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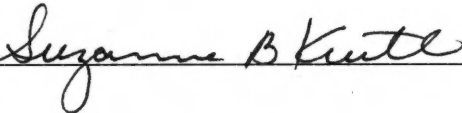
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ray Philip Dalton entitled "Sources of Attraction to the Megachurch: Factors Influencing the Individual's Decision to Participate." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Sociology.



Donald W. Hastings,
Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance







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SOURCES OF ATTRACTION TO THE MEGACHURCH:
FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INDIVIDUAL'S DECISION TO PARTICIPATE

A Dissertation
Presented for the
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Degree
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For
Peggy, Tim and Ami
For your patience, your encouragement
and most of all your love.

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant developments on the religious landscape over the past 3 decades has been the emergence of the megachurch. The rapid growth of these churches, both in number of weekly attenders and in number of congregations, is changing the way American Protestants "do church." The purpose of this study is to explore the social factors that influence one's decision to attend these huge churches. Although a great deal has been written about megachurches in the religious and the popular media, little has been done from a social scientific perspective. This dissertation is intended to help correct that deficiency.

A 183 item questionnaire was distributed to persons attending worship services in seven Southern Baptist megachurches. More than 1200 completed questionnaires were returned and analyzed.

This lengthy questionnaire tested a variety of established theoretical models of church development. Demographic and background variables helped place attenders in the context of their own economic, religious and personal history.

Beyond such contextual variables, items were constructed to test specific friendship network as influences on megachurch attraction. In addition to

measuring how friendships influence church-goers, and identifying how society might label them, this research examined how attenders label themselves. What aspects of the megachurch are most attractive? Many benefits are offered by the megachurch. Some benefits are acted upon while others are enjoyed if "only" perceived as yet another option.

Throughout the testing of these models, attraction to the megachurch was operationally defined via 3 dependent variables: Money given, time spent in church activities and satisfaction with the megachurch. This survey could have found evidence for a multi-theory model with all of the following theories: Demographic, friendship networks, and exchange theory.

The final model allowed the researcher to discern a concise set of variables that optimally predicts attraction to the megachurch. Findings show that the megachurch is neither a cult nor a radical departure from smaller, more traditional church. Instead, at the core, the megachurch is still very traditional in its appeal. What distinguishes the megachurch is not that it replaces traditional worship, but that it augments such worship with new opportunities for personal fulfillment.

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INTRODUCTION

The megachurch, "any church with an average weekly attendance of at least 2,000" (Vaughan 1993, p. 53), is the newest and most prominent manifestation of contemporary Protestantism (Willmer, Schmidt, and Smith 1998, pp. 193-4). Although emerging in the 1950s with Robert Shuller's Crystal Cathedral, the current style gradually became institutionalized in the best-known megachurch, Willow Creek Community in suburban Chicago (Cimino and Lattin 1998, p. 57).

This dissertation analyzes the ways in which individuals are attracted to, participate in, and join megachurches. Such a status passage (Glaser and Strauss 1971) begins with the seeker's initial encounter with the church and often progresses through deeper levels of involvement. During this passage individuals develop an attraction to the church and its perspectives. The megachurch, like other voluntary organizations, promotes commitment by encouraging persons to devote increasingly more personal resources to it and to contribute less to alternative organizations (Becker 1960; Iannaccone 1988, 1992, 1994; Iannaccone, Olson and Stark 1995). During the

life of the individual, this commitment process often begins as periods of transition or crisis (Fowler 1981, 1984; Lofland and Stark 1965; Roof 1978; Stark and Bainbridge 1980).

This study focuses on a number of questions related to the megachurch: What factors attract persons to attend or remain in such congregations? What are the social psychological, contextual, organizational, and religious factors that attract members? Are the sources of megachurch growth new converts or church transfers (Perrin, Kennedy, and Miller 1997)? What roles do small groups and friendship networks play in attracting persons to the megachurch? How do megachurches market their message to attract and retain their target audience? What message is proclaimed by the megachurch? Is the message increasingly in conflict or in conformity with the norms of the culture (Witten 1993; Shibley 1996; Warner 1997)? In other words, do megachurches attract people to their services like smaller churches, cults and sects, or are they something new?

This study is limited to Southern Baptist megachurches. All data were obtained from questionnaires completed by persons attending worship services at seven of these congregations.

THE STUDY SITUATION

American religious institutions are adapting to a new

way of "doing church" (Miller 1997, p. 1). Consumers are demanding choice and diversity in all things, including religious expression. Some congregations are able to attract large numbers of attenders and members for worship and services; others have plateaued or are declining in numbers. Dean Kelley argued that the common sense approach to church development (being reasonable, rational, receptive to outside criticism, democratic, and cooperative was, in fact, a "recipe for the failure of the religious enterprise" (Kelley 1972, p. vii). Declining churches are not victims of changing times. They simply fail to provide a needed product (Kelley 1972, p. 17). That "indispensable" product is the provision of meaning for one's life (pp. 38 ff.). Churches that provide meaning (and therefore attract and retain members) proclaim an exclusive truth, demand adherence to a distinctive belief system, and reject the lifestyles and values of the outside world (Kelley 1972, pp. 78-81). Laurence R. Iannaccone (1994) concludes that Kelley was right: denominational growth rates correlate strongly with "strictness" (p. 1181). "Strictness increases commitment, raises levels of participation, and enables a group to offer more benefits" (Iannaccone 1994, p. 1181; Young 1997, p. 142).

R. Laurence Moore argues that Americans have remained religious because religious entrepreneurs have found ways to make religion competitive with other cultural products

(Moore 1994, 38). In Moore's words: "audience enthusiasm did not happen by accident. It had to be created" (p. 51).

No aspect of the current religious marketplace better illustrates the entrepreneurial spirit than the megachurch movement. Scholars estimate that in the United States more than 400 megachurches exist (Niebuhr 1995a). These churches tend to be ethnically white (although a large number of African-American megachurches are emerging in urban areas), theologically conservative Protestant, and geographically Southern suburban (Vaughan 1993, p. 117).

Although size is the most distinctive feature of megachurches, it is their innovative style and philosophy that set them apart from more traditional congregations. Megachurches are often located on large tracts of land in affluent metropolitan areas with large multiple-use buildings and immense parking lots. Most offer a variety of weekday programs such as aerobics classes, health clubs, sports, counseling, support groups, child care, and Bible classes. On Sunday mornings (or other times scheduled for worship) large screens project Scripture verses and lyrics to contemporary religious songs. Dramatic skits and sermons that focus less on spiritual matters and more on the pragmatic issues of everyday living, replace traditional worship forms (Niebuhr 1995a; Witten 1993, p. 20; Shibley

1996, p. 90). According a megachurch pastor: "Entertainment is really the medium of the day" (Niebuhr 1995b).

Many characteristics of megachurches discussed above contradict insights of Kelley (1972), Iannaccone (1994), and others who argue that strictness and conservative theology go hand in hand with membership growth. Such churches, usually quite conservative in theology, do not appear to be very strict. Commitment and participation levels are usually low among the rank and file. "Free-riders" (Iannaccone 1992, 1994), attenders who contribute little or nothing, do not seem to be a problem. Instead of strictness, "megachurches celebrate comfort, ease and the very idea of contemporary suburban life" (Goldberger 1995). To understand these apparent contradictions, we must explore the ways megachurches are organized to attract attenders, and identify the social, psychological, and cultural factors that make megachurches attractive to individuals.

Clearly, persons gain benefits from attending and joining megachurches. The nature of these benefits and the factors that increase attraction (from the perspective of the individual attender, and from that of the organized church) are the concerns of this study.

Rather than distinctiveness, it may be accommodation to the prevailing culture that fuels megachurch growth (Warner 1997, 90). Megachurches promise solutions to private, individual needs, as opposed to commitment. Such churches:

not only fit the surrounding culture but also offer programs -- social services -- that meet a full range of personal needs, particularly for those in crisis or in search of community. . . We live, after all, in a consumer oriented culture, and churches are becoming market savvy institutions (Shibley 1996, pp. 131-2)

People may not be looking for strict religion. For the same reasons they shop large discount stores, they want a "full-service" church that offers the most benefits with the least cost. Churches that grow are giving people what they want. The key to understanding megachurches is to realize that they are organized to know what a particular segment of the religious market wants, and how to provide it.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

An essential part of studying attraction to religious institutions is determining its source. There is no single, comprehensive theory. Studies addressing this issue indicate that there may be several sources. Proposed theoretical statements have dealt with doctrinal belief, demographic and other background factors, economic factors, social relationships, values and benefits, and institutional factors. This study does not deal with doctrinal belief as a major determinant of megachurch participation. That is, it does not make comparisons across doctrinal beliefs, but instead, focuses more on attitudes and behaviors within the narrow range of beliefs of a single faith tradition

(Southern Baptist). This study is more concerned with the social factors that contribute to church attraction.

What is the process by which individuals decide to attend (or remain in) a megachurch? What are the factors that attract persons to megachurches? How does a religious "firm" (Finke and Stark 1992) attract attenders? These are the questions posed by this dissertation. The value of this study is the collection of substantive data that will contribute to an understanding of religious choice in a consumer-oriented society.

OVER-VIEW OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 discusses the social and theoretical context in which the megachurch must be understood. The megachurch presents a "new way of doing church." A better understanding of what that "way" is, is necessary, if we are to make valid comparisons to smaller churches. Theoretical models relating uniquely to the megachurch do not exist. Most theories of church growth were developed within relatively homogeneous cultures (McGavran 1970) or as an attempt to understand the factors that contribute to the growth or decline of denominations (Kelley 1972; Hoge and Roozen 1979a).

The Kelley thesis, that churches grow because they place serious demands on members and thus provide a sense of community and answers to life's perplexing questions (1972),

has gained support in recent years (Iannaccone 1994; 1997). Megachurches seem to contradict this idea. Megachurches may attract people because they offer a "full-service" religious experience. Everyone can find a niche within the organization where his or her personal, individual needs can be met.

Chapter 2 delineates the procedures used to gather data for this dissertation. A description of the research instrument, the operational definitions of dependent variables, and a description of scales are included.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 address a large variety of variables that potentially help explain attraction to the megachurch. Chapter 3 includes an examination of background and demographic factors of megachurch attenders. Of particular importance to this chapter will be earlier research and theoretical statements on the growth of religious organizations. These are examined using our megachurch data. Chapter 4 investigates the role of friendships and social networks in attracting new people into the megachurch. Chapter 5 explores the perceptions of *costs* and *benefits* by those who attend the megachurch. Of particular interest for chapter 5 is an attempt to identify the nature of the various audiences who are attracted.

In chapter 6 we recapitulate our findings by trying to integrate them into a broader theoretical framework. We attempt to develop a model to explain the attraction of

individuals to the megachurch. This final chapter discusses our results and their implications for the megachurch and for future research.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOCIAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE MEGACHURCH

During his celebrated tour of the United States, in 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville became intrigued with American religion. "There is," he wrote, "no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America" (1956 P. 314). Tocqueville commented on the unique character of American religion:

In France, I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country. I cannot better describe it than by styling it a democratic and republican religion (p. 319).

The "democratic" form of American religion described by Tocqueville remains strong to the present day. One of the places it is most readily seen is in the multitude of megachurches found in every large urbanized area in the United States.

THE MEGACHURCH: A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHURCH

New Wineskins

The defining characteristic of the megachurch is its size; however, a number of characteristics obtain that identify this rapidly growing form of American religion. The buildings, especially the worship facilities, are very large to accommodate the growing numbers of people who attend services. Often these buildings are part of a many-acre campus with additional buildings designed for child-care, youth services as well as the multitude of weekday programs offered by the church. In addition, there are usually well-manicured lawns, athletic fields, and mall-type parking lots. Many of the newer facilities feature state-of-the-art media centers, books stores, and food courts. At least one megachurch has a bowling alley and a seven-story recreational center (Putnam 2000, p. 66). Megachurch worship areas often look more like gymnasiums or auditoriums (or even warehouses) than traditional church sanctuaries.

New Wine

Theater style seating provides a comfortable vantage point for weekly attenders, who sit facing a large performance stage filled with professional quality musicians (ranging from orchestras to rock bands) playing contemporary Christian music. The minister delivers a "relevant" sermon that "blends Scripture with practical advice for a hurried

middle-class" (Niebuhr 1995a). Worship services tend to be informal and focus on practical matters, such as family and professional concerns, often mixing psychotherapeutic concepts with Christian doctrine. They emphasize religious experience over theology (Cimino and Lattin 1998, p. 57). That is, the contemporary megachurch provides answers for today's problems in a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere. The worshipper is told to sit back and enjoy the show. One young woman responded to the questionnaire for this study: "I come here a lot. It's really an entertainment issue. The worship services here are really good. When I want to do the *traditional church thing*, there is a Presbyterian church closer to my home that I go to" (italics added). In defense of this "entertainment evangelism," Lutheran megachurch pastor Walt Kallestad wrote in 1990:

Culture's pervasive entertainment media so conditions people today that, to compete for and sustain people's attention, what the church does on Sunday morning has to be stimulating, fast paced, interesting, engaging and even 'entertaining'" (Hunter 1996, p. 74).

A Variety of Wines

Traditionally, American churches were designed to include large classes and groups that ultimately hinder growth (Olson 1987; 1989). In contrast, each megachurch is a network of small groups (Vaughan 1993, p. 94; Cimino and Lattin 1998, p. 76). They grow by continually developing

new clusters of small groups (Vaughan 1993, p 94). The large church, although by nature a heterogeneous organization, is able to provide many homogeneous interest groups from which persons may choose their place of service. Such interest groups are the primary avenues for the recruitment of new members (Pritchard 1996). Because of the many small homogenous groups, large churches are better equipped than small churches to provide specialized services for the wider community.

Although megachurches have been successful in reaching the unchurched through "seeker" services (Pritchard 1996), the more difficult task of retaining members is accomplished through the small groups and the diversity of services megachurches are able to provide (Wuthnow 1994).

Specific purposes vary from group to group, but they are all designed to be culturally relevant (Hunter 1996) and to meet the everyday needs of the attenders. The most common types are Bible study and prayer groups, support and self-help groups (singles, marital and related family concerns, and drug and alcohol addiction, eating disorders, grief, etc.). Special interest groups deal with a limitless range of topics such as: occupational and professional interests, age-related concerns, hobbies, travel, and the like (Wuthnow 1994, pp. 65). Smaller membership churches do not have the staff, the volunteers, or the money to provide such a variety of ministries (Trueheart 1996, p. 38). The

resources that enable a church to offer such broad range of opportunities require a larger membership than smaller churches.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE CONTEMPORARY MEGACHURCH

Large churches are not new. In the nineteenth century London's Metropolitan Tabernacle accommodated 6000 persons to hear Charles Spurgeon each week. A century later, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. preached to more than 4000 persons in the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City (Thumma 1996, p. 481). In recent times, large Catholic cathedrals and urban Protestant churches that can seat up to 5,000 worshippers have been constructed (Vaughn 1993). Yet, the contemporary megachurch must be seen as performing a different function than earlier large churches. As Scott Thumma correctly perceives:

Seldom have they (large churches) been understood as symptomatic of distinct cultural currents or reflective of new societal trends. With the rapid numerical proliferation of these mega-congregations in recent years, however, that is exactly how they must be viewed. Both religious researchers and the general public must begin to view *these churches not as individual isolated cases of extreme success, but as a religious organizational pattern* which has arisen in relation to distinct societal changes (1996, p. 12, italics added).

The large cathedrals of an earlier time were the residences of the leaders of the Churches or denominations they served. As such, they were the places of official ceremonies and celebrations. Large Protestant churches

served as the "flagship" congregation of a denomination in a particular city, but they were always seen as "belonging to" their denomination. Although many contemporary megachurches have denominational affiliation, they tend to disregard national bureaucracies in favor of local autonomy (Vaughn 1993, p. 20).

Researchers about the midpoint of the twentieth century first noticed large congregations. After 1970 the growth rate of megachurches began to increase (Thumma 1996; Vaughn 1993). In 1949 a list of the largest churches in America identified 10 congregations (Entzminger 1949; Thumma 1996). Twenty years later Elmer Towns began a series of yearly reports on the "fastest growing Sunday Schools". In his first study, Towns found 15 congregations with Sunday school organizations with more than 2000 persons in attendance (1969). By the mid-1970s Towns reported 40 Sunday Schools of this size (1976). By 1980 Towns and his colleagues found more than 100 congregations with at least 2000 persons in worship service (Towns et al. 1981). The final decade of the twentieth century has seen a continuation of this growth. As of 1995 there were estimated to be 400 megachurches in the United States with smaller churches attaining megachurch status at a rate of one every two weeks (Vaughn 1993, p. 41). Indeed, the growth of these large churches is called one of the most significant religious

developments in the last 30 years (Schaller 1990; Vaughn 1993; Thumma 1996).

AS THE CULTURE SHIFTS, RELIGION FOLLOWS

The importance of the megachurch movement is not found solely in its rapid growth. These large churches represent a shift in evangelical Christianity, parallels of which can be seen in American culture as a whole, especially among middle-class, suburban, baby-boomers (Thumma 1996, p. 14). Leaders of the movement represent an entrepreneurial form of Christianity by growing churches through modern techniques of management and marketing. In doing so they are, according to church historian Bill Leonard, "setting the agenda for every religious community in the country" (Niebuhr 1995a).

That the megachurch movement has led conservative Christianity toward a more culturally relevant stance is undisputed. That it has done so in such a short time is remarkable. Os Guinness, a sympathetic critic of megachurches, explains:

Ten years ago the attention was on the Christian Right; today it is on church growth. Then the cry was "Mobilize!"; now it's "Modernize!" Then the focus was politics and public life; now it's church and missions. Then the reliance was on populism and political strength; now it is on entrepreneurialism and managerial strength. Then the orientation was the past and the restoration of the nineteenth-century consensus; now it is the future and renewal. Then the attention was on special-interest groups, epitomized by the Moral Majority; now it is on the megachurches. (1993, p. 22).

EXPLAINING MEGACHURCH GROWTH

A number of explanations for the success of the megachurch movement are advanced. Lyle Schaller (1995) credits the decline of denominational loyalty as one explanation of megachurches' growing popularity. That is, "megachurches are gradually filling in the void created by the erosion of the traditional role of denominations" (p. 56). Schaller adds, "the megachurches are the laboratory where the experiments are being carried out today in new approaches to worship, in new styles of teaching, in new family ministries, and in dozens of other pioneering ventures" (p. 56).

In an earlier article, Schaller (1990) compiled a list of reasons for the megachurch phenomenon. The list included:

- 1) The willingness of people to commute 5, 10 or 20 miles to an attractive, high-quality church, knowing that they will find plenty of off-street parking when they get there.
- 2) The freedom of younger generations to ignore denominational labels and shop around for a church that meets their needs.
- 3) The ability of the megachurch to provide a greater range of specialized ministries in which the "seeker" can find his or her particular niche.
- 4) A sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of the "market" rather than driven by traditional ministries.
- And, 5) the trend, in American

society, toward larger institutions providing "one-stop-shopping" (pp. 20-21).

Such *contextual* and *cultural* factors certainly do contribute to the growth of churches. But, such factors are not universally accepted as most important. For many, especially those sympathetic to the megachurch movement, *institutional* factors, such as organizational structure and theology are the primary contributors to the growth of such congregations. To understand the importance of these growth factors, we must review church growth theory and research.

UNDERSTANDING HOW CHURCHES GROW

Contemporary research on church growth has developed from two very different world views (Inskeep 1993). On one side is the "Church Growth Movement," comprised primarily of conservative Protestants whose goal is to "develop practical and successful techniques for bringing people to church" (Inskeep 1993, p. 135). The other perspective involves a scientific study of religious movements and organizations. Herein researchers are interested in developing theoretical models to explain the decline of membership in mainline churches since the 1960s (Inskeep 1993, p. 135).

Between 1976 and 1978 a group of social scientists, theologians, historians, and denominational statisticians met at Hartford Seminary to study the unprecedented decline in church membership and seek ways of combating this trend

(Hoge and Roozen 1979a). The participants of the Hartford study developed a typology of factors by which they could study the complex issue of church growth and decline (Roozen and Carroll 1979, pp. 39-40; Wagner 1981). The four factors are:

National contextual factors. These are factors external to the church that operate at the national level. Such factors include demographic trends, economic conditions, and political stability. Such conditions are usually beyond the control of the church.

National institutional factors. These are factors internal to the church that are controlled at the denominational level. Among these would be polity, emphasis on evangelism, and social programs.

Local contextual factors. These are characteristics of the local community over which the church has little or no control. They include population trends, patterns of neighborhood change, and local economic conditions.

Local institutional factors. These are factors pertaining to the local congregation. They include such characteristics as pastoral and lay leadership, organizational structure, style of worship and strictness.

Although the Hartford group did agree that the typology was useful, they did not agree on the relative importance of each of the factors (Hoge and Roozen 1979c). As we shall see, the particular perspective from which one approached

the problem of church growth and decline provides the researcher with a preference for one set of factors over the other. The following summary of the two approaches provides a helpful understanding of church growth research and the contributions each perspective made to the field.

THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT

The Church Growth Movement, primarily, emphasizes the necessity for churches and denominations to grow numerically through evangelism (Wagner 1981). The founder of the movement, Donald McGavran, was concerned with the growth of churches, not for scientific reasons, but because he saw the expansion of Christian churches as "what God desires" (McGavran 1970, p. 31). McGavran's influence is most obvious in the publication of his book, Understanding Church Growth (1970), and in the founding of the Institute of Church Growth at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California in 1965.

Theologically, the Church Growth Movement is a product of conservative, evangelical theology. Peter Wagner, probably the next most important "church growth" advocate after McGavran, states five assumptions that demonstrate the emphasis on institutional, especially theological, factors:

The glory of God as the chief end of humans. "Church growth people want to affirm that their theological starting point is God the Father."

The Lordship of Jesus Christ. "Church growth people have been born by the Holy Spirit into the Kingdom of God. Jesus is Lord."

The normative authority of the Scriptures. "Church growth theology is based on the principle that Scripture alone is the only infallible rule of faith and practice."

The ultimate eschatological reality of sin, salvation, and eternal death. "This is the conviction that decisions made by men and women in this life bear eternal consequences. . . the doctrine that everyone will ultimately be saved does not receive support of church growth people."

The personal ministry of the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of believers in all cultures" (Wagner 1981, p. xiii).

McGavran did not deny that contextual factors could, and often did, play an important role in church growth (McGavran 1970, p. 137). Both McGavran and Wagner focused, almost exclusively on institutional factors. For Wagner, the most relevant factors promoting church growth include: pastoral authority and power, a well mobilized laity, a church large enough to provide the necessary growth resources, structural balance between celebration and worship, cell groups comprised of people of similar backgrounds and ideas, utilization of proven evangelistic methods, and a priority of the church on growth (Wagner 1976).

Later church growth proponents developed an interesting blend of local contextual factors and local institutional factors to create a new kind of church. Two of the most prominent pastors of megachurches in the United States began their churches by taking surveys in their respective communities. Then they organized congregations around the principle of giving people what they want, within a framework of conservative theology (Hybels and Hybels 1995; Warren 1995). Many pastors soon found that the best way to grow, and to give the people what they wanted, was to provide as many opportunities for involvement as possible (Hunter 1987). In this way almost everyone could find a place in which to fit in. For George G. Hunter III, growing a large church is an "entrepreneurial task." One should not apologize for applying modern marketing techniques to evangelism (1987 p. 128).

