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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

COMMUNICATING IDENTITY:

COMMUNICATION PROCESSES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP IDENTITY THROUGH CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP RITUALS

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

ALAN LEWIS POGUE

Norman, Oklahoma

2002

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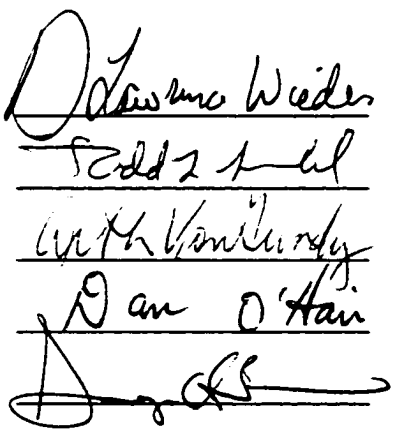
A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

BY



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Finally, for my mother, Lillian Fay Clark Pogue. I promised that I would finish.

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Communicating Identity

Abstract

How does communication work in the process of group identity creation and maintenance? This dissertation uses a social construction of reality orientation to seek the verbal, nonverbal, and ritual communication elements that work in the process of identity development in distinct communities. Ethnography and focus groups were used to collect data on two congregations of the Churches of Christ, one in the Midwest, and one in the South. The specific communication activities observed were those occurring in the context of the weekly worship assemblies. A complete ethnographic account of representative assemblies in each congregation is presented. This account provides the material for analysis of verbal, nonverbal, and ritual elements of communication. Verbal elements identified that relate to identity creation and maintenance are: terms, stories and reframes. Nonverbal elements identified are: proxemics, haptics, kinesics, chronemics, artifacts, environment, facial expressions, and physical appearance. Seating behaviors were found to be a powerful indicator of member identification with the group. Ritual elements consist of the verbal and nonverbal elements organized in a meaning-rich context of repetitive behaviors that serve to make abstract metaphysical concepts a reality for the worshippers. This reality shared by the worshippers appears to reinforce their concept of community. The traditions that develop in repetitive worship rituals are important to the maintenance of group identity.

The last chapter of this dissertation compared the observations to existing theories of the ways identity develops in groups. The theories include Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, and Turner's

Self-Categorization Theory. A model of a communication system operating in the weekly worship assemblies was described. The system is theorized to consist of the basic verbal element "terms" existing with a positive or negative value. These terms often occur within the text of a narrative or "story." These verbal elements occur within the context of nonverbal elements that add positive or negative values. These elements, organized into repetitive ritual acts with specific meanings, enable the process of group or collective identity creation and maintenance. This system exists in one of two states: stable or unstable. The stable state is characterized by meaningful traditions. The unstable state is characterized by changing traditions. This model should be applicable to other religious groups in addition to the congregations of the Churches of Christ. Prescriptions for church leaders apply the model to specific ways of developing a common group identity. A Glossary of terms with connotations specific to the religious group Churches of Christ is included in Appendix C.

COMMUNICATING IDENTITY:

COMMUNICATION PROCESSES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP IDENTITY THROUGH CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP RITUALS

Chapter One:

Research Interest

What role does communication perform in community building? What communication activities are associated with developing and maintaining a sense of community? How does a sense of belonging, or identification, develop among members of a community? These questions lead to this study.

This dissertation seeks to identify and understand the communication processes involved in the development of group identity. I believe that both the concept of community and the association of self with that community may be seen in the construction of a commonly held identity. The subject for this study is the community that is formed when a church congregation assembles together for their weekly worship service. I began this study with four assumptions:

The individual's associations with others in distinctly perceived groups (whether kinship, social, political, or religious) form the building blocks of society. Berger (1969, pp. 3-28) presents a concept of society as a human product resulting from the interaction of individuals with others in collectives over time. These collectives, while at a macro level result in a society, at micro levels may be seen in families, communities, and social institutions. The theory of the Social Construction of Reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), presented society as a dialectic process created by individuals in collectives over time, where the society also was the primary instrument in the creation of the individual's

personal reality. Berger (1969) extended the theory to apply to smaller units of society, specifically examining religion as a component of society and the individual's life, proposing the same dialectic process of reality creation. I believe it is consistent with the theory of social construction of reality to look for this dialectic process at micro levels of society as represented by a single congregation of a religious group. Wuthnow (1992b), following Berger, claims that it is at this micro level where individual identities are created, in local communities, specifically including local religious congregations. The importance of the local community (the church congregation) in the maintenance of the larger society is illustrated by Wuthnow's fear that a decrease in the role of religion in identity creation will result in a significant change in the larger society (America).

An individual's sense of identity may be revealed through communication processes. Goffman presents a way of observing individuals acts in society to see their concept of the role they are playing, thus revealing their view of self, or identity (Goffman, 1959). The observations described by Goffman are of communication processes. Burgoon (1994, p. 245) categorizes the observable communication processes associated with individual identity as identity management and impression management. Identity management refers to the characteristics and behaviors indicative of the individual's true self. Manifest identity badges communicate an individual's identity as a member of a group in ways recognizable by others.

An individual's identification with a group, a group's identification with an individual, or a group's identity may also be revealed through communication processes. Observable speech codes can reveal an individual's identification with a group (Philipsen, 1992, p. 140). Although language is considered the most important way that a

person's group identity may be seen, other communicative behaviors are also important ways of observing both identification with a group and common group identity (Deaux, 1996, p. 787). Individual identification with a group may be seen by means of the individual's attempts to accommodate to the communication style of the group (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). An observation of communication behaviors can reveal a person's attempts to identify with a group as well as the group's acceptance of that person's membership in the group (Wieder & Pratt, 1990). Ellis indicates that the larger group identity is seen in the interpersonal communication behaviors of individual members of the group (1999, p. xii).

Further, communication may play a very important role in the development of both individual and group identities. Identity can be seen as a dialectic process where individual and social identity are created and maintained through communication (Berger, 1969). Communication is the important process in human interaction where an individual develops a personal identity separate from the group, by means of the group, identifies with the group, and creates with the group a common identity. Group identity may be created and maintained through the ongoing process of group debate concerning common values (Sani & Reicher, 1999, 2000). Ellis (1999, p. 97) claims that "ritualistic forms of interaction" are the processes that "communicate identities and beliefs, create personal and generational bonds, and perpetuate cultures and value systems." One version of the connection between ritual and the creation of beliefs is discussed in the section on identity formation that follows. Chapter 8 presents a further discussion of the connection between ritual and the development of common beliefs that maintain the group identity.

Ritual communication, as practiced in religious assemblies in church congregations, is one way by which the group (the local church congregation) develops a sense of community as individuals identify with the group and accept the group's identity as part of their own individual identity. In this dissertation I will show how verbal and nonverbal elements of the communication process in the context of the Sunday morning worship assembly of a congregation work together to form a meaning-rich ritual. This ritual is the primary means by which the group constructs a common identity and individuals identify with the group.

Identity

Identity is a broad concept in the Social Sciences. Identity constructs are found across disciplines, in Psychology, Sociology, Social Psychology, Anthropology, and in Communication research and theory. Identity may be qualified as individual identity (also known as self or self-concept), or collective identity (also referred to as group identity, or political identity), or as a concept that overlaps both individual and collective: Social identity (or psychosocial identity). Identity concepts used in verb form are identification and affiliation.

> When we wish to establish a person's identity, we ask what his name is and what station he occupies in his community. Personal identity means more: it includes a subjective sense of continuous existence and a coherent memory. Psychosocial identity has even more elusive characteristics, at once subjective and objective, individual and social (Erikson, 1968, p. 61).

The difficulty of defining "identity" is indicated by this quote from Erikson. Beginning with individual identity, the concept seems simple: "a man's knowledge of who he is" (as defined by Gergen, 1971, p. 2). This term, as used by Gergen and others, is synonymous with the term "self."

Both the term "identity" and the term "self" represent multiple concepts that are similar but not exact synonyms, especially when considered across disciplines as well as among researchers and theorists within the same discipline. Gergen's definition is based on an individual making sense of self within self – an intrapersonal perception of self that is common to psychology. Sociological studies use an interpersonal definition of identity: How an individual perceives self in relation to others (both similar and dissimilar). This comparison of self with others may be a comparison of the roles played by self with the roles played by others (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Tajfel (1981), in a work that is foundational for communication accommodation theory, advocates Social Identity Theory (SIT), where individuals consciously choose to identify with select groups. Identity is created by means of comparisons of group memberships with other groups. According to Self-Categorization Theory (SCT, developed as an extension of SIT) identity develops through the process of categorizing characteristics associated with identity into in-group and out-group categories with positive values for the in-group characteristics and negative values for the out-group characteristics (Turner, 1982).

Identity formation. The process is dialectic: Through the ways that the individual is perceiving self in comparison with perceptions of others, others' perceptions of the individual also add to the over-all self-concept, or identity.

> It is possible to sum up the dialectic formation of identity by saying that the individual becomes that which he is addressed as by others. One may add that the individual appropriates the world in conversation with others and, furthermore, that both identity and world remain real to himself only as long as he can continue the conversation (Berger, 1969, p. 16).

One aspect of individual/group interaction in identity formation is the way in which the individual perceives self as a member of the group (identification). Once a

person has negotiated membership into a group (a combination of perceiving self as a member of the group, and being accepted by the other members as a valid part of the group), membership in the group becomes incorporated into the individual's collection of identity characteristics (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982). An individual is usually a member of multiple groups. The group membership that currently is considered most important as a determinant of self-perception and social interaction is referred to as "salient." As an individual identifies with the group, the individual begins to adopt the beliefs and behaviors (including communication behaviors) of the group (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991; Hogg, 1992). The degree to which the individual conforms to the beliefs and behaviors of the group (moderated by time) indicates the importance (salience) of identification with the group (in comparison with the importance of being an individual or being a member of another group) (Deaux, 1996; Hogg, 1992).

Another aspect of individual and group identity interaction concerns the group's acceptance of the individual as a perceived member of the group. Non-conformity to the standards of belief and behavior of the group will affect the group members' perception and/or acceptance of the individual as a member of the group (Ellis, 1999; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Hogg, 1992; Sani & Reicher, 2000; Wieder & Pratt, 1990). For an individual new to the group, the rules of the group must be identified and learned before being admitted to full membership in the group. In many situations, the rules may be unstated and learned through diffuse forms of socialization such as observations and direct participation. This makes admission to the group difficult for the new member. This is often the case for religious groups. Children growing up in the group are

socialized into the accepted way of acting and thinking. Adults coming into the group may be marginalized until they learn the ways of the group. Since socialization processes in a group may very likely be different when directed towards a child than towards an adult, the new adult member may be at a great disadvantage for achieving full membership in the group.

The aspect of individual and group identity interaction in which I am most interested concerns the ways in which the group as a whole comes to develop and hold a common identity. I consider this to be a prerequisite for consideration of a collection of persons as a community or a distinct group. This dissertation will seek to understand the process by which the group's identity develops, and the place of communication within this process.

Communication and identity. I approach this research from a social constructivist perspective, like that of Berger and Luckmann's, interested in how people in groups construct identities through interaction. This interaction between people is in the form of communication. The most common communicative interaction uses socially agreed upon symbols (words) to build a common reality, which enables the people to act together for common purposes. Identity, individual and group, is a construct built through this communicative process. Berger presents identity, both individual and group, as a construct built through a continuing conversation between and among people in a society (1969, pp. 12-22). The emphasis is on language as the means used by people to construct identities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 34-41). Gergen (2000) makes a case for Narrative to be the specific form in which language is instrumental in forming identity, primarily in self, but also in community through the dialectic relationship presented by Berger and Luckmann.

These identity creating dialectical processes of human interaction are not limited to verbal communication. Human interaction may occur by means of other sign systems (Berger, 1969; Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 36; Gergen, 2000, pp. 1-2) that I will refer to as nonverbal communication processes in this study. Nonverbal communicative behaviors are ways in which individual identity is presented to others (Burgoon, 1994, p. 245-254). Indeed, the role of nonverbal communication processes are so important in individual efforts to identify with the group that Giles' Speech Accommodation Theory had to be renamed Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991).

The study of "language as social interaction" is called "discourse" by Ellis (1999, p. 69). This discourse is the use of language in "context" to construct social realities. The "context" of this language includes the nonverbal communication processes occurring with the verbal use of language, as well as the occasion and group structured sequences and frameworks that govern the meaning derived from the language use (Ellis, 1999, p. 70).

In this study I am interested in the construction of a community of people (a group) as indicated by the social construction of "identity." The study will examine a group's use of language (both verbal and nonverbal) within context. Identities, both individual and group, are constructed from language use in formal contexts called "rituals" (Ellis, 1999, pp. 96-97).

Congregation and Identity. A congregation is a group of people of common faith who gather at a common place and time to practice ritual activities. Hopewell (1987, p. 12) defines a congregation as: "a group that possesses a special name and recognized

members who assemble regularly to celebrate a more universally practiced worship but who communicate with each other sufficiently to develop intrinsic patterns of conduct, outlook, and story."

This group of people creates a community with a distinct culture, a collective identity, and a common purpose. A congregation is a community as well as a part of larger communities. A congregation as a religious community exists within the larger community composed of congregations of people of similar faith. A congregation also is a community within a larger community composed of the people of the town or city in which the congregation is located. The culture of the local congregation is constructed from the elements of the cultures of the larger communities of faith and the society in which the congregation exists (Ammerman, 1997; 1998). Ammerman (1997) shows a dialectic relationship between the identity and culture of a congregation and that of the local community. Noting that over 60% of Americans identify with a religious congregation of some type, Ammerman (1997, p. 2) emphasizes the importance of understanding the processes of community in congregations in order to understand change in American society. Wuthnow (1988, 1992a, 1992b, 1997) presents a strong relationship between society and activities in congregations with the resulting belief systems. This relationship between society and congregation is such that each affects the other, consistent with Berger's (1967) concept of the role of religious groups within society.

A congregation is a group of individuals who hold to a common faith. This common faith, or religion, is an essential component of individual identity (Berger, 1967; Mol, 1976). The congregation is the place where individual faith is maintained by the group.

"Further, it is generally within congregations that particular religious world views are specified, elaborated, taught, disagreed with, and so on, and it is here that individuals learn, grow, change, and change others - - again in observable ways" (Young, 1994, p. 4). One result of these communication actions within congregations is a constant negotiation and renegotiation of the identities of individual participants (Wuthnow, 1997).

The most common and important activity of the congregation occurs when the individual members assemble together for the weekly worship event (Ammerman, 1997; 1998; Taylor, 1995; Wicks, 1983). This is the one time when the whole group is expected to be together. This is the one time when the group is truly a community in space, time, and action. This is the occasion for the religious ritual (worship). Berger (1967) claims that the most important activity that is socially constructed is to create a personal meaning or identity that makes sense of the world. This identity is built through religious ritual. Worshipping together consists of and is done through an ensemble of rituals that create a personal meaning, identity, and these make sense of the world or contribute to the sense of the world for the worshipper.

Congregation and Communication. Ritual may be viewed as a dynamic activity that acts upon individuals through repetitive presentations of symbolic meanings. I will consider ritual as a communication system, composed of elements in the subsets of verbal and nonverbal behavior, following the construct of a communication system as proposed by Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson (1967, p. 120). Although the system may include more than the ritual activity occurring during the worship assembly, the worship assembly ritual is the predominant means of constructing the common identity that allows for other activities of the congregation.

Mol (1976) emphasizes the importance of repetition of signs and symbols through ritual in forming identity. Taylor (1995) claims that this worship ritual is the process that communicates a sense of belonging, ownership, and participation in the group. Ammerman views the worship activities of the congregation as the rituals that create identity and community (1997; 1998).

Congregation and Identity and Communication. It follows from the claims of Ammerman (1997; 1998), mentioned above, that the way in which ritual as communication is practiced by a congregation creates and maintains a common identity. The ritual worship of the congregation as a communication system is composed of both verbal and nonverbal elements. This multi-channeled aspect of communication is important in that it means that the whole experience of the individuals congregating as a group as they are performing and witnessing ritual activities provides the process of and the materials for the creation and maintenance of identity, both individual and group (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1989).

Leach (1976) argues that religious ritual activities create and maintain meaning by making abstract concepts more concrete. This process includes verbal items referred to as stories, and nonverbal items of artifacts and actions. These stories, artifacts, and actions represent abstract, metaphysical concepts. These concrete items acting as symbols of the metaphysical concepts for worshippers actually develop a perceived reality of their own through regular use in ritual activity. These individual stories, actions, and artifacts, although distinct, act together in the assembly to create a whole message. " But now I want to stress the added complication that, although the receiver of a ritual message is picking up information through a variety of different sensory channels

simultaneously, all these different sensations add up to just one 'message'." (Leach, 1976, p. 41).

The specific groups to be examined are two congregations of the Churches of Christ. The Churches of Christ (see chapter 3 for a more detailed description) do not have a central headquarters that regulates the congregations. There is no formal, agreed upon, written creed or statement of faith. The Churches are congregational in the sense that each group is responsible only for and to its own congregation. Yet the similarity in practices and beliefs between congregations is striking. A common strand among Churches of Christ is the strong emphasis upon the correctness of the form of the worship service. Much of the expressed identity of the group seems to come from the perception of correctness of the same activities that (in theory) work to create and maintain common identity. This is an excellent group to study for the formation of a common identity through ritual. The research question is: How does the weekly Sunday morning assembly create and maintain a common identity for the members of the Churches of Christ.

Dissertation Organization

The next chapter (Chapter Two) will describe the research methods chosen and the ways in which this research was conducted. Chapter Three will present a brief description of the group being studied--congregations of the Churches of Christ. I will first describe the Churches of Christ in general, then the two specific congregations. A detailed description of the Sunday morning assembly at each congregation is needed to understand the context of the elements that will be described in later chapters. In Chapter Four I present a description of a typical Westlink assembly, followed by a detailed

description of Levy assemblies, and the chapter ends with a comparison between the two. In Chapter Five the specific verbal elements of terms, stories, and reframes are described. A case is made for positive and negative values associated with terms and stories. Chapter Six reports the nonverbal behaviors that provide the context for the verbal elements described in Chapter Five. The non-verbal elements have a greater impact on group identity formation than I suspected going into this study. Ritual as a communication system is presented in Chapter Seven, uniting verbal and nonverbal elements into a system that seems to exist in one of two states: stable or unstable. I present a theoretical model for understanding the communication process associated with group identity development and maintenance in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Two:

Methodology and Description of Research Methods

Methodology

This study seeks to add to our understanding of the process by which groups develop common perceptions of identity. This research in the area of group identity comes largely from a theoretical orientation of social constructivism. My research methods started with observations of the group according to established principles of ethnography. I began this process by constructing a conceptual web - a guide to my research in the form of possible research questions listed in hierarchical order. I gathered information through observation. I analyzed these observations looking for the rules that govern social interaction. I compared my conclusions with the theories and lines of research presented in the last chapter. Finally, after observing, analyzing, interpreting, comparing, and writing up the majority of this research, I compared my conclusions to the perceptions of others by means of three focus groups, although only one of those groups can be reported upon in this dissertation. This chapter will explain my chosen methodology and specific methods of conducting this research.

I chose to use ethnography to study Sunday morning assemblies of two congregations of the Churches of Christ. Ethnography has been found to be a useful method of social science research, particularly in the fields of Communication and Religious Studies (Becker & Eiesland, 1997; Carbaugh, 1995). Ethnography is particularly suited to studies of communication and identity (Philipsen, 1992, p. 140) as well as study of identity and religion (Becker & Eiesland, 1997). The importance of

understanding identity creation in the local congregation is stressed by Becker & Eiesland (1997) in their summation of a volume of ethnographies of religion:

> This work suggests that to understand the ongoing restructuring of religion and the ongoing development of an adequate set of concepts with which to understand it, we need to pay particular attention to the local construction and negotiation of religious identities as creative spaces for religious innovation (p. 20).

