quo. These heroes of the faith asked questions like: "Is the church visible or invisible?" and "What does it mean to be the church?"

I saw many faces move between churches that I attended, and the concept of church migration caught my attention at the end of 2016. The question arose whether church migration was influenced by theological considerations.

Engagement with the theologically-untrained members of my discipleship group caused me to appreciate a more practical interpretation of the Scriptures and beliefs. They also helped me to develop a better understanding of what people believe about the essence of church today. As it turned out, they had a firm grip on what the essence of church is, but in contemplating the metaphors for the essence of church in Paul's writings (Family, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ) the discipleship group develop a richer vocabulary with which they could describe their understanding of the essence of church, and they came to better understand its nuances.

The positive experience with the discipleship group inspired me to pursue an understanding of how these matters are perceived in the broader CFCC community. I therefore conducted the quantitative survey within the larger community to see what their theological understanding of the essence of church is, and whether it influenced their church migration. The questions were formulated to meet the needs of the leadership group and this research paper. Three main aspects were investigated: respondents' personal information, their history with the church (including push/pull factors) and their beliefs.

The respondents showed that they too have a solid grip on what the essence of church is.

The respondents' conclusions about what constitutes the essence of church corresponded well with the discipleship group's reflections. They agreed on attributes such as: the body of Christ, to be Jesus, to be family, to be a community, and to be the bride of Christ.

The majority of respondents agree with the essence of the church as described in Pauline theology, using these four attribute as a benchmark:

I believe the church to be [a community] at 90% (73)

I believe the church to be [family] at 83% (67)

I believe the church to be [the Body of Christ] at 95% (77)

I believe the church to be [the Bride of Christ] at 83% (67)

It was more difficult to show whether the respondents had an understanding of the question from the church fathers whether the church is visible or invisible. I had to make do with the data that I had because the church leadership curtailed the opportunity for follow-up questions. Respondents showed a preference for the idea that the church is invisible. The attributes used to cast light on respondents' beliefs about the visible/invisible church question were:

I believe the church to be [a Building] - visible church 5% (4) of 81 respondents agree with his.

I believe the church to be [Jesus] - invisible church 48% (39) of 81 respondents agree with his.

The research question was: “Does the understanding of the essence of church influence the migration of respondents between churches?” The research results show that it is unlikely that such theological factors influence migration. Although respondents had a sound understanding of the theological essence of church, the non-theological push and pull factors seemed to have a stronger influence on their migration decisions. The “how” of church (quality of preaching, leadership, worship, location, etc.) seems to be more important to respondents when choosing where to worship than the “what” of church (any of their beliefs about church and the extent to which the particular church holds to such beliefs).

The high importance of preaching suggests that a congregation with poor preaching could lose members to a congregation with strong preaching, as I have personally witnessed within the congregations I have attended over the last fourteen years.

This study explores some of the other pull and push factors, but further study could develop a more complete push/pull model for Christian churches of the South African region.

Common sense demands that church leadership develop an understanding of what drew members to them, and what causes members to leave. Pull factors must of course be maximised, and push factors minimised. Leadership will have to remain cautious about the theological underpinning for such push and pull factors, avoiding populist measures that may compromise sound theology. Members do not seem to consider theological factors in their migration decisions, implying high levels of trust in the doctrinal soundness of their receiving church.

As demonstrated by the awakening of GFCC respondents by participation in this study and in a discipleship experience, it is recommended that church leadership assist members in developing a richer theological vocabulary with which to describe their beliefs, and to provide members with the opportunity to identify their spiritual gifts within such a framework.

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## APPENDICES

Electronic questionnaire <https://goo.gl/forms/aE9dTULmw71O2OZu1>

# CHURCH SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

## 1. I am Part of \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Godfirst City Church  
 Nuwe Lewe Krugersdorp  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. I am \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Male  
 Female

## 3. My Status \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- Married  
 Single  
 Separated  
 Divorced  
 Widowed  
 Engaged

## 4. I was born between \*

*Tick all that apply.*

- 1923 - 1944  
 1945 - 1964  
 1965 - 1980  
 1981–1995  
 1996–2009

**5. I have received an education level of \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Primary School
- High School
- Degree
- Masters
- Doctorate
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Church History**

Information on your church involvement and movement

**6. I have been attending this church for \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 & 2 years
- Between 3 & 5 years
- More than 5 years
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. I have moved from another church within the last 2 years \***

*Tick all that apply.*

- Yes
- No

**8. If Yes, please provide the name of the church**

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. I moved from that church because of**

If non apply add it to other

*Mark only one oval.*

- Leader
- Offence
- Worship
- Teaching
- Children
- Reallocation / Work
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. In the last 4 years, I have attended a total of \_ churches \***

*Tick all that apply.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- More than 5
- More than 10
- More than 15

**11. I have been active in my current church for more than \***

*Tick all that apply.*

- 1 year
- 2-4 years
- 4-8 years
- More than 8 years



**12. I attend church \***

*Tick all that apply.*

- Many times a week
- Once a week
- Twice a month
- Once a month
- Special occasions

**13. What reasons push you away from church meetings \***

If non apply to this please add non to other - can select more than one

*Tick all that apply.*

- Preaching
- Music / worship
- Youth ministry
- Children ministry
- Outreach ministries
- Lack of friendship
- Size of the church
- My spiritual growth
- Personal reasons
- Lack of caring
- Leadership
- Personal Discipleship
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. What reasons pull you to this church \***

If non apply to this please add non to other - can select more than one  
*Tick all that apply.*

- Preaching
- Worship
- Youth ministry
- Children Ministry
- Outreach ministries
- Friendly people
- Size of the church
- My spiritual growth
- Personal reasons
- Caring
- Leadership
- Personal Discipleship
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Your Beliefs

**15. I believe the church to be**

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	True	False
The Body of Christ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A Building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A Community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jesus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People in Christ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bride of Christ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**16. I believe**

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Yes I do	No I don't
In Jesus alone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In Father alone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In Holy Spirit alone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In an all in one God	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In none of them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In healing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In praying in tongues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In prophecy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the miraculous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To Pray daily for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the whole bible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Only in the New Testament	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the promises of the Old Testament	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I practice Old Testament festivals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To read my bible daily	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am saved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am born again	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe in heaven	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have no fear of death	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**17. I have been born again / saved in this church**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Don't believe in it

**18. Do you believe your church service is based on the NT church concept**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

19. **Do you know your spiritual gift**

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

20. **If another person preaches do you stay away from this church?**

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

21. **Does your church feel like home/family?**

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

22. **Do you experience God in the service?**

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

23. **Do you want to rate your church experience**

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes      *Skip to question 24.*

No      *Skip to question 29.*

## Your church experience

Please rate your present church experience

### 24. The time of service

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Too Long	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Too Short

### 25. Worship session

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Too Long	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Too Short

### 26. Sermon or message

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Too Long	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Too Short

### 27. Relevancy of the sermon/message to my daily life

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not Relevant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Relevant