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF CHURCH GROWTH AND DECLINE

The second research focus on how churches grow emerged as a reaction to the trend of numerical decline that affected mainline Protestant churches in the 1960s. The seminal work for this period of research was Why Conservative Churches are Growing by Dean Kelley (1972). Kelley developed a model on what makes churches or denominations strong or weak (pp. 56ff). Kelley argued that the reason for membership decline among mainline churches

was that they had become less strict, and as a result, failed to provide adequate meaning of life for their members (1972). For Kelley, a strong church demanded commitment, discipline, and "missionary zeal" (p. 58). Conversely, weak churches were relativistic, accepting of diversity and dialogue, "lukewarm" (to truth), individualistic and reluctant about imposing one's religious views on others (p. 84).

Kelley's thesis challenged the prevailing ideas of religion and society. Since the enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Western intellectuals have predicted the decline and eventual disappearance of religion as advances in scientific knowledge replace belief in the supernatural (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, p. 1). This idea, known as the secularization thesis, states that modernization produces a "diminution in the social significance of religion" (Wilson 1982, p. 149). Wallis and Bruce (1991) suggest that, although religious belief and religiosity may continue, the significance of religious institutions will decline (p.3). For Wallis and Bruce, the processes of modernization will "generate secularization except where religion finds or retains work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural"(p. 9). The anomaly of the American experience is explained by this principle. According to Wallis and Bruce, "America is the paradigm case of such evacuation of the supernatural from religion, when what remains for the

majority of attenders is a practice predominately serving manifest social and psychological functions”(p.18). In other words, modernization theory says that the religions that attract people and become popular are those that accommodate modern values. Kelley did not agree. He believed that religion has its own internal dynamics that cannot be explained by *contextual* factors such as demographic trends, economic conditions, or geography (Tamney and Johnson 1998, p. 211)

Although Kelley wrote Why Conservative Churches are Growing while on sabbatical leave from the National Council of Churches, the book was vigorously criticized by mainline Protestants (McFaul 1974; Bibby 1978; Bouma 1979; Roof et al. 1979). An important result of the book was the large body of research that was produced in an attempt to counter Kelley's arguments. The Hartford group and subsequent book (Hoge and Roozen 1979a) were intended to collect the social scientific research on church growth and decline and to examine the factors that accounted for such change.

Kelley did not present his arguments for strong churches in *institutional* or *contextual* terms, but he did believe that membership decline among mainline denominations and churches “was the result of their institutional inability to advance a belief system or an organizational ethos that would foster ardent membership commitment” (Inskeep 1993, p. 136).

AFTER KELLEY: HARTFORD AND BEYOND

Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978, edited by Dean Hoge and David Roozen (1979a), was the first systematic attempt to examine the factors contributing to church growth and decline. For Hoge and Roozen, representing the majority of the conveners, the *contextual* factors are more important than institutional factors in determining church growth (1979c). According to Hoge and Roozen:

. . . local contextual factors are relatively more powerful than local institutional factors. The contextual factors explain about 50 to 70 percent, as an estimate, while the institutional factors explain 30 to 50 percent (1979c, p. 326).

Roof et al. (1979), in a similar fashion, dismissed Kelley's thesis, finding "only weak support for his argument" (p. 216). Roof et al. found that affluence of the surrounding community and an "influx of young, middle-class, largely white families into the community" were the two most important contextual factors in the growth of the Presbyterian churches they studied (p. 221). Important institutional factors included satisfaction with worship and church programs, involvement in social concerns, and cooperation and harmony among fellow members (p. 221).

In another study, Hadaway (1982) concluded that contextual factors, especially location, are most important in determining the vitality of a church. He found that most

churches in the downtown or inner city area are declining; whereas churches located further out toward the suburbs were more likely to be growing. According to Hadaway, "these findings underscore the tremendous impact of urban location on the church, an impact that cannot be ignored if church planning is to be realistic" (1982, p. 384).

Studies of Americans' attitude toward strict religion produced varied results. Roof (1993) found that baby-boomers who had left conservative congregations for mainline churches often listed, "narrow-minded teachings" and strictness as reasons for the move (p. 177). Although many Americans say they are attracted to strict religious groups, it is also true that many others are repelled by such qualities (Tamney and Johnson 1998, p. 211).

KELLEY REVISITED: THE RATIONAL CHOICE MODEL OF RELIGION

Twenty years after Kelley published Why Conservative Churches are Growing, his ideas were given new life by a group of sociologists who looked at religious vitality, commitment and, indirectly, denominational and church growth from the rational choice perspective (Iannaccone 1994; Finke and Stark 1992). Proponents of rational choice theory agreed with Kelley that institutional factors are most important in attracting people to religious organizations (Iannaccone 1994).

Iannaccone has restated Kelley's thesis in rational choice terms (1994, p. 1182). For Iannaccone, strict churches are strong because they discourage free-riders within the congregation, and thus increase the average level of commitment and participation among members. Such increased commitments permit the congregation to produce higher collective rewards that are the basis for being a strong church (Iannaccone 1994; Tamney and Johnson 1998).

Strictness supposedly solves the free rider problem by functioning as a high entry "fee." The "fee" is high enough to discourage all but the most interested or dedicated (Iannaccone 1994). Because megachurches welcome free riders, or "seekers," such churches are problematic for rational choice theory. If it is true that "numbers is the game" (Gregory 1994, p. 203), then free riders are not only non-problematic for the megachurch, they are essential, especially as a source of future contributors.

According to the rational choice model, congregations that are growing are the ones that "offer distinctive and rewarding experiences, fitting their religious products to the preferences of consumers in the market" (Sherkat and Wilson 1995). The most important factor for growing churches is strictness (Iannaccone 1994). Although a high degree of agreement exists for rating American denominations on "strictness" (Roof and McKinney 1987; Hoge and Roozen 1979c; Hoge 1979; Iannaccone 1994; Iannaccone, Olson, Stark

1995; Dudley 1979, p. 50), the nature of "strictness," that is, distinctive behavior and rewards, is not specified (Smith 1990; 1992; Gay 1996).

According to rational choice theory, individuals make choices in a rational manner, including the type of religion to which one does belong or does not belong. Rational choice theory has three basic assumptions about religion and human behavior (Finke and Stark 1992, pp. 252-255). First, individuals evaluate religion in the same way they evaluate any other commodity of choice. People compare costs and rewards and choose the religious (or nonreligious) expression that they believe will maximize their profit. Second, religion is a "collectively produced commodity." Not only are religious benefits greater when shared among like-minded persons, the plausibility (Berger 1967) of those benefits is also strengthened. It is through interaction with others that the values of religious rewards are determined. Third, because religion is a collective action, there is the constant threat of exploitation by free riders. On one hand, a congregation structure that relies on the collective action of numerous volunteers is needed to make religion credible and potent. On the other hand, unless volunteers are mobilized to a high level of participation, that same congregational structure threatens to undermine the level of commitment and contributions needed to make religion viable (Finke and Stark 1992, p. 253).

NON-MEGA VERSUS MEGA CHURCH: WHAT TO COMPARE, WHAT NOT TO COMPARE

Current church research is not sufficient

For the most part, church growth research in the United States has emphasized, primarily, the membership growth of denominations (Kelley 1972; Hoge and Roozen 1979a; Iannaccone 1994). Such attention is seen as a major weakness of the church growth literature. It is curious to focus on denominations in a pluralistic religious economy where churches specialize in services and target specific audiences, and congregational characteristics no longer conform across denominations.

Internal structure of a new church form

Traditional churches provided a dogma, a doctrine, and a circumscribing authority that compelled believers to sacrifice their time and donate their money in exchange for spiritual well being and even salvation. The flow of power went from the congregation member to the traditional church. The clergy could expect the pews to be full out of duty, fear, or even habit. The variations on this theme were the denominations themselves, with their various polities or preferred orders of service. But across Protestant denominations one finds one commonality: the church comes first, served by the congregation.

The megachurch is different. It does not rely solely on tradition, neither traditional message nor traditional medium (ritual). The member-to-be is sought actively, and in a way diverging from the older styles of evangelism. The customer comes first. A host of programs are offered, well beyond Sunday school, sermons, and Wednesday night suppers. The appeal of such an approach can reach both the unchurched and the disenchanted traditional believer. Note that the megachurch attracts from many denominations. Its appeal transcends theology and ritual.

Thus it does not make sense to approach the study of the megachurch from an inter-denominational stance. If there were a Baptist megachurch, and one that was Methodist, and another that was Pentecostal, there would be much more in common between them due to their common evolution into a megachurch. The denominational distinction is, if not lost, greatly reduced. From a traditional viewpoint, Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals do share certain commonalities as a result of being "Protestant," but, clergy, congregation members, and historians make much of their differences. But it is the similarities across megachurches that demand attention in this study.

The logic of size

For the sake of clear comparisons, then, we will draw distinctions between smaller, traditional churches and those

that attract in excess of 2000 weekly attenders. Even surface appearances can be enlightening. Consider the following: On one hand, we have 20 churches of about 100 attenders each; and on the other hand, we have one church of 2000 attenders. Obviously the smaller churches could afford to be one-dimensional. Indeed, they might need to be strictly one-dimensional to survive. To divide 100 persons into support groups for families, divorced persons, the young, the aging, the ill, and those with a multitude of other serious problems, in addition to special interest groups and Bible study groups, may stretch the resources of the small staff church. It certainly would set up too many groups of too small a size to be sustained across time. What of the 2000 under one roof? They can go to many rooms, to seek help for many different needs (probably at different times, for different motives), and collectively sustain the megachurch by forming and thriving as a host of a large number of help/study groups. It seems reasonable that such a large number of people would not agree on the sole purpose of their church. The very difference in number of attenders creates a new form of worship: many people, with many needs, from a diversity of faith perspectives (formally different denominations), all using the same church space divided into multiple settings (perhaps all week long).

For simplicity's sake

Even if the reader is convinced that a megachurch is not the same as a large traditional church, we must make one further point. If the megachurch is to be compared to non-megachurches, things could get complicated very quickly, and unnecessarily so. For instance, to compare a Baptist megachurch to non-megachurches from other denominations invites confusion due to Baptists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians and Episcopalians being so different in worship style. Keep in mind that we are seeking a clear set of comparisons between two forms of churches. Thus we must constrain the comparison group as much as possible. Our megachurches are Southern Baptist. Thus our non-megachurches churches are also Southern Baptist. It is hoped that the reader understands why this strategy for simplification was adopted. We do not expect a Methodist, or non-denominational, megachurch to be very dissimilar from one in our Baptist sample. We expect our findings will generalize. To avoid unnecessary nuances of divergence, we hold the denomination constant to study the underlying *form* of worship, the megachurch.

MEGACHURCHES OF ONE DENOMINATION: SOUTHERN BAPTIST

Number and locations of Southern Baptist megachurches

In 1997, there were seventy-nine megachurches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). All

of these congregations are located in metropolitan areas in 17 states (Table 1.1). Most of them are suburban, however a few older churches are still located in downtown areas in the central cities. A megachurch pastor summed up the significance of the location:

One reason we attract so many people, especially young people, is that we provide support for persons who are moving away from home for the first time or starting a new job. American young adults are on the move, and we are located at the receiving end of that mobility.

Table 1.1: Southern Baptist Megachurches by State: 1997

State	Number of Megachurches
Alabama	1
Arizona	2
Arkansas	2
California	4
Florida	12
Georgia	11
Illinois	1
Louisiana	1
Missouri	1
Mississippi	1
New Mexico	1
North Carolina	2
Oklahoma	1
South Carolina	2
Tennessee	5
Texas	30
Virginia	2
Total = 79	

Source: North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

The impact of the megachurches

In reality, 79 churches are a very small percentage of the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. When the relevant data of the megachurches are compared to the rest of the churches within the denomination, however, the dramatic impact of the small percentage of large churches becomes obvious.

The Southern Baptist Convention is predominately a denomination of small churches (Jones 1996). In 1997 the median church in the denomination had 233 members and 70% of the churches had fewer than 400 members (Jones 1998). Although there were 835 SBC churches reporting 2,000 or more members, only a small number ($n = 79$) actually had 2,000 or more persons in regular weekly attendance. Therefore, megachurches represented 0.2% of all SBC churches. Selected data for SBC congregations show the disproportionate impact that megachurches have on the denomination (See Table 1.2).

Total members in Southern Baptist megachurches, churches with 2,000 or more persons in weekly attendance, make up 4.3% of all SBC members. This fact is even more dramatic when compared to the category of churches with less than 100 members. This category of smallest congregations makes up 21% of all SBC churches (Fig. 1.1). The 79 megachurches represent almost 659,000 members whereas the 7,744 smallest churches have less than 451,000 members (Fig. 1.2).

Table 1.2: Selected Data for Southern Baptist Churches by Size of Church: 1997

Data	Size of Church (Total Members)									
	Total SBC	1-99	100-199	200-299	300-499	500-749	750-999	1000-1999	2000+	Mega-churches
Number of Churches	36,911	7,744	8,467	5,899	6,493	3,566	1,716	2,191	756	79
% of total		21.0%	22.9%	16.0%	17.6%	9.7%	4.6%	5.9%	2.0%	0.2%
Total Members	15,225,302	450,615	1,237,010	1,445,569	2,502,160	2,169,109	1,457,905	2,950,052	2,345,036	658,966
% of total		3.0%	8.1%	9.5%	16.4%	14.2%	9.6%	19.4%	15.4%	4.3%
Baptisms	395,484	21,866	43,325	41,505	66,561	52,408	32,306	62,622	50,818	24,073
% of total		5.5%	11.0%	10.5%	16.8%	13.3%	8.2%	15.8%	12.8%	6.1%
Mean baptism Per church	10.7	2.8	5.1	7.0	10.3	14.7	18.8	28.6	67.2	304.7
Baptisms per 100 members	2.6	4.9	3.5	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.2	3.7
Percent of total SBC monetary receipts		2.9%	6.3%	6.9%	12.8%	12.6%	9.1%	21.9%	20.1%	7.4%
Per capita Giving	\$450	\$438	\$349	\$328	\$350	\$397	\$430	\$507	\$589	\$774
Percent of total SBC missions expenditures		2.6%	6.2%	6.8%	13.4%	12.5%	9.3%	26.5%	17.9%	4.8%
Missions Expenditures As a % of Total receipts	13.3%	11.9%	13.1%	13.2%	14.0%	13.3%	13.6%	16.1%	11.8%	8.6%

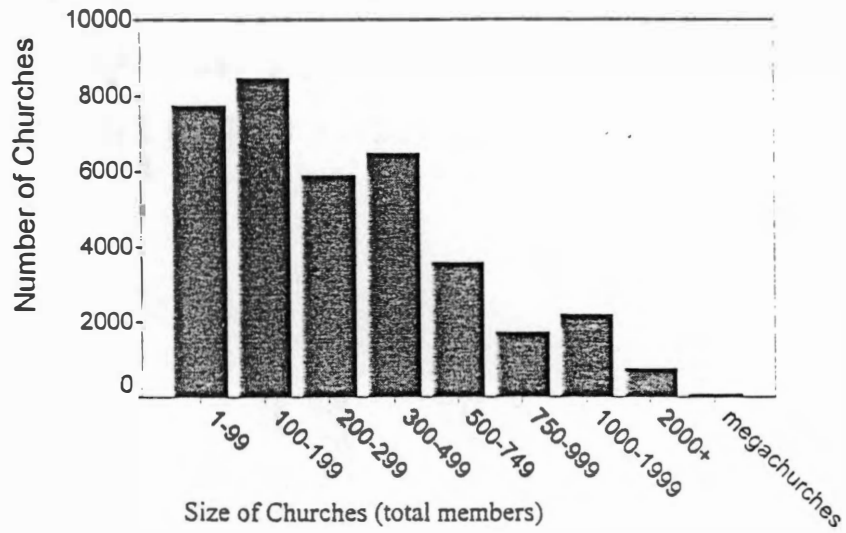


Figure 1.1: Number of Churches in 1997 by Size of Church

Source: North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

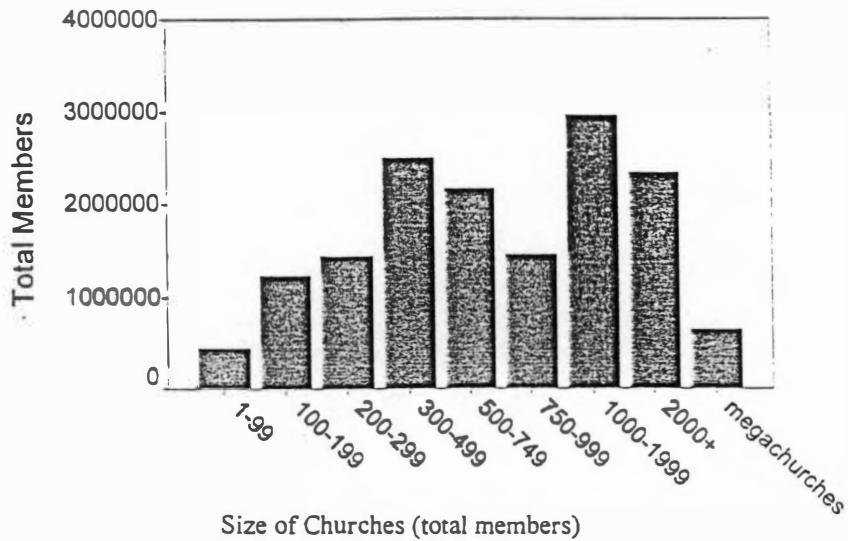


Figure 1.2: Total Members in 1997 by Size of Church

Source: North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

An even greater impact of the megachurches is demonstrated when baptism and monetary statistics are compared. Baptism statistics are extremely important to Southern Baptists as they represent growth by addition of persons not transferring from other churches. In 1997 Southern Baptist added almost 400,000 persons to their rolls through baptism. The 79 megachurches accounted for more than 24,000 or 6.1% of all baptisms in 1997 (Fig. 1.3). The mean number of baptisms for megachurches was 305, 4 1/2 times the nearest category of churches (Table 1.2). Megachurches look much more like other churches when you compare baptisms per 100 members. Across the entire Southern Baptist Convention, churches baptized 2.6 persons for every 100 members in 1997. The megachurches' rate of baptisms per 100 members (3.65) is not greatly different than the churches in other size categories.

The most revealing statistics on the relationship of megachurches to the rest of the denomination are found in monetary receipts (Fig. 1.4) and expenditures (Fig. 1.5). Megachurches, with only 0.2% of the total congregations, collected 7.4% of all money given to SBC churches in 1997. When *per capita* giving is examined, we find attenders of megachurches gave an incredible \$774 per member in 1997. Table 1.2 show that no other category of churches comes Close. This figure is deceptive. The *total number of members determines the per capita giving*, and although

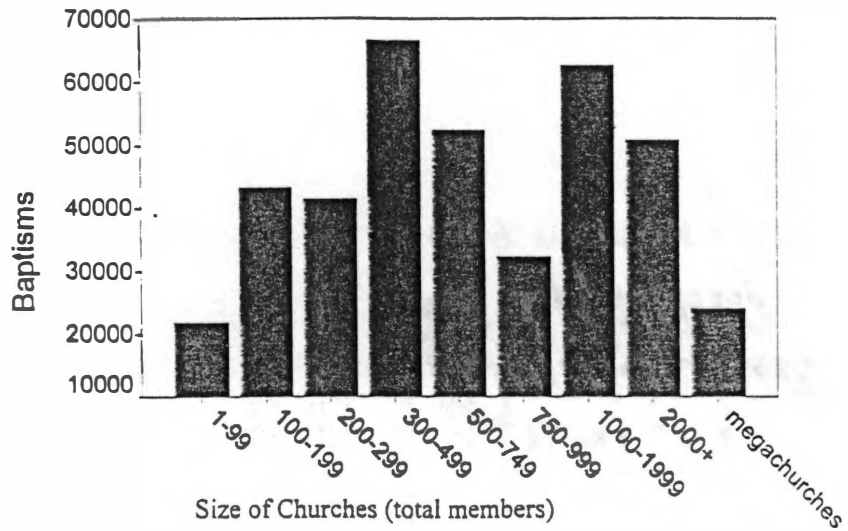


Figure 1.3: Total Baptisms in 1997 by Size of Church

Source: North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

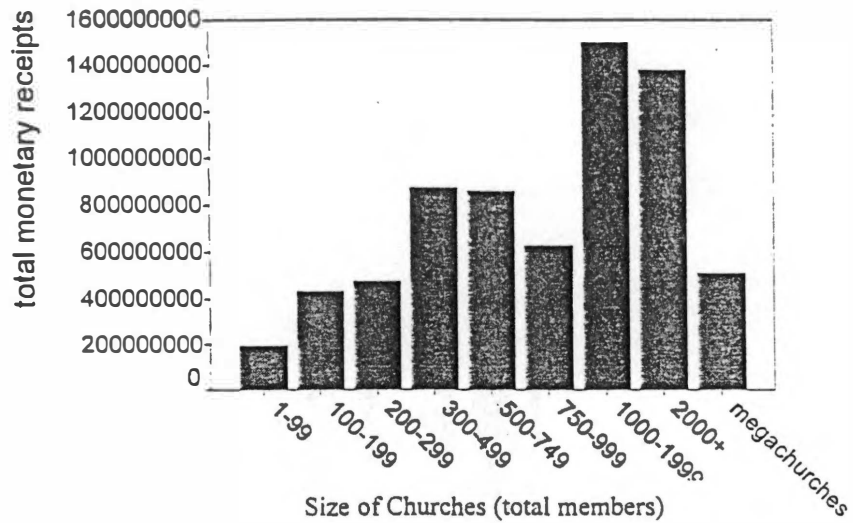


Figure 1.4: Total Monetary Receipts in 1997 by Size of Church

Source: North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

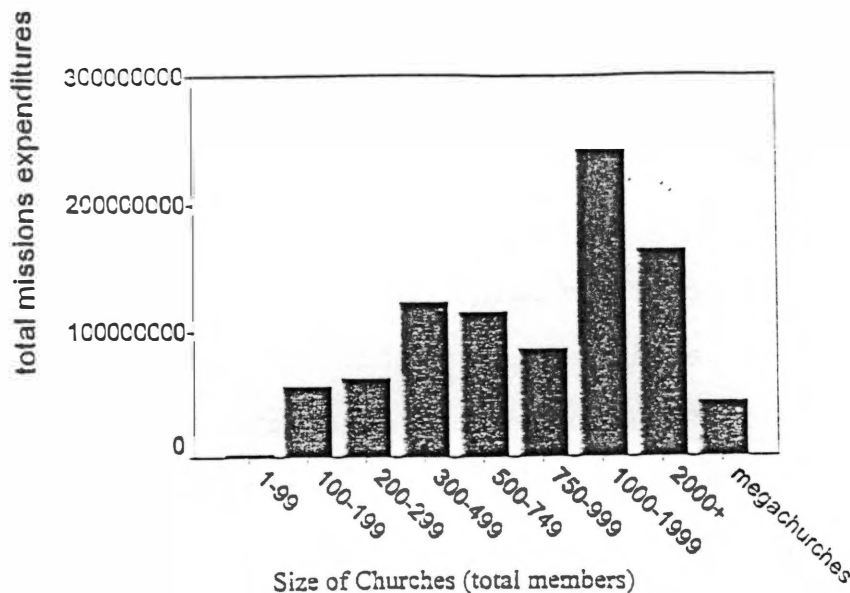


Figure 1.5: Total Missions Expenditures in 1997 by Size of Church

Source: North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

megachurches are well represented in total members (4.3%), they are the only churches with an attendance consistently greater than their membership. Simply put, there are many more persons putting money in the collection plate each week than members.