This collection of ethnographic studies of religious contexts found "an ongoing negotiation with and interpretation of religious meaning and practice in our society" (Becker & Eiesland, 1997, p. 18) along with a "continual creation and reconfiguration of religious discourses and identities" (p. 19). Becker & Eiesland (1997) promote the use of ethnography as the appropriate research method for studying these meanings and creation of identities in religious contexts:

> Ethnography is a particularly appropriate tool in analyzing periods of rapid social and institutional change. Ethnography is a method uniquely suited to challenging the conventional wisdom, for subjecting large-scale theories to empirical examination, for generating data on new phenomena, and for generating new theories or insights on the subjects we thought we already knew. Ethnography is a form of rendering an account that does not emphasize formalism or move to theoretical closure in a premature way. It allows for the expression of emergent understandings, partial accounts, and contradiction.
> But this is not to say that ethnography has no place at the table as we refine our more abstract and theoretical understandings of American religious life (Becker & Eiesland, 1997, p. 19).

The value of using Ethnography to study identity in religious communities can be seen from the many recent studies using this method (Allen, 1987; Buckser, 1996, 1998; Feher, 1997; Gray & Thumma, 1997; Itoh & Plotnicov, 1999; Kunkelman, 1990; and Wicks, 1983). The value of using ethnography to study communication processes has been well established (Bauman & Sherzer, 1989; Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991;

Hymes, 1964, 1974; Litke, 1990; Philipsen, 1992, 1994; Saville-Troike, 1989; Thumma, 1998).

Ethnography of Communication. Ethnography of communication refers to research using ethnographic methods to study human behaviors that are communicative (Hymes, 1974, p.3). The emphasis is upon studying communication in its natural context of human interaction.

> As to basis: one cannot take linguistic form, a given code, or even speech itself, as a limiting frame of reference. One must take as context a community, or network of persons, investigating its communicative activities as a whole, so that any use of channel and code takes its place as part of the resources upon which the members draw (Hymes, 1974, p. 4).

Ethnography of communication is a "way to examine communication as a cultural resource" (Carbaugh, 1995). "While creatively invoking cultural meaning systems, communication also socially positions persons (through roles or identities) and creates relations among them (e.g., from egalitarian to hierarchical)" (Carbaugh, 1995, p. 275).

The goal of ethnography is to map these meaning systems and to understand the process of communication by the way people make meaning together. This method is consistent with a social constructionist view of human interaction.

A community is a social construct created through communication processes. Once constructed, the community is an objective reality to its members (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 61). My research reported here uses ethnography of communication to identify and understand the processes that result in a sense of community as seen by a common perception of identity of the group.

Identity is also an important concern of communication theory, and ethnography is a valuable method for exploring the role of communication in identity creation. Philipsen

(1992, pp. 139-140), took particular note of the role of communication in identity creation in arguing for the cultural study of communication using ethnography as a method:

> In addition to these communicative (referential) and persuasive-coordinative (rhetorical) functions, communication studies is concerned with a communal function. Here the concern is with how the use of language and other symbolic resources serve to create for interlocutors a sense of shared identity.

Continuing the argument, Philipsen indicates the value of this form of study to understand the role of communication in identity construction: "Speech codes... perform a crucial function in the activity of interpersonal linking, particularly at the level of individuals identifying symbolically with a group, tradition, or community" (Philipsen, 1992, p. 140). Thus, understanding identity construction is within the realm of communication studies, and ethnographic methods are an appropriate way to explore this process in human interaction.

Seeking to understand what the communication participants perceive to be meaningful interaction, the ethnographer must first identify units of communication, then seek to discover the communication patterns by describing the interrelationships between the units that compose communication interaction. Hymes (1974, pp. 54-61) proposes 16 components of communication able to be examined with ethnography: Message form, message content, setting, scene, speaker, addressor, hearer, addressee, purposes-outcomes, purposes-goals, key, channels, forms of speech, norms of interaction, norms of interpretation, and genres.

Methodological Triangulation. One criticism of ethnography is its inherent subjectivity. For the social scientist from a quantitative orientation, the subjectivity of interpretations raises a question of reliability. The depth of information gathered through ethnography should result in greater validity (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991, p. 124). The reliability of results may be improved by using multiple methods (Frey, et. al, 1991; Litke, 1990). This use of multiple research methods to strengthen a study design is called methodological triangulation (Patton, 1990, p. 187). Morgan specifically suggests using focus groups with the subjects of ethnographic observation at the end of the study to test the researcher's understandings. By presenting areas of researcher interest to the participants as topics in a focus group discussion, it is possible to get direct insights into their own feelings in the matter. Of course, it is also important to bear in mind that these discussions provide only self-report data (1988, p. 32). Morgan goes on to say that any discrepancy between the researcher's interpretations and the group members' interpretations becomes an additional form of useful data (p. 33).

Focus groups should use subjects representative of the population being studied. It is not necessary to use subjects from the actual group site being studied (Morgan, 1988, p. 32). For a complete presentation on the use of focus groups in qualitative research designs, see Krueger (1994), Morgan (1988), and Stewart & Shamdasani (1990).

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of religion focusing on participants' perception of a common identity established through communication behaviors (verbal, nonverbal, and ritual) with methodological triangulation using a focus group.

Plan of Study

The Community. The Churches of Christ are the descendants of a religious movement from the early nineteenth century that sought to unify the Christian world by restoring the form and worship of the New Testament Church, having a doctrine existing solely in the Bible (Allen & Hughes, 1988; Hughes, 1996). The Churches of Christ are congregational. They do not recognize any central authority.

This study will look at the weekly Sunday morning assembly of two congregations: The Westlink Church of Christ in Wichita, Kansas, and the Levy Church of Christ in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Both congregations have experienced change in their traditional rituals over the past few years. The Westlink Church of Christ is located in an upper middle class neighborhood on the western edge of Wichita, Kansas. The congregation recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. The Levy Church of Christ is located in a lower middle class neighborhood in the center of North Little Rock, Arkansas. Levy, like Westlink, was founded in the 1950's. Westlink is a congregation with an average Sunday morning attendance of about 250. During the course of these observations (1996-1998) the seasonal average attendance ranged from 220 to 320 people. Levy is twice the size of Westlink, with an average attendance of about 500. During the period of observation (1998-2000) the seasonal average attendance ranged from 480 to 580.

The Occasion. The average Church of Christ congregation will have some kind of formal assembly at least three times during a week: Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening. Most congregations also have Bible classes before the Sunday morning assembly, a time when the members meet in small groups, often sorted by age.

The only time during the week when the majority of the members are together at one place, involved in a common interaction, is the Sunday morning assembly. This assembly is usually referred to as the "worship." Both the Levy and Westlink congregations have similar attendance patterns. Their average Sunday morning assembly was about 80% of the number on the church membership roll. The Sunday evening assembly and Wednesday evening assembly was about 40% of the roll, and the Sunday morning Bible classes were about 60% of the roll. This research will examine the Sunday morning assembly, since this is the occasion of the most frequent common group interactions.

Methods of Data Collection. I conducted this research at both Westlink and Levy in the role of participant-observer. A participant observer is (fully) involved in the social situation, in this case, without letting people know they were being studied (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991, p. 238), sometimes called covert observation. [For ethical reasons, the leadership of both congregations were informed of my activity and gave approval.] The advantage of participant-observer is the depth of insight into the group (Patton, 1990). I have been a part of this group of people all of my life. I can speak with an insider's understanding. The disadvantage is the possibility of bias and of blind spots that would mask valuable interactionional data. This process of observation over a four year time period led me to question almost everything in the assembly, most of which I had taken for granted, even when I was one of the leaders or planners of a worship assembly. The double vision occurring from trying to see our ritual from an outsider's perspective was both uncomfortable and illuminating.

Observations were recorded as extensive descriptions of the group interactions, focusing on verbal, nonverbal, and ritual behaviors. Chapter 4 presents a summary description of the observed interactions of each congregation's assembly. These descriptive notes were then reviewed to find the common elements or units of communication. These units are described and defined in Chapters 5 and 6. After completing this process, I attempted to verbally and graphically present the ways in which these elements interact in the communication process, especially in meaning-rich, ritual behaviors (see Chapter 7).

The theoretical and literature review sections of this research were completed after the observation and analysis process recorded above. This is in keeping with the grounded theory method for analyzing qualitative research (Patton, 1990, p. 67). Interpretations of the observations are to occur after the observations are collected. The researcher tries to see units and relationships without the influence of existing theory. After I completed much of the observations, analysis, and writing of this dissertation, I compared my results to existing theories and lines of research. Chapter 1 of this paper was completely re-written after I finished Chapters 4-7. Chapter 8 compares my observations and interpretations to current theories of group identity development and the role of communication in that process.

After the initial observations were made, recorded, and examined, representative members were asked to participate in focus groups to determine what meaning they draw from the behaviors occurring in the assembly. The first two focus groups were composed of members of the Levy congregation. The members of the third focus group were volunteers from a Church of Christ congregation in Little Rock. Members of the Levy

and the Westlink congregations were determined to be ineligible to participate in the focus group by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus. The IRB's decision to exclude the focus group participation of any member from congregations I had been involved with but to permit the use members from another congregation was made to protect members from any possible coercion due to my dual role as investigator and minister. As a consequence of this decision by the Institutional Review Board, the data gathered from the first two groups were not allowed to be included in this dissertation. The insights gleaned by the researcher are not so easily removed.

The third focus group consisted of members of a small Bible study group from a congregation across town. The minister of that congregation had heard of my research. He asked if I could use some of the members of that congregation in a focus group. I requested that the potential focus group members should be representative of the age, sex, and years of membership in the Churches of Christ close to the average of the congregations I had observed. He told some of the leaders in that congregation of my need for volunteers for a focus group concerning the Sunday morning worship assembly. One of the several small groups associated with that congregation volunteered to devote one of their weekly meetings to being a focus group. The group members were given two weeks notice of the date of the focus group meeting. They were encouraged but not required to attend the meeting. The group normally met in the home of one of their members. When I arrived at the home, about 6:30 on a Thursday evening, I was introduced to the members of the group. I had only met one of the members before.

Demographic data were collected by means of a short survey (see Appendix B). The purpose and process of a focus group was explained. The group selected a recorder. The participants were asked to respond to a list of questions, based on the conceptual net (see below). The list of questions is included in Appendix A. I read each question and asked for a response. The members of the Bible study group used a similar method in their weekly Bible study. Most of the members responded verbally to each question. All of the members responded to at least some of the questions. After all the group members had an opportunity to respond to a question, the answers were read back by the recorder. The group was given a second opportunity to comment on the answers already given, either extending or qualifying one or more of the previous responses. The focus group meeting lasted 1 and 1/2 hours. At the conclusion of the meeting, I reported to the group on my own responses to the same questions, based on my observations of Levy and Westlink.

A comparison between my understanding and the group members' understanding of the meanings of observed behaviors and rituals is included in Chapters 6-8.

Documents used in the assembly, such as handouts of the "order of worship" and "sermon outline" as well as "announcements," were used along with observations to determine the structure of speech acts and ritual. Publications of the Church of Christ are used to illustrate common background, tradition, and meaning of the larger group "Churches of Christ in the U.S." in comparison with the smaller groups "Levy" and "Westlink."

Research Questions: Conceptual Net

A useful method for determining the direction and focus of research using ethnographic methods is to begin with a "conceptual net" (D. L. Wieder, class notes, Spring,1995). A conceptual net is a series of questions organized in hierarchical form that leads the researcher from general concerns to very specific questions that focus observation. The researcher is interested in all of the questions developed, but may find evidence for answers to only a few of the questions. New questions and concerns may arise during the course of observation, which may be added to the net. The analogy of the "net" is to catch any verbal, vocal, or visual information that may be useful in understanding the situation observed.

This material is later used in forming concepts and theories. My conceptual net is designed to find evidences of how people form a common identity through the processes of communication. The specific people and situation to be observed is the Sunday morning assembly of a congregation of the Churches of Christ. The questions for guiding discussion in the focus groups were also drawn from this conceptual net.

1. How does language use during assemblies work to construct and maintain collective and individual identity?

   a. Does the group have peculiar instances of language use?

      i. What is the linguistic structure of a typical assembly?

      ii. How does this structure compare to other examples of assembly?

   b. How do the terms used by members of the congregation identify self?

      i. What terms are peculiar in usage to the congregation?

      ii. What are the meanings assigned to these terms by the congregation?

iii. What are the meanings of these terms to outsiders?

iv. How do these terms help to construct the collective identity?

2. How do the nonverbal communication elements work to construct and maintain collective and individual identity?

a. Nonverbal behaviors

i. What are the common nonverbal behaviors (gestures, facial expressions, posture, movements, orientations, etc.) occurring during the time of the assembly?

ii. What are the perceived meanings of these behaviors?

b. Artifacts

i. What are the common artifacts (clothing, accessories, possessions, etc.) used in the assembly?

ii. What are the perceived meanings of these artifacts?

c. Environment

i. What are the common environmental factors (use of space, etc.) that affect the assembly?

ii. How do the environmental factors affect meaning in the assembly?

3. How does the ritual of the assembly help members to construct and maintain common identities?

a. How do the rituals practiced during assemblies of the congregation reveal the collective identity of the congregation?

i. What are the ritual meanings shared between members?

ii. What messages concerning the identity of the congregation do

outsiders get from the rituals?

iii. What is the collective identity perceived by the members?

iv. What is the relationship between ritual and perception of identity?

b. How do the rituals performed during assemblies of the congregation create identity for members of the congregation?

i. What are the rituals practiced during the assemblies?

a) What constitutes a ritual?

b) What are the perceived meanings of the rituals?

c) How are these meanings perceived?

d) Does the language used for the rituals differentiate between perceived meanings?

1) What are the commonly used terms within the congregation for each ritual?

2) Is there a difference between the meanings conveyed by the use of different terms for the same ritual?

e) Are the meanings of the rituals perceived differently by various sub-groups in the congregation?

1) What are the sub-groups in the congregation?

2) How is membership attained in a sub-group?

3) Who perceives membership in a sub-group?

4) Is there a collective identity for the sub-group?

5) If so, how does this interact with collective group identity?

6) How are the sub-groups related to one another?

7) How do the sub-groups interact

i) with one another?

ii) with the rituals of the assembly?

8) Is the effect of the interaction between groups on identity similar to that of the interaction between individual members?

ii. What is the relationship between ritual and perception of identity?

iii. How is identity created in the assembly?

c. How does change in ritual affect the congregation?

i. What constitutes a change in ritual?

a) At what point is a change recognized as a change?

b) Is there a corresponding change in terminology for the ritual?

c) Is there a difference in perceived meaning associated with a change in ritual?

ii. What changes when a ritual changes?

iii. Is there a relationship between ritual change and identity shift?

a) If there is, does an identity shift precede or follow ritual change?

b) Does there appear to be a causal or correlational relationship between ritual change and identity shift?

Chapter Three:

Description of the Groups

Churches of Christ

The population for this study consisted of two congregations of the Churches of Christ. This chapter will present the rationale for using this particular group, a very brief history and description of the Churches of Christ, and a more detailed description of the two congregations observed in this study.

Why use the Churches of Christ? Why use the Churches of Christ? Aside from the very pertinent fact that I have easy entry into the community due to my work as a minister with this group, and, aside from the fact that I have a unique understanding of this group as a lifelong member, the Churches of Christ are interesting at this time because they seem to be undergoing an identity crisis. Many congregations have polarized and split in recent years over relatively minor issues, dealing largely with competing methods of performing the worship ritual in the weekly assemblies. The resulting variety of worship styles in a formerly homogeneous group of congregations may have led to the current widespread questioning of the basic identity of the groups known as Churches of Christ. This possible link between group identity and ritual performance among a group with which I have intimate knowledge, presents an opportunity to examine the relationship between group identity and ritual activity as perceived through communication behaviors.

The Churches of Christ have had an unusually homogeneous set of ritual practices and beliefs considering they are autonomous congregations with no central authority or agreed upon written creed. With a history of almost 200 years, the ritual practices have

attained the status of traditions. Hughes (1996, p. 2) comments on their unusual self identity in an introduction to the history of the group:

> Churches of Christ began as a sect in the early nineteenth century and evolved into denomination during the course of the twentieth century. This fact would hardly be striking, or even very interesting, were it not for the fact that Churches of Christ have passionately rejected the labels *sect* and *denomination* as pertinent to their own identity. Indeed, their resolute rejection of these labels has been central to what Churches of Christ have been about for almost two hundred years. Since their denial of these categories flies in the face of social reality, their story is one of deep irony and absorbing interest.
> Often, these people have argued that they have restored the primitive church of the apostolic age and are therefore nothing more or less than the true, original church described in the New Testament. For this reason, Churches of Christ generally have denied that they had a defining history other than the Bible itself and have expressed little or no interest in their particular history in the United States. Many members of the Churches of Christ remain to this day virtually ignorant of Alexander Campbell, the early nineteenth-century leader who helped give shape and texture to this movement in its founding years. What is more, many of these same people studiously avoid learning about Campbell or any other important leader from their past: They fear that to acknowledge dependence on any human leader would make them a denomination with a human founder rather than the true, primitive church founded by Christ. This unique self-understanding has served to create institutional identity out of a denial of institutional identity, and it has shaped the history and character of Churches of Christ in countless and often paradoxical ways.

The Churches of Christ are the descendants of a religious movement from the early nineteenth century that sought to unify the Christian world by restoring the form and worship of the New Testament Church, having a doctrine existing solely in the Bible (Allen & Hughes, 1988; Hughes, 1996).

Demographics. The current membership of the Churches of Christ in the United States is estimated to be between 1.5 million (Lindner, 2000) and 1.6 million (Lynn, 1997) people. There are over thirteen thousand congregations in the United States, with an average membership per congregation of 94 people, and an average member is forty years of age (Lynn, 1997). The majority of the congregations and the members are

located in the South, with the highest concentration of members living within a region that extends from Central Tennessee to West Texas (Hughes, 1996; Lynn, 1997. The most commonly known educational institutions associated with the Churches of Christ are Abilene Christian University, David Lipscomb University, Harding University, and Pepperdine University.

History. The modern day Churches of Christ are descended from a 19th century movement to unite Christianity by restoring the simplicity of the church of the first century. The early leaders, Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone, were Presbyterian ministers who left their denomination (along with many followers) and joined the Baptists for a time. They eventually decided that churches should be organized as congregations instead of denominations. The movement they started became known as the Restoration Movement, from their stated intent to restore the form of the church described in the New Testament. One branch of the movement later decided to organize the congregations into a denomination with a central headquarters in the late 19th century. This branch became the modern day Disciples of Christ. In 1906, the remaining congregations of the Restoration Movement divided over the issue of using instrumental music in the worship assemblies. The pro-instrumental music congregations became the current Christian Church. The non-instrumental music congregations became the modern Churches of Christ.

The 1906 separation from the Christian Church left the Churches of Christ with the smaller and poorer congregations located mostly in rural areas of the Southern United States. The bitter debate that led to the division over the use of instrumental music in worship produced a collection of congregations with a common belief that they had more

accurately reproduced the pattern of the New Testament Church. The Churches of Christ continued to grow in rural areas until World War II. After the Second World War, the Churches of Christ began to grow in the cities as their members began to move off the farm and prosper in urban and suburban areas of the South and Southwest. A world evangelism emphasis grew among congregations of the Churches of Christ due to the many members who had served in the Armed Forces during the war returning home with stories of the people in foreign countries who had never heard of the Churches of Christ. In the 1950's the Churches of Christ began to focus on domestic evangelism, planting new congregations throughout the United States. The members of the Churches of Christ were more affluent by the 1960's, a period when the average member was of the middle class. The rapid growth in both number and size of congregations during the 1950's and 1960's began to slow in the 1970's and actually declined some in the 1980's. The Churches of Christ, still located primarily in the Southern United States with many large congregations of prosperous members in the urban and suburban areas, began to question its identity in the 1990's. The homogeneity of worship rituals that was so notable during most of the Twentieth Century began to change during the late 1980's and throughout the 1990's to the turn of the century, resulting in some differences between congregations. (For a more complete history of the Churches of Christ, see Hughes, 1996).