Receipts are only half of the story. How a church spends its money is also quite revealing. Southern Baptists spent more than 900 million dollars on missions in 1997 (Jones 1998). Generally, larger churches accounted for more money spent on missions than smaller churches. Churches with 1,000 or more members reported almost half of all mission expenditures. Megachurches, while collecting 7.4% of all receipts, spent only 4.8% of the total mission money.

When mission expenditures are figured as a percentage of total receipts, every category of churches spent between 11 and 16% except megachurches, which gave only 8.6%.

These data allow us to make several observations regarding the influence of megachurches on the denomination. There is a shift in participation patterns in the Southern Baptist Convention. The median size of churches is declining (Jones 1996), but the number of megachurches within the denomination continues to grow. Key statistics, such as baptisms and financial records indicate that megachurches are major contributors to the denomination. The megachurches are not as dependent on the denomination as smaller churches. Most megachurches develop their own programs and do not look to the national organization for leadership. The flow of influence is from the megachurch to the denomination. Megachurch pastors and musicians are in great demand as conference leaders, and smaller churches are adopting megachurch styles. As the significance of denominations declines and new styles of "doing church" increase, it will be important to understand the attraction of these new styles.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, our focus is on methodological issues of the present study. Three major issues are delineated. First, we briefly comment on the research instrument used in gathering the information on persons attending Baptist megachurches. Second, we turn our attention to the research design that was developed to gather data about this relatively untapped resource, the megachurch. Here we focus on such topics as selection of the sample and survey procedures. A profile of respondents is examined. Third, we discuss the operationalization of variables and scale reliability and validity. We also note potential problems inherent in the project.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The original idea for this study developed from conversations with personnel from the Research Division of the North American Mission Board (SBC) as early as 1996. Phillip B. Jones, Director of Research, suggested that financial assistance for a project would be available if the project was relevant to Southern Baptist constituents.

Subsequent conversations revealed that although megachurches represent a growing portion of Southern Baptist churches, in actuality, very little is known about them. During several trips to Atlanta, Georgia, a preliminary research design was formulated, and the kinds of questions to be asked were discussed.

In 1998 this researcher was awarded a generous study grant by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Trust, through the Appalachian Colleges Association that allowed me to take a year off from my teaching duties to finalize the survey instrument and visit a number of megachurches.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Because this is a pioneer study, a research instrument was developed specifically for the project. The purpose of the instrument is to provide the widest possible scope of information on correlates of attraction to megachurches using survey methodology. An extensive questionnaire was developed for persons attending churches in the study sample. The attender survey was designed to be completed in one sitting at each church after a worship service or at a time suggested by the pastor. The researcher provided instructions. Questionnaires completed by attenders provide a broad range of data about the individual as well as subjective perceptions on the megachurch and the factors that attract the individual.

After a preliminary questionnaire was developed, it was pre-tested by administering it to 215 members of two large Southern Baptist churches. Although both churches selected for the pre-test have large memberships, they do not exceed 2,000 in regular attendance, and therefore have not attained megachurch status. The pre-test churches are not included in the population from which our sample was chosen. During the test, special attention was paid to the length and logical structure of the questionnaire and the comprehensibility of the questions (Babbie 1973, p. 214).

Most questionnaires were completed in 20 minutes, followed by a time of discussion and evaluation. Most participants were favorable about the questionnaire format with minor questions of clarification. All suggestions were considered, and most were incorporated into the final product. The length of the questionnaire was the major problem for the older members of the test sample. As a result, the final questionnaire was shortened from its original version. It was assumed (somewhat incorrectly) that a long questionnaire would not be a serious problem in megachurches, because such churches tend to attract persons from younger segments of the population.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In a lengthy questionnaire (Appendix A), persons

attending Sunday morning worship services at selected churches were be asked about:

Involvement with the church. Questions in this section concern the duration and extent of the attender's participation in the church. Questions also ask about *friendships* within the church and the perceived *benefits* of attending.

Beliefs and religious background. Participants are asked to respond to questions concerning their Christian commitment, doctrinal beliefs and religious practices. A number of questions probe sources of spiritual inspiration and values.

Personal background information. The final section of the questionnaire asks various demographic questions. Items in this section concern gender, age, marital and family status, where the respondent grew up, education, income, occupation, and participation in community organizations.

SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE: CHURCH LEVEL

Because this study examines factors that attract persons to megachurches, it was necessary that detailed data be obtained from attenders of such congregations. In 1997, 79 congregations were classified as "megachurches" by virtue of having more than 2000 persons attending Sunday morning services. These churches make up the research population for this study. In the spring of 1998 a letter from Phillip

Jones, Director of Research for the North American Mission Board, was sent to pastors of all 79 megachurches outlining the nature of this research (Appendix B). Follow-up telephone calls were made a few weeks later, and where possible, visits were made. Pastors and other key leaders were asked to consider a survey of attenders at a Sunday morning service. Of the 79 megachurches, 7 agreed to participate.

SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE: RESPONDENT LEVEL

Although the church leaders and the researcher decided the specific time and method for distributing questionnaires within each church jointly, a number of common procedures were followed in all 7 congregations. The project was introduced to attenders in a Sunday morning service and questionnaires were made available to any adult choosing to participate. For the most part, questionnaires were completed after the service, between services, or during the Sunday school hour. Instructions were provided by the researcher, and, in most cases, the questionnaires were completed in 15-25 minutes and turned-in. When time constraints were a factor, respondents were allowed to take survey forms home to complete and return to the church at a later time. In all, 1,203 questionnaires were completed in the 7 churches.

THE DATA

After collecting the data from the first church (n=235), data-entry was completed and preliminary statistical analyses were performed. At this time all fill-in responses were coded, applying a numerical value for each specific response. This early analysis provided a model for later analysis on the complete data set.

Completed questionnaires, for the remaining 6 churches, were entered into a computer data set. The data were entered in the same order as the questionnaire and one record was reserved for each respondent. The final data set contained 1,203 cases (records) and 193 columns. All analyses were completed using SPSS 8.0 For Windows.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The seven churches that agreed to participate in the study were compared to the population of 79 churches. Despite the voluntary nature of sample selection, the seven churches were remarkably similar to the larger set of megachurches. Table 2.1 shows the comparison of the sample churches to the population of churches. These same variables were, in turn, used to compare the 79 megachurches with churches in the Southern Baptist Convention (Table 1.1 above).

Table 2.1: A Comparison of Selected Data of the Megachurch Sample and the Population of Megachurches: 1997

Data	Sample mean (N=7)	Population mean (N=79)
Total Members	8218	8341
Total Baptisms	299	305
Worship Attendance	3361	3046
Total Receipts	\$6,093,145	\$6,457,896
Total Missions Expenditures	\$587,002	\$556,421

Source: North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

The respondents in the sample tended to be young to middle age, and married with children. A slight majority of the respondents were female, and a large percentage (89.1%) of all respondents were white. About one half of the sample grew up on a farm or in a small town, and three fourths were originally from the South. Both education and income levels are quite high. (A summary of the sample data is found in Table 2.2).

OPERATIONALIZATION OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

One of the main tasks of this study is to determine and explain social-psychological influences of megachurch participation. Therefore, the variables selected as independent variables in this study are life-cycle stage,

Table 2.2: Summary Descriptive Statistics For Study Sample

Characteristic		Sample Data (N= 1,203)
Sex	Percent Male	41.5%
	Percent Female	58.5%
Race	Percent White	89.1%
	Percent Black	9.2%
	Percent Other	1.7%
Age	Median	45 years
	Mean	46.1 years
Marital Status	Single (never married)	11.7%
	Married	71.4%
	Widowed	5.6%
	Separated	1.1%
	Divorced	10.2%
Household Type	Live Alone	13.2%
	Adults sharing living quarters	5.4%
	Married couple without children	11.3%
	Married couple w/children at home	41.9%
	One parent w/children at home	7.3%
	Married couple with children no longer at home	21.0%
Education	Less than high school graduate	2.3%
	High School diploma or equivalent	15.6%
	Some post-high school work	33.9%
	4-year college degree	24.4%
	Graduate work or degree	23.8%
Income	Less than \$20,000	9.3%
	\$20,000 to \$49,999	34.4%
	\$50,000 to \$79,999	30.9%
	\$80,000 to \$99,999	10.3%
	\$100,000 or more	15.2%

socio-economic characteristics, early socialization, religious beliefs and practices, community attachment, friendships, and personal orientations.

These variables were selected because they include appropriate past experiences (early socialization), current life situation (life-cycle stage, community attachment, friendships) and personal attitudes and perceptions concerning the megachurch (religious beliefs and personal orientations).

The **life-cycle stage** is indicated by a number of variables, namely, age, marital status, and household type. **Age** is a measure of the respondent's age at their last birthday. **Marital status** is measured by the response to one of five categories: single (never married), married, widowed, separated, divorced. **Household type** is indicated by a response to one of six categories: live alone, adults sharing living quarters, married couple without children, married couple with children living at home, single parent with children living at home, married couple with children no longer at home.

Socio-economic characteristics are measured by responses to questions on two variables: education and income. Education is treated as an ordinal-level variable and is classified into 5 categories. Income is also treated as ordinal-level, and classified into 8 levels (Appendix A).

Early socialization is measured by asking a number of questions on the respondent's early life experiences. Respondents were asked the state (or country) in which they spent their adolescent years. Respondents were also asked the *type of community* in which they grew up. Possible responses included: farm, rural non-farm, small town, suburb of a city, neighborhood within a city, and inner city. In addition to these geographical questions, several questions concerning the early religious socialization of the respondent were asked. These questions included: "Have you ever experienced a moment of decisive faith commitment or conversion?" "If 'yes,' how long ago?" In addition, respondents were asked to describe their "first contact with the Christian faith," the "denomination of the church they attended as a youth," the "importance of religion in their family when they were growing up," and if their parents "shared the same religious beliefs" when the respondent was growing up.

Current religious beliefs and practices are measured by asking two attitudinal questions on beliefs about Jesus and about the Bible. Questions on religious behavior concerned frequency of prayer, the importance of religion in the life of the respondent today, and changes made as a result of one's Christian commitment. In addition to the above questions, a number of Likert-type questions were asked on attitudes toward various religious concerns. All religious

questions are found on pages 5-6 of the questionnaire (Appendix A).

Community attachment questions were designed to measure the investment one has within their community. To measure community attachments respondents were asked, "How long they have lived in the metropolitan area," driving time (in minutes) and distance (in miles) from home to church, and participation in various community civic and social organization not affiliated with their church. The various demographic, background, and community attachment variables discussed up to this point will be examined in chapter three.

Friendship factors concern networks of friends in the megachurch. Questions are asked about friends who were in the megachurch before the respondent began to attend and about friendships made since the respondent began attending the church.

Personal orientations are determined by the benefits one perceives gained by attending the megachurch. This variable is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF ATTRACTION

Earlier we posed the question "What factors are related to *attraction* to the megachurch?" But a prior question, one that has direct relevance to this study, is "what does the construct '*attraction to the megachurch*' mean?" For the

purpose of this study, a number of variables were selected to indicate the individual's attraction to the megachurch. First, it is assumed that persons who contribute more money and spend more time in church activities are more attracted to the group than persons sacrificing less. Therefore two behavioral measures were used: persons were asked to report the percentage of their income contributed to the church, and the amount of time per week they spend in church activities. Such behavioral measures of attraction can be termed "commitment." Rogers (1968) has demonstrated the interchangeable use of terms such as commitment and loyalty with the concept of attraction in voluntary association research literature.

Second, to indicate a more attitudinal measure of attraction, a number of questions were combined to create an index of "satisfaction" with the megachurch. This is done to demonstrate that attraction can exist without behavioral (outward) manifestations. Questions included in the index relate to one's sense of belonging, positive feelings about the programs and direction of the church, and the quality of relationships within the church. Respondents were asked to mark how much they agreed/ disagreed with the statement on a 4-point Likert type scale.

The twelve questions used to create the "Satisfaction" index include:

1. I feel a strong sense of "belonging" to this church.

2. I regularly take part in the activities of this church.
3. I am personally excited about church life at this time.
4. I have many close friends in this church.
5. I find myself in agreement with the direction this church is going most of the time.
6. The senior pastor has a clear vision for the growth of this church and its members.
7. When I talk to someone about personal matter or concerns, it is usually people within this church.
8. When I get together with others socially, it is usually with people within this church.
9. The music and songs in this church are very inspirational to me.
10. The sermons speak to my needs most of the time.
11. The most important part of this church, for me, is the inspiration I get from worship.
12. I experience God more at this church than I have at any other church.

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF *SATISFACTIN* INDEX

The reliability of the attitude index for ***satisfaction*** was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, which measures the internal reliability or consistency of the items included in the index (George and Mallery 2001). The purpose of the reliability measure is to check the internal consistency of the measurement instrument. Index reliability is measured between 0.0 and 1.0 as a positive value. The higher the alpha value, the greater the reliability of the measurement instrument. George and Mallery (2001) state that an alpha near or above .7 provides acceptable evidence of reliability (p. 217). The alpha for our *Satisfaction index* exceeded this criterion, .85.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Before we turn to the analysis of our data we must recognize that a number of potential limitations and problems are present within this study. Some of these are discussed below.

First, this is an exploratory study. Although a great deal is written about the megachurch in the popular press, little has appeared in scholarly works. No studies were found which dealt with attraction of individuals to megachurches. Many theories set forth factors that cause various religious groups to grow, and several of these are tested in this study.

A second limitation of this study is that all the churches belong to one denomination. By choice of the principal investigator, this is not a study of how an individual decides to adopt a religious frame of mind. It is not about declaring one's self a Christian, nor about accepting the Baptist tradition. Instead, this study takes as its starting point the Baptist denomination. More precisely, it is an investigation of Baptist megachurches. Whether our results generalize beyond the Baptist megachurch is an issue of external validity.

We deliberately attempted to control for theological and polity differences that would arise if our sample of megachurches included many denominations. Again we sought to simplify where possible. As a result, we may have lost

the ability to generalize findings across denominations. Such a shortcoming does not concern us. To rule out this artifact, future research must extend our findings to other denominations.

A final problem is, at least at first appearance, more serious than those above. The problem is that persons who agreed to complete the survey are persons who are on the whole, quite satisfied with their church. A lack of variance on questions of religiosity and values could be a serious problem for this study.

Religiosity is not of special concern to us. It is not because respondents lack religious fervor, but precisely because they are expected to be religious. Obviously they were sufficiently religious to be at church and complete our questionnaire. A "ceiling effect" for religiosity is to be expected. Again we are not currently concerned with describing or explaining the absentees, the "ones that got away" on a given Sunday. We sampled attenders. A more pertinent concern is a potential "ceiling effect" for the construct *satisfaction*.

If the main dependent variable, namely "satisfaction," has a ceiling effect then the internal validity of this study could be threatened. For instance, co-variation between any independent and dependent variables cannot be established if the criterion has little or no variation. In this case, hypothesis testing would become futile.

Fortunately, this is not the case in the present study. Sufficient variance in the criterion (satisfaction) obtains to allow several independent variables to become significant predictors.

What first appeared to be a weakness of the study is in fact a strength. The narrow band of variance makes for a conservative test of our hypotheses. That is, we end up comparing those who are "satisfied" with those who are "very satisfied." Such a subtle comparison could have worked against us, but fortunately some of our results reached statistical significance. Put differently, if, in the future, we also obtain responses from less invested attenders, then the observed pattern of results would be, presumably, even stronger.

Having operationalized the dependent and independent variables, and having identified potential constraints on our hypotheses testing, the data can now be analyzed in light of prevailing theories. Chapter 3 presents descriptive analyses with respect to demographic and background characteristics of the sample.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND BACKGROUND FACTORS

A number of theories propose to explain an individual's attraction and commitment to an institutional church (Hoge and Roozen 1979b; Hoge and Polk 1980; Roof and Hoge 1980; Hoge and Carroll 1978; Alston and McIntosh 1979). No consensus exists on the relative value of each theory's explanatory power. Indeed, there is little agreement on the validity of each theory. In this chapter we will test empirically three measures of attraction to the megachurch in light of four competing explanations: deprivation theory, child-rearing theory, localism theory, and social learning theory.

THEORIES AND EARLIER RESEARCH

Deprivation Theory

Perhaps the best-known attempt to explain religious commitment is a group of related theories (Roof and Hoge 1980) that state that social deprivation (e.g. economic) will drive a person to seek compensation in religious organizations (Glock 1964; Glock and Stark 1965). The

theory predicts that persons who experience more deprivation in American society exhibit greater church activity and commitment. Glock, Ringer and Babbie (1967) proposed that deprivation theory accounts for higher church involvement among women, older adults, and persons of lower socioeconomic levels. Glock and Stark, in a study of Episcopalians, defined deprivation as "any and all of the ways that an individual or group may be, or feel, disadvantaged in comparison to other individuals or groups or to an internalized set of standards" (1965 p. 246).

Research abounds which examines the relationship between conditions of deprivation and church behavior (Hoge and Carroll 1978; Hoge and Roozen 1979b; Alston and McIntosh 1979; Hoge and Polk 1980; Roof and Hoge 1980; Roberts and Davidson 1984; and Wimberley 1984). With the exception of one early study (Glock, Ringer, and Babbie 1967), most studies of mainline denominations have found little or no support for the deprivation theory. Indeed, at least two studies have shown that church involvement correlates positively with socioeconomic status (Demerath 1965; Campbell and Fukuyama 1970).

The findings by Campbell and Fukuyama suggest "religion is largely an expression of social captivity for people of privilege while it is largely an expression of compensation for social deprivation for underprivileged people" (1970 p. 104). In other words, deprivation theory may explain

religious beliefs, but it does not explain levels of church participation (Hoge and Roozen 1979b, p. 51).

A variation of the deprivation theory developed by Glock, Ringer and Babbie (1967) is the "*family surrogate theory*." The theory suggests that persons who do not have family ties (e.g. young adults away from home or married adults without children) are more likely to participate in churches, that serve as a surrogate family. The theory was supported by the 1952 Episcopalian data (Glock, Ringer and Babbie 1967); no other study has found such support (Hoge and Roozen 1979b, p. 53).

In summary, if the deprivation theory is valid, persons who experience some form of social disadvantage should exhibit greater levels of attraction to the church.

Child Rearing Theory

A theory that directly contradicts the family surrogate theory is the child rearing theory, which was first proposed by Nash and Berger (1962) and Nash (1968). Interviews of new members of suburban churches found that many people joined when they started families and had children. According to the theory, the presence of young children in families often leads the family to join or become more involved in a church (Hoge and Polk 1980). Several studies found support for this theory (Anders 1955; Lazerwitz 1961; Chaves 1991; Wilson and Sherkat 1994; and Stolzenberg et al.

1995), but the predictive power is often weak (Alston 1971; Hoge and Polk 1980). Other research suggests that increased religious participation is actually a life cycle or age effect (Mueller and Cooper 1986; Firebaugh and Harley 1991; Ploch and Hastings 1994, 1998), and not just a *family* or *children* effect. Ploch and Hastings suggest that positive correlations between short term conditions such as family formation and children may actually be part of the longer term effect of aging (1994).

Localism Theory

Based on concepts developed by Robert Merton (1957), Roof argued that persons who are "localistic" in their community orientation and values are more likely to participate and be committed to organizations that uphold traditional local culture (1976, 1978). Such a local community provides day-to-day support for the members of the community in the face of increased pluralism and cosmopolitan values. For Roof, this is a theory of "religious plausibility" (1978, p. 39), helping the individual maintain a value system and worldview (Berger 1967).

Roof developed an index of local-cosmopolitan orientation as a measure of person's embeddedness in a community. In two studies among Baptists and Episcopalians, Roof found that Protestants with "local" orientations were

more involved in their churches. "Locals" are less mobile geographically, more traditional in values, more orientated toward family and friends in their neighborhood, and more involved in local institutions (Roof 1978; Roof and Hoge 1980).

Social Learning Theory

A great portion of what humans know, and how they behave, results from their observing the behavior of other humans (Shaw and Costanzo 1982, p. 42). In other words, you are what your environment and interactions have made you. A number of studies have shown the importance of socialization in shaping one's religious beliefs and practices (Hood et al. 1996).

The basic argument of the "social learning theory" is that socialization is an important determinant of religious involvement. The theory says that one's level of participation is a learned behavior going back to one's earliest years (Roof and Hoge 1980). Yinger (1957) says that it is important not to overlook the fact that "those persons who are most interested in religion, . . . are drawn largely, although not entirely, from those groups that are most concerned to train their members to be religious" (p. 92). Therefore, if socialization is as powerful a factor in church attraction as social learning theory suggests, we should find that those persons who were raised "in the

faith" would exhibit a greater attraction than persons who do not have such a background.

MEASURES OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Deprivation

Such theories assume that attraction to religious organizations compensate for some form of deprivation. Five indicators of social deprivation were used: education (5 levels), family income (8 levels), marital status, gender, and age.

Family Surrogate and Child Rearing

It is often useful to test theories simultaneously (Hoge and Polk 1980, p. 317). That is possible with *family surrogate* and *child rearing* theories, because they look at the same data from different angles. Specifically, what is the impact of children (or no children) in the home? To test these opposing theoretical perspectives, respondents were classified according to family types: single, married couple without children, married couple with children at home, single parent, and married with children no longer at home. Tests were run only for persons age 20 - 39. Thus only those persons of typical childbearing age were selected. Comparisons were made for several combinations of family types (married, with and without children, single, single parent, etc.).

Localism

Localism theory assumes that "locals" are more committed to the social life of their immediate communities, and consequently they are more attracted to organizations within their communities (Roof 1978). Two indicators were used to measure localism: length of residency in the community, and how far one lives from the church (driving time and distance).

Social Learning

This theory argues that early socialization is a critical factor in church attendance in later life. In order to test this theory it is important to understand something of the respondent's early religious experiences. Four measures of socialization were used: importance of religion in the home as a child, parents sharing the same faith, denomination attended as a child and first contact with the Christian faith.

THEORY-DRIVEN SETS OF HYPOTHESES

Based on the theories discussed above, a number of hypotheses can be set forth. We hypothesize that socio-economic and demographic characteristics have little effect on attraction to the megachurch.

Deprivation

Demographics and income hypotheses. Because deprivation theory was proposed as an explanation of sect

and cult attraction and not mainline churches, we believe that it will not predict attraction to megachurches. Persons are not expected to participate in megachurches as an act of compensation for low social status. More specifically, we do not expect women, the poorly educated, and the poorly paid, nor blue collar workers to report a special attraction to the megachurch.

How old are you? How old is your faith? Age is a demographic characteristic with a non-obvious feature. In non-megachurches, members tend to increase in their participation, at least until mid-life (with a tapering off effect), and on money, their generosity increases at least until age 50 or 60 with little or no decline. Percentage of income tends to increase with age (Hoge 1994). Would the same hold for megachurches? If so, as age of a member increases, so should their satisfaction as well as their financial giving.