Most members of the Churches of Christ would not be aware of even the brief history of the group presented in these few paragraphs. This attitude towards their history is similar to the concept of time proposed by Anderson to explain one of the ways in which the Mediaeval Church created the imagined community of Christendom (Anderson, 1991, pp. 22-25). According to Anderson, in these communities faith in God

allows the members to see themselves as simultaneous in time with the First Century Church. The time in history between the present and the First Century is not seen as important. This attitude towards history is consistent with the noticeable lack of interest in their history demonstrated by most members of the Churches of Christ.

Organization. The *minister*[1] of the congregation is the most visible leader of the group, *preaching* a *sermon* each Sunday that is a statement of the ways in which the members of the group are to believe and act. The *minister* is always under the oversight of a group of men who represent the beliefs and expectations of the group. This group of men may be the *Elders*, or the *men of the congregation*, or even an *eldership* of another congregation.

Most congregations of the Churches of Christ interpret the teachings of the Bible to indicate that males are to fill the public leadership roles in the congregation. It is very rare for a woman to speak during the assembly. The *song-leader*, *preacher*, *prayer-leaders*, and *scripture readers* are always males in most of the congregations. Even the members who are assigned to pass the communion trays between rows are exclusively male in most congregations. The proper role for women in the assembly is a current issue for many congregations.

Each congregation selects leaders to guide the group. These leaders are referred to most commonly as *Elders*, but also may be called *Pastors* or *Shepherds*. *Elders* are always plural-- there must be at least two in a congregation. Some smaller congregations do not have two or more men whom the group believes embodies the characteristics of *Elders*. These congregations may be led by men of the group who meet regularly in a

[1] Terms that have a unique meaning to the group will be indicated throughout this dissertation by the use of italics.

business meeting to make any decisions necessary for the functioning of the group. If the congregation has a *minister* provided by another congregation, then they may be guided by the *elders* of the group supporting the *minister*. This is referred to as a *mission* church of the larger congregation. The goal for a *mission* church is to grow to the point where it supports its own minister and selects its own *elders*. At that time the smaller group is no longer accountable to the larger congregation.

A congregation with elders will usually also have *deacons*. *Deacon* is a subordinate office to *Elder*. *Deacons* are supposed to do the work of the congregation, serving others. Organizing the weekly assembly is usually the responsibility of one or more *deacons* in a congregation.

Congregations

Congregational form. The Churches of Christ are congregational. They do not recognize any central authority. The lack of a board or central authority to oversee the work of the congregations is both a matter of doctrine and a source of pride to members of the Churches of Christ. Foster (1994, pp. 17-40), after examining a number of media reports concerning the Churches of Christ, found the congregational nature of the churches to be frequently commented upon, with terms such as "fiercely autonomous," "radical congregationalism," "rigid congregational polity," and even "the most extreme form of congregationalism among all the churches." With this feature in mind, it is very surprising to note the homogeneity of belief and practice between congregations of the Churches of Christ across the country. Until this past decade (1990's), a person could travel across the United States, visiting the Sunday morning assembly of congregations in each state, and find a uniformity of ritual practices.

The feature of common practices in worship assemblies among Churches of Christ has been disparagingly referred to by its members as *two songs and a prayer.* A traditional service would frequently have components of two songs led by a song leader from the front of the auditorium, followed by a prayer led by a member (the opening prayer), followed by another song, then a lesson (sermon) delivered by the minister, followed by an invitation song, then a song before communion, the communion service, the offering, a closing song, and a closing prayer. The most common variation would be reordering the service to place the communion song, communion, and offering after the opening prayer and before *the song before the lesson.*

In the larger urban and suburban congregations of the Churches of Christ, the weekly ritual is becoming more diverse, both between congregations, and between Sundays within a congregation. This change in ritual among congregations has sparked concerns about the identity of the Churches of Christ (Lamascus, 2000). Some among the Churches of Christ are describing the current state of the Churches of Christ as an identity crisis (Childers, Foster, & Reese, 2000: Cope, 1996: Foster, 1994).

The congregations embracing changes within the ritual practices in the assembly see themselves and call themselves *Progressive.* (The people opposing them usually prefer the term *liberal*, considered an insult when applied to their religious practices.) The congregations trying to maintain the rituals in ways similar to preceding generation's practices, see themselves and call themselves *Traditional.* (Again, the people opposing them prefer to use the term *legalists*, another term considered to be an insult when applied to religious practices.) The majority of the larger congregations among the Churches of Christ are somewhere in the middle between these two camps. They call

themselves *Moderates* or *Mainstream.* They consider themselves to be the mainstream of the Churches of Christ. Within the geographical area where the Churches of Christ are the strongest, congregations of each type can be found in the cities. Most of the rural and small town congregations are *Traditional.* Most of the Suburban and Urban congregations are *Moderate.* In some cities, especially in Texas, congregations across the city began to polarize over some issue (usually associated with the practices in the Sunday morning assembly.) The resulting migration of members between congregations leads to an increase in congregations at the opposing poles, and a decrease in *Moderate* congregations.

The issues could be as apparently minor as *clapping*, which refers to the rhythmic clapping the time to songs being sung in the assembly. Minor issues usually have to do with the method or procedure during the assembly. These issues seem to polarize the members along generational lines – older members versus the younger members. Similar types of issues are the use of *new songs* in the assembly, singing during the *communion service*, multiple song leaders, or whether the song leader or preacher is allowed to move to the side or front of the pulpit area while performing their role in the assembly. All of these issues have been the stated cause of church splits. None of these issues reflect doctrinal differences. Any change in the normal assembly ritual might be interpreted by a member to mean that the congregation is moving towards a position on some issue.

An example of a major issue would be the use of instrumental music during the assembly. This type of issue is a doctrinal issue--a significant change in practice is taken to indicate a significant change in belief. Other major issues that threaten congregations of Churches of Christ are the role of women in the assembly, and the necessity of baptism

for salvation. A change in doctrinal belief by a congregation on one of these issues would result in changes in the ritual practice of the assembly, but the leadership of the congregation would make a formal public announcement about the new belief, probably after much public study, debate, and polarization with the members.

Both types of issues affect the ritual of the congregation as well as the perceived identity of the group. I am interested in the way group identity is perceived through these common, ritualistic behaviors. I am especially interested in differences between the way in-group members and out-group members interpret the same sets of behaviors. During this period of identity exploration and reconstruction, the processes of identity construction are more open to question, and thus more explicit. An understanding of both the process of identity creation and maintenance, and the process of coping with change in identity, may be facilitated by studying this group at this time.

This study will look at the weekly Sunday morning assembly of two congregations: The Westlink Church of Christ in Wichita, Kansas, and the Levy Church of Christ in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Both congregations have experienced change in their traditional rituals over the past few years. Both congregations consider themselves to be within the mainstream of the Churches of Christ.

Westlink. The Westlink Church of Christ is located in an upper middle class neighborhood on the western edge of Wichita, Kansas. Most of the members live within two miles of the church building. The congregation recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Westlink is a congregation with an average Sunday morning attendance of about 250. The average age of members of the congregation during the period of observations was 37. (The average age was taken from an internal study of membership.

I conducted the study for the use of the elders and staff at Westlink. Permission to use this information was granted by the Westlink elders.) The education level of the adult members is diverse. Many of the members have Master degrees, often in business, education, or healthcare. At least one member has a doctorate in engineering. Among the younger families, most of the adults have a college education. The men tend to have degrees in engineering, accounting, and business. The women tend to have degrees in education, accounting, and healthcare. A large number of the men are skilled labor at the aircraft manufacturing plants. They possess a high school diploma and technical training. Advanced education is not a requirement to be considered for a leadership position with the congregation. The elders tend to be managers or small business owners. The deacons are engineers, accountants, teachers, aircraft technicians, managers, salesmen, etc.

Companies associated with aircraft manufacture are the primary employers in Wichita. The population of the city ebbs and flows with the fortunes of the aircraft industry. Most of the members at Westlink had moved to Wichita because of the aircraft industry. Many had lived in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Saint Louis, other centers of aircraft manufacturing. New families coming and established families leaving was a normal part of the life of the congregation.

Westlink is located just north of the region where the Churches of Christ are most common. Many of the members grew up in areas where the Churches of Christ were strong. They brought a traditional background with them when they moved to Wichita. When I first moved to Wichita from Oklahoma, Westlink seemed much less traditional than the Churches of Christ I had known. Westlink considered itself to be a moderate

congregation as far as differences within the Churches of Christ, but most of the congregations in Wichita considered Westlink to be Progressive.

Levy. The Levy Church of Christ is located in a lower middle class neighborhood in the center of North Little Rock, Arkansas. The members of Levy are drawn from a much larger area than for Westlink. Many of the members live over five miles from the building. Levy is a few years older than Westlink, approaching its 50th anniversary. Levy is twice the size of Westlink, with an average attendance of about 500. The average age of members at Levy is 36 years. (Again, this figure is taken from an internal study of membership, which I conducted for the Levy staff.) This is very close to the average age at Westlink. Like Westlink, Levy had a great diversity in the member's education level. There was more diversity among the racial make-up of the congregation than at Westlink. Levy was a mostly white congregation, with several black families and a few Hispanic families. The largest employers of the congregation's members were Alltel and Acxiom. Alltel is an information services company. Acxiom is a custom software developer and database manager. Another large employer of members was an electrical contractor. Members at Levy were accountants, programmers, software designers, sales, management, electricians, teachers, healthcare workers (doctors, nurses, therapists, etc.) railroad workers, construction workers, etc. Levy members have a diversity of careers.

Levy is in the very center of the region where Churches of Christ are most common. Many of the members at Levy have also moved from other regions. A common reason for these members to locate in the Little Rock area was the proximity of Harding University. Harding draws students from Churches of Christ across the country. More of the students are from out of state than from Arkansas. Many of these students

find employment in the Little Rock area when they graduate. It is a common story among couples under 50 years of age to have met at Harding, having come from different states. They speak of Arkansas as a good compromise on where to live. Many of the members who had grown up in Arkansas had moved to Little Rock from rural areas in search of work. Only a few of the members had actually grown up in North Little Rock.

When I first moved to Arkansas, Levy seemed much more traditional to me than Westlink. Arkansas is located in the very center of the area where the Churches of Christ have their strength. The congregations on average are much more traditional than those in other parts of the country. Levy as a congregation saw itself as *Moderate* where Church of Christ issues were concerned. Compared to the other congregations in Arkansas, Levy was very *Progressive.*

Chapter Four:

The Occasion

This chapter will present a summary of the observations of the Sunday morning worship assembly at Westlink and at Levy. The importance of the Sunday morning assembly within the overall context of congregational activity will be explained, followed by a short explanation of how ritual segments will be identified for later categorization and examination. A typical Sunday morning assembly at Westlink will be described, segment by segment, in order from the initial entry to the final exit. The same kind of description will be presented of a typical Levy assembly. The chapter will conclude with a comparison between the two congregations' assemblies. This chapter, while long and possibly tedious, is necessary to set the context of the communication elements and interactions to be identified and discussed in the following chapters.

The Sunday Morning Weekly Assembly

The average Church of Christ congregation will have some kind of formal assembly at least three times during a week: Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening. Most congregations also have Bible classes before the Sunday morning assembly, a time when the members meet in small groups, often sorted by age. The only time during the week when the majority of the members are together at one place, involved in a common interaction, is the Sunday morning assembly. This assembly is usually referred to as the *worship*. Both the Levy and Westlink congregations have similar attendance patterns. Their average Sunday morning assembly was about 80% of the number on the church membership roll. The Sunday evening

assembly and Wednesday evening assembly was about 40% of the roll, and the Sunday morning Bible classes were about 60% of the roll.

This research will examine the Sunday morning assembly time since this is the occasion when the most frequent common group interactions occur.

Segments of Ritual

The *worship service* is composed of several distinct segments and many communicative elements. The segments will be identified in this chapter, and the elements in later chapters. The segments vary in length, organization, formality, and perceived importance. The segments also vary in perceived meaning as understood by focus group members. Focus group members were easily able to identify the various segments. I was surprised at the unanimity in prioritizing the importance of meaning drawn from the segments by the members of the focus group. Although these segments are obvious, a consistent means of determining when one segment ended and another began was necessary for scientific observation. I chose to use Pike's method to categorize observations for communication analysis, especially since it was illustrated by examples from a worship service.

Pike (1967, p. 74) drew on the logic of structural linguistics in his analysis of a Sunday morning Church service. His analysis showed that "the service, though a single continuum of constant physical activity, nevertheless was divided into significant major chunks of activity" (1967, p. 74). Pike used the term "segments" to label these "chunks of activity." Segments begin and end "whenever there is an appreciable CHANGE in activity" (p. 75). Changes are seen when the actors differ, with vocal activity, and with nonverbal activities. One result of using this method from Pike was the forced ability to

focus on nonverbal aspects of the assembly, resulting in a much more in-depth observation of communicative behaviors in this study than I originally anticipated.

Westlink Assemblies

The Westlink Church of Christ is a congregation meeting on the west side of Wichita, Kansas. The surrounding area is suburban, characterized by housing additions and shopping centers. The congregation has been in existence for about 40 years. Some of the original founders of the congregation are still members. At the time of these observations (1992-1998), several original members were still active in leadership roles (elders or retired elders). The congregation has grown in recent years. Many of the families in the congregation have been there less than three years. The average age of a member of the congregation is about 34. Westlink views itself as "middle of the road" as far as beliefs and practices in comparison with area Churches of Christ.

Setting. The assemblies at Westlink meet on Sunday morning at 10:30. Preceding the assemblies are Bible classes that begin at 9:30. About 70% of the congregation attends the Bible classes. The assemblies usually end about 11:45. Following the assembly the majority of members either go home or to a restaurant to eat Sunday dinner with their family, extended family, and sometimes close friends from the congregation. Some of the members (about 40%) return for another assembly on Sunday evening from 6:00 to 7:00. Most of the members then *go out to eat* with others from the congregation, in several distinct, although informal, groups to the common restaurant for that group. An example is the group of senior citizens that met at the Wendy's restaurant every Sunday evening.

Westlink also holds a midweek assembly on Wednesday evening. At the mid-week assembly, members come at 6:00 and share supper. Volunteers from the congregation take turns preparing the meal. Members of the informal sub-groups often volunteer together, so that one week the teenagers might be serving the meal, and the next week a group of the young mothers might serve the meal. Bible classes begin at 7:15 and end at 8:10.

The average Sunday morning assembly has 270 people in attendance, with about 120 returning for Sunday evening. About 200 attend Bible classes on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Of those attending on Wednesday evenings, about half will come early for the supper.

The assemblies are held in a semi-circular *auditorium* (about 110 degrees) that will comfortably seat 350 people. The *pews* are in four rows, separated by aisles about 4 feet wide that run from the rear to the front of the auditorium. Each pew is about 20 feet long. People sitting in the pews to either side of the auditorium are almost facing the people sitting in the pews on the other side of the auditorium. The back wall is lined with a single row of pews separated from the four blocks of pews by an aisle about 6 feet wide. Figure 1 illustrates the layout of the Westlink auditorium.

On Sunday morning, the *song-leader*, *prayer-leaders*, and the *preacher* speak from the *pulpit* area. This is a stage at the front center of the auditorium, raised about two feet above the level of the auditorium floor. A large, wooden podium occupies the center of the stage.

Actors. The roles played in the Sunday morning assemblies are set by tradition. The primary players are the song leader and the preacher. Each of these players will

perform for at least 20 minutes during the assembly. The supporting cast is composed of prayer leaders (at least two and as many as four), announcer (my term, the group does not have an accepted term for the person who makes the weekly announcements), sometimes one or more special announcers, *communion prayer leader* and *communion servers* (also known as those who *wait on the table*). The audience also participates in the song service and in the communion service.

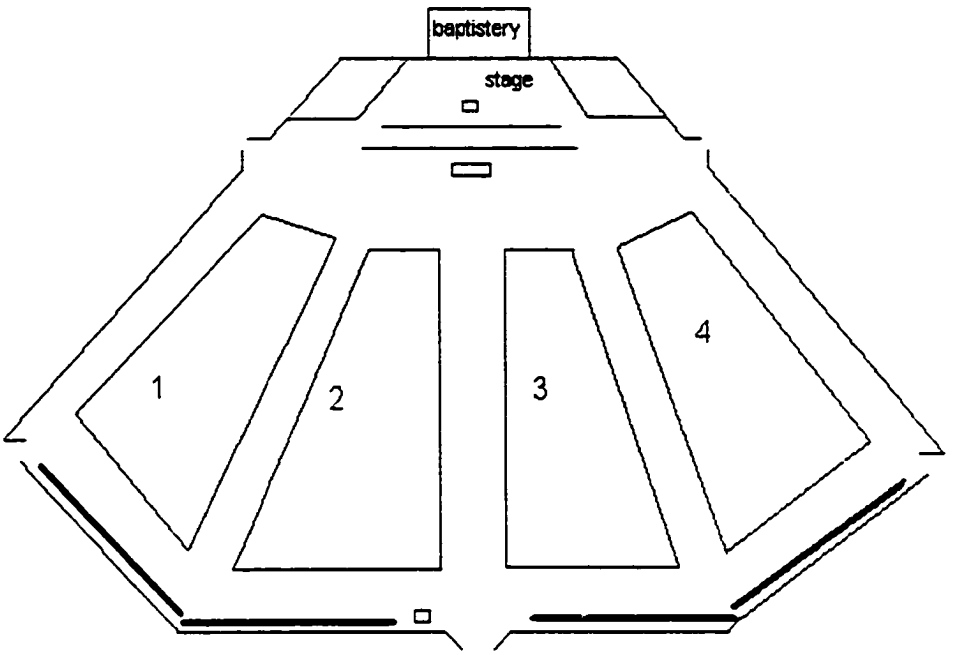
Ritual segments. A typical Sunday morning service includes segments known and referred to as *the welcome*, *announcements*, *greeting*, *songs*, *prayers*, *kids' can*, *communion*, *contribution*, *the lesson*, and *the invitation*. These are regular, planned, and expected parts of the service. Other segments noted below may be observed using Pike's method of noticing changes in actors, vocal activity, and especially nonverbal activities. I have assigned labels to some of these unnamed segments, such as *entry* and *exit*. The unnamed segments occur as regularly as the named segments, but would only be noticed by the members if omitted. For example, the processional march to the front pews by the men who will *wait* on the *table*, the dismissal of children to *Bible Time*, standing for the *invitation song*, or for the *closing prayer*, are all regular, though unnamed, segments of the weekly ritual.

Description of a typical Westlink assembly. The auditorium is used at 9:30 am for a Bible class. This class ends at 10:15. A buzzer in the foyer at the back of the auditorium sounds at 10:10 to warn the class teacher that classes are about to end. The noise level in the hallway increases drastically. First, parents of small children begin to leave their classes so as to be in position in front of the door to the child's classroom at 10:15. The members of the auditorium class hear the buzzer, are able to hear the

increased activity in the hall, and begin to stir and speak softly to each other. At the 10:15 buzzer, the children are released from their classes. Immediately, the noise level in the building increases by an order of magnitude over the earlier increase in volume. Children come running into the auditorium even if the instructor in the auditorium class has not finished speaking. Parents and other members gradually stream into the auditorium from five doors. (See illustration of Westlink Auditorium in figure 1.)

Two of the doors are located at the front sides of the auditorium. A large double door is located at the middle of the back wall. The remaining doors are located at the corners of the back wall and the side walls. As the members come into the auditorium they exchange greetings with other members as they move towards their regular pew. This entry segment lasts until 10:30. During this time visitors and members who did not come for the Bible classes will also begin to enter the auditorium. Families recombine after the separation due to various classes, greeting different friends, etc. The families mark their pews with an assortment of Bibles, lesson books, children's books and toys, purses, coats, etc. The men in charge of orchestrating the members' formal public roles in the morning's assembly hurry through the auditorium, rounding up the men who are to say prayers or serve in the communion service. The *lady* in charge of the nursery will remind the *ladies* chosen for that day's service to report to the nursery to watch over the toddlers. People with requests for *prayers* or *special announcements* will seek out the *minister* responsible for *the welcome* and the *announcements* to make their plea for inclusion.