Now to that non-obvious feature. In addition to testing for an age effect in a straightforward fashion, a provocative hypothesis is now added. Could it be that "age" is simply a proxy for the amount of time a person spends in the faith? If so, this demographic variable would become a factor of socialization. This bears more delineation and will be discussed under "social learning theory" findings (below).

Impact of Children

Family Surrogate hypotheses. "Does the church serve as a surrogate family for the lonely in society?" The idea of the theory is especially appealing for the megachurch. Large numbers of single persons and married couples without children are present in the metropolitan areas of our nation. It makes sense that such persons would seek the fellowship provided by the variety of programs offered by the megachurch. Thus, it is hypothesized that unmarried persons and childless couples will be more attracted to the megachurch than persons with more social attachments.

Child Rearing Hypotheses. Child rearing theory is the reverse of the family surrogate theory. According to this theory, church participation will increase with the responsibilities of family life. Although some earlier studies have supported the child rearing theory, we assume that the presence of children do not increase attraction to the megachurch.

Although day care and other programs offered by the megachurch may be appealing to those with children, no reason exist to expect such parents would be more satisfied than those childless members, due to the benefits of fellowship mentioned above. Is it possible to find support for each theory, but not reject one theory in favor of another? Yes. Perhaps at a smaller church, one theory would "win out" because only a few programs could be offered.

Thus, such a church program may be *either* child-driven or targeted toward couples and singles. The first program would support the child-rearing hypothesis; the latter would support the family surrogate hypothesis. But the megachurch may well offer many programs even beyond this dichotomy. Later, the chapter on "Benefits" will shed further light on this matter.

Investment in Locale

Localism may predict loyalty to non-megachurches. Can it predict attraction too? Perhaps, but, the megachurch is by definition an extremely inclusive organization. It can be many things to a great many people. Therefore a wide array of people attends, as the megachurch *becomes* its own community. If this is so, loyalty might be garnered from folks driving from near and far, from people who have lived at that location for years, and from newcomers. In other words, the inclusive nature of the multifaceted megachurch may overwhelm ties built predominantly on location alone. This logic aside, to be fair to localism theory, its hypotheses will be worded as if it does predict attraction.

How long have you lived here? Greater investment in the local community is expected for those persons who actually live in the community and have lived there longer. Such people are expected to report greater attraction.

Do you travel far to get here? We expect longer driving times to be inversely related to satisfaction and other measures of attraction. If not an out-of-towner, one would be an "out-of-locale" person, and thus not as attracted.

Hypotheses of Socialization

We assume that childhood socialization is an important source of adult patterns of church participation. For many megachurch attenders, though certainly not all, their level of attraction is related to their experiences as young persons. Such "attraction" is again measured by financial giving, time spent in activities and satisfaction.

Attraction to the megachurch as an adult is positively related to several life experiences during the developmental years. This general assumption led us to four specific hypotheses: (1) religion was important as the respondent grew up, (2) the respondent's parents shared the same faith, (3) the respondent's first contact with the Christian faith is predictive, and (4) the denomination of the church most often attended by the respondent as a young person predicts later attractions.

In addition to "history in the faith," all persons have a history within their own particular megachurch. Most large congregations do not emerge solely as megachurches, but include a pre-megachurch past. In every case, the

churches in our sample existed as churches prior to achieving megachurch status. The 7 churches in our study include congregations that have sustained megachurch status both recently and for over a decade (ranging from four to fifteen years). From our data it is easy to determine what size a church was when each person first became involved.

Furthermore, we hypothesize that the timing of a person's involvement ("temporal location") will affect their present attraction to that church. In other words, we suspect that persons who were involved with the church before it became a megachurch ("transitionals") will be more attracted than persons who have joined since the church became a megachurch. We assume that the persons who have made the "transition" from non-megachurch to megachurch will take greater pride in their congregation and exhibit greater attraction.

To test these relationships we extracted three groups from our sample of individual respondents. The first group consisted of persons who had begun attending the church within the first two years of the church reaching megachurch status. We called these people, "charter members" (N = 244). Predating the "charters," are those who were involved long before (at least five years) the church became a "megachurch." This group is referred to as "transitionals" (N = 300). Lastly, those who started attending well after

the congregation became a megachurch (at least five years), are called "late-comers" (N = 293).

FINDINGS

Deprivation Theory

Most SES variables (income and occupation) did not exhibit meaningful differences among the measures of attraction (percentage of income given, time spent in activities and satisfaction). Education was significant for satisfaction, $F(4, 1001) = 8.88, p < .001$. That is, persons with less than a college education were slightly more *satisfied* than all other levels of education. No significance was found for *percentage of income given* or *time spent in megachurch activities*, for education level.

Race and gender, contrary to earlier studies supporting deprivation theory (Glock, Ringer and Babbie 1967), were not significantly related to measures of attraction. However, age did produce the typical positive correlations. The pattern held across all three dependent variables, but never to an extraordinary level. The amount of variance explained ranged from .6% to 4.4%. A related, more pinpointed hypothesis will be dealt with shortly under "social learning theory." In sum, we found only minimal support for deprivation theory as an explanation for an individual's attraction to the megachurch.

Family Surrogate and Child Rearing Theories

To test these opposing theories, we created a series of family-type comparisons. To avoid the effects of age, we included only persons age 20-39 (N= 380), thus avoiding the responses of persons beyond the childbearing years. By doing this, we have examined more comparable data.

Groups that were compared included: (1) "Married couples with children at home" versus "married couples without children," (2) Persons who "live alone" versus "Single parents with children at home," (3) "Married couples without children" versus "single parents with children at home," and (4) All family types with children at home versus all groups with no children present in the home.

No significant results were obtained for measures of family surrogate theory or for child rearing theory. Neither theory should be seen as a sole explanation for attraction to the megachurch. Note, that most everyone reports being highly satisfied. This "ceiling effect" will be deconstructed later.

Localism Theory

Three measures of local community investment were included in the survey. These are "length of residence in city," distance in "miles" and "driving time" from home to church, and "region of the country" where the respondents spent their early years.

No matter which operational definition one chooses, no significant effect was found for localism theory. Only .64% ($r = .08$) of the variance was explained for "how long" a person had lived in the city, and any explained variance completely disappeared ($r = .007$) when we controlled for age. Here again, we are compelled to look at the variable "age" with justifiable skepticism. Social learning theory allows us to address this skepticism.

Social Learning Theory

No significant differences were found for giving, time spent, or satisfaction for three independent variables: "importance of religion growing up," "parents sharing the same faith," and "denomination of church most often attended as a child." As mentioned earlier, "age" yielded an interesting result.

Since most people report, "first contact with Christianity" at a very early age (77.4%), then older persons will have been in the church for a longer period of time. Perhaps it is duration-in-the-church and not simply 'age' that makes the difference (on attraction and a host of other church-related measures). Can biological age and duration-in-the-church be untangled?

Easily, if one has a sufficiently large data set. The current data set is large enough to allow a very specific

analysis. Years since 'first contact' was held to 10 years or less and then differences due to age were reexamined.

A startling result was found, in line with the provocative (non-obvious) hypothesis. Older members are **not** more satisfied than younger members, if one holds constant the amount time since first contact (e.g., 10 years or less). If anything, the younger members are more satisfied than the rest. If the constraint of 'time since first contact' is removed, the age effect returns, with the eldest in the church reporting most satisfaction. We now know that such contentment really speaks of the older persons having a longer history in the faith.

Temporal Location within the Megachurch

Can it be that how one is attracted to a megachurch is, somehow, linked to the status of that church when the individual began attending? That is, does it matter at what point in the history of the church one becomes involved? Indeed, we hypothesized that; persons who came into the church before it had achieved megachurch status ("transitionals") would be more attracted to that church than persons arriving later. To test this, we ran an analysis of variance for each of the three groups ("charters," "transitionals," and "late-comers") against each of our three dependent variables.

We found a significant relationship between when a person started attending the megachurch and each of the measures of attraction. Our hypothesis that persons coming into the church prior to megachurch status would be most attracted was supported. For each of the indicators of attraction the "late-comers" were least attracted. That is, they gave less time and a smaller percent of their income to the megachurch. They are less satisfied than persons whose initial involvement with the megachurch was at the time the church achieved mega-status or before. Note that the "transitionals," persons who were involved with the church before it became a megachurch, spend the most time and give the greatest percent of their income. The persons *most satisfied* with the megachurch are those who came into the church just as it became a megachurch (the "Charters").

DISCUSSION

Our main concern was examining the relative importance of economic, demographic and socialization factors that may contribute to the individual's attraction to the megachurch. Because the megachurch is different than non-mega churches, especially in its multiplicity of programs, it was predicted at the outset that demographic and related characteristics would not produce a wealth of significant findings. With the exception of "temporal location," this is what we found.

Perhaps these findings indicate that it is not the characteristics of the attender that determines attraction, but rather the opportunities to satisfy individual needs through a close personal network of friends. We turn to this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

PERSONAL NETWORKS AND MEGACHURCH ATTENDANCE

Most previous studies of religious commitment sought to identify psychological or socio-demographic characteristics of individuals who seek to solve problems by joining certain religious organizations (Roof et al. 1979; Hadaway 1981; Olson 1989). The results of such studies are varied.

Another factor that we believe to be important in understanding what attracts people to the megachurch is the network of friends and family to which one belongs. No matter how the attender describes his or her reasons for participating, the original decision requires some contact with the organization (Lofland and Stark 1965). This fact is so obvious that it is often overlooked in studies of organizational growth (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, p. 312).

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Research shows that friendship ties are important to the social life of the individual (Wirth 1938; Simmel 1955; Wellman 1979; Wellman and Wortley 1990; Adams and Allan 1998). Even participation in religious groups is associated

with the number of friends one has within the group (Stark and Glock 1968; Hoge and Carroll 1978; Welch 1981; and Olson 1987; 1989). Such relationships may be a relative, a close friend, a neighbor, or a co-worker with whom the individual has had significant interaction.

One of the earliest attempts to study the importance of friendship networks is found in the work of Elizabeth Bott (1957). According to Bott, the formation of these networks is due to three factors: the density of relationships, their duration, and the number of persons involved.

Bott identifies three types of relationships: categorical, structural, and personal. From each of these relationships derives a social network in which the individual finds a place. The *categorical* relationship is superficial, although it may serve an instrumental purpose. It characterizes casual encounters, such as those that take place in the public marketplace. Lyn Lofland (1985) describes "categoric knowing" as information which can be obtained visually. "Thus," says Lofland, "information about the age or sex of another usually requires no more than visual apprehension" (1985, p. 16). In the megachurch, this type of relationship is characterized by little involvement and irregular attendance. Such persons are similar to members of an audience (Stark and Bainbridge 1985) who often attend to be entertained or engaged in a private religious experience (Olson 1987, p. 180). In this type of

relationship, social status does not enter into the judgments about one another (Bott 1957).

In *structural* relationships, the behavior of individuals is assessed on the basis of their social position. Persons attend church and often become involved in activities, but they do not develop friendships that extend beyond the walls of the church. In his study of Baptist churches, Daniel Olson found that many persons attending those churches knew their "church friends" only in the context of the church, and the only reason many people attend at all is to have some contact with friends. Olson concludes that the relationships of many church members "are not very multiplex" (1987, p. 185). For many, if not most megachurch attenders, a few friendships limited to the church may be enough.

An additional level of friendship obtains. According to Bott (1957), behavior that is based on the direct relationships that bind group members together, are *personal*. Lofland (1985) describes personal relationships as based on information about the other person that goes beyond information about roles and statuses. Such relationships are based on intimate knowledge. "To know another personally is always to apprehend [that person] as a unique historical event" (Lofland 1985, p. 16). Among church attenders the qualitative leap from "group of Christians"

to "community" is possible when the members open themselves to one another.

WHITE'S MODEL

An important theoretical statement at this point is Richard H. White's (1968) religious influence model. White argues that religious organizations (both conventional and unconventional) are first and foremost group phenomena (p. 25), and that religious commitment develops through the transmission of religious norms in a group context. These norms must arise from interaction with other members. The more one is integrated into a religious group via friendship ties, and the greater the intensity of these ties, the greater the individual's commitment to the norms of the group (Welch 1981). White's model seems to explain the survival of deviant as well as traditional religious groups in modern society (Welch 1981).

LOFLAND AND STARK'S MODEL

Much of what is known about how people become involved in religious movements comes from the early studies of the Unification Church (Lofland and Stark 1965). In a key study, Lofland and Stark developed a seven-step process of conversion. Briefly, this model says that for a person to convert to a cult they must: (1) Experience stress in their lives. (2) In seeking to resolve the stress the individual

must have a religious perspective or orientation in their life. (3) The person must become a religious-seeker. That is, they begin looking for some way to resolve the stress in their life. (4) The individual must experience a crisis or turning point in their life. (5) The seeker forms an *affective-bond* with one or more members of the cult. These emotional ties begin to pull the person toward the group. (6) There must be a reduction in outside attachments and relationships. (7) Finally, the cult provides an intensive interaction with other cult members. For Lofland and Stark, it is the cumulative effect of all these experiences that produces the conversion (1965).

Although a number of researchers have disagreed with specific points of the Lofland and Stark model (Snow and Phillips 1980; Greil and Rudy 1984), others have suggested that, rather than a cumulative model, the seven steps merely outline some of the "key" conditions present in conversion (Kox et al. 1991). Dawson (1996) states, "while many scholars have clearly over generalized the relevance of Lofland and Stark's findings, the research their model inspired has consistently confirmed *some of these 'conditions'*" (p. 146, italics added). A number of generalizations can be drawn from Lofland and Stark and subsequent studies that speak directly to the issue of friendship networks and interpersonal ties (Dawson 1996):

AMONG FRIENDS

First, studies of recruitment to new religious movements typically find that persons become involved primarily through social networks and relationships (Harrison 1974a; Harrison 1974b; Welch 1981; Olson 1989). Friends and family members already in the group are much more likely to attract new members than impersonal encounters in airports or door-to-door literature distribution (Stark and Bainbridge 1980).

AMONG GOOD FRIENDS

Second, research generally concurs with Lofland and Stark that an important aspect of attraction is the affective tie one has with a person or persons already in the group. Harrison found that merely hearing about Catholic Pentecostalism from other sources is not as effective in attracting new members as learning about it from a friend who is clearly an active member (1974a). Thus, the slope does not become especially slippery following an aggressive confrontation. Instead, the invitation to convert is most persuasive when offered by a friend, not a stranger.

INTENSITY OF FRIENDSHIP

Third, a related factor is the importance of the

intensity of interaction of new members with the existing membership (Dawson 1996, p. 149). Two related, but separate issues define "intensity" of such social interaction: The *more interaction* a new recruit has with the group, and the *greater the number of members* with whom the recruit has contact are important contributors to the conversion and growth of commitment of persons recruited to cults and new religious movements. But what about conventional religious groups? Are the same factors as important when one is attracted to a mainline church or an evangelical Protestant denomination? In other words: "is all religion sustained by social networks?" (Stark and Bainbridge 1980, p. 1389).

Research suggests all religious groups depend on interpersonal networks to attract and retain new adherents. Edward A. Rauff, in a study of why people join the church states:

It is somewhat surprising to hear of people choosing churches on the basis of friendship or even the advice of acquaintances. Perhaps this speaks of a lack of deep religious or traditional roots. The straight road of denominational loyalty that has kept so many of us in the same religious environment has for others been washed away. Excessive moving, disappointment with a congregation, intellectual disdain for dogma, or a poor religious education have made it easy for some to wander out of a traditional path. They are free to pick and choose (or not choose) until someone else reveals a quality of life, a firm conviction, an ability to cope—or just says a concerned word or two. If the ensuing church visit is satisfying, the formerly unchurched person may be on his or her way to a well-founded membership (1969, p. 64).

Church activity, emotional satisfaction, and well being are associated with the number of church friends one has (Ellison and George 1994). "However," says Daniel Olson, "it is unclear . . . whether church friendships attract and retain church members or whether people who spend a lot of time at church simply have more church friends" (Olson 1987, p. 20).

A number of church growth studies found that church friendships do attract new members. Roof, Hoge, Dyble, and Hadaway (1979) concluded that friendships were strongly correlated with church growth among Presbyterian churches. Welch (1981) found that social participation in a congregation reinforces one's commitment to the norms of that particular group. Welch also hypothesized that "extensive friendship ties and formal participation within the congregation which are not neutralized by extra-congregational commitments will result in stronger commitment to the norms of traditional Christianity" (p. 85). Presumably, it would take close friendships outside the church to lessen the likelihood of one being attracted to the megachurch. For this reason, this study will compare "quality of friendships" with the number of extra-organizational involvements of the attenders.

Several studies on the neo-pentecostal movement among Roman Catholics found interpersonal ties were important in recruitment (Fichter 1975; Harrison 1974a; 1974b). Fichter

found that close personal relationships are a significant source of attraction to the charismatic movement and are associated with enthusiastic participation (1975, p. 103). Harrison's survey data showed that more than half of all current members of Catholic Pentecostal groups had close friends in the movement or developed a relationship with a member before they ever attended a prayer meeting (1974b, p. 391).

In a study of five Baptist churches, Daniel Olson concluded that the desire for friendship plays an important role in the decision to attend (1987, 1989). Although he found satisfaction with the quality of preaching to be a greater predictor of continued attendance, friendship ties were still significant (Olson 1989).

HYPOTHESES

The foregoing discussion suggests several hypotheses on role of friendship networks in attracting persons to the megachurch. These friendships are realized as individuals fulfill their commitments to the church with either great flourish (high level of participation, i.e. active) or half-heartedly (low level of participation, i.e. inactive). Five hypotheses are required to test the impact of friendships on church attraction. The first of five hypotheses will require only a frequency count. The second hypothesis

requires a correlational analysis. The remaining three hypotheses will be tested by analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Hypotheses 1 & 2: Friendships before membership

Close friends. First, the *timing of friendships* is crucial. We expect close friends, or relatives to have been in the church before the person became involved in the church. We assume that pre-existing friendships instigate interest in the megachurch. This hypothesis emerges from earlier findings related to cults and new religious movements (Dawson 1996) as well as more conventional religious groups (Roof, Hoge, Dyble and Hadaway 1979).

Friendly first contact. Second, we relaxed our definition of "friendship" to test the importance of more casual relationships. That is, we looked not only at *close friends*, but also early contact such as "invited by a friend or neighbor," or a pastoral visit. It is hypothesized that such contacts in the early stages of getting to know the church will be positively related to the person's attraction to the megachurch.

Hypotheses 3 & 4: Friendships during membership

Quality of friendships. Third, we anticipate that measures of attraction (money given, time spent in activities, and satisfaction with the church) will be

positively correlated with *number of close friends* one has in the church.

Quantity of activities with friends. Fourth, a person's *diversity of activity* within the megachurch will also be positively associated with measures of attraction.

Hypothesis 5: Outside distractions

Finally, we hypothesize that extra-organizational participation (involvements in organizations outside the church) will inversely relate to attraction to the megachurch. As with the first hypothesis (timing of friendships), this hypothesis is derived from studies of non-conventional religious groups (Welch 1981). Such earlier research revealed that potential converts to cults were less likely to convert if they maintained affiliations outside "the church" (Lofland and Stark 1965; Stark and Lofland 1980).

MEASUREMENT

In this study, *number of close friends* is measured by asking megachurch attenders: "Think for a moment of your five closest friends (outside of your family) - how many are involved with this church?" Responses ranged from 0 - 5. The number of close friends one reports is taken to be a measure of *quality* of friendship. Presumably your "closest friends" give you the most meaningful social interactions.

A related question provides a simple measure of close friends in the church before the respondent began attending. The attender is asked to think of their *closest friends in the church* and tell "how many of these people were close friends before you started attending this church?" Once again, responses could range from 0 to 5.

The *quantity of friendship contacts* is defined by measuring the number of activities in which one participates in the megachurch. Ten different types of activities, such as: "informal gatherings with other attenders; Sunday school class; support/care groups; missions; music activities; positions of leadership," and "served on committee" were included. Subjects were given a choice for each type of activity ranging from "actively participate, infrequently participate, no longer participate," or "never." If a person marked "actively participate," a score of "1" was coded for that activity. All other options were coded as "zero." The sum of the ten activity scores was then obtained. Each respondent's score for quantity of activity ranged from 0 to 10.

A score of 10 would reflect a very active attender (at least by their own account). They would have endorsed being particularly active, an extreme score on the original 4-point scale and they would have said so across all 10 activities. A score of "zero" would reflect the opposite: a person who is not active in even one type of involvement.

To test the influence of extra-organizational involvements on one's attraction to the megachurch, respondents were asked to record their connections across 13 community groups and organizations. These included services and charitable organizations, and groups such as political parties, business, professional, labor, sports, leisure and religious groups not connected with the megachurch they were attending. Persons were asked to mark the types of organization in which they were active. Scoring for this variable, therefore, was a "1" if the organizational type was marked, and a "0" if left blank. A sum of all "1s" was then obtained, providing a total score that ranged between 0 and 13.

PREDICTED PATTERN OF RESULTS FOR FRIENDSHIP

Given the hypotheses of friendship relations and three dependent variables (money given, time given and satisfaction) we set forth the following predictions:

A friend as first contact. If the megachurch operates like a cult, then most attenders would have at least one close friend in the church, and this friendship would have existed prior to their initial involvement.

Who invites? Who invites a potential attender into the church should matter. That is, the main dependent variables (money given, time spent and satisfaction) should correlate with such items as "invitation from a church member,"

"invitation from a close friend or family member," or "personal contact by the pastor or staff member."

Quality vs. quantity. Three indicators of attraction again serve as our dependent variables: donations of money, time spent per week, and level of satisfaction. To predict these indicators we explore two aspects of friendship: quality (having few versus several close friends in the church) and quantity (amount of contact experiences, comparing those at a low level, to those at a medium or high level). Furthermore, these contact experiences are assessed in the church and outside the church.

Thus the two independent variables can be cross-tabulated, with the result being a fully-factorialized design: a 2 (Quality) X 3 (Quantity). Although we tested whether this 2 X 3 influenced the three indicators of attraction, we did not have an *a priori* prediction for what pattern an interaction effect might take. However, we do have two main effect predictions that seem rather straightforward, and were tested by an ANOVA:

A. Hypothesis 3 (Quality): The more friends one has in the church, the more this person will give of their money and time, and the more this person will report being satisfied with the megachurch.

B. Hypothesis 4 (Quantity): The more involved one is in church activities, the more contact they would

presumably have with friends, and again the greater their attraction as measured by the three indicators.

Following statistical procedure, these main effects were tested simultaneously, along with the 2 X 3 interaction, in an ANOVA. It is predicted that the likely outcome of this ANOVA is that either one or two main effects will reach significance. We now turn to the actual results, which did follow our expectations for the most part. The patterns of the means, and the implications of these patterns will be discussed below. For the exact means per condition, see Table 4.1. Significance levels are reported below.

Outside distractions. By using cult research as a precedent, we expect outside involvement to detract from appreciating a megachurch. Conversely, a lack of outside involvements would give the megachurch a monopoly on the attention of the would-be member.

ACTUAL RESULTS

A friend as first contact

According to hypothesis 1, we thought that megachurch attenders would have been drawn into the influence of the church through a network or friends already attending the church. In actuality we found this not to be the case. Almost two-thirds (64.8%) of the persons responding said

Table 4.1 Measures of Attraction (Means) by Quantity of Activities And by Quality of Friends in the Church

Number of Friends in Church	Number of Activities in Church	Measures of Attraction		
		Money	Time	Satisfaction
Low	Low	4.95	2.32	2.98
	Medium	5.12	2.69	3.12
	High	5.61	3.19	3.15
High	Low	4.97	2.60	3.13
	Medium	5.34	3.01	3.37
	High	5.41	3.47	3.46

none of their close friends were in the church before they started attending. The mean number of close friends in the church before involvement was .78. Our hypothesis was not supported. It appears that close friends are not necessary to attract members to the megachurch.

Who invites?

If "close friends" are not required to attract new members, what about more casual relationships? To test this hypothesis we ran correlations for the three dependent

variables and three types of relationships (invitation from a church member, invitation from a close friend or family member, and personal contact by the pastor or staff member). Although six of the 9 correlations reached significance (.05), the amount of variance explained by the relationships were small in every instance. There was one significant relationship for *financial giving* ($r=.07$, $p = .013$ for "pastor/staff contact"), and two significant correlations for *time spent* ($r=-.056$, $p = .033$ for "invitation by a church member," and $r= -.111$, $p < .000$ for "invited by a close friend"). All three types of contact reached significance for *satisfaction*: "invited by a church member" ($r= .122$, $p < .001$), "invited by a close friend/family member" ($r= .072$, $p = .013$) and "pastor/staff contact" ($r = .155$, $p < .001$). However, the amount of variance explained by each set of variables never exceeded 2.4% and, in most cases did not exceed 1%. Therefore, we conclude that personal networks within the church, at least early on, are relatively unimportant.

Quality vs. Quantity

In testing hypotheses 3 and 4, we find the diversity of activities (Quantity) did make an appreciable impact on each of our three dependent variables. Furthermore, quality of friendship (having more close friends) helped predict *time*

spent in church activities and satisfaction. The following is a summary of our findings.

Percentage of income given to church. One main effect reached significance, $F(2, 932) = 14.86, p < .001$. What provided the significant variance is clear. One group that differs from the rest: The *amount* of contact experiences. That is, the *Quantity of friendships*. Technically speaking, quality of friendship did not drive the effect for financial giving. But each increase in of quantity of friendship experiences provided a significantly higher level of money given.

Amount of time spent per week in church activities. This time both main effects reached significance. Quality of friendships (having more close friends in the church) seemed to matter reliably for the first time ($F(1, 935) = 26.60, p < .000$). And again the amount of contact experiences (Quantity) was also significant ($F(2, 935) = 70.77, p < .000$). Those who participate in the most diverse kinds of activities also spent the most time in church activities per week.

This pattern may appear obvious, but it is not entirely tautological. Plausibly someone may give as many hours to a few involvements, as someone else who may give a little time to a greater number of types of activities. As it turns out, this logical possibility did not occur. If you are

involved in a myriad of activities relative to another member, then you give more time, in absolute terms than they do.

In addition to the statistical findings, there is another comfort in this finding. The two measures of *time given* and *number of diverse activities* should be related if the survey respondent is following directions and being consistent. Our time finding lends support to this assumption.

Satisfaction. Again, with this more psychological indicator, both main effects reached significance. The *Quantity* (diversity of participation) main effect was, $F(2, 859) = 20.96, p < .000$. The *Quality* (number of close friends) main effect, reached significance, with an $F(1, 859) = 53.29, p < .000$.

The results are clear. The more active a member, the more they report being satisfied. And the pattern is completely incremental, meaning that High > Medium > Low. And, if the attender has more close friends in the church, that attender is also more satisfied.

Additionally, the two main effects co-exist, without interacting. Thus the effect of satisfaction "stair-steps." If you do not have many close friends and if you are relatively inactive, then you are least satisfied. You can reach intermediate satisfaction by either involving yourself more or by having more close friends. To reach the higher

levels of satisfaction, one needs to have either many close friends, or be extremely active. Those who are very active and who claim many close friends in the church report the highest level of satisfaction. Again no interaction occurred.

These patterns, even as main effects, should be of great interest to the megachurch pastor (and their treasurer). The church can basically double-dip from the member's pockets and daily planner, and they will be happier for being asked. More activity and more monetary donations seem to co-vary with satisfaction. The church and its programs "win" (favor) on all three counts.

Outside Distractions

The notion that extra-organizational involvements would impinge upon the attraction to a megachurch was tested in two ways. First, extra-organizational involvements was left as a continuous variable and entered as a co-variate into the 2 X 3 ANOVA discussed above. It did not add any significance. Next, extra-organizational involvement was trichotomized and added into the 2 X 3 ANOVA. This 2 X 3 X 3 ANOVA yielded no main effect for external involvement, nor did it interact with any other factor.

This lack of significant effects for either the co-variate analysis or the larger factorialized ANOVA casts doubt on the applicability of the findings of cult research

on the workings of the megachurch. Couple this with the rejection of hypothesis 1 and it appears that the megachurch is highly dissimilar to a cult. Therefore the megachurch can be placed in the context of typical community involvements, whereas a cult cannot afford such mainstream activities by its members.

DISCUSSION

Studies of recruitment to cults and new religious movements have demonstrated the crucial role of friendships and personal networks within the group in determining the likelihood of one joining (Lofland and Stark 1965). If the megachurch attracts persons in the same way as a cult, we would expect hypotheses 1, 2, and 5 to be supported. In other words, we would expect friendships existing within the church, invitations to attend by friends and others in the church, and fewer community involvements outside the church to contribute to the attraction. We did not find these conditions. The number of friends one had in the megachurch, prior to involvement, is not significantly related to the measures of attraction (money given, time spent or satisfaction). This finding does not discount earlier research, but it does point to the fact that megachurches are not cults.

There are two aspects of friendships that did come into play. First, closer friendships would be preferred, and the

more close friends one has the better (hypothesis 3). Second, it is not just a matter of having friends, but of having the opportunity of interacting and sharing experiences with them. If this logic holds true, then hypothesis four should be supported. This is what we found. It is not just the number of friends one has in the church; it is the opportunities for social interaction. In the end, quantity of experience opportunities won out. A megachurch pastor agreed:

We live in a society of 'experience junkies.' People come and go. They skip from church to church looking for the best 'feel good' experience. Our job is to provide that experience.

Opportunity for experience appears to be an important key to attracting people. The megachurch does this through its multiplicity of options.

Can it be that the basis of attraction to the megachurch lies, not in the particular friendship choices, but in the interaction itself? This idea is a major proposition of exchange theory (Secord and Backman 1964, p. 269), and will be the focus of our next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF MEGACHURCH ACTIVITY

Americans want many things from their religious institutions. And whether or not they get what they want is ultimately more important than doctrines or beliefs (Gallup and Castelli 1989, p. 253). If this is true, the church that can offer more than traditional worship and ministry styles should be able to develop and maintain larger membership. The purpose of this chapter is to report an exploration of the relation between a person's participation and the benefits they report receiving from the megachurch. In other words we will try to determine if megachurches are attracting persons by offering an increased variety of programs. This variety corresponds to the differentiated needs of potential members. Our theoretical framework stresses the importance of the individual's motivations for participating and their perception that they have gained benefits. This general relation is interpreted in the context of an exchange model of participation in social groups. Especially relevant are the pioneering works of Homans (1950; 1961) and Thibaut and Kelley (1959). Homans

describes social behavior as "an exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons" (1961, p. 13). "Thus," says Emerson, "exchange theory has as its focus, the flow of benefits through social interactions" (1981, p. 33).

The hypotheses developed by Homans are organized around the concepts of activity, interaction, and sentiments (1950) and motivation (1961). It is the latter concept that is of particular importance to the present study. Answers to why an individual engages in some activity, interacts with other persons, or holds certain sentiments are found in behavioral psychology and elementary economics (Homans 1961, p. 12). From these two disciplines, Homans introduces a number of basic propositions on the individual's motivation for participating in social activity (1961, pp. 53-54). A summary of propositions relevant to the present study include:

1. *Activity is directly related to the similarity of a stimulus situation to a past stimulus situation in which activity was rewarded.* Homans argues that the motive for any activity is that the person has found the activity (or similar activities) rewarding in the past. A person will be motivated to participate in activities that have been rewarding in the past, and avoid activities that have been dissatisfying in the past. It is a simple and

uncontroversial assertion about human nature that people act in ways that have produced beneficial results in the past.

2. *Activity and reward are directly related.* This proposition implies that when a person has to choose among two or more activities that have been rewarded in the past, the person will choose to participate in the one that has been most rewarding.

3. *The relation between activity and reward is enhanced by the presence of value, and reduced by the presence of satiation.* For Homans, the sentiment of value increases the likelihood of an activity being performed. If one has a choice between two activities that are equally rewarding, the one that is considered more valuable will be performed. Satiation (the continued expression of an activity to the point where it ceases to be rewarding) reduces the relation, in that of two equally rewarding activities, the one that has been performed most recently, if it led to satiation, will be suppressed in favor of an alternative activity.

4. *Activity and cost are inversely related.* When a person has a choice among two or more activities that have been costly in the past, the person will likely choose the activity that has been least costly.

5. *The relation between activity and cost is reduced by value and enhanced by satiation.* If an activity is costly but valuable, a person may perform that activity regardless

of the costs; but if a person is satiated, they may choose not to perform the activity even if costs are minimal.

Thibaut and Kelley (1959), like Homans, have drawn from both behavioral psychology and economics for their understanding about behavior. They also stress similar concepts in their basic propositions that when two or more people interact, each individual seeks a behavior that will provide them with the greatest reward and the least cost (p. 12). Thibaut and Kelley emphasize that almost any behavior is rewarding and costly, and that the decision to participate in an activity is based on the balance of reward and cost for that activity in comparison with the reward-cost balance of a potential alternative activity (pp. 9-30).

MEGACHURCH PARTICIPATION AS SOCIAL EXCHANGE

According to exchange theory, a person's motivation to participate is a function of the benefits (valued by the person) provided by the organization, the costs (valued by the person) exacted by the organization, and the available alternatives perceived by the person (Homans 1961, pp. 51f). The application of the exchange model to voluntary organizations, such as a church, is complicated by difficulties in calculating costs, benefits, and alternatives because of the nonmaterial and relatively intangible inputs and outputs. The extent that such

calculations are made by church attenders, and the manner in which they are made, are not well understood or documented.

The first hypothesis of this chapter states the minimal expectation to be fulfilled in the individual-organization exchange model. It is proposed that *there is a positive relation between the perceived benefits of individual attenders and participation in the programs of the megachurch.*

What would the non-megachurch have to do to become more like the megachurch? It would have to increase its convenience and approachability. Indeed this is what we see with a number of smaller churches. Consider the church that has expanded its options for worship to two or three services a weekend. Many non-megachurches provide a variety of educational options in an attempt to reach more people. But herein lies a major difference between non-megachurches and megachurches. The latter not only offers more options, but different options. The megachurch diversifies, as well as proliferates its program menu.

If megachurches do indeed offer more options that are rewarding, and these rewards are diversified beyond what the non-megachurch can offer, then some very real consequences should appear. Church attenders will not lose interest (sate) in potential activities as quickly. They will find the megachurch rewarding as a whole, because of the myriad of choices. According to Homans, a reward loses its

power to influence behavior if it is presented too often or in too great a quantity (1961, p. 19). Humans, like animals in a lab, get their fill of even a good thing. The key is novelty or newness. The megachurch achieves this novelty by offering more and different programs than non-megachurches.

To apply this idea, let us watch potential church members reject a smaller church in favor of a megachurch simply because of the notion of satiation. In the non-megachurch the people enjoy the sermons, at first. They become involved in a group and accept responsibilities and assignments. But after some time they begin to perceive the church is not meeting their changing needs. As denominational doctrine becomes *less* relevant, the experiential forms of spirituality will become *more* important (Cimino and Lattin 1998, p. 18).

Communality in a non-megachurch involves a personal faith, adherence to an agreed upon doctrine and commitment to authority. The rewards in non-megachurch activity involve belonging to a community as well as the intangible concept of salvation in the afterlife. Activities may not be enjoyable, but the benefits outweigh the costs. In other words there is a profit of reward for those persons who highly value these benefits. For persons not so inclined, the likelihood of burnout is high. A person who highly values experiential religion may be less likely to value many of the tasks of the non-megachurch.

Not many researchers have stressed the importance of experience opportunities in church attraction. It is a given that smaller churches cannot offer as many options as the megachurch. If non-megachurches have few choices, the likelihood of a person finding activities they enjoy is less. Conversely, the megachurch, by offering a myriad of options, increases the likelihood that when persons get involved, the activities will be the ones they desire. Therefore, the second hypothesis for this chapter predicts that there is a positive relation between kinds of participation and attraction. That is, the more activities one tries the greater the attraction in terms of satisfaction, time spent and financial contributions.

TURNING COSTS INTO REWARDS

Activities that are costly in the non-megachurch may become rewarding in megachurches. That is, for smaller churches to accomplish its many tasks, a large percentage of its members (albeit a small number of people) are required to do many things, maybe even things they do not enjoy. However, the megachurch need not make such demands. Essentially the megachurch offers more opportunities of service from which to choose and has a much larger congregation from which to tap this myriad of relatively happy workers. The result is that no group or person needs to serve beyond a moderate contribution, because there are

many others who can lessen the overall workload.

Furthermore, the need to serve in a capacity other than one's preferred area is greatly reduced. In sum, could it be that people consider church size when deciding which church to attend? Perhaps they know that smaller churches demand more involvement (costs) than large churches.

PERCEIVED BENEFITS

The assumption of this chapter is that the decision to attend and participate in a megachurch is related to the benefits (perceived by the attender) it offers. Thus attraction to a megachurch increases in proportion to the benefits its attenders receive. Once attending, persons can exhibit attraction in a number of ways, including financial giving, time spent in church activities and a subjective feeling of satisfaction with the church.

The third hypothesis says that *how one perceives the benefits gained from attending the megachurch will depend on how the attender understands what it means to be religious*. Traditionally, American Christians have expected spiritual benefits from church attendance. They want to "deepen their relationships to Jesus Christ and learn about the Bible" (Gallup and Castelli 1989, p.253) and strengthen connections to "an authoritative framework of meaning" in a rapidly changing world (Miller 1997, p. 163; Cimino and Lattin 1998, p. 70). Persons for whom "spirituality" is a primary way of

experiencing institutional religion make up a majority of American church rolls. If the megachurch were not qualitatively different than smaller congregations, one would expect this *mystical orientation* in their members as well.

In addition to benefits received from mystical religion, many people are seeking ways to put their faith into action (Gallup and Castelli 1989, p.253; Miller 1997, p. 163). Attendance at traditional, mainline, churches peaked in the 1950s (Miller 1997, p. 17). In the 1960s and 1970s church attendance declined as the baby boomers came of age. The emerging paradigm in American religion (Warner 1993; Miller 1997) must be seen, at least in part, as a function of the maturing of the baby boom generation. Donald E. Miller (1997) describes four value shifts that are changing American religion.

First, "brand" loyalty has very little meaning to most boomers; the fact that they were raised Methodist or Episcopalian does not determine where they choose to go to church. Second, tradition is more often a negative than a positive word . . . it is not surprising that they seek out churches with contemporary music. Third, boomers want to be involved in running and managing their own organizations rather than entrusting decisions to someone at the top . . . Fourth, boomers tend to be local in their interests and fail to see the value of remote denominational organizations that are spending millions of dollars on issues outside their own community (p. 17).

A pastor of one megachurch remarked: "The people attending many of our services know very little about

doctrine, tithing, or traditional hymns, but they are very interested in reaching out to our community in either evangelism or social projects."

Megachurches have adopted an organizational style that accommodates the values of many baby boomers. All megachurches in this study reported that they had special programs, for all age groups, to get people involved soon after they started attending. Classes, such as "Discovering My Ministry," or "Discovering My Spiritual Gifts;" special interest groups for teens, college students, parents, singles; and special ministries such as counseling, home visitation and spiritual retreats are designed to give members and attenders opportunities to become involved in the work of the church as well as minister to others. Another pastor said: "The faster we can put people to work, the better our chance of keeping them." Thus, there are at least two ways persons are attracted to institutional religion at the end of the 20th century. Could there be a third?

Spiritual growth and the desire to serve others are no longer the only competing models of how American Protestants benefit from organized religion. In a Time magazine story entitled "The Generation that Forgot God" (Ostling 1993, p. 48) church historian David Wells describes what could be a third orientation: "biblical truth is being edged out by the small and tawdry interest of the self in itself. The

Christian Gospel is becoming indistinguishable from any host of alternative self-help doctrines." The Time reporter concludes, "some of today's most influential religious figures are no longer theologians but therapists" (p. 48).

Wade Clark Roof credits baby boomers with reintroducing personal experience to legitimate religion. Baby boomers see religion "less in doctrinal or ecclesiastical terms, and much more in personal meaning terms, and often in vague and generalized terms (1993, pp. 186-187). According to Roof, baby boomers "are inclined to regard experiences as superior to the accounts of others, and the truths found through self-discovery as having greater relevance to them than those handed down by way of creed or custom" (p. 67).

If baby boomers can be credited with the revival of personal experience, subsequent generations have begun to take experiential spirituality to the extreme. According to Tom Beaudoin, "[Generation] Xers will not simply receive religious truth paternalistically from a religious authority. What counts as religious must meet the ultimate test: Xers' own personal experience" (1998, p. 74).

It is not difficult to find anecdotal evidence for these changes in American religion. A young adult attending a megachurch in this study commented: "What I like best about this church is that it lets people worship God within their own personality type." This is not far removed from the religion of self, described as "Sheilaism" in Habits of

the Heart (Bellah, et al. 1985, p. 221). A megachurch pastor illustrated this trend:

It can be summed up by looking at the changes in recent years in Army recruiting posters. When I started as a young minister the posters showed Uncle Sam pointing outward saying: "I want you." People were being called to something beyond themselves. Now the slogan is: "Be all that you can be." That's what the church is saying too.

In sum, traditional churches have two permutations: one is a natural extension, the other being more reactionary. In the end, three needs may exist for the potential member: 1) seek mystical experiences, passively, 2) opt for a more active evangelism, or 3) focus on the needs of self.

Thus it seems there may be three distinct **orientations** that make the megachurch an attractive choice for the religious consumer. The ways these orientations can combine in megachurch congregations was not predicted *a priori*. Precisely which of these orientations, or combination of orientations, best predicts attraction is explored in the remainder of this chapter.

MEASURING THE ORIENTATIONS

An inventory of 27 statements representing potential "benefits received" was given to persons attending services at selected megachurches. A Likert format was used with 4 = Very Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 2 = Somewhat Unimportant, and 1 = Very Unimportant. Note that these values are different (reversed) from the actual

questionnaire codes. This is explained in Appendix C. Responses were factor analyzed to identify dimensions underlying reasons for participation (Hastings, Kurth, Scholder and Cyr 1995, p. 109). We used a maximum likelihood solution with varimax rotation. Criteria for specifying acceptable factors included loading values of $> .3$ and eigenvalues > 1.0 . Excluding scores that loaded strongly on more than one factor, there is strong evidence that the items selected indicate three orientations and that each appears to be a distinct way of perceiving the benefits one receives (See Table 5.1). These orientations are identified as *mystical*, *outreach*, and *self*. Some of the most strongly endorsed (high factor loading) benefits relating to these orientations include:

- 1. Mystical-orientation:** "Values to live by" (.591), "Preaching" (.552), and "Spiritual growth" (.472), "Answers to life's perplexing questions" (.522).
- 2. Outreach-orientation:** "Reaching the unchurched" (.613), "Ministry and care to my surrounding community" (.756), and "An opportunity to use my gifts and abilities" (.700).
- 3. Self-orientation:** "Increased self-esteem" (.652), "Chance to meet new people," (.578) and "Entertainment" (.625).

Table 5.1 Factor Loadings for Perceived Benefits of
Attending The Megachurch

Benefit	Factors		
	1 (Self)	2 (Outreach)	3 (Mystical)
Business contacts	.503		
Entertainment	.529		
Help w/personal problems	.380		
Increased self-esteem	.626		
Respect of family	.647		
Alternative to secular social activities	.406		
My needs are being met	.389		
Chance to meet new people	.551		
I feel less guilt	.627		
I can attend here without everyone knowing me	.508		
Support from caring friends		.410	
Opportunity to use my gifts		.700	
Ministry to the community		.756	
Reaching the unchurched		.613	
Sharing/prayer groups		.503	
Answers to life's questions			.522
Something to believe in			.370
Spiritual growth			.472
Values I can live by			.591
Being part of a family			.357
The preaching			.552
Challenge of living out my faith			.599
Solid Bible teaching			.624

Extraction method: Maximum likelihood

Rotation method: Varimax

Factor 1: Eigenvalue = 7.470; % of variance = 27.666

Factor 2: Eigenvalue = 2.790; % of variance = 10.332

Factor 3: Eigenvalue = 1.362; % of variance = 5.044

To identify the three orientations, scales were constructed from the above factor items. Cronbach's Alpha shows that the items are reliably related. Eight items comprised the Mystical-orientation scale (Alpha = .79). Five items were included in the Outreach-orientation scale (Alpha = .79). Ten items made up the Self-orientation scale (Alpha = .80).

A MENU OF MULTIPLE OFFERINGS

Is attending a megachurch like going to a fast food franchise or a discount superstore where the main purpose for being there is the product? More than one observer has compared megachurches with shopping malls (Niebuhr 1995a; Ostling 1993,) or discount superstores (Cimino and Lattin 1998, p. 56). According to Cimino and Latin, to reach the unchurched consumer, megachurches focus on "practical matters, such as family concerns and personal growth, not doctrine, sometimes mixing psychotherapeutic concepts with biblical teaching. Attenders seek to feel God's love, not understand church theology - a theme that plays well with the decreasing importance of denominational doctrine among baby boomers" (1998, p. 57). Megachurches emphasize experience over theology or doctrine, and commitment expectations are held to a minimum (Pritchard 1996). Such

churches are meeting social and psychological needs of individuals more readily than other churches (Shibley 1996, p. 113). One of the most important, and most difficult, questions is what do people gain from participation in a megachurch?

Unlike many smaller churches, megachurches are not just affiliations of persons bound by a common tradition. The megachurch is a network of specialized programs and ministries. All traditional ministries can be found in the megachurch: worship, outreach, and education; however, in the megachurch there is also an array of programs not found in smaller congregations. For example, Saddleback Community Church in California offers support groups for persons of all ages for almost any problem, including (but not exhausting) dependency and addiction, eating disorders, cancer, depression, grief, teen pregnancy and various family problems. In addition to support groups, Saddleback provides many ministries that allow persons opportunities to put their faith into action. Some of these include: emergency relief, work with abused women and children, Habitat for Humanity, music for all ages, crafts, computer training, international missions, evangelism, prison ministry and Bible teaching. Within non-megachurches there are too few people and too scarce resources to provide such a variety of narrowly focused programs. The ministries that were once found only in many disconnected organizations are

now available within a single megachurch. Thus, the megachurch has become the "superstore" of American religion. Religious "shoppers" can find everything they need under one *ecclesiastical* roof.

Such a multi-faceted program is able to attract a wider variety of persons (i.e. more persons) than are churches with more limited resources. Megachurches have made a point of understanding the needs and desires of the people they are trying to reach and giving those people what they want. Churches grow because they provide a diversity of program opportunities that can be rewarding to potential members, and enough variety so that the attender does not become satiated in the performance of an activity.