Figure 1. Westlink Church of Christ Auditorium floorplan



The sound of several hundred people speaking at once in a normal voice is heard as a loud roar. To a newcomer, this activity may appear to be very chaotic and irreverent. For the Westlink member, this activity and sound represent the person-centered service that the Westlink congregation intentionally tries to present. On Sundays, when a special program during class time has disrupted the regular schedule between classes and service, the activity and sound level are noticeably less during this "entry" segment. The changed sequence has an effect that can be seen through the rest of the service: Members speak in lower voices, or cease to speak; children are much more quiet and still; there is less movement by members during the service; and the duration of the exit segment is much shorter.

At 10:30 am, one of the ministers (usually the one that is not delivering the lesson that morning) ascends the three steps to the stage and stands behind the podium.

sweeping the audience with his gaze. This is a signal to the audience to find their seats and be quiet. After about 30 seconds of staring at the audience, the minister leans toward the microphone mounted on the podium and, with a loud voice, greets the audience with a "Good Morning!" Many in the audience respond with a chorus of "good morning." If this response does not have sufficient enthusiasm for the minister, he may repeat "good morning" in a louder voice. The minister will then welcome the audience to the morning's assembly. If a special theme is being used for the service, it is explained at this time. A special mention is made of visitors. Members and visitors are asked to complete *registration cards* that are located in the back of the pews. Special announcements and *prayer requests* are mentioned at this time.

Sometimes this *greeting* segment contains a *special announcement* segment. This segment is signaled by the minister introducing someone who has a *special announcement*. Another person (usually one of the elders or deacons, but always a male) ascends to the stage and makes some kind of announcement. Special announcements seem to occur whenever an announcement requires an unusual amount of detail, or the person promoting the activity or occasion which is the subject of the announcement is enthusiastic about motivating the audience to participate in whatever is being announced. A common *special announcement* concerns the youth activities being planned for the day. The youth minister bounces up to the podium and encourages all the youth to participate while giving sufficient details for the parents to make sure that their children come prepared at the appropriate time.

When the person making the special announcement concludes, the minister resumes the *greeting* segment. This segment ends with the transition to the *welcome*

segment. The minister then addresses the visitors, offering them a special *Westlink welcome*. Then the minister asks all of the Westlink members to stand (pause) and to welcome the visitors (who are the only people left seated). During the *welcome* segment, the noise level again increases dramatically. There is much movement of the members around the auditorium. This segment usually lasts for about two minutes. It could be very disturbing to a newcomer, since the service has officially started and includes this pandemonium. Actually, the newcomer is too busy being greeted to be disconcerted by the noise and movement. The *welcome* developed as a means to locate and greet shy visitors. It has become a regular part of the service because of the informal, person-centered atmosphere that it creates (from the standpoint of the ministers).

During the course of these observations, several times the *welcome* segment was omitted from the weekly ritual. This was usually due to an extra long *special announcement* taking up too much time, or someone other than one of the ministers performing the *greeting* segment. If a minister were sick or out of town, one of the elders, deacons, or song-leaders would fill in by performing the *greeting*. Occasionally, a *special announcement* is considered so important that it takes precedence over the regular announcements. The special announcer would then be given the task of performing the *greeting*. On these occasions, the *welcome* is usually omitted. Omission of the *welcome* results in two noticeable differences from a normal Sunday morning. The noise level during the entire assembly is lower. The *exit* segment is of shorter duration.

The end of the *welcome* segment is signaled by the appearance of the *song leader* on the stage. The *song leader* stands and stares at the audience for a few seconds until people begin to find their seats. Then the *song leader* announces a number from one to

about nine hundred. This number represents a song in the *song-books* that are in racks fastened to the backs of the pews. The members then pick up *song-books* and turn to the number called. *Visitors* begin to copy this behavior. The *song leader* always calls the number twice. Then signaling the end of the *welcome*, the *song leader* may have to call the number three or even four times. The appearance of the *song leader* on the stage also signals the beginning of the *song service* segment. The *song service* consists of several songs interspersed among other segments of the assembly. Each song is also a segment. The *song leader* announces the number of the song, raises his hand, and begins to sing the soprano part of the song. Within the first four notes, the majority of the congregation joins in singing with the *song leader*. The song service is *a cappella*, meaning that instrumental music is not used.

After a song or two, the *song leader* signals the end of this segment of the song service by sitting down. A *member* (assigned this task before the assembly began, often several days earlier) moves to the stage, stands behind the podium, and says a prayer. This segment is known as the *opening prayer*. The prayer concludes with an *amen*. Some of the members softly repeat *amen*.

Until a few years ago, it was common for a congregation to chorus *amen* at the end of every prayer. My observations of several congregations during the 1960's, 70's, and early 80's indicate that this was a common practice in many Churches of Christ. This practice of loudly repeating *amen* at the conclusion of a prayer has almost died out at Westlink.

After the *amen*, the prayer leader returns to his seat, and the *song leader* calls another song. After several song segments, the *song leader* signals the approach of the

next major segment of the service by identifying a song as the one *before the Lord's supper*. This statement warns the men who participate in the *communion service* to be ready.

At the conclusion of the song, the *song leader* returns to his pew. Six men walk from the front pew to the table on the first wide step of the stage. There is just enough room behind the table for these men to stand in a line abreast facing the audience. Another man steps up to the podium on the stage while the six men are lining up behind *the table*. The man behind the podium is the *prayer leader* for the communion service. The men behind the table are the *servers*. The *prayer leader* makes a few comments about the importance of the communion service and explains its role in the service and in the life of the Christian. The *prayer leader* then reads a short scripture selection followed by a *prayer for the loaf* or *bread*. This *bread* symbolizes the body of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the sins of the world, including the members of the Westlink congregation. Some form of this statement is made by the *prayer leader* every week. The bread is a round piece of baked pastry similar to a pie crust. On the table on the stage are two stacks of silver trays about a foot in diameter. Each tray contains at least one piece of *bread* about four inches in diameter. There are six trays in each stack. The men distribute the trays among themselves, with the two men on the outside getting three trays each, the next two men receiving two trays, and the two men in the center each receiving one tray. The trays are passed to the congregation two rows of pews at a time. This is a very quiet time during the service. When a tray is passed to a member, the member is supposed to break a small piece off of the loaf and eat it as he or she passes the tray to the next member. The member has been instructed in various sermons through

the years to think about this *bread* as the symbol of the body of Christ, how the body suffered on the cross, and how the body of Christ lives on in the world in the form of the *members* of *the Church* (referring to the Church of Christ) who are also *members* of the *body of Christ*. This is a solemn segment accompanied by the longest period of silence during the assembly. In my analysis, this is the most overt identity forming ritual of the assembly. (An analysis to be explained in chapters 7 and 8).

After each member of the congregation has had the opportunity *to partake of the bread*, the servers, at the back of the auditorium by this time, return to their place behind the table on the stage. The *prayer leader* makes a few comments about the *cup*, and says a prayer for *the cup*. These comments usually include statements to the effect that *the cup* symbolizes the blood of Christ, shed on the cross for the sins of the world, including the members at Westlink. Some form of this statement is made every week by the prayer leader. The cup is represented by small, clear, plastic cups large enough to hold about 1/2 ounce of liquid. These cups are held in large silver trays about 18 inches in diameter. Each tray holds 60 little cups. Each cup is about half full of grape juice. Two stacks of these trays, with six trays in each stack, sit on the table on the stage. The servers distribute the trays the same as they did the loaf. The auditorium is still quiet. Each member is supposed to be thinking about the blood of Christ shed for them. (This concept is taught primarily through the brief statements before and during the prayers). At the end of this segment, the servers are at the back of the auditorium. They march to the stage in two files, and line up again behind the table. The third segment of the communion service is the *contribution* or *offering*.

Theologically, this segment is not considered to be a part of the communion. However, in the organization of assembly practices, in most congregations of the Churches of Christ, the *contribution* forms the third act in the communion. The *prayer leader* often tries to distance this segment from the previous two with a statement such as: "For the sake of convenience, we will now collect the contribution." The *prayer leader* may or may not say a few words about the *contribution*, or read a scripture. Often, the *prayer leader* only says a short prayer before the contribution. The two stacks of six trays for the contribution are kept on a shelf under the table, rather than in plain sight on top like the *loaf* and *cup* trays. This further distances the act of the *contribution* from the ritual of the *Lord's Supper*. The servers distribute the trays and pass them along the rows of pews in the same way as the loaf and cup trays were passed. People drop checks, cash and coins in the trays as they pass by. The audience is silent, although there is some shifting in the pews and limited movement, especially by the small children. The children are warned by the passing of the contribution trays that their segment is near.

When the servers have passed trays along all the pews and assembled at the back of the auditorium, the *song leader* moves to the stage. The next segment is *kids can*. This is a new tradition at Westlink. The announced purpose is to involve children in the assembly in a way that they feel a part of the church. The children donate money each week. The donations are used to fund various efforts around the world that feed and clothe children.

The *song leader* announces that it is time for *kids can*. The noise level from children increases. The *song leader* frequently explains, "This is an opportunity for children to contribute to a fund that is used to help needy children." At this time, the

song leader announces that a special activity (called *Bible Time*) for children between the ages of two and five is held in a classroom during the remainder of the assembly. Both of these announcements are made on a regular basis, primarily for the benefit of visitors. *Kids can* is an unusual activity among Churches of Christ. The special activity (*Bible Time*) for children is not as unusual, but is uncommon among other congregations.

The *song leader* calls a song number (usually of some song associated with children), and urges the children to come forward for *kids can* and go to *Bible Time*. As the congregation begins to sing with the *song leader*, children from about 18 months up to about ten years of age move into the aisles and to the front of the auditorium. During the period of these observations (1994-1998), the number of children moving towards the front ranged from about 40 to over 90. A *member*, one of the *elders* (the leaders of the congregation), moves to the stage and takes a large (about five gallon) clear plastic jug from a shelf under the table. This jug is placed on the floor at the front of the auditorium. Children crowd around the jug trying to shove money, both coins and bills, into the 1 ½ inch opening of the jug. Many of the smaller children hold onto the hand of a parent (most often their mother) or older brother or sister. About half of the children then exit from the auditorium through the left, front door to pass to *Bible Time*.

At the conclusion of the song, the *song leader* sits down in his pew, and the *minister* moves to the front of the auditorium to begin the *lesson* segment. This segment usually begins about 11:00 am. The minister greets the audience and gives a persuasive speech based on a Bible text, called a *sermon*. The speech is about 30 minutes long. At the end of this segment, the *minister* announces an invitation for any person in the audience with a need for help to come forward while the audience stands and sings a

song. The number for this song is announced earlier in the service, sometime before the *minister* begins to speak. The song books have cloth strings attached to their spines to serve as place markers for this *invitation song*. The *minister* descends from the stage and stands at the front of the auditorium while the *song leader* moves to the stage and begins to sing the *invitation song*. Sometimes a member or a family moves down the aisle to the front during this song. When this happens, the *minister* asks the person or family to be seated on the front pew. The minister sits with them and asks how they need to be helped. The need may be for *baptism*, to *place membership* with the congregation, or to *ask for prayers*. At the end of the song, the *minister* announces to the congregation the person's need. Then an *elder* will be called to lead a prayer for the person.

If the need was for *baptism*, the *minister*, the person who responded, and several other members who are either close friends or family of the person who responded, move to the baptistery area. This area is behind the stage and raised about six feet above the floor of the auditorium. The *minister* and the person use the dressing rooms to change into appropriate clothing. For the *minister*, this clothing consists of a pair of hip waders identical to those popular with duck hunters. For the person, the appropriate clothing is white cotton coveralls. The *minister* and baptismal candidate then descend into the baptistery, a tub of water (which is usually heated to a comfortable temperature, but is very cold whenever the heater has gone out) about three feet deep, four feet wide, and eight feet long. Until this moment, the baptistery has been concealed from the audience by a curtain. While the *minister* and baptismal candidate are changing and getting into the baptistery, the *song leader* leads several short songs. When the *minister* is standing in the center of the baptistery, facing the audience, and the baptismal candidate is

standing to one side of the minister, facing the *minister*, the curtain is drawn open. The song leader stops the song, and the *minister* asks the candidate if he or she believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The positive response from the candidate represents their *confession*. The minister then says: "Because of your confession of faith, I now baptize you into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins." This statement is the standard baptismal formula used with little deviation in the Churches of Christ. Immediately upon making this statement, the *minister* lowers the candidate into the water, usually by laying the person backwards, supporting the person with one hand at the middle of the back, and the other hand holding the person by their arm. The baptismal candidate is completely immersed under the water, then lifted back upright by the *minister*. Usually the *minister* hugs the new Christian while members of the audience clap or say amen. While the *minister* and new Christian move back to the changing rooms to dry off and change back into their clothes, the *song leader* leads several songs in a row without calling numbers. The congregation sings until the *minister* and the *new member* have changed clothes and come to the front of the auditorium. The whole congregation forms a large circle around the auditorium, holding hands and singing. Then the *minister* welcomes the new *member* to the *family* and calls on an *elder* to say a prayer for the *new member*.

If there are no responses to the *invitation song*, the *minister* and the *song leader* move to the back of the auditorium while a pre-selected *member* moves to the stage and says a prayer. This segment is known as the *closing prayer*.

After the *closing prayer* ends (with an *amen*), the people in the audience begin to visit with each other. This segment is the "exit," although it has no formal term. The exit

often lasts for about 30 minutes. During this time *members* make plans to meet for Sunday dinner with other *members*, conduct church business, meet *visitors* and *new members*, and gradually move out of the auditorium toward the parking lot. By 12:30 the auditorium is empty. The morning's ritual is over.

Levy Assemblies

Levy's assembly has changed some during the two years of these observations. The current ritual format is presented in this section. A comparison between the current format and the former format will be presented in Chapter 8 within a section on changes in the ritual form. This section will explain the Sunday morning assembly at Levy, then this chapter will conclude with a comparison between Levy and Westlink.

The standard Levy assembly can be divided into three primary segments: *Singing*, *communion*, and *lesson*. Each major segment is usually around 20 minutes in duration. Within each segment are minor segments that may be similar across the segments. An example is *the singing*--in this primary segment of the assembly, the minor segments of *family time*, *opening prayer*, *scripture reading*, and *singing* may occur. During the *lesson* segment, at least one *prayer* and two songs will be included. A short lesson is often included in the communion section.

An example of a specific assembly at Levy(December 12, 1999):

10:00 Opening song "Hark the Herald Angels sing" (led by regular *song leader*)

10:03 Family time (announcements (by an *elder)* and special announcement by *Youth Minister*

10:07 Scripture reading (same *elder* that made the announcements) 1 Chronicles 16:23-34

10:08 Song "Lord, We come before Thee now"

10:09 Song "Silent Night"

10:11 Song "Tempted and Tried"

10:13 Song "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

10:15 Song "Be with me, Lord"

10:17 Prayer (led by a *deacon*)

10:18 Song "Come Share the Lord"

10:19 Communion talk (by *Associate Minister*, read passage and apply)

Scripture reading - 2"

Application talk - 4"

10:25 Communion prayer #1 - Loaf (a former *elder*)

10:26 Men serve the loaf

10:30 Communion prayer #2 - Cup (same former *elder*)

10:31 Men serve the cup

10:34 Offering prayer (again, the same former *elder*)

10:35 Men collect the offering

10:36 Song "The first Noel" [Children pass to Bible Hour]

10:38 Sermon (*Minister*) "The rich young ruler (Luke 18)"

11:00 Song - Invitation "Jesus is calling (led by alternate *song leader*)

11"02 Song – Closing "We're Marching to Zion"

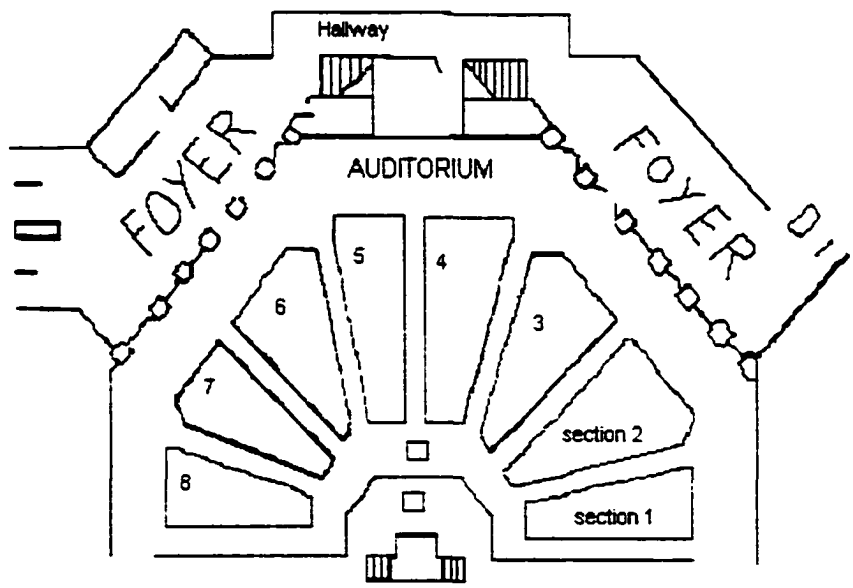
11:04 Prayer – Closing (led by a long time *member*)

11:05 Dismissed

Description of Levy assembly. Levy's weekly Sunday morning assembly begins at 10 am. This assembly is preceded by Bible Classes that begin at 9 am. There is a 15 minute break between classes and the assembly. One of the larger adult classes meets in the auditorium. This class is composed mostly of older adults and *visitors*. (This composition of the auditorium class is a tradition among Churches of Christ). Its existence permits older *members* and *visitors* to stay in one place for both Bible Class and Worship.

During the break between class and the assembly, the people in the auditorium may move around and visit with each other. People begin to stream into the auditorium from four doors (see auditorium layout in figure 2). The older people (over 50) tend to sit on the left side of the auditorium and the younger people sit on the right (see chapter 6, the section on spatial arrangement and proxemics). The people visit with each other as they find their seats. Background noise level is a muted roar (not as loud as at Westlink).

Figure 2. Levy Church of Christ Auditorium floorplan



Text announcements (Bulletins and PowerPoint). As the people enter the auditorium they obtain a bulletin. If they enter through one of the foyers at the back of the auditorium, a greeter hands them a bulletin. If they come in one of the two doors at the front of the auditorium (coming from Bible class), they can pick up a bulletin off a small table beside the doors. The bulletin has information about the morning's assembly (usually at least an order of worship), a *prayer list* (people who have requested prayers due to illness, hardships, etc.), reports of the past weeks activities, announcements of coming activities, a short teaching article or comments from the ministry staff and/or the elders.

Levy is equipped with a dual digital projector system that projects PowerPoint presentations onto the walls. The auditorium has a high ceiling (about 30 feet) and the front wall area on either side of the stage is large enough for an image about 15 feet by 15 feet. Sometimes (either when there is some very special event coming, or when someone has had the time to set up the system) the morning's announcements are projected on the wall with the PowerPoint presentation. These announcements are a combination of simple text (the same announcements in the bulletin about coming events), some bright colored text on a contrasting, bright colored background, and digital photos of recent events. This presentation begins about 10 minutes before the worship service begins (9:50 am). Each announcement is a slide or series of slides. As people gather in the auditorium, finding their seats and visiting, some read the text projected on the wall. Whenever a picture is projected on the wall, most of the audience looks towards the front walls, and the noise level drops noticeably. When the next text slide is projected, the noise level increases, and people tend to turn their focus away from the front wall.

Behind the Scenes. During the period just before Worship Service begins, the men who are designated to serve the communion that day gather in a hallway beside the right front door. Two of the deacons, assigned the responsibility of organizing the men who will serve communion and say the prayers, circulate among the audience reminding men that they are supposed to serve that day. If someone is not in attendance who has been previously assigned the role of *prayer leader*, etc., then these deacons find a substitute.

Several people try to find the man assigned to make the announcements, so as to give him some last minute announcement. The role of announcement maker rotates among four men (2 elders and 2 deacons).