A REVIEW OF HYPOTHESES

Some key questions guide our comparison of models. Is there an exchange relationship between megachurches and their attenders? That is, does an attender's orientation drive their attraction? If so, an increase in *perceived* benefits (orientations) should be accompanied by higher levels of participation [hypothesis 1]. Who is the most attracted, those more involved in church programs (highly committed), or those less involved (free-riders) [hypothesis 2]? Finally, does it matter if the type of involvement is *matched* with one's orientation [hypothesis 3]?

Benefits and Participation

Our first hypothesis, that there is a positive relation between perceived benefits and involvement in activities, is easily tested. This hypothesis assumes that persons who see the megachurch as a place of many rewards are more likely to be involved in more activities than persons who see few benefits. When perceived benefits were correlated with kinds of participation, a positive relationship was indeed observed: $r = .16$, $p < .001$ (1-tailed). Note, however, that the relationship is not terribly strong, explaining 2.56% of the variance. Perhaps it is not just a matter of perceiving benefits and being involved. It may be that types of participation need to be matched with the types of benefits one perceives. Before we address that possibility, consider one simpler test: does mere participation predict attraction?

Participation and Attraction

Hypothesis 2 is a bit more complex, with three parts. Here it is suggested that involvement in the activities of the megachurch is positively related to the measures of attraction. In fact, this is what we found. All three attraction measures correlated positively with involvement: *satisfaction* ($r = .33$, 10.9% of variance explained), *financial giving* ($r = .22$, 4.8% of variance explained), and *time spent* ($r = .43$, 18.5% of variance explained).

Perhaps participation alone is enough. That is, the more active attenders become, the more attracted they are to the megachurch. It is "better to give than to receive," and to be active in the church may *not only be necessary* for spiritual happiness, *but sufficient*. If this is the case, then greater participation may be linked to attraction, regardless of the type of activity. Certainly the three correlations above attest to the pattern, with some strength. But is it simply a matter of activity, or does the *type* of activity matter? That is the question we examine in the next section.

Multiple Paths to Attraction

For the person who sees many benefits, the greater number of activities is not seen as costly. They are, in fact, enjoyable. If such a relationship between benefits and participation exists, then a related question must be asked. Does it matter if persons are involved in activities that are related to their orientations? If this is true, a *correspondence* between having a outreach-orientation and actually performing outreach activities should be more satisfying than being involved in outreach activities and not endorsing that specific orientation. Such an approach involves the *matching* of perceived benefits with actual involvement.

Our survey asks a series of questions on types of activities and the amount of participation in these activities. These were classified as "mystical," "outreach," and "self," to match them to the three orientations (see Table 5.1). *Mystical* programs include such activities as Sunday school, worship service, Bible study, and programs designed to meet spiritual needs. *Outreach* activities are local missions, positions of leadership (teacher, deacon etc.), and work on various committees. Programs that are considered *self-oriented* include informal gatherings with other members, support groups, and weekday programs.

TRI-PART ANALYSES

We will examine the impact of matching orientation and participation on each of the 3 dependent variables. That is, time spent per week in church activities, financial giving, and satisfaction. The following explains what we mean by "matching orientations and participation." For persons identified with 1 one group of benefits or orientation (Perceive 1), only 2 possibilities exists. Either that person **is** involved in activities associated with their orientation (1 of 1) or they **are not** (0 of 1). The second group of attenders, those who report being highly identified with 2 orientations, have 3 possible results (Perceive 2). They do not participate in activities related to either of their orientations (0 of 2), they participate in activities

related to only 1 of the 2 orientations (1 of 2), or they participate in 2 types of activities corresponding to their preferred orientations (2 of 2).

The final possibility is that persons are highly invested in all 3 orientations (Perceive 3). If this is the case, 1 of 4 scenarios can exist. The attenders may appreciate all orientations but not be greatly involved in any activities (0 of 3), they may participate in only 1 type of activity (1 of 3), they may score high in 2 types of activities (2 of 3), or they might actually participate in all 3 types of activities (3 of 3). Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 depict the results for all matching types related to the 3 dependent variables. These results are discussed below.

PREDICTING "TIME SPENT"

As a measure of attraction to the megachurch, persons were asked to report "about how many hours" per week they spent in worship services and activities organized by their church each week. Possible responses ranged along a 6-point ordinal scale from "less than one hour" to "more than 20 hours."

Perceive 1: The Purists

Perceive 1 is the first of 3 possible scenarios. Perceive 1 refers to those with only 1 dimension to their spirituality, at least perceiving the benefits provided by

the megachurch. It is an either-or classification. A person under the rubric "Perceive 1" is either seeking spiritual growth, or seeking Self-Help, or is outreach-minded. Under this classification a person has only 1 orientation.

This uni-dimensionality should have ramifications across the 3 dependent variables. Certainly these folks are the *least* expected to appreciate the multiple nature of the megachurch. After all, what is unique about the megachurch is its offering of a multitude of experiences. Those who are highly involved under Perceive 1 are maximizing their participation, but only in 1 area. Thus the question remains, can doing the 1 thing that you most desire in a church keep you satisfied, giving money, and giving of your time?

In this section we address this latter measure of attraction (time spent in church activities). The other dependent variables will be taken up, in turn, in the sections that follow.

Perceive 1, then, ranges between only 2 types of members: those who are active in their 1 favorite area of the church (1 of 1), and those who are not active in the 1 area they profess to embrace (0 of 1). Concerning "time spent in weekly church activities" (Figure 5.1), a significant difference between these 2 types of members was revealed, $F(1, 99) = 10.37, p < .002$. Those "purists" who

pursued their passion (participated in only that activity) report spending more time at church ($M = 2.81$, closer to the "3-5 hours per week" category). Persons who claim only 1 orientation, but do **not** actively participate, are closer to the category of spending "1-2 hours per week" at church ($M = 2.36$). At the very least this serves as a "manipulation check" of sorts and confirms our definition of low versus high participation. Does this hold true for those who perceive multiple benefits from the megachurch, for those who may begin to appreciate the multi-dimensionality of this huge institution? To answer that, we now turn to "Perceive 2."

Perceive 2: Perceiving Two Benefits

Perceive 2 is the second "matching" scenario. Persons classified in this way strongly identify with 2 orientations. Possible combinations include "mystical and outreach," or "mystical and self," or "outreach and self." When matched with activities, 3 potential combinations emerge. Just as in Perceive 1, persons can maximize their participation, except this time they will be highly involved in 2 types of activities (2 of 2). Persons can also perceive 2 sets of benefits and yet not be involved, to any extent, in church activities (0 of 2). However, for the first time a middle ground of activity exists. Persons can

be driven by 2 orientations, but only participate in 1 type of activity (1 of 2).

When we observe *time spent in weekly church activities*, we see differences in the amount of time given to the church relative to the way persons perceive the benefits offered by the megachurch (Fig. 5.1). The overall pattern reached significance: $F(2, 199) = 4.20, p < .02$. More specifically, what drives this is the difference between the extremes. The Duncan *post hoc* comparison showed those who claimed 2 orientations **and** participated in activities related to those orientations ($M = 3.18$) spent significantly more time per week in church activities than did those who were not involved in activities related to their perceived benefits ($M = 2.75$). In other words, those who claim 2 orientations and participate in activities related to both orientations spend, on average, 3 to 5 hours a week in church work. Those who do not participate in activities related to their 2 perceived types of orientations average only 1 to 2 hours per week in church activities. Perceive 2 obviously has a greater range than Perceive 1. However, a final variable delineates even more variability, namely Perceive 3.

Perceive 3: Perceiving Three Benefits

Perceive 3, the most complex of the relationships, refers to those persons who report high levels of perceptions for all 3 orientations. That is, they

appreciate mystical and outreach, as well as self-oriented benefits provided by the megachurch.

Persons perceiving 3 orientations have 4 possible ways in which to relate their activities to their orientations. First, they may not participate in church activities, even though they recognize benefits of such activities (0 of 3). Second, they may be involved in only 1 type of activity (1 of 3). The third possibility is that they participate in 2 of the 3 orientations (2 of 3). Finally, they may maximize their church involvement by participating in types of activities related to all 3 types of perceived benefits (3 of 3). Persons who match 3 of 3 enact every type of behavior provided by the megachurch. They claim they enjoy all 3 types of benefits offered and they take advantage of each.

Regarding *time spent in weekly church activities* (Figure 5.1), we see the relationships reached significance: $F(3, 156) = 6.12, p < .002$. Once again it is the extremes that represent the greatest differences. That is, persons who maximize perceived benefits and activities (3 of 3) spend more time per week in church related activities than those who see 3 types of benefits but do not participate in activities related to those benefits (0 of 3). A Duncan *Post Hoc* comparison reveals a significant difference between these 2 groups. Persons classified as "3 of 3" averaged 3-5

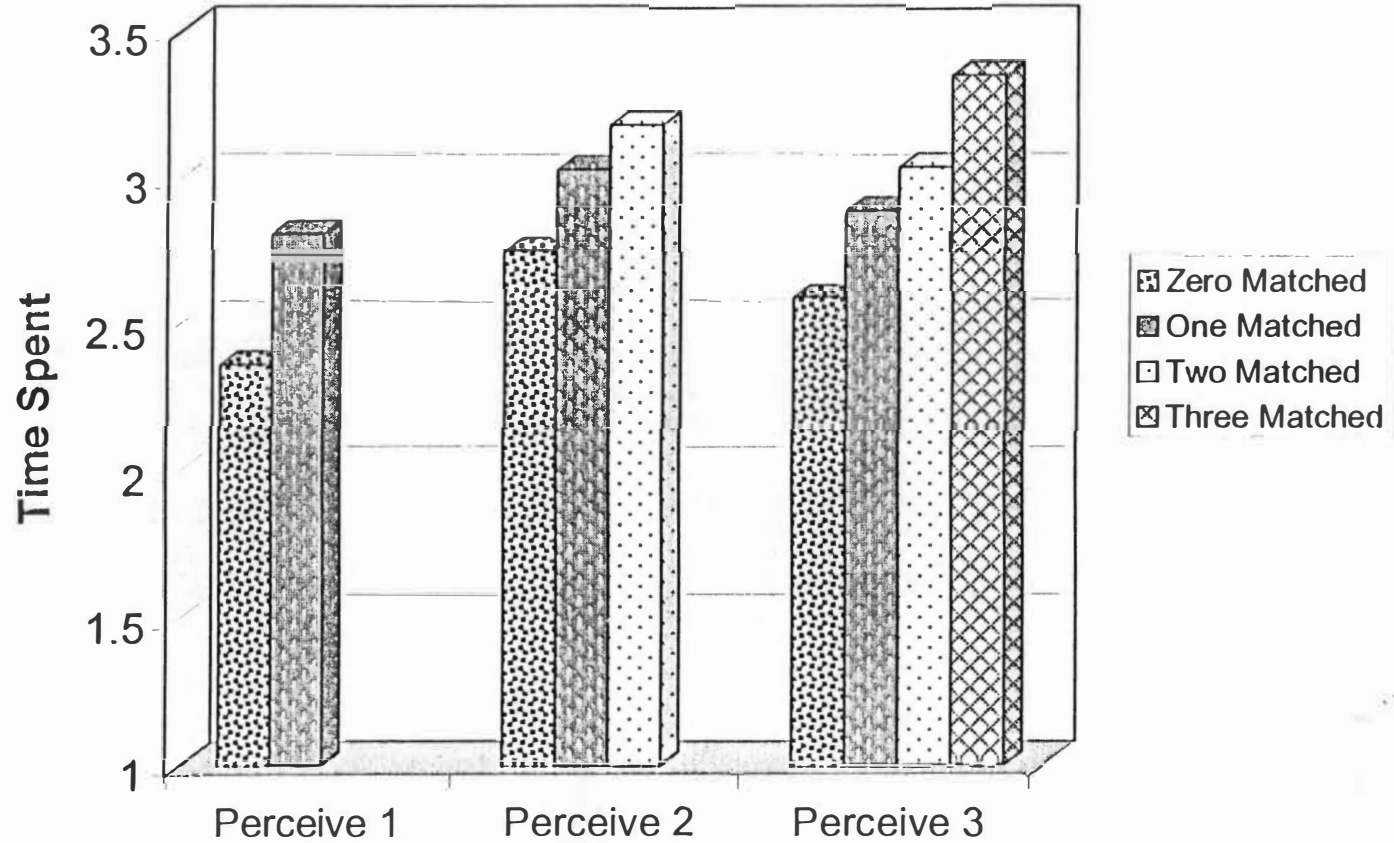


**Fig. 5.1 Perceived Benefits
and Actual Involvement:
Predicting Time Spent in Weekly Activities**

hours a week in activities, while "0 of 3" persons averaged only 1-2 hours a week in church activities.

PREDICTING "FINANCIAL GIVING"

A second empirical measure of Attraction to the megachurch is financial giving. Attenders at our sample of megachurches were asked to report how much they contributed to their church. Responses could range from (1) "I do not contribute financially here or anywhere," (2) "Most of my giving is to another church," (3) "I give a small amount occasionally," (4) "I give regularly but less than 5%," (5) "I give around 5-10% of my income to this church," and (6) "I give regularly 10% or more of my income to this church."

Perceive 1: The Purists

Perceive 1 (Figure 5.2) includes all persons who indicate that they perceive only 1 type of benefit. Such persons were either involved in the activity matched with their orientation (1 of 1) or they were not involved in such activity (0 of 1). It is assumed that persons who identify with only 1 type of orientation do not fully appreciate all that the megachurch has to offer, and therefore, are less attracted than persons who perceive multiple benefits.

The mean financial giving response for persons who see only 1 type of benefit and participate in a related activity is 5.24 (5-10% of their income), compared to 4.76 (less than

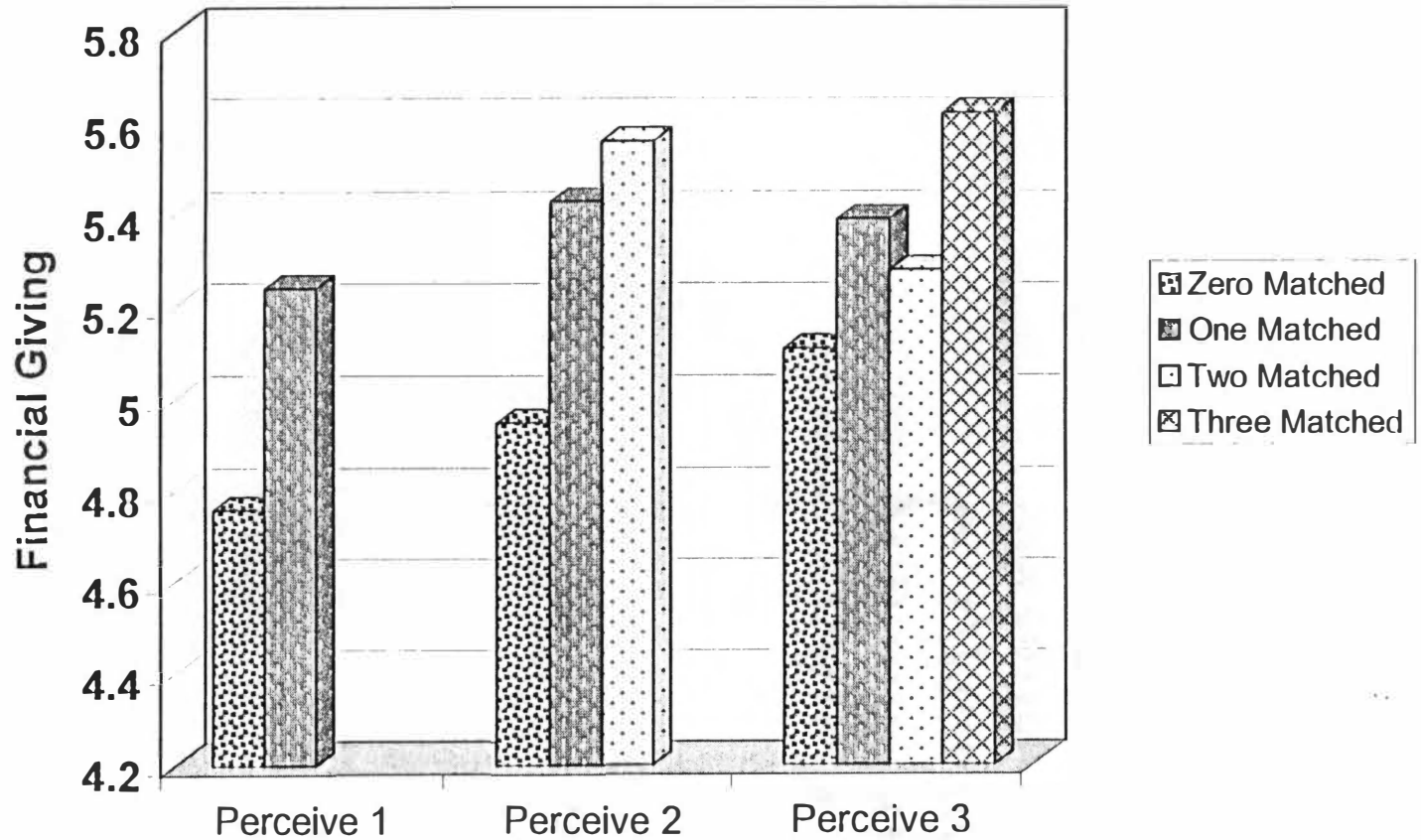


**Fig. 5.2 Perceived Benefits
and Actual Involvement:
Predicting Financial Giving**

5%) for those not participating in activities associated with their 1 perceived benefit. In other words, if a person appreciates only 1 type of benefit offered by the megachurch, whether or not that person participates in activities matched to that perceived benefit makes a slight difference ($p < .11$) in their financial contributions. To see if the pattern holds with the addition of orientations we now turn to persons perceiving multiple benefits.

Perceive 2: Perceiving Two Benefits

When we examine the financial giving of persons who identify with 2 orientations we see, once again, that participation makes a difference (Figure 5.2). We found a significant difference $F(2, 199) = 5.62, p < .005$ between the percentage of income given by persons who perceive 2 types of benefits, but were not involved in related activities (0 of 2, $M = 4.95$), and those participating in at least 1 type of activity related to their orientations (1 of 2, $M = 5.43$; 2 of 2, $M = 5.56$).

For giving money, there was not a significant difference between persons who participate in only 1 type of activity and those participating in 2 types of activities. Again, involvement in activities is an important factor in measures of attraction. But we also see that seeing multiple sets of benefits is also important. Does the same

pattern continue when persons maximize perceptions of benefits? We examine this question in the next section.

Perceive 3: Perceiving Three Benefits

The person who is most likely to want what the megachurch has to offer is the person who highly values all three categories of benefits. However, it is important to see that the willingness to "pay" for the benefits received depends on that person's participation in related activities (Figure 5.2). The greatest percentage of income given comes from individuals who perceive 3 types of benefits **and** who participate in the activities corresponding to all 3 (3 of 3). However, it is important to note that any participation (1 of 3 or 2 of 3) increases the percentage of income given to the megachurch. If you are responsible for getting others to subsidize a megachurch, the upshot is: get members to perceive a variety of services and get them involved in multiple programs.

PREDICTING "SATISFACTION"

The final measure of attraction to the megachurch used in this study is the more subjective construct, *satisfaction*. This variable was measured by a 12-item index intended to determine how happy the attender was with what was happening in the megachurch. The "satisfaction index" was discussed in chapter 2 (pp. 53-54) above.

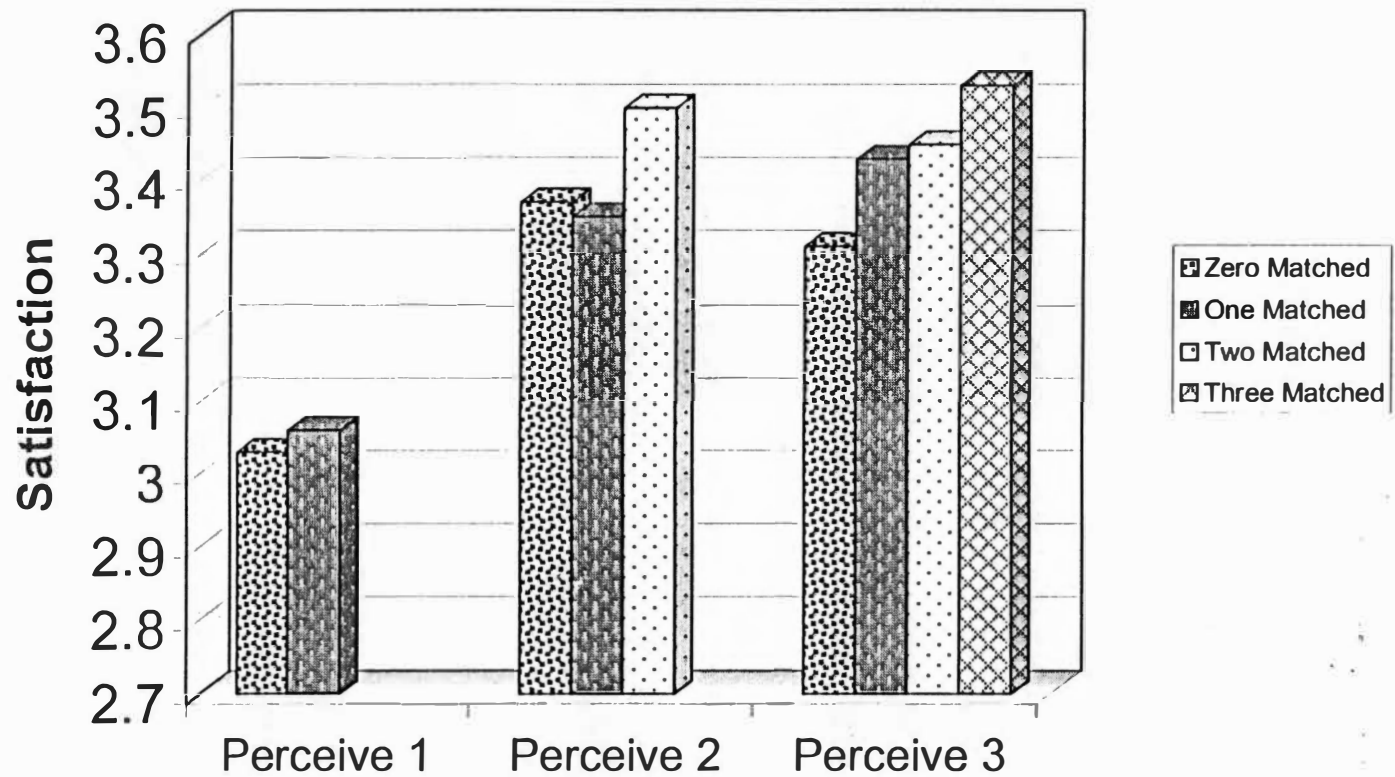


**Fig. 5.3 Perceived Benefits
and Actual Involvement:
Predicting Satisfaction**

Perceive 1: The Purists

Persons who recognize only 1 type of benefit (Perceive 1) are the least satisfied group within the megachurch. This is true whether or not they participate in an activity related to their orientation (Figure 5.3). In fact, there is no statistical difference in levels of satisfaction for "0 of 1" and "1 of 1."

Two points must be made here. First, although persons perceiving only 1 type of benefit are less satisfied than those perceiving more benefits, it is a relative difference. Most people responding to our questionnaire reported fairly high levels of satisfaction. This is understandable since, we assume, persons tend to be satisfied with the churches they choose to attend. We also assume that persons who choose to participate in our survey are more attracted to the megachurch than persons who did not participate. Although we understand this to be an important point, we do not believe it diminishes the implications of our findings.

A second point is drawn from the findings. We assume that persons who perceive only 1 type of benefit can be perfectly happy in a smaller congregation. However, we believe that the megachurch is organized in such a way to attract people through a multitude of experience opportunities. Therefore it is the person who recognizes the value of multiple benefits that enjoys the megachurch experience the most.

Multi-Perspectives: Perceiving Two or Three Benefits

Is satisfaction tied to one's perception of benefits or participation, or both? Megachurch attenders who perceive more than one type of benefit (Perceive 2 and Perceive 3) are more satisfied than persons perceiving only one type of benefit (Perceive 1). It is interesting to note that there is not a statistically significant difference for *satisfaction* among persons who identify with two or three orientations regardless of the number of activities in which they participate. This is even true for persons who are not involved in any activity related to their perceived benefits. We can conclude that, although behavioral measures of attraction (*time spent* and *money given*) are largely dependent upon participation in activities, the more social-psychological measure (satisfaction) requires only the perception of multiple sets of benefits.

COMPARING MEASURES OF ATTRACTION

Hopefully, one has a sufficient appreciation for the patterns of means that obtain within each of the classifications Perceive 1, Perceive 2, and Perceive 3. It is further hoped that one has noticed some striking patterns in Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3. To highlight the significance of these broader patterns, we will explicitly explore (and test) the extremes. That is, we will look specifically at those who maximize their participation in each of the 3

"Perceive" categories (for all 3 measures of attraction), and we will look at those who are not involved in activities related to perceived benefits ("0" categories) for all 3 measures.

First, those who maximize their options within each of the 3 types of matching categories allow us to compare the influence of benefit perceptions, while holding the notion of "doing all that you care to do" constant. That is, we wish to compare those who do the 1 activity they embrace to others who do the 2 activities they embrace to yet another group who embrace 3 activity types (Mystical, Self-Help, & Outreach) and **do** all 3 activities. All of these groups do everything they say they prefer. They are all consistent. They are all fairly efficient from a cost-benefit perspective. As it turns out, they are similar in giving more money than all other groups.

The groups are *different* in satisfaction, however. This slippage in pattern, this difference, is understandable in the context of the megachurch. For there to be a difference on the attitudinal variable of satisfaction, one apparently needs to embrace the multiple nature of the megachurch. The one group that is lower on satisfaction includes those who are in Perceive 1. As suggested earlier, single orientation persons may not appreciate fully what the megachurch offers.

Curiously, if they do get highly involved (albeit in "only"

1 activity), then they do give close to the same amount of money as others.

The other groups offer a very clean comparison of "free-riders": All 3 are examples of people who report being low in participation. They occur in Perceive 1, Perceive 2 and Perceive 3. You might think this lack of involvement would lead to less satisfaction and less financial giving. You would be half right. The free riders, at least at this point in their tenure with their megachurch, do just that, *free-ride*. They give the least financially (and in time).

Note, nonetheless, these groups are **not** equal in satisfaction. Again the defining features of the megachurch come to our aid. The explanation is straightforward: So long as you perceive that your megachurch offers multiple benefits, you are satisfied ($M = 3.41$ for Perceive 2, $M = 3.43$ for Perceive 3), and significantly more satisfied than those who lack this perception ($M = 3.03$ for Perceive 1). The attitude of the megachurch attender is moved by perception, but not their wallet.

CONCLUSIONS

We began this chapter with the question: Do persons consider costs and rewards when they engage in activities such as attending a particular church? Our answer is guided by exchange theory and the assumption that such decisions

are based on an attempt to gain the greatest reward at the least cost or sacrifice (Iannaccone 1995c).

Persons perceive the megachurch as providing certain kinds of benefits. The characteristic ways in which people recognize benefits we call "orientations." 3 such orientations were identified (*mystical, outreach, and self*). We then tested the relationships between the orientations and our measures of attraction.

Some limitations exist on the usefulness of economic (exchange) models of interpersonal behavior (Homans 1961; Thibaut & Kelley 1959). The major limitation is that such models assume humans to be essentially rational, capable of accurately evaluating the rewards and costs of potential behavior and able to select the most rewarding activity and avoiding the most costly. Homans (1961) and Thibaut & Kelley (1959) do admit that limitations exist, but conclude that such limitations are not insurmountable. It is possible to minimize the economic language of this theoretical model and still conclude that much social behavior -- behavior in the megachurch -- is consistent with it.

Despite the difficulty of measuring the intangible benefits provided by religious activity, it is possible that persons do consider costs and rewards in selecting activities in the megachurch. Our data suggest that people not only differ in their perception of benefits derived from the megachurch, they also differ in the amount of

participation related to those benefits. We also conclude that it is the relationship between perceived benefits and participation in activities that contribute to the attraction of the individual to the megachurch.

The relation between perception of benefits and participation in megachurch activities varies from one measure of attraction to another. For persons who are most *satisfied* in the megachurch, perception, alone, is the key. Persons who appreciate more than 1 type of benefit report greater satisfaction *whether or not* they participate in related activities. Those persons who are not involved but who recognize multiple benefits (0 of 2 and 0 of 3) are more satisfied than persons who only see 1 set of benefits (1 of 1). Certainly the large array of experience opportunities is one of the crucial factors in attracting persons to the megachurch. That is, the person who is capable of appreciating multiple benefits is likely to be more attracted to this contemporary style of "doing church," than persons who are limited in their perception of benefits.

Nonetheless, it is one thing to say you are "satisfied" with the church; it is another to be willing to give your time and your money. These behavioral measures of attraction require more than mere perception of benefits, one must also be active. Persons who do not participate in any activity related to their orientations (0 of 1, 0 of 2,

and 0 of 3) give significantly less time and money than persons who do participate, even minimally (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

The necessity of participation has important implications for the megachurch. Persons attending the megachurch are consumers, picking and choosing where they want to participate and leaving the rest alone. As such, they are like shoppers in a mall. They can be very satisfied with the selections without "buying" anything.

The "shopping" analogy is currently used, in the sociology of religion, by proponents of rational choice theory. This perspective employs economic language to explain attraction to religious institutions. Rational choice theories assume that people are rational and make decisions on the basis of what they perceive to be the least "costly" means to achieve goals. Those religious groups most attractive to the individual consumer offer distinctive benefits that are viewed as a "good bargain" (Stark 1996, p. 178). Following the arguments of Kelley (1972), Iannaccone concludes that *strictness* is the distinctive characteristic that "increases commitment, raises levels of participation, and enables a group to offer more benefits to current and potential members (1994, p. 1181)."

Contrary to Iannaccone's assumption, megachurch growth is not the result of strictness. Indeed, the distinctive characteristic of the megachurch appears to be more that of

accommodation to the prevailing culture than opposing it.

One respondent to our survey illustrated this point:

I don't like to admit this, but I think one of the reasons that this church is growing is because people today (including myself) have a tendency to take the path of least resistance. I enjoy this church, but it doesn't ask much of me in return. I can feel good about myself for being here.

Given the importance of individualism to modern people, the popularity of megachurches is not surprising. Our data indicate that the churches that attract large followings are those doing the best job of meeting the private needs of the individuals who attend.

The lesson for leaders of megachurches should be obvious. To continue to attract large numbers, the megachurch must continue to offer a multitude of spiritual development ministries, mission opportunities, and self-help programs. Probably initial involvements, and certainly satisfaction, are related to the perception of benefits. To get attenders to give of their time and money it is crucial to help them become involved in the activities that are related to the very benefits they perceive as important.

CHAPTER 6

A FINAL MODEL EMERGES:

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT MEGACHURCH ATTRACTIVENESS

This study investigated the factors that attract individuals to participate in a megachurch. To do this, we presented results of previous research on the growth of religious organizations. We also presented our own findings on the significance of a large number of variables related to megachurch attendance. But, now we are interested in exploring more fully the independent contribution that each variable makes toward understanding attraction to the megachurch.

THE NEED FOR A NEW MODEL

The present chapter is primarily exploratory in nature, because there is a lack of theoretical and empirical studies that answers the question, "What variables, or sets of variables, have the greatest potential for predicting attraction to the megachurch?" We are trying to predict what individuals found attractive from a series of independent variables. Up to this point we have presented

variables in groups that appear to be related among themselves; however, the concept of *attraction* was not formulated sufficiently to produce a unified prediction model. To do this, we have chosen to test empirically which variables and sets of variables have the greatest predictive power *vis-à-vis* our dependent variables. We use regression analysis, including only the variables from earlier chapters that showed promise of being significant predictors of attraction.

A REVIEW OF THEORETICAL TESTS

We began our examination of attraction to the megachurch by testing a number of socio-economic and demographic factors in chapter three. We tested theories of church attendance that produced positive results in other studies (of other types of churches). These theories included: deprivation and family surrogate, child rearing, localism, and social learning. We found little support for any of these classic theories. Our most promising result concerned the point at which a person began attending the megachurch. Therefore, *temporal location* is included as a variable in our regression analysis.

To reiterate, religiosity was not found to be a significant factor in predicting megachurch attraction. The reason was not that religion was unimportant, but just the opposite. Measures of religious belief and practice were

uniformly high. Almost all (99.6%) of the persons completing our survey said they believed Jesus to be "divine, the Son of God" (the highest category). Concerning the Bible, 93% believe it is "the Word of God." That is, 57% believe the Bible is to be "taken literally word for word," with another 36% stating they believe the Bible "contained no errors, but some passages are to be taken symbolically instead of literally." Almost 80% (79.4) reported that they prayed at least once a day. In other words, almost everyone in the megachurch accepts the message being proclaimed.

In chapter 4 we examined the role of friendships and personal networks in attracting people to the megachurch. We found that *friends in the church* are not a significant source of initial attraction, but the number of friends, and the number of potential interactions do contribute to the continuing attraction to the megachurch. Therefore, we include current church friendships and types of church participation in our regression analysis.

Chapter 5 examined ways in which persons consider benefits offered by the megachurch. Factor analysis of potential benefits identified three "orientations," or ways of perceiving the rewards of megachurch attendance. We called these orientations: "mystical," "outreach," and "self." Although we tested the relationship between orientations and attraction in the megachurch, we have yet

to examine the interrelationships between orientations. To do this we included each orientation, as a separate variable, in our regression analysis. In the end, 6 variables comprise our inter-theoretical model: temporal location, friends in the church, kinds of participation, mystical-orientation, outreach-orientation, and self-orientation.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The multiple regression technique yields two types of results that are important to our discussion. First, it provides standardized regression coefficients (beta weights) for each of the variables. This measure indicates how much change is produced in the dependent variable by a standardized change in one of the independent variables (Vogt 1993).

Second, the analysis produces a multiple regression coefficient (R). When the coefficient is squared (R^2), it gives the percentage of variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the predictor variable (Vogt 1993).

Since we lack a single model for predicting attraction to the megachurch, only variables that appeared to be theoretically promising in the earlier analyses are examined in the final model. As described above, these variables include: *temporal location* (when a person started attending the megachurch), *friends in the church*, *type of*

participation, and the three orientations ("Self," "Outreach," and "Mystical").

A series of multiple regression analyses were computed to identify the models that best accounted for the variance in the dependent variables: *time spent in activities*, *money given*, and *satisfaction*. A hierarchical analysis was used to evaluate the main effects and all possible interactions (Hastings, Kurth, Scholder, and Cry 1995). The full model, including all interaction terms, was evaluated in a series of tests of successively lower orders of interactions and main effects. No interactions (5-way, 4-way, 3-way, or 2-way) produced significant results ($p < .001$). Only the main effects remained significant. Thus only the first-order models are reported. The formula for the best model is presented below using the multiple linear regression equation:

$$y = B_0 + B_1x_1 + B_2x_2 + \dots + B_nx_n + e$$

where:

y = dependent variable

B_0 = Constant (y-intercept)

B = regression coefficient

x = score on independent variable

e = residual error

Overall, certain patterns emerged from our analyses. Some are not as strong as we would like them to be. Such weak relationships appear to be a consequence of the complex reality being measured rather than a limitation of the technique applied. Perhaps attraction to a new religious format requires more than self-report to be fully understood. Nevertheless, our survey made strides toward a deeper explanation and our study certainly frames what future research would be most profitable. We examine the results of the regression analyze in the following sections.

FINDINGS

Time Spent in Activities

The regression findings for *time spent in weekly church activities* to the megachurch are presented in Table 6.1. Four variables were shown to be significant in reducing the unexplained variance in the dependent variable. Among the variables that predict a willingness to spend time in weekly church activities, *kinds of participation in the church* has the largest coefficient (.377). This is consistent with our earlier finding that the involvement one has in the megachurch is positively related to attraction as measured by the amount of time one spends in church activities.

Additional variables that contribute to the coefficient of determination (R^2) are *close friends in the church*,

Table 6.1: Regression Coefficients for Independent Variables
on Measures of Attraction
(Standard Errors in Parentheses)

Independent Variables	Financial Giving		Time Spent per Week		Satisfaction	
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta
Close Friends			.094 (.015)	.203	.047 (.007)	.197
Participation	.267 (.055)	.165	.377 (.044)	.289	.125 (.021)	.186
Self-Orientation	-.232 (.070)	-.120	-.227 (.052)	-.146	.099 (.028)	.121
Outreach-Orientation	.489 (.086)	.216	.332 (.064)	.182	.105 (.037)	.111 ^a
Mystical-Orientation					.429 (.053)	.330
F ^b	27.476		69.301		101.493	
R squared	.086		.245		.394	
d.f.	(3, 875)		(4, 582)		(5, 779)	

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, probability for all regression coefficients is less than 0.001

^a $p < 0.004$

^b Probability for all F-values are less than 0.000

outreach-orientation, and *self-orientation*. The 4 variable model explained 25% of the variance in *amount of time given* to the church each week. Of particular importance, however, is the fact that there is a **negative** relationship between *self-orientation* and the amount of time they spend in church activities. This means that persons who are most strongly drawn to the megachurch through benefits that serve the needs of the individual are less likely to give of their time doing the work of the church.

The best regression model for "time spent" is presented in the following formula:

$$y = 1.28 + 0.377x_1 + 0.332x_2 - 0.277x_3 + 0.097x_4 + e$$

where:

y = Time spent in church activities

x₁ = Types of participation

x₂ = Outreach-orientation

x₃ = Self-orientation

x₄ = Friends in church

e = Residual error

Financial Giving

Similar results are found when we examine the contribution of variables to the "percentage of income given to the church" (Table 6.1). This time, a 3 variable model is obtained with *Outreach-orientation* the strongest

predictor ($B = .489$). This is logically consistent. Those persons who see the value in doing the work of the church and advance the causes of the church are the most likely to give their money to these causes. *Types of participation* and *Self-orientation* are the only additional significant contributors to "financial giving." These three variables explain almost 9% of the variance in giving to the church. Note, once again, self-orientation is **negatively** related to our dependent variable. That is, persons who strongly perceive "self-type" benefits are less likely to give their money. Unlike "time spent in church activities," *Friendships* are not a significant contributor to "financial giving" in the megachurch. The best regression model for "financial giving" is presented below:

$$y = 3.509 + 0.489x_1 + 0.267x_2 - 0.232x_3 + e$$

where:

y = Financial giving

x_1 = Outreach-orientation

x_2 = Types of participation

x_3 = Self-orientation

e = Residual error

Satisfaction

Table 6.1 shows that 5 variables in our regression model contribute significantly to one's *satisfaction* with

the megachurch. For the first time, *mystical orientation* appears in our regression models. Indeed, perceiving mystical benefits has the largest coefficient ($B = .429$) in our model predicting "satisfaction." From the strength of *mystical orientation*, we see that the megachurch still has much in common with non-megachurches. Spiritual benefits are highly prized and are, therefore, still provided by the megachurch. We also see "participation," "church friendships," "self-orientation" (primarily concerned with one's own needs), and "outreach-orientation" (wanting to extend the mission of the church and serve others), contributing to *satisfaction* in the megachurch. The model that includes these 5 variables accounts for 39.4% of the variance in satisfaction. The best regression model is presented below:

$$y = 0.589 + 0.429x_1 + 0.125x_2 + 0.105x_3 + 0.099x_4 + 0.047x_5 + e$$

where:

y = Satisfaction

x_1 = Mystical-orientation

x_2 = Types of participation

x_3 = Outreach-orientation

x_4 = Self-orientation

x_5 = Friends in church

e = Residual error

All of the significant explanatory variables in our regression analysis are found in smaller congregations. Although the megachurch is a **new** expression of American religion, it is not new because it is tapping different emotions or spiritual needs. The megachurch is not an alien religion without prior ties to another established religious body. That is, the megachurch is not a cult (Stark and Bainbridge 1985). To define the megachurch as such is unproductive because what works for a cult does not lead to attraction in would-be members in a megachurch.

In contrast to mainline churches, cults first attract members via new friends that ask converts to leave their families, old friends, and other outside distractions (Lofland and Stark 1965). Megachurches, though a new expression of religion, express contemporary cultural values (Miller 1997; Shibley 1996). The megachurch holds their converts' attraction more by what happens after a person becomes a member. The more they get involved in community activities, the more they integrate their new worship style with family and friends, the more the megachurch membership grows.

A megachurch springs from very traditional roots. It tries to get a newcomer to become invested in such activities as worship, missions, and small group meetings. It does this very openly. The megachurch is just better at what it does than most non-megachurch organizations.

The megachurch is not just a giant non-megachurch. It is not a huge denominational-type offering of mainly one style of worship. It is not a new product, yet it is certainly more than just a new label. A church evolves into "mega" status due to marketing and following through on a series of opportunities unavailable in a facility with a critical density of less than 2000 attenders. It is a "super-store" of religion.

Like Wal-Mart, the megachurch does not "sell" products that cannot be found in other churches, but it does bring all the "products" together under one roof. As we saw in chapter 5, it is the perception of multiple benefits that produces *satisfaction*. And nowhere are the multiple benefits in greater supply than in the megachurch.

After presenting our findings in the preceding chapters we have identified a number of factors that appear to contribute to attracting people to the megachurch. We have also found that a number of popular hypotheses about church growth do not apply to the megachurch. It is now time to put our findings into a broader perspective. In the concluding section of this study, we would like to try to answer two general questions: "What have we found?" and "Where do we go from here?"

CONCLUSIONS

The first thing we should ask is, "What do people

expect the megachurch to do for them?" In exploring this we found three broad perspectives or "orientations" to benefits offered by the megachurch. Persons identified with the first orientation, the *outreach-orientation*, find their reward in helping others. They want to teach and lead groups in the church (and the megachurch provides more groups than ever before). They also want to continue their ministry beyond the walls of the church through social ministries as well as evangelism. They are happiest when they are giving of themselves. The second perspective is the *self-orientation*. The major concern of this group is to have personal needs met. People in this group seek out self-help programs and those ministries of the megachurch that address specific problems (and the megachurch fills fellowship halls and educational buildings with more self-help groups than ever before). The third perspective is called the *mystical-orientation*. Persons in this group derive greatest benefits from the spiritual offerings of the church. That is, they are most attracted to the preaching, the music, and programs such as Sunday school (and these are still at the core of the megachurch). Note that persons are not limited to only 1 orientation. As we reported in chapter 5, persons who appreciate more than 1 set of benefits demonstrate higher levels of attractions than do persons who only perceive 1 benefit.

Providing What People Want

Our findings regarding the megachurch run contrary to much of the literature discussed in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. Dean Kelly (1972) and the rational choice theorists who follow him, credit the success of conservative churches to the strict demands made on their membership. In spite of the conservative theology preached by the megachurches, we found no indication of strict demands being placed on the rank and file members. Indeed, we believe an argument can be made that the attractiveness of the megachurch is that persons are free to choose their own style of what it means to be a Christian. In other words, the megachurch is firmly planted in a culture where the individual's experience is highly valued. Persons immersed in such a culture and who have an affinity for conservative Christianity find in the megachurch the opportunity for "religion on their own terms."

Given the three orientations existing among the potential members available to the megachurch, the question becomes, "What activities does the megachurch have to perform to attract the most people?" One answer to this question is found in the results of our regression analysis earlier in this chapter: The megachurch must continue to provide opportunities for personal ministry, a variety of programs, including many found in smaller churches, and an environment conducive to friendship interactions.

Outreach-oriented persons are strongly attracted to the megachurch. In fact, outreach-orientation is the one independent variable that predicts all three measures of attraction (Tables 6.1 above). People who desire to express their religion primarily through service to others and who perceive the megachurch as providing the opportunities to accomplish that, will be attracted to the church. In fact, outreach-orientation is the strongest predictor of *financial giving* in our regression analysis (Table 6.1).

A second aspect the megachurch should target in a recruit is having mystical-orientation. As we found in our analysis of "satisfaction", persons who desire spiritual benefits are still a major constituent of the megachurch.

The third orientation (Self) is somewhat problematic. We entered this study with an intuitive notion that megachurches attracted primarily self-seeking individuals. That is, we suspected the megachurch to be capitalizing on the spiritual, emotional, and social problems of "a generation of seekers" (Roof 1993). The megachurch is the most highly evolved expression of religious friendship opportunities. With thousands of like-minded megachurch attenders, options for self-fulfillment and friendships abound. Although megachurches are structured to address the problems of individuals, we did not find a *self-orientation* to be a strong positive predictor of attraction. In fact, in both behavioral measures - *financial giving* and *time*

spent -- the relationship of *self-orientation* was **negative**. In other words, the less a person demonstrates a self-orientation, the more likely they are of giving of their time and money. Thus a self-orientation does predict "satisfaction" in the megachurch, but such an orientation does impede self-sacrifice (giving time and money).

This is not to say that megachurches discourage self-oriented persons from attending, because helping people with their problems is one thing all religious organizations seek to do. Rather than targeting persons, as being particularly self-needy, perhaps it is better to characterize recruits as currently looking for items to place in their spiritual shopping carts. Seekers may tend to take their "lists" to a place offering one-stop shopping. Perhaps they will eventually begin to perceive new benefits provided by the megachurch. In the mean time, the self-oriented persons can be seen as providing ministry opportunities within the congregation for outreach-oriented members, as well as filling seats in worship and small groups thus helping to create the critical mass needed for a church to be a megachurch.

Our regression analyses identified an additional factor of attraction: *friendships in the church*. Note that this measure refers to friends that have been made **since** the person began attending, and **not** friends who were in the church before the person started attending. This factor is

the strongest predictor of "time spent in weekly church activities," and the second strongest predictor of "satisfaction." The implication of this is clear. It is very important that the megachurch provide opportunities for making friends and interacting with others in the context of the church.

Catering To Specialized Interests

Megachurches are a tribute to knowing their "customers" and meeting their needs (Lewis 1996). In addition to traditional ministry approaches, megachurches have adopted the increasingly targeted methods of the secular business world. Just as athletic shoe companies have introduced different styles to attract different segments of the market, so have megachurches extended their "product line" to include all possible combinations of people and needs through **small groups**.

Small groups offer members and non-members the opportunity to be with others like themselves without becoming overwhelmed or threatened by the larger congregation. They also provide the social networks and programs that allow participants to perceive that the megachurch is tailored to meeting their needs. Not only do "customers" expect such service, they demand it. According to Pine and Gilmore:

No longer should customers settle for standardized goods and services when companies can efficiently

deliver, through mass customization techniques, only and exactly what each desires. If your company resists doing so, some competitor surely will soon, forever disrupting the dynamics of your industry (1999, p. 82).