The Assembly. The worship service usually begins exactly at 10 am when the *songleader* for the day begins singing. This beginning does vary. Sometimes the *songleader* sits on the front row and begins singing. The *songleader* has a wireless microphone that broadcasts his voice throughout the auditorium. When the *songleader* begins singing, he may remain seated for the first song, or stand and move to the stage while singing. More often, he moves to the stage first, greets the audience with a "Good Morning!" makes some short positive comment (this is a great day to be together and worship the Lord) then begin singing. The words of this song, and all other songs sung during the service, are usually displayed on the walls on both sides of the stage. Most of the time, the image consists of bright yellow print on a dark blue background. At least one person sits in the control room at the middle of the balcony operating the computer PowerPoint images and controlling the sound levels.

Family Time. After the first song, the *songleader* usually sits down and the person making the announcements for the week moves to the front of the auditorium, to a small lectern centered in front of the stage, but on the floor level. The announcements consist of a report on the sick (members and family of members), births or deaths occurring during the previous week that affect any of the members (even if they are reported in the weekly bulletin), and coming activities. The announcer may make humorous comments about the activity announcements.

If there are any special announcements, the announcer introduces the person making the special announcements, and that person moves to the front of the auditorium and makes their announcement and plea for help or involvement. (See special announcements at Westlink). This segment, including all announcements, is called the *family time* by the worship organizers at Levy. The order of worship on the front page of the bulletin, or the worship order handout, labels this segment *family time*. This is not a common term for this segment. Probably only the organizers and leaders of the assembly are familiar with this term. The average member would refer to this segment as *the announcements.*

Song Service. After the announcements, the next segment of the assembly may be a song, or a prayer, or a scripture reading. An *opening prayer* is inserted into the ritual either at this point, or towards the end of the singing portion of the service. The *opening prayer* is always separated from the *communion service* by at least one song. The opening prayer is usually led by an elder, former elder, or deacon. This is a high prestige prayer (as are the communion prayers) and is usually limited to someone who is a perceived leader in the congregation. This is not a stated policy, and probably not a

conscious decision by the deacons who assign the prayers. If someone other than a perceived leader is chosen to lead the opening prayer, this tends to indicate that the person is seen, at least by the deacons who organize the worship assembly, as a future or potential leader. Several times a year one of the young men from the youth group will be asked to lead the opening prayer. These young men are seen as leaders in the youth group and future leaders of the church (somewhere).

A *scripture reading* is optional for the weekly ritual. If one is used, it may be inserted after the announcements, before the communion service, or before the lesson. When the *scripture reading* is inserted after the announcements, frequently the announcer also reads the scripture. Whoever reads the scripture does so from the small lectern. The lectern on the stage does not have a microphone attached to it. The small lectern does have a microphone attached. The location of the microphone limits the position from which a participant may vocally address the audience. The *song leader* and the *preacher* use wireless microphones. They are usually the only ones to ascend to the center of the stage and use the larger lectern.

Songs in the *song service* are sung in a series lasting up to 15 minutes. Since the words of these songs are projected on the wall, the song leader can move directly from one song to another without announcing the number or name of the song. Sometimes, for various reasons, the songs are not projected with PowerPoint. When this happens, the song-leader calls out the number of the song in the song book in a fashion that is identical to the procedure employed at Westlink.

Communion Service. The transition from the *song service* to the *communion service* is made with a song, usually announced as "the song before the communion."

After this song is sung, the *song leader* sits down, and the *communion prayer leader* and the men who are going to *serve the communion* move to the front of the auditorium. The *prayer leader* stands behind the small lectern at floor level. The men *serving the communion* stand to either side of the stage (see floor plan in figure 2), behind tables with five men on the left and four men on the right. The *table* is prepared with the trays for *the loaf* and *the cup* stacked on top. The baskets for collecting the offering are kept under the table, symbolizing the separation of the offering and the communion.

The *communion prayer leader* often reads a short scripture about the communion, makes a short application, then *leads a prayer* for the *loaf*. After the prayer, the men serving the communion pass the trays containing *the loaf* among themselves (usually two trays per person) and then move to the front of their assigned aisle. One man moves down each aisle, alternating between passing the trays down a row on their left, then on their right. It takes about 4 minutes to pass the trays for the loaf. When the men have finished passing trays among their assigned sections, they assemble at the back of the auditorium, in two files, one file at the back of the aisle immediately to the left of the center aisle, and the other file at the back of the aisle immediately to the right of the center aisle. They then march together back to their tables at the front of the auditorium. The *prayer leader says a prayer* for the *cup*. This may or may not be preceded by another reading of scripture and comment. The men repeat the serving process for the *cup*, which takes about one minute longer (5 minutes total serving time). At Levy, when the *cup* is passed, the members remove a small plastic cup from the tray, pass the tray, then sip the grape juice out of the cup, and place the empty plastic cup in a small cup-holder attached to the back of the pew in front of them (beside the song book racks). The

taking the cup from the tray and passing the tray on saves several minutes over the serving time if Levy's procedure was the same as Westlink's (where they sip the juice and place the cup back in the tray). When the men have finished their assigned sections, they again form files and march back up the aisles.

The *offering* follows the *communion*. The same *prayer leader* states that it is time for the *offering*, and usually emphasizes that this activity is different from the communion. For example, he may say "At this time, for convenience sake, we will collect the offering." The *prayer leader* may, but usually does not read a scripture about the offering, and he then *says a prayer* for the *offering*. One man at each table reaches under the table, pulls out a stack of wicker baskets, and passes two baskets to each man, who then moves down his aisle, passing the baskets down each row. The collecting of the *offering* takes less than two minutes.

Sometimes the *song leader* leads a song between the communion and the offering. This further separates the two activities. Sometimes the *song leader* leads a verse of a song between the *loaf* and the *cup*. And every so often (once or twice a year) the song leader leads a song, sung softly, while the *communion* is being served. Some of the members do not like for a song to be led while the *communion* is being served. Usually the *communion time* is reserved for meditation in silence broken only by the occasional rattle of *communion trays* being bumped together, or the soft sounds of people shifting in their seats. When a baby cries during the *communion* it is a very noticeable sound.

The *song leader* begins another song at some point while the *offering* is being collected, no later than the point at which the men passing the baskets reach the back of the auditorium. This song marks a transition to the lesson segment of the assembly. At

the beginning of this song, the *song leader* announces that there is a special class offered for the preschool children (3-6). As this song is being sung, the children are supposed to move to the door at the front right of the auditorium, where adults take them to their class.

The Lesson. When this song is completed, the *song leader* leaves the stage for his seat while the *preacher* ascends the stage, places Bible and notes on the lectern in the center of the stage, reaches down and flips the switch on the wireless microphone attached to the *preacher*'s belt or pocket, faces the center of the audience, and begins with some type of greeting (typically, "Good morning!") There is seldom much of a verbal response from the audience, unlike Westlink. The *preacher* often makes some short comments about what is happening during the week at the church, and may make some comments about the assembly to that point (such as "I appreciated the prayer led by Bill this morning.") Then the *preacher* begins to *preach* a *sermon*. The *sermons* are usually between 20 and 30 minutes in duration.

The Invitation. At the close of the *sermon*, the *preacher* issues an *invitation*, then the *song leader* begins to sing the *invitation song* while moving to the stage. The *preacher* descends to the floor level, and stands facing down the center aisle. Two other leaders of the church, either elders or deacons, also move to the front of the auditorium, and stand facing down an aisle to each side of the *preacher*. Their duty is to receive any respondent that comes forward. If someone responds, the receiver takes their hand and leads them to one of the front seats. There, the receiver quietly questions the person responding as to their need (while the congregation continues to sing the *invitation song*). When the *invitation song* is completed, the *preacher* sits on the front pew with the

responder and the elder/deacon who received them. Either the *preacher* or the receiver (usually the *preacher*) moves to the floor microphone at the small lectern to announce to the congregation the name of the respondent and their stated need. Responses are handled in the same way as described above at Westlink.

The Close. After the *invitation song* is sung, if there are no *responses*, the song leader asks if there are any other announcements (there usually are not) then begins the *closing song*. After that song is finished, the closing prayer leader moves to the small lectern at the front of the auditorium, and leads the *closing prayer.*

Comparison of Westlink and Levy Assemblies

The following charts compare the segments and actors at Westlink and Levy. Segments are listed in order of occurrence. Actors are listed in the order in which they appear.

Segments:	Westlink	Levy
	entry	entry
	welcome	family time
	greeting	greeting
	announcements	song
	welcome visitors	announcements
	song service	song service
	songs	songs
	prayer(s)	prayer
	communion service	scriptures reading
	song	communion service
	scripture &/or comments	song

	prayers	scripture reading
	serve loaf & cup	comments on scripture
	contribution	prayers
	kid's can	serve loaf & cup
	lesson	contribution
	invitation	children's dismissal
	song	lesson
	responses	invitation
	introduction	song
	prayer	responses
	baptism	introduction
	close	prayer
	song	baptism
	prayer	close
	exit	song
		prayer
		exit
Actors:	Westlink	Levy
	minister	song leader
	song leader	announcer
	opening prayer leader	opening prayer leader
	communion leader	scripture reader (optional)
	communion servers (6)	communion speaker

elder of the month	communion leader
preacher	communion servers (9)
respondents (optional)	preacher
closing prayer leader	receivers
	respondents (optional)
	closing prayer leader

Summary

There is a remarkable similarity between the ritual elements at Westlink and at Levy. The two congregations are separated by over 400 miles and two states. Both congregations developed the current format out of a common tradition, but many of the current forms were considered to be unique to the congregation. Even as a participant and observer, I did not realize the great extent of similarity until I wrote this comparison of the two assemblies. The next section of this dissertation will analyze these assemblies, categorizing communication behaviors as either verbal or nonverbal elements. The interactions among these elements in a weekly, expected ritual will be presented in Chapter 7 as a communication system. Finally, in Chapter 8, a theoretical relationship between the communication system of the assembly and the development and maintenance of group identity will be presented.

Chapter Five:

Verbal Elements

The elements of communication seen in the group assembly of the Churches of Christ may be divided into the categories of verbal and nonverbal. The verbal elements consist of the ways in which the communication code English Language is used to express, share, and co-create identity. The verbal elements may be further categorized as terms or phrases, and stories or narratives. This chapter will illustrate the ways in which terms and stories are used in the assembly to create and maintain identity.

Terms

Terms are words that carry special connotations to the group. These terms may be divided into two categories: Insider words and outsider words. Insider words are terms that carry an identifier tag along with the special understood meaning of the term. The fact that a person uses that particular term in that particular context signifies that the person is an insider.

An example of the identifying feature of an insider word was the seed for this dissertation. Several years ago, my wife and I were dining at our favorite restaurant. It was a Sunday afternoon. The restaurant was crowded by people coming from Church. In a break in our conversation, we clearly heard the couple at the next table say something about "The Church." In the culture of the Churches of Christ, the term *Church*, when used with the definite article the refers to *the Church of Christ*. My wife and I began to quietly discuss whether or not the couple beside us were members of the Churches of Christ, while we continued to eavesdrop on their conversation. Another insider term was used: "The Elders." With the usage of these two terms in the context of talking about

their congregation, we concluded that they were probably either members of the Churches of Christ, or possibly the Christian church. We were unaware of any other religious group using those terms in the ways in which the couple beside us used them in their conversation. At this point, I had an "Ah Ha!" experience (An experience where theory and life come together to create a new understanding of the world). My study in the course "Language and Social Interaction" suddenly made sense. I was assigning an in-group identification to this unknown couple solely because of their selection of terms within a context. My wife and I began to try to list the terms that would serve as identifiers of a person's membership in the Churches of Christ. This dissertation grew from that casual dinner conversation.

Outsider words function much like insider words. In addition to the denotative meaning of the term, a connotation of membership or non-membership in the group is derived by the listeners. In the Churches of Christ, the most common way that a person within the group demonstrates that they are not quite a member is in the terms used to designate the minister. The minister may be referred to as *the minister*, *the preacher*, or even *the pulpit minister* (although the last is only found in larger congregations of the Churches of Christ. Used in smaller congregations, it becomes an outsider word.) Frequently, the minister is referred to as the pastor, the reverend, or even as the father. These terms, while acceptable and proper in other religious groups, are not considered appropriate in regards to the *minister* in the Churches of Christ. The term pastor may be used to designate an elder. This illustrates the way the context determines the appropriateness of the term for identification purposes. Pastor is an acceptable term, but only in regards to the elders, where it is not commonly used. Father is a common mode

of address in the Churches of Christ, but only in reference to The Lord. Use of acceptable terms in unacceptable contexts demonstrates that the user is not one of us (Pratt & Wieder, 1993; Wieder & Pratt, 1990).

The members of the focus groups were surprised at how easily they could agree on the insider and outsider terms when asked the question: "What words or terms indicate to you that a person is a member of the Churches of Christ?" and "not a member of the Churches of Christ?" The following list is a composite of my observations and the focus group responses.

Insider terms	Outsider terms
Acts 2:38	John 3:16
Bible Study	Altar
Bible School	Altar call
The Church	Asked Jesus into my heart
Elders and Deacons	Choir
Gospel Preacher	Closed communion
Gospel Meeting	Denominational
Immersed	Eucharist
Member of the Church	Organ
New Testament Christian	Pastor
Response to the invitation	Priest
	Reverend
	Sprinkling
	Synod

The members of the Churches of Christ also have a number of terms with meanings peculiar to the group. These terms are often similar to religious terms used by other faiths. The understood meaning is different, at least to some degree. These terms, although unique in their usage, do not seem to carry the identifier tags that are part of the insider/outsider words. A glossary of Church of Christ terms is included as Appendix C. A person attending an assembly of the Churches of Christ may feel like an outsider until they have an understanding of these terms.

Stories

I choose to use the term story for this section. The terms story and narrative are generally synonymous in social science research (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 13-14). Although a narrative could be considered to be "anything recounted in the form of a story" (Denning, 2001, p. 1), Bochner (1994, p. 30) defines narrative as "the stories people tell about their lives." Stories are the organized retelling of events selected and ordered to establish a valued endpoint (Gergen, 2000, p. 2).

Stories serve to give meaning to the behaviors of others, enable individuals to make sense of their own lives, and maintain common values in a society (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 14). Stories share values across a group by exemplifying behaviors to be emulated or avoided (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 139. Boyce (1996) links the study of narrative in organizations with Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality (1967), placing story within the theory as the mechanism in the process of legitimation, where a socially constructed reality is passed on to a new generation. Boyce (1996) summarizes the research in organization story telling and social construction:

> The salient aspects of the research explicitly linking social construction, story, and organization are that: (a) stories are useful for new member socialization and generating commitment, (b) familiarity with dominant organizational stories can be an indicator of adaptation, (c) story can be a vehicle for social control, and that (d) meaning can develop consciously and/or unconsciously.

The importance of examining story in this dissertation is seen in the way that stories act as a mechanism to create and maintain identity. Story is important in the construction of individual identity (Christensen & Cheney, 1994, p. 229). Story also has similar importance in the development of group, organizational, and cultural identity (see Bochner, 1994; Boyce, 1996; Christensen & Cheney, 1994; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Gergen, 2000; and Polkinghorne, 1988). Hopewell (1987) applies the concept of story as a mechanism for identity creation and maintenance to the study of the community that exists within a religious congregation.

The identity of the group seems to be shaped to a large extent through the common story of this particular congregation of the Churches of Christ. There seems to be both a Church of Christ story and a congregational story within the context of the Church of Christ story. The story is told in parts. These parts appear in the *sermon*, the *announcements*, the *prayers*, the comments about the *Lord's Supper*, and in the *Bible class* lessons and discussions. For those who know the story, they are reminded of it weekly in the *sermons*, sentences in prayers, and in the terms and word choices used throughout the assembly. Most members have the Church of Christ story taught to them explicitly at some point in their life. This usually occurs in the context of a *Bible study*. A *Bible study* is a lesson or series of lessons on the basic elements of membership in the Churches of Christ. A *Bible study* may consist of a dyad: the teacher and the student. It may consist of a small group: the teacher and several students. It is always a personal

application of the beliefs of the group to the actions of the student(s). The Church of Christ is placed within a historical context of *God's plan for humans*. The steps of the *Plan of Salvation* are taught. The essential expectations of a new member in the Church are explained. The uniqueness of the Levy congregation may or may not be taught at this time. The congregational story is more likely to be taught from the pulpit by the *preacher* to the congregation. Usually the congregational story is presented as an example of how this particular group is demonstrating the principles and practices of the Church.

A thorough explication of this concept is beyond this dissertation. I will give brief evidence of it and then illustrate how a word choice common in the prayers of the Levy congregation reinforces the story for Levy members.

The Levy Story. The current story of the Levy Church of Christ is reflected in the mission statement adopted by the leaders of the congregation several years ago. The mission of the Levy Church of Christ is to: "Build a strong family for the glory of God." Family is alternately applied to the congregation or to the family units within the congregation. The church bulletin (the announcement and teaching handout distributed before the assembly each week) is titled "Levy Family." The announcements each week are made within a segment of the assembly called "Family Time." References to the congregation during announcements, prayers, and the sermon often use the term *Levy Family*. The ways in which the stories and illustrations used in the weekly sermon reinforce this concept is worthy of a dissertation of its own. Suffice it to say that the Levy story presents the congregation as a family unit within the extended family of God represented by the Church.

Consistent with the congregational story of *Family* is the choice of terms used in prayers as an address to God. Within the Churches of Christ there are several acceptable forms of address to use in prayers to God. Beginning with the simple "Dear God," and including "Our God," "Almighty God," "Holy God," "Dear Lord," "O Lord," and sometimes even "Jehovah God." But the predominant (about 90% of the time) form of address for God in public prayers at Levy is "Our Father," or simply "Father." This form of address is consistent with the example given in the Lord's prayer recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew, and used by many people of Christian faith. In the Churches of Christ it is only one of several accepted forms, and I have not noticed a preference for this form at any congregation other than Levy. (This may be because I have attained a deeper awareness of these matters through this research, and further experience will reveal this form of address to be most common in the Churches of Christ.) I believe the great preference for "Our Father" and "Father" as the form of address in prayers is a result of the acceptance of the congregational story of Levy as a family within the extended family of the Church. Within that story, God is the Father and head of the family.

The story may grow naturally over a period of years. In Levy's case, elements of the story were in place. After months of discussion by the leaders, the story was made explicit in the form of the mission statement and a commitment to family demonstrated by instituting a new position of ministry--Family Minister--and hiring a full time minister to fill this role. Now the terms used in the assembly reflect and reinforce the story. A common identity as a family is created and maintained through these verbal elements.

Reframes: Changing Interpretations of Events to Support the Story. Using the group story to change individuals' interpretations of events can be seen in several observations of the way that preachers respond to disruptions during the assembly. The Levy congregation includes a number of young families with infants and small children. When a child begins to act in a manner that is distracting to the members seated nearby, one of the parents usually removes the child from the auditorium. This act of removal is frequently a distraction. Parents usually try to quiet a child before taking the step of removal. One of the purposes of the *Children's Bible Hour* is to relieve the parents from the stress and distractions of trying to keep a child quiet during the assembly. Babies are normally a distraction to the parents during the assembly, and often to the members sitting nearby. The emphasis that Levy has placed on attracting and retaining young couples has resulted in an abundance of babies, which creates frequent distractions during the assembly. It is common for older members to complain about the noise caused by the babies during worship. When these older members complain to the parents of babies, they are discouraged from bringing their children into the assembly. This unfriendly attitude towards children is not in keeping with the Levy story of family.

One Sunday morning, during the lesson time, several babies began to express their dissatisfaction with life. At least five babies, in different locations across the auditorium were crying loudly at the same time. It was hard for people sitting close to hear the sermon. The noise was so loud and piercing that most of the members were looking around for the offending babies. The preacher paused in the middle of his lesson, looked around at the auditorium, and said "Listen to that!" After another long pause, he said "Isn't that a wonderful sound!" Pausing again, and looking around at the entire

auditorium with a big smile on his face, the preacher said, "We are so blessed here at Levy to have so many babies. This assures us of a healthy future. I want to commend these parents for their diligence in starting their children out right by bringing them to church." Then the preacher resumed his lesson. The babies also became quieter. The members were offered a different interpretation of the event of a baby crying during the assembly.