This speaks directly to the difference between the non-megachurch and the megachurch. To explain, let us use an analogy. The non-megachurch is like a circus. Many things may be going on at the same time, but they are all taking place within the same tent. The megachurch, on the other hand, is like a carnival. There is still a center of attraction (the giant worship service), but added to it is a seemingly endless midway of sideshows. Peter Berger, with almost prophetic insight, describes the pluralistic society which has, on one hand, helped shape the megachurch, and on the other, provides the context to which the megachurch is responding:

The religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be marketed. It must be "sold" to a clientele that is no longer constrained to "buy." The pluralist situation is, above all, a market situation. In it, the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities (1967, p. 138).

Everyone one wants to belong to a meaningful community. The only problem with this is, not everyone agrees what is "meaningful." Therefore, one type of group will not satisfy a diverse aggregate of people. Prior to the advent of the megachurch, people would solve this problem by "comparison

shopping," that is, they would move in and out of many churches seeking the right "fit" for their personal needs. But, with the megachurch, this variety of options coexists within the same congregation. If more sources of personal connection are provided, and if more friendships are made and maintained, then the megachurch will be successful.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several implications for future research that may be derived from this study. Our research has focused on the social-psychological influences on the individual megachurch attender, further study needs to be done on the broader, structural factors that have contributed to the creation and growth of megachurches. It must not be forgotten that evangelical Christianity did not invent religious commodification (Moore 1994, p. 255). In most cases, megachurches are the product of entrepreneurial leaders who have learned their management and organizational skills from secular institutions. Future research on the backgrounds and philosophies of megachurch leaders would be an important addition to our body of knowledge.

Finally, an intriguing question on the future of the megachurch phenomenon emerged from this research: "Is a shift in orientations taking place?" The nature of our data does not allow us to give a definite answer. However, such a shift could change the structure of the megachurch. To

answer this question would require a series of studies at different points of time in the future. It is the belief of this researcher that such a project would be worthwhile. If this study has answered some of the questions with which we began, and inspired future research, then it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Congregational Survey

Congregational Survey

This congregation is part of a national study of large churches. As part of that study, we would like to have information from as many adults in the congregation as possible. Your responses are anonymous (do not put your name on this survey). Individual questionnaires will be kept completely confidential and after all responses have been tallied, your congregation will get only a summary of everyone's answers. Please take a few minutes to respond to these questions. Simply check (✓ or X) the response that is most appropriate for you. If there is a question you cannot answer, just skip on to the next item. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate now, or at any time after you have started on the form. If you withdraw after you start, your questionnaire will be returned to you or destroyed. Thank you for your help in this important study.

I. The first section contains questions about your involvement with this church.

1. How long have you been attending worship services and activities at this church?

_____ years [1,2]; or _____ months if less than 1 year

(If this is your first visit to this church, skip to question 15)

2. How often do you come to worship services here?

[3-1] ☐ Less than once a month

[3-2] ☐ Once a month

[3-3] ☐ Two or three times a month

[3-4] ☐ Once a week

[3-5] ☐ More than once a week

3. Are you a member of this church (i.e. have you officially joined)?

[4-1] ☐ Yes

[4-2] ☐ No

If you answered "Yes," how long have you been a member?

_____ years [5,6]; or _____ months if less than 1 year

4. Before you started attending this church, were you participating in another congregation?

[7-1] ☐ Yes

[7-2] ☐ No

If you answered "Yes," what was the denomination or group affiliation of your previous church?

_____ [8,9]

If you used to go to another church, what was the main reason you left? (Be as specific as you can.):

_____ [10,11]

5. About how many hours (average) do you spend in worship services and/or activities organized by this church each week?

[12-1] ☐ Less than 1 hour (or NONE)

[12-2] ☐ 1-2 hours

[12-3] ☐ 3-5 hours

[12-4] ☐ 6-10 hours

[12-5] ☐ 11-20 hours

[12-6] ☐ More than 20 hours

6. How far from this church do you live?

_____ (miles) [13,14,15]

How long does it usually take you to travel to church?

_____ (minutes) [16,17,18]

7. Which of the following best describes your financial giving to this church?

[19-1] ☐ I give regularly 10% or more of my income to this church

[19-2] ☐ I give around 5-10% of my income to this church

[19-3] ☐ I give regularly but it is less than 5%

[19-4] ☐ I give a small amount occasionally

[19-5] ☐ Most of my giving is to another church/group

[19-6] ☐ I do not contribute financially here or anywhere

8. Suppose you had to join a new church. Which of the following would you most likely join? (Please choose only one.)

[20-1] ☐ One with a major focus on evangelism

[20-2] ☐ One with a major focus on social action

[20-3] ☐ One with a dynamic pastor and exciting worship programs

[20-4] ☐ One with programs designed to meet my personal needs

[20-5] ☐ Other: _____

[20-6] ☐ I don't know

9. Think for a moment of your five closest friends (outside of your family)—how many are involved with this church? _____ (21)

10. How many of these people were close friends before you started attending this church? _____ (22)

11. How important are the following benefits you receive from attending this church?

		Important		Unimportant	
		(-1) Very	(-2) Somewhat	(-3) Somewhat	(-4) Very
(23)	Answers to life's perplexing questions	☐	☐	☐	☐
(24)	Business contacts (monetary gain)	☐	☐	☐	☐
(25)	Entertainment	☐	☐	☐	☐
(26)	Help with serious personal problems	☐	☐	☐	☐
(27)	Increased self-esteem	☐	☐	☐	☐
(28)	Respect within my family and/or community	☐	☐	☐	☐
(29)	Something to believe in, in today's world	☐	☐	☐	☐
(30)	Spiritual growth and development	☐	☐	☐	☐
(31)	Support from caring friends	☐	☐	☐	☐
(32)	Values I can live by	☐	☐	☐	☐
(33)	An alternative to secular social activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
(34)	An opportunity to use my gifts and abilities	☐	☐	☐	☐
(35)	Ministry and care to the surrounding community	☐	☐	☐	☐
(36)	Being a part of a family where I really belong	☐	☐	☐	☐
(37)	Reaching the unchurched	☐	☐	☐	☐
(38)	Strong traditional worship	☐	☐	☐	☐
(39)	Contemporary worship	☐	☐	☐	☐
(40)	The preaching	☐	☐	☐	☐
(41)	The music	☐	☐	☐	☐
(42)	The challenge of living out my faith	☐	☐	☐	☐
(43)	Sharing/prayer groups	☐	☐	☐	☐
(44)	Solid Bible teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐
(45)	Ministry to children/youth	☐	☐	☐	☐
(46)	My needs are being met	☐	☐	☐	☐
(47)	Chance to meet new people	☐	☐	☐	☐
(48)	I feel less guilt when I attend	☐	☐	☐	☐
(49)	I can attend here without everyone knowing everything about me	☐	☐	☐	☐

List any additional benefits you feel you receive from attending this church not listed above, (be specific):

12. How important were the following influences in attracting you to this church?

		[-1]	[-2]	[-3]	[-4]
		<u>Important</u>		<u>Unimportant</u>	
		Very	Somewhat	Somewhat	Very
[50]	Church advertising	☐	☐	☐	☐
[51]	I grew up in this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[52]	Invitation from a church member	☐	☐	☐	☐
[53]	Invitation from a close friend or family member	☐	☐	☐	☐
[54]	It was close to where I lived	☐	☐	☐	☐
[55]	It is a Southern Baptist church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[56]	Personal contact by the pastor or staff member	☐	☐	☐	☐
[57]	Radio or TV program	☐	☐	☐	☐
[58]	Reputation of the church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[59]	It provided a support group for a special need	☐	☐	☐	☐

List any additional influences that attracted you to this church not listed above, (be specific):

13. Indicate your level of participation in the following church activities or programs.

		[-1]	[-2]	[-3]	[-4]
		Actively Participate	Infrequently Participate	No Longer Participate	Never
[60]	Informal gatherings with other attenders	☐	☐	☐	☐
[61]	Sunday School class	☐	☐	☐	☐
[62]	Support/care group	☐	☐	☐	☐
[63]	Youth/children's activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
[64]	Local missions activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
[65]	Choir/music activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
[66]	Women's/ Men's organizations	☐	☐	☐	☐
[67]	Week-day programs	☐	☐	☐	☐
[68]	Position of leadership (teacher, deacon, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
[69]	Served on a church committee	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. Listed below is a series of statements that concern your involvement with this church. Please respond to each statement according to how much you agree or disagree with it.

		[-1] Strongly Agree	[-2] Agree	[-3] Disagree	[-4] Strongly Disagree
[70]	It is likely that I will leave this church within the next 12 months	☐	☐	☐	☐
[71]	I feel a strong sense of "belonging" to this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[72]	I regularly take part in the activities of this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[73]	I am regularly involved in a small group at this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[74]	I have been given the opportunity to participate in the making of important decisions in this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[75]	I am personally excited about church life at this time	☐	☐	☐	☐
[76]	I have many close friends in this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[77]	I find myself in agreement with the direction this church is going most of the time	☐	☐	☐	☐
[78]	The senior pastor has a clear vision for the growth of this church and its members	☐	☐	☐	☐
[79]	The denominational affiliation of this church is very important to me	☐	☐	☐	☐
[80]	The most important part of this church for me, is the care I get from others in small groups	☐	☐	☐	☐
[81]	The theology of the pastor of this church is very important to me	☐	☐	☐	☐
[82]	When I talk to someone about personal matters or concerns, it is usually people within this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[83]	When I get together with others socially, it is usually people within this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[84]	The music and songs at this church are very inspirational to me	☐	☐	☐	☐
[85]	The sermons at this church usually make me feel good about myself	☐	☐	☐	☐
[86]	The sermons at this church speak to my needs, most of the time	☐	☐	☐	☐
[87]	The most important part of this church, for me is the inspiration I get from worship	☐	☐	☐	☐
[88]	I find myself in agreement with the direction this church is going most of the time	☐	☐	☐	☐
[89]	This church makes demands on my time and lifestyle that are not understood or appreciated by my friends in the secular world	☐	☐	☐	☐
[90]	One thing I like about worship services at this church is that they are not like those I experienced in the past	☐	☐	☐	☐
[91]	I have been criticized by others because I attend this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[92]	Christian radio and /or television is an important part of my daily routine	☐	☐	☐	☐
[93]	I have lost friends because of my involvement with this church	☐	☐	☐	☐
[94]	The values expressed by people in this church are different than the values expressed in the business world	☐	☐	☐	☐
[95]	I only go to church to please friends or family members	☐	☐	☐	☐
[96]	I experience God more at this church than I have at any other church	☐	☐	☐	☐

II. In this section, we ask some questions about your beliefs and religious background:

15. Have you ever experienced a moment of decisive faith commitment or conversion?

[97-1] ☐ Yes

[97-2] ☐ No

If you answered "Yes," how long ago did this occur? _____ years [98-99]

16. My first contact with the Christian faith was: (briefly describe):

[100-101]

17. Which statement comes closest to what you believe about Jesus Christ?

[102-1] ☐ He is divine, the Son of God

[102-2] ☐ Perhaps the greatest person who ever lived, but not divine

[102-3] ☐ He was another religious leader, like Mohammed or Buddha

[102-4] ☐ He never actually lived

[102-5] ☐ I don't know

18. Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible?

[103-1] ☐ The Bible is the Word of God, to be taken literally word for word

[103-2] ☐ The Bible is the Word of God. It contains no errors, but some passages are to be taken symbolically rather than literally

[103-3] ☐ The Bible is inspired by God, but contains historical and scientific errors

[103-4] ☐ The Bible represents the best human attempts to understand God's nature

[103-5] ☐ An ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts

[103-6] ☐ I don't know

19. About how many times would you say you have prayed privately during the last seven days, not counting mealtimes or church services?

[104-1] ☐ Two or more times a day

[104-2] ☐ About once a day

[104-3] ☐ Several times a week

[104-4] ☐ Once a week

[104-5] ☐ None

20. When you were growing up, how important was religion in your home?

[105-1] ☐ Very important

[105-2] ☐ Somewhat important

[105-3] ☐ Not too important

[105-4] ☐ Not at all important

21. When you were growing up, did your parents share the same religious beliefs?

[106-1] ☐ Yes

[106-2] ☐ No

22. What was the denomination or religious affiliation you most often attended as a youth?

[107-108]

23. Today, how important is religion to you?

[109-1] ☐ Very important

[109-2] ☐ Somewhat important

[109-3] ☐ Not too important

[109-4] ☐ Not at all important

24. Over the past year, have you made changes in your actions and priorities as a result of your Christian faith?

[110-1] ☐ No real changes

[110-2] ☐ Some small changes

[110-3] ☐ Some major changes

25. How important are the following sources of inspiration for your personal spiritual growth?

	[-1] Important		[-2] Unimportant	
	Very	Somewhat	Somewhat	Very
(111) Small groups (Bible study, prayer, fellowship, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
(112) Worship services	☐	☐	☐	☐
(113) Reading Christian literature	☐	☐	☐	☐
(114) Christian radio/television	☐	☐	☐	☐
(115) Missions activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
(116) Unspoiled natural areas/nature	☐	☐	☐	☐
(117) Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐
(118) Church camps/ conferences	☐	☐	☐	☐
(119) Private prayer/reflection	☐	☐	☐	☐
(120) Christian groups not connected to any one church	☐	☐	☐	☐
(121) Private Bible reading/study	☐	☐	☐	☐

26. Listed below are a series of statements that are concerned with religious, personal and social values. Your responses are confidential, so respond as honestly as you can.

	[-1] Strongly Agree	[-2] Agree	[-3] Disagree	[-4] Strongly Disagree
(122) My religious beliefs are really the basis to my whole approach to life	☐	☐	☐	☐
(123) I'd like to find someone who would tell me how to solve my personal problems	☐	☐	☐	☐
(124) I can be friendly with people who do things which I consider wrong	☐	☐	☐	☐
(125) Religion is a private matter between God and myself. What I believe is of no concern to others.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(126) I seem to have real inner strength in handling things. I feel I'm on a solid foundation in my life.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(127) I do not believe in compromising. When people do not have values that I share, I don't want to have much to do with them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(128) Our laws give too much protection to criminals.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(129) There is no excuse for lying to someone.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(130) Abortion should be made available to any woman who wants one.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(131) I sometimes think when people have misfortune, that they only get what they deserve.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(132) I believe our nation has suffered because we no longer allow prayer in public schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(133) Women can be just as effective as men as leaders in the business world	☐	☐	☐	☐
(134) God helps those who help themselves.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(135) In recent national elections, I have most often voted for (or would have voted for) the Republican candidates	☐	☐	☐	☐
(136) If persons try hard enough, they will usually be successful in life.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(137) Bible study and prayer are very important in my daily life.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(138) I am comfortable sharing my faith with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(139) There is so much in today's culture that works against my moral standards that I often find it impossible to live up to what I believe is right.	☐	☐	☐	☐
(140) I am often confused as to what is right and what isn't. One set of standards doesn't seem to fit every situation.	☐	☐	☐	☐

27. In general, how much confidence do you have in the following institutions in the United States?

	(-1) Great Deal	(-2) Some	(-3) Very Little	(-4) None
[141] Church or organized religion	☐	☐	☐	☐
[142] Military	☐	☐	☐	☐
[143] Public schools	☐	☐	☐	☐
[144] The presidency	☐	☐	☐	☐
[145] The Supreme Court	☐	☐	☐	☐
[146] Congress	☐	☐	☐	☐
[147] Big business	☐	☐	☐	☐
[148] Medicine/health care	☐	☐	☐	☐

III. Finally, we would like to know some background information about you. (Remember, this information is anonymous and will be kept strictly confidential.)

28. How long have you lived in this city (or the larger Metropolitan area)?

- [149-1] ☐ I do not live here. I am just visiting [PLEASE STOP, THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY.]
- [149-2] ☐ Less than 1 year
- [149-3] ☐ 1-5 years
- [149-4] ☐ 6-10 years
- [149-5] ☐ more than 10 years

29. What was the major reason you moved to this area? Briefly describe:

_____ [150,151]

30. Where did you spend most of your childhood and adolescent years?

_____ [152,153]
(Specify state(s)—or country if outside the U.S.)

31. What was the type of the community in which you spent most of your life before you were 18 years old?

- [154-1] ☐ Farm
- [154-2] ☐ Rural, but not farm
- [154-3] ☐ Small town
- [154-4] ☐ Suburbs of a city
- [154-5] ☐ Neighborhood within a city
- [154-6] ☐ Inner city

32. What is your sex?

- [155-1] ☐ Male
- [155-2] ☐ Female

33. What is your race or ethnic background? Specify:

_____ [156,157]

34. What was your age at your last birthday?

_____ years [158,159]

35. What is your marital status?

- [160-1] ☐ Single (never married)
- [160-2] ☐ Married
- [160-3] ☐ Widowed
- [160-4] ☐ Separated
- [160-5] ☐ Divorced

36. Which statement best describes the people who, currently, make up your household?

- [161-1] ☐ I live alone
- [161-2] ☐ My household consists of adults sharing living quarters
- [161-3] ☐ A married couple without children
- [161-4] ☐ A married couple with children living at home
- [161-5] ☐ One parent with children living at home
- [161-6] ☐ Married couple with grown children no longer living at home

37. Do you have any family members—other than spouse and/or children—who attend this church?

- [162-1] ☐ Yes
- [162-2] ☐ No

38. What is your highest level of formal education?

- [163-1] ☐ Less than high school graduate
- [163-2] ☐ High school diploma, GED or equivalent
- [163-3] ☐ Some post-high school work (include some college, junior college, vocational training, etc.)
- [163-4] ☐ 4-year college degree
- [163-5] ☐ Post-college graduate work or degree

39. What was your approximate total household income in 1997?

- [164-1] ☐ Under \$10,000
 [164-2] ☐ \$10,000 to \$19,999
 [164-3] ☐ \$20,000 to \$34,999
 [164-4] ☐ \$35,000 to \$49,000
 [164-5] ☐ \$50,000 to \$64,999
 [164-6] ☐ \$65,000 to \$79,999
 [164-7] ☐ \$80,000 to \$99,999
 [164-8] ☐ \$100,000 or more

40. Which of the following categories best describes your current employment situation?

- [165-1] ☐ Employed full-time
 [165-2] ☐ Employed part-time
 [165-3] ☐ Self-employed
 [165-4] ☐ Retired
 [165-5] ☐ Unemployed/disabled
 [165-6] ☐ Student
 [165-7] ☐ Homemaker

What is your occupation (or what was it before you retired)?

[166-167]

41. Are you actively involved in any of the following community groups/organizations? (Check all that apply.)

- [168-1] ☐ Service organizations (Lions, Rotary, etc.)
 [169-1] ☐ Resident groups (Neighborhood Watch, Tenant organizations, etc.)
 [170-1] ☐ Political parties/organizations
 [171-1] ☐ Charitable organizations (not part of your own church)
 [172-1] ☐ Sporting or recreation organizations
 [173-1] ☐ Leisure groups (Senior Citizen Club, etc.)
 [174-1] ☐ School committee/organization (PTA, PTO, etc.)
 [175-1] ☐ Parenting groups
 [176-1] ☐ Amateur theater/arts
 [177-1] ☐ Professional/business organizations
 [178-1] ☐ Labor organizations
 [179-1] ☐ Religious group (not part of this church)
 [180-1] ☐ Others (please specify) _____
 [181-1] ☐ None of the above

42. If you have additional comments you would like to make concerning this church, you may write them in the space below. [182-183]

For office use only

[184 through 186]

[187 through 193]

Thank you for helping with this survey.

APPENDIX B

Letter Of Introduction



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC

NAMB

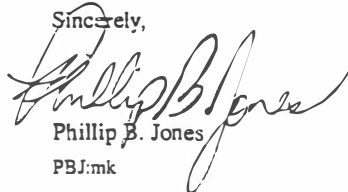
Dear Pastor:

The North American Mission Board (NAMB) is in the process of gathering information on the megachurch. In doing so, we have partnered with Ray Dalton, an instructor of sociology at Carson Newman College and former researcher with the Home Mission Board. Ray will be using the information we collect to write reports for NAMB and to complete his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Tennessee. (His dissertation is titled *Sources of Attraction to the Megachurch: Factors Influencing the Individual's Decision to Participate*.) I think this information will be of tremendous value as we help to plant and grow new churches and mobilize "On Mission" Christians. In fact, we hope to use some of the information in an upcoming issue of our new flagship publication, *On Mission* magazine.

You were previously asked to complete a pastors questionnaire and to have a lay leader in your church complete a questionnaire. In a second stage of this project, Ray will be working with a sample of megachurches and surveying their participants to gain further insights about the factors influencing their decisions to attend their particular church. I think this will be the most interesting and valuable part of the entire study. Ray is prepared to offer you a summary of attendees' responses for your church as well as a summary of all the attendees' responses in the sample churches. You should find this summary helpful in understanding your church and comparing it to other megachurches in the SBC.

I hope that you can find time to participate with Ray in this next part of our study. Thank you for your help. May God continue to bless you in your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Phillip B. Jones". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and initials.

Phillip B. Jones
PBJ:mk

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APPENDIX C

Methodology Note

All data for the present study were obtained from the 8-page questionnaire administered to more than 1,200 megachurches attenders (Appendix A). For original data entry purposes, the questionnaire was pre-coded. To avoid response bias the direction of response options was counterbalanced across questions. To make each question consist to one another, some response values had to be reversed from their original direction. Thus responses could be combined as scales and compared in the same direction. This was done by the simple formula: $(a + 1) - b = x$ where a is the highest value of possible scores for a question; b is any given value of a response to that question, and x is the new value. For example, if a question offered 4 possible responses (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree), the value of each response could be reversed by adding 1 to 4 and subtracting the original response value. Thus, in the above example, 4 becomes 1 ($5 - 4 = 1$), 3 becomes 2, 2 becomes 3, and 1 becomes 4.

The following is a list of all variables in the original questionnaire (Appendix A) by final status (reversed score or left in original direction):

Variable

1 - 18	Original direction
19	Reversed
20 - 22	Original direction
23 - 69	Reversed
70	Original direction
71 - 94	Reversed
95	Original direction
96	Reversed
97 - 101	Original direction
102 - 105	Reversed
106 - 108	Original direction
109	Reversed
110	Original direction
111 - 129	Reversed
130	Original direction
131 - 132	Reversed
133	Original direction
134 - 138	Reversed
139 - 140	Original direction
141 - 148	Reversed
149 - 187	Original direction

VITA

Ray Philip Dalton was born in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, on March 2, 1948. He attended school in Norris, Tennessee where he graduated from Norris High School in 1966. He attended Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee from 1966 to 1970, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in Sociology and Psychology. He did further work in Sociology at Georgia State University in Atlanta (1971), and in Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois (1973-1975) and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (1975-1979). While in Louisville he earned a Master of Divinity (1976) and a Master of Theology in Church and Community Studies (1979).

From 1979 until 1986 he served as Executive Director of North Loop Ministries in Chicago, Illinois. In 1986 he became Associate Director of Program Research for the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1990 he accepted a teaching position in Sociology at Carson-Newman College. He is currently serving in that position. He was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Tennessee in May 2002.

He is married to the former Peggy Sharpe and they have two children, Timothy and Ami.