This new interpretation offered by the minister as a meaning to associate with the event being experienced by the group is an example of a reframe. A reframe (at least in the common usage of this term in counseling) is an intentional offering of a new or different interpretation of an event experienced by another. Reframes derive from the concept of frames, the psychological limits placed on elements to be considered as part of the context of any human interaction. The term frame originated from the idea of a picture frame representing the limits of information available to an observer of a picture (Bateson, 1972/1987, p. 186). Frames are a useful analogy to understanding how people make sense of human interactions. Goffman (1974, p. 345) explains:

> Thus far, the individual considered is someone who has perceptions, frame-accurate as one possibility, deceived, deluded, or illusionary as the other; he also takes action, both verbal and physical, on the basis of these perceptions. And it has been argued that the individual's framing of activity establishes its meaningfulness for him.
> Frame, however, organizes more than meaning; it also organizes involvement. During any spate of activity, participants will ordinarily not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also (in some degree) become spontaneously engrossed, caught up, enthralled.
> All frames involve expectations of a normative kind as to how deeply and fully the individual is to be carried into the activity organized by the frames. Of course, frames differ quite widely in the involvement prescribed for participants sustaining them. Some, like traffic systems, are properly sustained as an off-and-on focus of attention whose claim upon the participant is deep only when there is sudden trouble to avoid. Other frames, like that in which sexual intercourse is understood, prescribe involvement that is literally and figuratively embracing. In

> all cases, however, understood limits will be established. a definition concerning what is insufficient involvement and what is too much.

Goffman goes on to argue that frames used to make sense of situations that are not adequately explained by the information allowed within the frame cease to be effective and need to be replaced by frames that allow new sets of information to be considered as the context of interaction (1974, p. 347).

If a person's perception of reality is considered subjective, with more than one possible interpretation of events, and the choices of interpretation are considered to be limited by knowledge gained from and by society, then reframing is a powerful communication tactic to lead an individual or group to accepting an interpretation considered to be more useful by the reframer. Reframing is used in psychotherapy to replace a person's worldview with a new, healthier worldview that allows the client to function in their socially constructed reality (Watzlawick, 1996). Reframing does not have to be as extensive as replacing world-view. Reframing could be as simple as suggesting to an observer or participant a different interpretation of motive for an actor in an interaction Reframing during the assembly can unite the group with a clearer common identity, as exemplified by the minister interpreting the unpleasant noise of a crying child to mean something positive for the group, based on their agreed upon value of family.

I could not help but compare the reaction of the preacher at Levy to that of another preacher in a similar situation at another congregation. In that event, a young mother with a new baby was proudly sitting close to the front of the auditorium. (This place had been her usual seat before she had her baby.) The baby began to cry. The sound distracted the *preacher*. He stopped in the middle of his lesson, looked down at

the young mother who was desperately attempting to quiet the baby, and said "we have an attended nursery. It is for babies, so they don't disrupt our worship." He then stood and stared at her until she gathered her baby, purse, and diaper bag, and walked, red-faced, out of the auditorium. I interpreted this event to mean that children were not welcome in the assembly of that congregation. At the time, we had three small children. Soon after this event my family moved to another congregation that seemed to be friendlier towards families.

Another example of re-framing (offering a new way of interpreting events within the story) was witnessed at Levy. A new family, consisting of a mother and her two young sons, had started attending. The mother had little background in any kind of formal religion. She chose a seat on the next to the front row in section 5, next to the middle aisle. On this Sunday her boys, about 5 and 6 years of age, sat in front of her, on the very front row. This violated the convention of leaving the front row of each section empty. During the *Lord's Supper* the boys were scuffling and talking together, creating a distraction by their noise, movement, and location. The boys were still moving and talking in unacceptable ways later in the assembly when the *preacher* began his introductory comments to his lesson. After greeting the congregation, and introducing a new family that had placed membership, the preacher called out the boys' names. When the two boys on the front row looked up, the preacher asked them to come up on the stage with him. They bounced up onto the stage, and the preacher had them stand on each side of him, facing the audience. He placed a hand on each boy's shoulder, and introduced them to the congregation as newcomers to Levy. He said, "aren't these good looking young men? We sure are blessed to have boys like this at Levy. I think these boys may

be *preachers* some day. I would like for you (speaking to the congregation) to start praying for these boys, that God will bless them and use them in His service." He went on to commend their mother for bringing them to church. After the boys sat back down, they sat up and focused on the preacher. They still whispered together, but they were not the distraction they had been. The distracting actions of newcomers to Levy were re-framed in the congregation from nuisance to opportunity.

These examples illustrate the ways in which stories are created among the group. They are created explicitly through statements of the purpose of the group, through lessons explaining parts of the story, and implicitly through actions in accord with the story, use of terms supporting the story, and through re-frames of interpretations of events into accord with the story.

Chapter Six:

Nonverbal Elements

The majority of perceived meaning in interpersonal relations comes from nonverbal communication (Burgoon, 1994, pp. 234-235; Knapp, 1978, p. 30). A complete search for the elements of communication used in the assembly of the group to create and maintain identity has to consider nonverbal elements. This chapter provides descriptions of observations to answer the research question: "How do nonverbal communication elements work to construct and maintain identity."

This chapter will categorize the observed elements of nonverbal communication in the assembly into eight categories: kinesics, vocalics, physical appearance, haptics, proxemics, chronemics, artifacts, and environmental features. These categories are similar to systems of classification used by other researchers to sort and examine components of nonverbal human interactions (Burgoon, 1994; Goffman, 1959, p. 24; Knapp, 1980; Mehrabian, 1972; Ruesch & Kees, 1956/1970; Weitz, 1974). My choice of terminology for the classification system is closest to those used by Burgoon (1994). Burgoon's classification system identified seven classes of nonverbal signals, which could be seen as codes. I will depart from Burgoon's classification by adding the category of environmental factors. This is consistent with Knapp's use of a category of environmental factors. Knapp's classification system of nonverbal behaviors also listed seven classes: kinesics, physical characteristics, touching behavior, paralanguage, proxemics, artifacts, and environmental factors (1980, pp. 4-11). The class touching behaviors is consistent with the term haptics. The class paralanguage is consistent with the term vocalics. The nonverbal behavior of proxemics (the use of space and distance)

will be covered after a short explanation of environmental factors, due to the close relationship between the physical environment of the auditorium and the choice of seating behaviors that are the majority of the observations recorded under the heading of proxemics.

Kinesics

Kinesics is a class of nonverbal communicative behaviors comprised of body movements. Gestures, posture, facial expressions, and other similar movements of the body are included in this category. Kinesic behaviors identify members as part of the group or outsiders in ways similar to that seen with terms. The most noticeable way that kinesic behaviors communicate identity is when someone violates an unwritten rule of behavior. This works very similar to using terms that are acceptable in many religious situations, but not in the Church of Christ. Just as using the term "sanctuary" for the auditorium marks someone as an outsider, some commonly accepted religious movements mark their user as "not one of us."

Gestures, meaningful movements of the hands and arms, are not commonly used by the members during the assembly. The leaders in the ritual of worship will use some gestures. The *preacher* is expected to use the gestures appropriate for a public speaker. Sometimes the man making announcements will use a sweeping arm gesture to emphasize that all of the audience in included in the announcement. Other times he might point or nod his head in the general direction of a group that is specifically being targeted by an announcement. The *songleader* normally will use one arm to beat the time to the song. Sometimes a *songleader* will lead a children's song that has associated hand motions. The children and a few of the adults will use the hand motions with the song.

The members of the Churches of Christ generally do not use expressive gestures during the assembly, with the exception of an accepted form of prayer gesture.

During prayers many members fold their hands together in a prayerful gesture common in many Christian faith communities. The right and left hands are placed together, palms touching, fingers straight and pointed up. In the assemblies of Churches of Christ this common hand gesture denoting reverence and supplication is very understated. The clasped hands are held close to the chest if standing for a prayer. When seated, the clasped hands are often held close to the lap, elbows on legs, body bent forward. For many members, the fingers are not pointed, but inter-twined and folded down against the backs of the hands. Most members make some version of this gesture during a prayer, but it is not a strong indicator of in-groupness. Attendees who do not form a prayerful gesture with their hands during the prayers are not particularly noticed. Most members either lean forward during a prayer (if seated) or bow their head (if standing). But some members hold their head up straight and merely close their eyes. It is considered irreverent to look around during a prayer. This unwritten rule about looking at fellow members during prayers complicated these observations, but may account for the rather mild identity feature of hand gestures during prayers.

Both Westlink and Levy had several examples of people using unacceptable gestures during prayers. It is common to have visitors to the assembly from other faith communities. Their common worship behaviors can mark them as outsiders. The "lifting up holy hands" is a phrase used in some songs. The practice is not common in the Churches of Christ, and is not regularly seen at either Westlink or Levy.

Members notice when someone raises a hand or hands during a prayer or song.

Whether one hand raised high, fist clenched or hand open and palm forward, or both hands raised above the head, elbows slightly bent, palms either facing forward or inward; any form of hand raising marks someone as an outsider. The reaction is different depending on whether the offending person is considered a visitor from another faith, or a member of the Churches of Christ from another congregation. A visitor from another faith is noticed, but seldom corrected. They eventually become uncomfortable with being the only one raising hands, and either conform or go elsewhere. A member from another congregation raising hands would be considered progressive, and a conservative member would probably find the opportunity outside of the assembly to engage in debate concerning the appropriateness of this action.

The act of raising hands marks someone as an outsider. Since this has become one of the accepted practices in some progressive congregations of the Churches of Christ, the reaction to a member beginning to raise hands would be different than to a visitor from another faith or another congregation. Other congregations of the Churches of Christ in both the Wichita area and the Little Rock area had experiences with members beginning to raise hands. Some of the members at Levy and at Westlink approached their elders desiring a policy prohibiting the raising of hands during prayer or songs. The raising of hands by a member would represent a different view of worship than what the concerned members found acceptable. Both groups of elders declined to make a ruling on hand raising. This official refusal to disapprove hand raising has not resulted in any members consistently raising their hands (yet).

The various interpretations of the same action indicate the role context plays in determining the meaning of nonverbal signals. The interpretation of an offending visitor

from another faith is a mild "that person has not been taught correctly." The interpretation from a member of another congregation of the Churches of Christ is "that person believes differently from us." In the first instance, the fault lies with the offender's background. In the second, the fault is with the offender's choice of belief. The second is more of a threat, so the response is more likely to be an active attempt to correct the offender. Now, this corrective action will probably be taken by someone without any official standing in the group. Self appointed caretakers of the community's beliefs abound in the Churches of Christ, causing frequent problems for the official leadership of the congregation.

The action of an accepted member of the group who begins to raise hands is responded to more forcefully. Some congregations of the Churches of Christ have actually split over issues such as this. The debate will rage over the appropriateness of raising hands. The real issue is over the difference in belief represented by the raising of hands. For a member to begin this action, knowing that it is not done, is a challenge to the system of belief of the group. These challenges are met quickly. This reaction to a mild gesture of individual faith shows the communicative power of nonverbal signals as a statement of identity with the group.

Other kinesic actions the focus group perceived to mark a person as an outsider were kneeling during the prayer, making the sign of the cross, and standing for a response. All of these actions would indicate that the person was from another faith community.

The focus group also identified some kinesic actions that would indicate the person might be a member of another congregation of the Churches of Christ, but new to

their congregation. The most common action they identified was for a visitor to sit while the congregation stood during the *singing*. The focus group determined that the common meaning that members of their congregation take from the sitting behavior of a newcomer is that the sitter "must be a traditional Church of Christ member who disapproves of us." (The focus group members' interpretations of several outsider actions were that the outsider was critical of them. This apparent suspicion possibly stems from the verbal criticism directed at members of the group due to their choices to be different from basic Church of Christ assembly behaviors such as a cappella singing and allowing only men to speak during the assembly.)

The focus group notice of nonverbal behaviors that marked someone as an outsider to the congregation, although an insider to the Churches of Christ, led me to notice similar actions at Levy. The non-Levy, possible Church of Christ actions are clapping during songs, replacing the communion cup into the tray after sipping, and placing the completed attendance card in the offering tray as it passed. The last two actions are common in many congregations of the Churches of Christ, including at Westlink. At Levy they are not to be done.

I asked several Levy members what actions on the part of people attending the Levy assembly might mark them as an outsider. The older, long time members at Levy only identified *clapping* during songs. Several of the young couples, members at Levy less than a year, clearly and emphatically responded about the way they felt to be an outsider when they realized that no one else was replacing the communion cup or placing the attendance card in the plate. These are mild violations that communicate newcomer. The clapping during songs was an insider behavior with the focus group members, but

identified by all the Levy members (the ones I asked) as indicating a non-Levy member of the Churches of Christ. Clapping during songs carries a similar message as to lifting up hands. Congregations of the Churches of Christ considered *progressive* frequently clap time during songs (as do the members of the congregation of the focus group members). Clapping during songs at Levy carries a message of a non-traditional (or even anti-traditional) attitude towards the established worship ritual of the Churches of Christ.

I do not want to overstate the message perceived by clapping or raising hands. Both the focus group and selected Levy members identified these actions as important ways in which a person demonstrated by their behavior that they were not "of us," even though the appropriate insider behavior was exactly opposite between the two congregations represented.

The most common movements on the part of the audience consist of standing or sitting for songs and prayers. Unlike other religious services I have attended, in the Churches of Christ the *song leader* or *prayer leader* indicates whether the congregation should stand or sit for a song or prayer. A newcomer can easily fit in by responding to the signs from the leader or just following the actions of the group. Although it is common to stand for part of the *song service* and for the *closing prayer*, the only part of the ritual where standing is required is the *invitation song*. This is the one time in the assembly where the congregation is trained to stand even if they are not told to do so.

Facial Expressions

Acceptable facial expressions during the assembly have changed during my lifetime in the Churches of Christ. When I was a child, it was uncommon for anyone to smile during the assembly, unless the *preacher* told an amusing story. The *preacher*,

song leader, *prayer leaders*, *communion servers*, and *ushers* all wore solemn faces. I vividly remember the first preacher I ever saw smile during a sermon. In the Westlink and Levy congregations, the facial expression during the assembly varies considerably. Many of the older members still wear a solemn, church face during the assembly. As soon as the last *amen* after the *closing prayer* is said, they begin to smile and greet people with a happy face. Most of the members wear more natural facial expressions. The *song leader* and the *preacher* are now expected to smile more than frown. The *prayer leaders* may be solemn, or start with a smile at the audience before they begin to pray. During most of the assembly the majority of members smile. The exceptions are during the prayers, during the Lord's Supper, and toward the end of the sermon. At these times, the audience wears a solemn face, not quiet a frown, but a serious expression. To smile during these times indicates that the person is not taking the ritual activity seriously or reverently.

Vocalics

Vocalics are vocal features of speech other than the words. This includes the volume of the voice, the pitch, rate, inflection, and pauses. Although these items are constantly adding meaning to the spoken word, I observed little evidence of vocalics working in ways that related to identity. This is probably due more to my lack of perception of the vocal cues than to the absence of vocal cues relating to identity creation and maintenance. I have observed in small group settings at Levy and at Westlink that the members can listen to a tape recording of a sermon and suggest whether the speaker is from the Church of Christ, a Southern Baptist, or a Pentecostal by the vocal cues.

According to Communication Accommodation Theory, members of the group

will begin to speak in ways similar to the perceived style that is the norm of the group (convergence), as long as they seek to be identified with the group (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Compared to sermons observed by ministers in other religious groups, Church of Christ preachers are more likely to use a soft volume for emphasis than a loud volume. They are more likely to pause after making an important point rather than before. Their average speech rate will be faster than a Southern Baptist's, but slower than a Pentecostal's. They are more natural sounding (less formal) than an Episcopalian or Presbyterian, but much less dramatic than a Pentecostal, or even a Baptist. The style of the *prayer leaders* probably reflects the style of the *minister*, but I do not have enough data to compare to support this supposition.

The one area where vocalics obviously differentiate between the in-group and out-group is in the volume of voice allowed when a member speaks to another member during the assembly. A very quiet whisper is acceptable although not desirable during the assembly. This is most allowable during the sermon, and least allowable during a prayer (when the expectation is for complete silence). Violations of this rule are seen with young children, teenagers sitting without their parents, and visitors with little or no prior experience of worship. Children who violate this rule are to be hushed, and then taken out of the auditorium if they do not promptly respond to being hushed. The approach to teenagers who violate the rules (forced convergence) is described under Westlink Seating Behaviors later in this chapter. *Visitors* who speak in a normal voice do not receive the same consideration as they would when violating a term rule or a gesture rule. At both Westlink and Levy, I witnessed a newcomer being reprimanded during the course of the service when a member sitting close by leaned over and quietly whispered

something to the *visitor* who had been speaking in a normal voice. I assume they were politely told they needed to whisper, since the result was that they began to whisper, and they continued to attend the services.

Physical Appearance

Nonverbal communication cues included in the class of physical appearance include clothing, hairstyle, cosmetics, fragrances, jewelry, accessories, and the like. In this area, similar to the explanation under facial expressions, both Levy and Westlink differ considerably from the norm of congregations of my childhood. Some congregations of the Churches of Christ still place much emphasis upon appropriate dress for attending the assemblies. Some congregations actually have explicit rules concerning allowable clothing styles.

When I questioned the focus group about acceptable ways to dress for the assembly, the resulting discussion surprised the group members. The focus group initially agreed that their congregation did not have expectations of dress. They proudly contrasted their congregation's attitude toward dress with the attitude they had experienced at other congregations of the Churches of Christ. Traditional congregations expect more formal clothing to be worn while attending the Sunday morning assembly. Men in leadership positions are expected to wear a suit and tie. All men are expected to wear at least a dress shirt and a tie. The congregation in which I was reared had an explicit dress policy. Men without a coat and tie were not allowed to lead in the assembly (not even to pass the communion trays.) Women were expected to wear a dress. Pants were not acceptable for women, even on a Sunday evening or Wednesday evening, when the dress code for men was less formal.

The members of the focus group reported similar experiences with the congregations where they were reared. The focus group members were proud of the fact that members of their congregation dressed casually for the Sunday morning assembly. They reported that the people who stand out from the group are the ones who dress more formally. A suit and tie for a man, or a dress for a woman, marked the person as an outsider. When I asked about limits for informal dress, the initial response from the group was that it did not matter at their congregation. Then one member reported being disturbed the previous Sunday morning when one of the teenagers wore shorts to the assembly (even though it was the middle of the summer in Little Rock). Another member responded, "yes, I was bothered by that also, but her mother gave her a good talking to about it." The first member replied, " Oh no, there were TWO of them . . . the one I saw was a young man!" The discussion that followed this exchange led the group to conclude that they had the same attitudes toward dress as the traditional congregations. Only the range of allowed dress was different. This realization was unpleasant to the focus group. I believe these expectations of dress, and the meanings drawn from violations of expectations, are similar across groups. The difference is in the particular type of dress expected. When the focus group members considered their feelings about someone wearing shorts to the assembly, they felt like the offending member was not taking the assembly seriously or showing appropriate respect for God. This interpretation of some dress being too casual was the same standard that they grew up with in traditional churches.

At Levy, the *minister* delivering the sermon is expected to wear at least a tie, and usually a coat and tie. Older members at both Levy and Westlink dress formally.

Women wear a dress or a skirt and blouse. Men wear a suit or a coat and tie. Younger members (under 40) dress more casually. The women may wear a dress, or skirt and blouse, or a pant-suit. Dress shirts without a tie are common for men, especially during summer months. Polo style shirts are also common during summer months. Men usually wear dress slacks during winter months and khaki slacks or casual slacks during summer months. The teenage boys are the most casual dressers. They usually wear jeans all year. During cold weather they might wear a sweater or a casual shirt. During warm weather they most often wear a T-shirt. The teenage girls usually dress very formally. The contrast between the boys and girls by dress is very noticeable when they sit together as a group (formal verses informal as much as gender specific clothing).

Artifacts

Artifacts are the manipulable objects that have communication value. Artifacts observed in the Westlink and Levy assemblies were song books, Bibles, attendance cards (visitor and member), communion trays, offering plate (Westlink) or basket (Levy), and note paper (Westlink). These items were commonly available to everyone. In addition, individuals bring with them personal objects such as Bibles, notepads, children's books and toys, and even food and drink. The fact of the handout (Westlink) or bulletin (Levy) was also an artifact, although the content would be considered verbal communication.

The only artifact identified as meaningful by the focus groups was the song books. A member of the Churches of Christ can visit a new congregation, pick up the song book, and tell where that congregation stands on the continuum from *Traditional* to *Middle of the Road* to *Progressive*. One of the issues that separate *Traditional* from *Progressives* is the type of songs to be sung in the assembly. *Traditionals* prefer hymns

and older songs. (Some of the *progressive* members disparagingly claim that a song has to be at least a hundred years old before it is acceptable to the *Traditionalists.*) The *Progressives* prefer new songs. Looking at a song book indicates what kind of songs the congregation sings. Looking at the state of the song book indicates the importance of the song service to the congregation. An old, worn song book will probably be accompanied by a less than exciting song service. A new worn song book indicates that the song service is very important, a mark of *Progressive* and *Middle of the Road* congregations. A new, mint condition song book indicates that the congregation probably is using some kind of projection system to display the songs during the assembly, common in progressive congregations and in some *Middle of the Road* congregations such as Levy.

Westlink liked to use both old and new songs. They used their song books. During the six years that I was associated with Westlink, they twice upgraded to newer song books with a larger selection of songs. Levy used one of the newest song books with a very large selection of songs. I heard one of the members angrily complain about Levy using the projection system during the song service when they had such wonderful modern song books.

The artifact of song books carried an identity message concerning the group that could be understood by any long time member of the Churches of Christ. The occasion of purchasing new song books can be traumatic for the congregation. They may lose the comfort of knowing the numbers or pages of their favorite songs. They may even end up with a book that omits some of their favorite songs. A large number of new songs in the song book can disturb the *Traditionalists*, threatening their perception of the identity of the congregation. On the other side, not enough new songs in the new song book

threatens the *Progressives* perception of the identity of the congregation.

Recently, while on vacation, I attended a congregation of the Churches of Christ in another state. I had never been to that town before, and I did not even know there was a congregation of the Churches of Christ in that community until I saw the building on the side of the road. I was not as comfortable walking into a strange congregation as I once would have been, because of the changes in the Churches of Christ in the last decade. The service was about to start as we entered. It was a smaller congregation, only about 60 people were there, until my family entered. We quietly moved to a pew (towards the front of the auditorium, since all of the pews in the back half of the auditorium were full). As the service began, I picked up one of the song books from the pew rack. It was an older edition of Songs of the Church. This was the song book of choice for the *progressive* congregations of the Churches of Christ during the decade of the 1980's. I began to suspect that this was a *moderate* congregation, even though it was a small congregation and located in a small town, two characteristics associated with *traditional* congregations.

The clincher was the Bible in the song book rack. Many congregations place Bibles in each pew, so this was not unusual or particularly meaningful to me as to my interpretation of the identity of this congregation. The Bibles used by congregations as pew Bibles are usually either a King James Version or New King James Version (used by *Traditional* congregations) or a New International Version (commonly used by *Progressive* congregations and many *Mainstream* congregations). The pew Bible for this congregation was a New American Standard. This version was commonly used by *Progressive* type congregations in the 1970's (although the differences between

congregations in the 1970's were too minor to allow for clear distinctions of *Progressive* or *Traditional*). I was reassured by the combination of song book and Bible that I was attending a *Mainstream* congregation. At this point in my thought process, I realized the interpretations I was making solely from these two artifacts.

Another set of artifacts that might be seen in a congregation could be classified as food and drink. Food and drink are allowable only for select ages. Infants are allowed drink in the form of a bottle or a sipping cup. Infants and small children are allowed food, usually in the form of crackers or dry cereal. The food of choice for small children at Westlink was dry Cheerios in a zip lock bag. The Cheerios were used to keep the child occupied and happy during the service. Dry crackers seem to predominate at Levy. Section 8, where the couples with small children sit, is called *cracker row* by some members at Levy because of the frequency of children munching on crackers during the assembly. (It is hard to cry with a mouth full of cracker.) Any form of food or drink for older children or adults is considered improper in the Sunday morning assembly. (All of the adult Bible classes, except for the auditorium, serve coffee at the beginning of class. A member knows better than to take their cup of coffee into the auditorium for the worship assembly.)

Haptics

The category of haptics includes nonverbal behaviors that communicate through touch. The haptic behaviors observed at Westlink and Levy were hand shakes, shoulder touches, and hugs. The hand shake is the common greeting among men at both Westlink and Levy (and in most Churches of Christ). Greeters stand at the doors to the auditorium at Westlink and at Levy to greet and shake hands with everyone who comes into the

auditorium. The elders, deacons, and ministers circulate among the attendees before the service shaking hands and greeting members and meeting visitors. After the service concludes, the members move into the aisles and greet one another and shake hands as they leave. Shoulder touches are a common way to get someone's attention, both during the assembly and before and after the assembly. Hugs are not common at either congregation. Hugs are most often exchanged by women, usually when they have not seen each other for an extended period of time. Hugs are common after a response for prayers or baptism. After the service concludes, many of the members move to the front of the auditorium and hug the person who has responded. The hugs show the importance of this event. A mere handshake is not sufficient. The touching behavior seems to represent a ritual action that reaffirms the community relationship on a weekly basis.

Chronemics

Chronemics is a classification of nonverbal messages associated with the use of time. An example of an identifiable characteristic of subgroups at Levy is the relationship between the time of arrival at the building and the start time of the service. The observations of these differences were outside the assembly time due to the large percentage of the members who attend the Sunday morning Bible classes each week before the assembly. The older members (over age 65) tend to arrive about 10 minutes early. They spend the time visiting quietly with each other before class starts. The young families (those with small children) tend to arrive about 10 minutes late. They take their children to class then rush in to their own class. The teachers in classes composed of young families have learned to make announcements and small talk for the first ten minutes of class until the majority of the members arrive. After the assembly time is

over, the older members are among the first to leave. The younger families stay longer. The last to leave most Sunday mornings is the sub-group of young couples. They stay and visit with each other until the custodian turns off the lights. The young couples usually go eat lunch together at a restaurant or the home of one of the couples.

Another chronemic behavior was observed at Westlink. A relationship appeared to exist between the omission of the Welcome segment and the duration of the exit segment at the end of the assembly. When the two minute welcome segment was included in the normal ritual, the exit segment lasted about 30 minutes. When the Welcome was omitted, the exit segment only lasted about 20 minutes. This indicates a multivariate relation between the elements of communication in the assembly. In the next chapter I will propose that the various elements work together in a system, where a change in one will affect others. This relation between an early segment of ritual and the later interpersonal greeting segment of exit supports the idea of a system.

Environmental Factors

Wasserman (1983), p. 83) believes that the arrangement of space in the auditorium is important to building a sense of community during the assembly: "Seating patterns which allow worshippers to look at each other, to sit close together, to gather around the table as a family, all enhance a congregation's sense of relationship with one another." The semi-circular arrangement of the pews at both Westlink and Levy allows for a greater visibility of other members. This physical arrangement emphasizes the role of the members to other members as well as the role of any person performing on the front stage.

Proxemics

Proxemics are a class of nonverbal signals relating to the use of space and distance. The nonverbal communication behavior that seems most relevant to identity is the seating behaviors of the members and visitors during the assembly. Proximity is associated with liking or affiliation (Burgoon, 1994; Knapp, 1978; Mehrabian, 1976; 1981). Observations of seating behaviors give indications of the subgroups within the congregation, the interpersonal relationships within the congregation, and even the degree of affiliation towards the congregation by individuals and family units. All of these behaviors have implications for the ways people identify with the group and subgroups.

Seating Behavior. In both congregations observed (and in most Churches of Christ), it is traditional for the front pew in each section to remain empty during the assembly. At the end of the *sermon* an *invitation* is given. The *minister* closes the sermon with a statement that any who wish to respond to the sermon, confess Christ, be baptized, place membership, ask for prayers, or state a need, may come forward while the congregation stands and sings an *invitation song*. (See a fuller description of the invitation and its place in the ritual performance of the assembly in chapter 4, and under *invitation* in the glossary in Appendix C.) The people that choose to *come forward* sit on the front pews. On average, one person comes forward about every other Sunday.

Seating preferences are relatively stable. Most of the members sit in the same pew every week. This is obvious to most members. On a Sunday morning members look around and notice who is not there because they are not in their regular seat. The deacons who organize the men who serve during the assembly count on people sitting in the same spot each week, so they can be located easily. One family at Westlink had been sitting in

the same pew for over 20 years. They were slightly offended one morning when they found a plaque on their pew with their name on it.

Visitors to the assemblies, not knowing the territories staked out by the members, usually seat themselves in a pew normally used by one of the members. When this happens, the member, coming into the auditorium and finding their normal seat taken, tends to sit in the closest empty pew to their normal space. This can cause a ripple of disruption as several families are slightly relocated to seats different than normal. Some members' sense of territory is so strong that they inform the visitor of their intrusion. One of the members of the focus group reported on a visit to Levy several years ago, when a lady informed her that she was in the lady's seat, and had to move. On the occasion of my first Sunday at Levy, my wife and I chose a seat next to the center aisle, three rows from the back of the auditorium (section 4). A man sitting across the aisle introduced himself to us, and warned us that we were sitting in another family's normal pew. We offered to move, and he encouraged us to stay where we were. Shortly before the start of the worship service, an older couple sat down in the pew behind us. The lady leaned over the pew, introduced herself to my wife and me, and informed us that we were sitting in their pew. We offered to leave, and she replied "It is alright today, but next week you need to find another seat."

This stability over time of seating preferences allows observations of groupings by the proximity of people to others with like characteristics. Social groupings within the congregation can be identified by seating clusters. The focus group members reported on the stability of seating behaviors at their congregation. All of the members of the focus group try to sit in the same seats, or at the very least in the same area each week. When

asked why they originally chose that area, the group response was that they chose to sit with friends or family members who had already formed the habit of sitting in that area. This indicates that a stronger affiliation for certain people or groups of people can be interpreted by observing patterns of seating behavior.

Westlink Seating Behaviors. The front, right, center section of pews (section 3 in Figure 1) is usually occupied by the youth group. The youth group is composed of young people from about 12 years of age to about 19. The junior high age youth sit on the front two rows of the section (one row behind the "front row"). The high school age sit on the next two rows, and the college age sit on the fifth row back, directly behind the high school youth. Most of the youth sit in this section during every assembly. The youth who do not sit with the group are considered "fringe" kids (at least by the *Youth Minster* and the youth group leaders). They are not quite a part of the group. The youth that do not sit with the group usually do not participate in youth activities (trips to other congregations for youth fellowships, parties at member's homes, devotionals in the park). When a young person who has been sitting with the youth group begins to sit elsewhere in the auditorium, it is a cause for concern. Some of the leaders among the youth soon approach the person who has distanced self from the group, and invite him or her back. The youth leaders ask if there is a problem. The leaders will encourage others from the group to invite the straying member back into proximity with the group. The sitting together establishes an identity component of the congregation. The youth see themselves as a part of the congregation and as a part of the youth group. A member may view self as not a part of the group, but as a part of the congregation. Similarly, guests of the youth may come to see themselves as a part of the youth group, before they see

themselves as a part of the congregation. Sitting with the group communicates involvement with the group.

Just as the youth group is a sub-group within the group Westlink, there are sub-groups within the youth group (junior high, senior high, girls, boys). The junior high age youth demonstrate additional nonverbal behaviors indicating involvement with the sub-group of junior high. They tend to whisper and pass notes during the assembly, heads down, shoulders rounded, focused on the events of their row. The adult members of the congregation view activity of this type as unacceptable behavior. About once every three months, the behavior of the junior high youth becomes so obvious to adults in the congregation, and perceived as disruptive to the assembly, that one or more parents of junior high age youth take action to bring the youth in line with congregational expectations of behavior. This action usually consists of the adult getting up from their seat during the assembly and moving to the section where the youth are sitting. At this point, some parents move into the section and sit in the middle of the youth most obviously being distracting. (Usually the parent sits by his or her child. It is considered the parent's responsibility to enforce the congregation's expectations of appropriate behavior during the assemblies). Sometimes the parent removes his or her child from the group by tapping the child on the shoulder, or getting the attention of another child close to his or her's if the offending child is too far from the aisle (which seems to be the case most of the time). The offending child has to stand to make their way to the aisle, join his or her parent, and return to the parent's normal seat. This activity is very visible to the majority of the congregation, since it occurs during the assembly, most often during the sermon, while the congregation is seated, and because the youth are sitting at the front of

the auditorium. The offending child is very embarrassed. The other members of the group tend to sit up straight and behave according to the congregation's expectations for the rest of the assembly. Those children whose parents witnessed the removal activity can expect to be interrogated sometime shortly after the close of the assembly as to their involvement in the disruption. Frequently the parents, who believe their children were involved in a disruption during the service, will require their child to sit with the family unit for a few Sundays until they believe the child has learned the behavior expected during the assembly. This is a good example of the socialization process that communicates group norms to members of the group.

The other members of the youth group (high school and college age) exhibit behaviors that appear to be more focused on the activities of the assembly. They face forward. Many take notes on the lesson. They respond to the cues that segment the ritual actions (such as stand and sing, bow in prayer, greet visitors, etc.). Junior high age seems to be the time when the final socialization process occurs for proper behavior during the assembly. It is interesting that this process is conducted at the front of the auditorium in full view of the rest of the congregation.

The only other group within the congregation that can be observed by their sitting in close proximity to each other are the young families. These people have children younger than 12 years of age. Traditionally, families with small children (3 years and under) sit on the back row. This eases the process of removing a disruptive child from the service. During the period of these observations, about half of the young families attending on a given Sunday sit on the back pews. The other half sits in the front, left, middle section, across the middle aisle from the youth group. The age of the children is

not the deciding factor in who sits where. Instead, it is the case that the families that sit up front are more involved with the work and the life of the congregation outside of the assemblies than the families that sit in the back. Within the assemblies, the men from these front families are more likely to perform a public role (prayer leader, song leader, communion server, etc.). This common characteristic, level of involvement, appears to hold true across the auditorium. The more involved a person is in the congregation's life, the closer to the front center of the auditorium they sit. Mehrabian (1981, p. 126) stated that distance was related to social interaction.

Affiliation is related to proximity. The closer people sit to each other, the more they tend to like each other. The closeness in proximity may promote a closeness in interaction, or the closeness in proximity may be a result of the closeness in interaction, or they may even be bi-directional in causality. According to Berger (1967, pp. 9ff), the construction of reality (or world-building) is a two-way process. It is like a conversation, affecting and being affected by the interaction. Thus, the people who want to be more involved with the congregation should sit towards the middle. The people who sit towards the side walls will tend to become less involved in the congregation. This is very noticeable with visitors to the assemblies. They prefer to sit at the back or the sides.

The result is not only a physical and emotional/psychological distancing from the heart of the congregation, but they also end up sitting with the least involved members who are unlikely to seek to interact with the visitors. To promote more interaction with visitors, the congregation should encourage them to sit in the middle of the auditorium.

Seating Behaviors at Levy. Seating behaviors at Levy are similar to those at Westlink in that 1) distinct groupings are observable, and 2) there seems to be a

correlation between proximity to the front and center of the auditorium and involvement in the activities of the congregation.

The physical arrangement of the auditorium at Levy is similar to Westlink in the semi-circular arrangement. Westlink has four sections of pews arranged in a 1/3 of a pie shape (see figure 1). Levy has eight sections of pews arranged in a full 180 degrees, a 1/2 pie shape (see figure 2). Levy also has a balcony section that is seldom used.

Groupings by age are much more pronounced at Levy than at Westlink. This is probably due in part to some of the physical features of the building and grounds. The auditorium may be entered by one of four doors. Two doors are at the back of the auditorium, and two at the front (see floor plan, figure 2). Two small foyers are located at the back of the auditorium, at each door. These foyers are connected by a short hallway. The south foyer has doors opening out onto the parking lot where the handicap spaces are located. There is a covered area for cars to pull up to the door and drop off passengers. Many of the elderly members enter the building through this door. The actual entrance into the auditorium from this foyer is behind section 3. It is not surprising that most of the elderly members sit in sections 2, 3, and 4.

Another grouping by age that seems to be related to the design of the building is seen in the seating preferences of the families with small children. The door at the front of the auditorium, on the north side, leads to most of the classrooms. Over half of the members enter the auditorium through this door. The section closest to those doors (section 8) is used by a group composed almost exclusively of families with small children. The nurseries available to families during the worship service are accessed through those doors. Families with children small enough to need to be taken out of the auditorium during the service are most likely to sit closest to their exit so as to cause the

least disruption (similar to the families on the back row at Westlink). These north front doors are also the access to the children's Bible Hour (see description of exit in chapter five).

These groupings by age and family composition can be seen clearly as you look clockwise around the auditorium from the north door. Young families with small children are located in section 8. In section 7, young families with preschoolers and elementary age children. In section 6, at the front is the youth group, junior high closest to the front, with the senior high behind them. Parents of the youth tend to sit towards the rear of this section, and in section 5. Sections 4 & 5 have a high concentration of couples who have launched their children (college age and young adult). At the rear of section 5 are the singles who are middle aged and divorced. The singles and the youth group are the most homogeneous groups to be recognized by seating behaviors. The other groups' seating behaviors are predominantly one of age and/or family type grouping, with a mixture of other people included in the section.

Sections 4 & 5 (with the exception of the singles on two rows at the back of section 5) are the most diverse. Older/younger, single/married/widowed, and several multi-generation family units. One family is illustrative of these multi-generation units. This family sits in section 5, rows 5 & 6, every week. The patriarch, his daughter and son-in-law, their daughter and son-in-law, and grandchildren as young as preschool, the uncle (the patriarch's son) and his son and daughter-in-law, and the patriarch's grandson (the nephew of the son and daughter that sit in this section) with his wife and 3 elementary age children, for a total of 16 people from four generations. Several multi-generation units sit together in the auditorium, most within these two sections.

The stability of seating behaviors at Levy is very noticeable. After I had written the preceding paragraph about the exemplar multi-generation family, I noticed the patriarch sitting at the back of section 3 one Sunday morning. This change in seating, especially towards the back and side of the auditorium caused me some concern. I walked over to the patriarch and began to visit with him. I noticed that he was sitting close to one of our older female members. I suspected that there was some kind of romantic relationship developing, partly because they were sitting together, but largely due to the degree of movement across the auditorium by the patriarch in his seating behavior. A few weeks later they announced that they were engaged. Now, they are married, and she has joined the patriarch as a part of his family grouping back in the middle of section 5.

Sections 2 & 3 are mostly composed of older members (over 50 years of age). Section 1 is another very diverse grouping. Proximity of seat choices towards the front center correlated with level of involvement in the activities of the congregation is not as obvious at Levy as Westlink, with the glaring exception of members who choose to sit in section 1. The people in section one are least likely to attend other services of the congregation, least likely to have attended the Bible classes before the worship assembly, and least likely to take an active role in the assembly (prayer leader, serving table, etc.). Few of the formal leaders of the church (elders, deacons, staff, teachers) sit in section 1. (At the time I made my initial observations, none of the leaders were sitting in this section. The increase in attendance has forced some members to relocate their regular seats, and a few ended up moving from section 2 to section 1.) Where the front row and often the second row of the other sections are empty, in section 1 the front five to seven

rows are often left empty.

The groupings by age and family type are encouraged by the design of the Sunday morning Bible classes. Children's classes are offered by age and grade. Adult classes are segregated by age and family type. There is a class for the junior high (grades 7-9), senior high (10-12), college, young families (couples with babies and preschoolers, young couples without children, and a few young single adults), families with school age children (including parents of teenagers), middle age (most of the singles and some couples whose children are grown), older middle age (couples from 45 to 65), retired (over 65), and the auditorium class (mostly over 65 but a sprinkling of other ages). When these classes dismiss, the members mingle together in the hallways leading to the auditorium. But once in the auditorium, they almost reform their class units by the way they cluster together in their seating preferences.

Changes in Seating. The stability of seating choice over time is so pronounced that a change in seating location for a family may indicate a change in their perception of relationship to the group and/or the congregation. One family noticed during the observations at Westlink seemed to reveal their affiliation with the congregation by their choice of seat. On their first Sunday to visit, they sat toward the back of the south, outer section of pews. They returned the next Sunday and sat in the same place. The next Sunday they came to Bible class, and when they moved to the auditorium for the assembly, they sat across the aisle in the south middle section toward the back of the auditorium. They continued to choose to sit in this location for several Sundays. After attending regularly for about 2 months, they entered the auditorium one Sunday and chose a seat in the south middle section (their normal section) but one row back from the

front of the auditorium (a movement forward by ten pews). At the end of service that day they stated their desire to be considered members of the congregation. From that Sunday on, their regular seat was the second pew from the front, south middle section.

A change of seating in the opposite direction was noticed at Levy. One of the *elders* always sat in the middle of section 6. One Sunday he chose a seat on the back row of section 6 (a movement of 6 rows towards the back). The next week he took the same seat on the back row. Again on the next Sunday, and that day, at the end of the assembly, another one of the *elders* stood before the congregation and read a letter of resignation from the *elder* sitting on the back row. The (now former) *elder* continued to sit on that row for a few more weeks, then moved forward several pews, and eventually returned to sitting in his usual place in the middle of section 6. His seating behavior seemed to reveal a psychological distancing of self from the center of the congregation, readjustment, and acceptance of his new position by returning to his traditional seat.

Seating choices may also indicate the degree to which a member identifies with a subgroup within the congregation. As mentioned above, the youth group at Westlink is very conscious of members who choose to sit anywhere other than with the group. At Levy, one young family was observed to begin sitting at the front of section 5 on the Sunday when they *placed membership*. They had two preschoolers and the mother was pregnant. This choice of seat at the very center of the auditorium was unusual because of the age of their children. The couple was very excited about being a part of the congregation. They began to attend the Bible classes. Their children were noisy and very active during the assembly. One or both parents would have to remove one or both of the small boys during each service. After a few months, the mother had a baby girl.

The young families in the congregation were very attentive to this family, hosting a *baby shower*, providing meals for the family while she was in the hospital and the first few days she was at home. The baby developed some severe medical problems when she was a few weeks old. The congregation prayed at each service for the little girl. Some of the other young mothers were frequently at the hospital with the mother. After the baby recovered, the family started sitting in the middle of section 6, closer to where the young families usually sit. Although they still do not sit among the other young families, their movement of regular seating halfway across the auditorium towards the younger families seem to indicate the beginning of identification with the group young families.

One of the problems facing church leaders concerns the members who slip away (Malone, 1992). Members seldom just quit the church. They tend to start missing a few times, then their attendance becomes more infrequent. Their activity with the life of the congregation decreases. Eventually they are seldom seen, although they may still claim to be associated with that congregation. The stability of seating behaviors over time may indicate when a member begins to distance themselves from the congregation. Observing the members preferred seating and any significant changes in the location of the members' regular seat may provided a physical indication of the members social identification with the group.

Formality of Assemblies at Westlink as Determined by Use of Space and Artifact

The Sunday morning assembly is more formal than the Sunday evening. On Sunday morning, the *song leader*, *prayer-leaders*, and the *preacher* speak from the pulpit area. This is a stage at the front center of the auditorium, raised about two feet above the level of the auditorium floor. A large, wooden podium occupies the center of the stage.

On Sunday evenings, the leaders of the assembly stand behind a small lectern at the front of the auditorium, on the floor level. They are physically closer to the congregation, and there is less of a barrier between them in the nature of the lectern versus the podium. This reflects the general relaxed nature of the evening assembly. The congregation does not dress as formally. The side pews are usually left empty, and everyone sits closer together. When the service is over, people tend to stand around and visit with each other for a longer period of time than on Sunday morning. The informality seems to promote social interaction. The assembly ritual is structured similarly to the morning assembly's.

Chapter 7:

Ritual as a Communication System

The verbal and nonverbal elements do not occur in isolation. They occur in the context of the *worship*, the ritual assembly repeated weekly by the group. This chapter will examine the context--the weekly ritual actions, and the ways in which meanings are perceived by the group. The question driving this chapter is: "How does the ritual of the assembly help members to construct and maintain common identities?'

Ritual Components and Group Identity

When a member of the Churches of Christ is asked to explain who they are, the explanation is more likely to consist of a description of certain elements of the worship assembly than a statement of beliefs. When a statement of beliefs is made, it is usually explained within a context of the differences between the Churches of Christ and other Christian religious groups in the practice of the worship ritual (see Childers, Foster, & Reese, 2000, pp. 131-132 for a discussion of this point, and Barnett, 1979, for an example). This characteristic of members of the Churches of Christ was illustrated by the responses of the members of the focus group. Although they had stated early in the focus group interview session that they no longer considered themselves to be *Church of Christ*, their identity as a group was still tied to their practices during the worship assembly (which they called the *praise service*). They supported their concept of being a separate group from the Churches of Christ by three distinctive features of their assembly: They occasionally used instrumental music as they sang, they had an open-mike time for individuals to speak to the congregation (which they called the *sharing time*.), and they allowed women to speak during the assembly. The instrumental music

and the women speaking are contrary to the doctrinal beliefs of the Churches of Christ. These actions are sufficient for other congregations of Churches of Christ to consider this congregation to no longer be a part of the same church. The focus group members were more emphatic about the *sharing time* as a feature that distinguished them from congregations of the Churches of Christ. The *sharing time* is an example of a difference in method (as opposed to doctrine), but it was still a major (if not the major) component of the focus groups' congregational identity. The most interesting thing to me was the use of characteristics of their weekly ritual to differentiate themselves from the larger group--Churches of Christ. I believe this shows their heritage as well as supporting my argument about the importance of the component behaviors in the weekly ritual for group identity formation and maintenance.

This emphasis upon differences is in keeping with Turner's theory of categorization (the emphasis of differences between the in-group and out-group characteristics, and the similarity of in-group characteristics) as an extension of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (Deaux, 1996; Hogg, 1992, pp. 88-99; Tajfel, 1981, pp. 254-256; Turner, 1982). The explanation of the identity of the group "Church of Christ" by a member using a description of differences in worship illustrates the importance of the worship ritual to identity perception.

The Churches of Christ traditionally describe the *worship* as consisting of five items, based upon examples of practices in the First Century Church: Singing, praying, preaching, giving, and the Lord's Supper (Barnett, 1979). The differences, most often emphasized between the Churches of Christ and others, are found in the practice of a cappella singing and the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. A strong identity

message is drawn from the comparison of the method of practice of these two components of the weekly ritual. Few modern religious groups use a cappella singing or hold a weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. These facts set the Churches of Christ apart, supporting their distinctive identity. The out-group differences are emphasized: "They don't do it our way." An in-group identification is also based on the perceived similarity between the practices in the worship assembly of *The Church* and the Churches in the first century: "Since we do it the same way they did it, we are the same church." Among other meanings being perceived during the ritual worship, the in-group/out-group message is always presented implicitly, although seldom explicitly during the assembly.

Repetitive Ritual. The weekly repetition of the ritual leads to an expectation of how things should be. When a ritual component is omitted or included in a different spot, it is usually disturbing to the members. Westlink tried to change the reliance upon tradition by changing the order of the ritual components each week. The stated purpose for a new order each week was to make the members pay more attention to the meaning of each component. Some within the leadership of the congregation viewed tradition as weakening the meaning of the individual components. Among Churches of Christ, congregations who value the traditional repetitive assembly worship ritual are referred to as *Traditional*. The congregations who believe that repetitive activities decrease the perceived meaning of the ritual are referred to as *Progressive*.

The regular reordering of components could be as simple as having the *Lord's Supper* after the *sermon* instead of before. It often would include extra songs between other components, such as three songs before the Lord's Supper instead of the usual one. During this period of Westlink's experimentation with the worship order. Scripture

readings were used extensively, in different locations within the worship. Multiple scripture readings were sometimes used, spread out the same way as songs. The members expressed dissatisfaction with certain components on a weekly basis. The weekly assemblies were often uncomfortable for the majority of the members due to the weekly change. The *preacher* frequently acknowledged this discomfort during the sermon, trying to frame it in a positive way as "stepping outside of our comfort zone." The lesson frequently presented was that we could not grow unless we stepped outside of our comfort zone.

The change in worship order did promote conscious questioning of the meaning and purpose of the traditional activities of worship. After several months of changes, the worship order settled into a new pattern that remained relatively constant for a few months, thus creating new expectations of the weekly ritual. The questioning and criticism quickly died out. A new tradition was formed, which continued with little change for several more years. So the ritual consists of both the traditional components (singing, praying, etc.) as well as the expected order in which these components are acted.

Expectation of Ritual Stability. The extent to which members rely upon the expected ritual is very visible when their expectations are violated. An example observed at Levy demonstrates this in a way that was humorous at the time, at least for the observers, although probably not for the actor.

Levy occasionally invites another *preacher* to present the sermon. This is usually used to emphasize the uniqueness of the day. On this occasion, the Sunday was set aside to emphasize evangelism. All four Sundays in the month were used to emphasize some

aspect of evangelism and missions, leading up to a special contribution on the last Sunday of the month for mission work. The first Sunday of the month was devoted to the message that evangelism is a responsibility of each member. A very well-known evangelist among Churches of Christ was invited to speak during the sermon time. This preacher had delivered thousands of sermons at hundreds of congregations over a forty-year career. He was an accomplished speaker, usually well able to handle any unusual occurrence during his part of the assembly. The song leader that morning was Jimmy[2], one of the best song leaders in the congregation. He was in particularly fine voice that day. After a rousing song service, Jimmy announced the *invitation song*, led the song before the sermon (during which time the children left for their service), then left the auditorium. The traditional practice in the Churches of Christ is for the *song leader* to sit on the front row, or near the front row during the sermon, so as to quickly mount the stage at the conclusion of the *invitation* and begin *the invitation song*. The *preacher* did not notice that Jimmy had left the auditorium. Unknown to him, Jimmy also taught the children in their worship service. It was Jimmy's practice to rotate the responsibility of leading the *invitation song* and the *closing song* among several other *song leaders*. The congregation had become used to this practice, which had been going on for several months whenever Jimmy was the *song* leader.

The *minister* began his introductory remarks by commenting on the fine song service and particularly upon the ability of Jimmy. He then continued into his *sermon*. About 30 minutes later, as he was preparing for the *invitation*, he asked Jimmy to come forward to lead the song. Normally, the *preacher* gives the invitation ("If you are subject

[2] Names have been changed. Whenever possible, names have been omitted and the actors role has been used to identity the person in the situation being reported (i.e. the *preacher*).

to the invitation today, please come forward while we stand and sing."). Then the *song leader* moves to the front of the auditorium to lead the song. The relief *song leader* was waiting for the traditional *invitation*. The *minister* was trying to find Jimmy, and wanted him up front ready to lead the song as soon as the *minister* finished speaking. When Jimmy did not come forward, the *minister*, apparently realizing that his request was out of the ordinary, explained that he wanted Jimmy up front and ready to sing, then he began his *invitation*. His *invitation* was longer than normal. The *minister* was known for his persuasive *invitations*, which could extend as long as ten minutes. After a couple of minutes of speaking, he stopped in the middle of a thought, looked around, and said in kind of a grumpy voice, "where's Jimmy." No one responded. The minister looked slightly alarmed and said in a very loud voice "Jimmy, where are you?" He paused, and one of our *elders*, sitting close to the front started to explain where Jimmy was. (Now this was a brave thing for him to do. It is taboo for anyone from the audience to speak during the *sermon* component, unless the person is saying a loud *amen*, which signals approval of the speaker's thoughts. Even this practice has almost died out among the Churches of Christ.) Not hearing the *elder* trying to explain about the relief *song leader*, the *minister*, now alarmed, addressed the entire audience with another loud "Well, where is Jimmy?" At this point, the relief song leader, who had been sitting in a different side of the auditorium from the direction Jimmy had disappeared, moved to the front of the auditorium and tried to get the attention of the *minister*. The congregation, beginning to see the humor in the situation (which had ruined the very serious tone of the sermon) begin to whisper and chuckle. The *minister* came down from the stage, head moving rapidly left to right, scanning the audience, repeating over and over "Jimmy, Jimmy!"

Finally the relief *song leader* got the attention of the *minister*, who allowed him to lead the *invitation song*. I don't think the *minister* ever figured out what happened to Jimmy.

This mishap illustrated the degree of expectation of the traditional actions during the ritual, even down to the expected seating behavior and movement of the *song leader* during the *sermon*. It also illustrates the reaction of members, sometimes close to panic, when their expectations are violated. Even the members in the seat seem to be bothered whenever the ritual is changed, even in a minor degree.

Effects of Change in Ritual

An example of change in a minor degree is seen at Levy when Bob[3] is the *song leader* or relief *song leader*. For some still unknown reason, Bob will have the audience sit down after standing for the *invitation song*. The normal practice, for years and in most congregations, is to only sit down when there is a response. After the response is taken care of, the audience is asked to stand "for the closing song and prayer." Following the prayer, the noise level usually rises dramatically, and people quickly move to the aisles and begin to visit with each other. Bob usually asks the audience to sit for the *closing song*. Then the *prayer leader* moves to the front and *says the closing prayer*. After the prayer when the audience is seated, there is always a moment of silence, then the sound level slowly builds as people slowly get up and start to move to the aisles. The difference is the habitual movement after a *closing prayer* while standing, compared to the thoughtful movement after a *closing prayer* while being seated. The Churches of Christ consider their worship services to be much more informal than those of many churches, but the habitual action on the part of the audience seems to be just as strong as if they had a more formal role to play in the worship assembly.

[3] The name has been changed.

A similar example of minor change affecting the audience was noticed at Westlink on the few Sundays when the *Welcome* was omitted. The *Welcome* at Westlink had become a tradition after being regularly used for several months. The members came to expect a time to stand and great *visitors* (and one another) early in the service. The *Welcome* might be omitted during times when the announcements ran long. Omission of the *welcome* results in two noticeable differences from a normal Sunday morning. The noise level during the entire assembly is lower. The exit segment is of shorter duration. Some of the members like for the noise level to be lower. This is an indication of respect. Since Westlink has intentionally tried to structure the activities of the congregation to emphasize the family nature of the church, the higher noise level during the assembly is usually interpreted as reflecting the relaxed atmosphere of the assembly. The noisy *Welcome* segment seems to add to the informal feeling during the assembly.

The longer period of the exit segment on the normal Sundays when the *Welcome* has been included seems to indicate a relationship between the ritual actions during the assembly and the interpersonal actions of the congregation after the assembly concludes. The relationship to identity construction may be as simple as the interpersonal element added into the group ritual that promotes a feeling of closer relationship among the group. The fact that the remainder of the ritual assembly and the exit behaviors are affected by the inclusion or omission of this one segment indicates the systemic nature of the ritual assembly as a whole. A change in one element affects the other elements.

Changing Tradition. Levy decided to make an intentional change in their traditional order of worship. Like Westlink, the leaders at Levy wanted to make the meaning of one of the ritual segments more explicit. Unlike Westlink, the method was

not to just change order. After several weeks of discussion among the leaders, a new order was established. The old order had been very typical of congregations of Churches of Christ: *Announcements, singing, prayer, another song, the sermon, invitation, song, the Lord's supper, contribution, closing song, closing prayer.* The central segment in the older order was the *sermon.* A decision was made to make the central segment the *Lord's Supper.* The *Lord's Supper* would be lengthened, a teaching element added to it in the form of *scripture readings* and/or a short lesson on the meaning of the elements of the *Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper* segment would be bracketed by a lengthened *song service* early in the assembly, and a shortened *sermon* segment towards the end of the assembly. The overall time allotted for the worship assembly was lengthened from one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes. A smaller change was instituted at the same time. A new segment at the beginning of the ritual would be called the *Family Time.* This would incorporate the *announcements, special announcements, greeting,* and some kind of special song at the very beginning of the service that would function as a call to worship. The reasoning behind the *Family Time* was 1) it would reframe the announcement segment from a necessity that was seen to interfere with worship to a part of the worship ritual that 2) carried the meaning that the worship ritual was a family gathering, for the purpose of building family.

The normal method of preparing the congregation for a change in ritual has been to announce the coming change in advance and justify it by giving reasons why the purpose of the ritual will be better accomplished with the change. This method was not followed. Instead, on the first Sunday of the new order, an announcement was made that for the next several Sundays we would emphasize the *Lord's Supper.* It is not unusual to

have one or two Sundays of special emphasis during the year. The congregation accepted the change as temporary for the purpose of emphasizing the meaning of the *Lord's Supper*. The *song service* and the *sermon* concerned the particular meaning of the *Lord's Supper* to be taught that morning. The next Sunday, the *song service* and the *sermon* were on another aspect of the Lord's Supper. After several Sundays, the *song service* and the *sermon* emphasized a different theme, but the order stayed the same. There was some grumbling by some members for a while (about a year) over the length of time taken by the *prayer leader* during the *Lord's Supper*. Under the old format, the prayer leader would say three prayers, each about 30 seconds long. With the new emphasis upon the *Lord's Supper*, the *prayer leaders* were encouraged to read a few scriptures and make a short statement about the application to our activity of the *Lord's Supper*. The three prayers continued to be a part of the leaders responsibility. The total speaking time was increased by about 5 minutes. After almost two years of the new format, Levy has a new traditional order of worship.

An unanticipated side effect of the change in the worship ritual was the de-emphasis upon the *Preacher* as the primary *minister*. When the *sermon* was the central segment of the assembly, the *preacher* was considered to be on a higher level than the rest of the ministry staff. A few months after the change in worship order, the *preacher* for Levy decided to quit *preaching* and accepted a position as a *minister of involvement* at a congregation in another town. Usually, a change in *pulpit ministers* is accompanied by a period of instability in the congregation. In this case, despite the high esteem and affection in which the departing *preacher* was held by the congregation, there was no perceived instability. The existing ministry staff filled the role of *preacher*. After about

9 months of looking for a new *preacher*, the leaders of the congregation decided not to replace the *preacher*. Instead, one of the staff ministers agreed to do most of the *preaching* in addition to other duties. Another staff minister was hired, and the emphasis in the work of the congregation shifted to that which is done outside of the assembly. This seems to indicate the important role of the ritual in the group. A simple shift in location of a segment results in a change in priorities of the group.

Changing Method of Existing Ritual: Impact of Technology. In addition to method of practicing ritual, frequency of practicing ritual, and the order of ritual activities, the means by which the ritual is practiced also affects identity. Within the Churches of Christ, one method of determining whether a congregation is to be considered *progressive* or *traditional* is whether they sing their songs from a hymnal or off the wall. The traditional method in Churches of Christ has been to use a hymnal. This is a book of songs located in song book racks attached to the backs of each pew. Before a song, the *song leader* would announce the song number, allow time for members to turn to the page, then begin the song. Some popular songs were known by their number as much as by their name. Purchasing new song books could bring about a temporary crisis in the congregation until *members* accustomed themselves to the new numbers. New song books also changed the song service for months: A new segment would be added to the existing song service--learning a new song. When a new book was purchased, the song leader would take it upon himself to learn new songs in the book, and teach them to the congregation at the rate of one new song per week, or sometimes one per month when the congregation complained too much about learning new songs. Like

other changes mentioned, a change in song books was uncomfortable. Even learning a new song brought minor discomfort for many *members*.

Sometime during the late 1980's, many congregations started using overhead projectors and transparencies to teach new songs to the congregation. This grew out of a common practice among the youth groups, who seldom bothered with song books. They just learned the songs and sang from memory. The *youth ministers* would teach new songs to the group by using a transparency and the overhead projector. Sometimes the youth would sing one of their songs at the beginning of the assembly. When the members wanted to sing along, the *youth ministers* started bringing the overhead into the auditorium to teach that new song.

Some congregations started using the overhead frequently during the assembly. Congregations like Westlink would use it occasionally, usually just to learn new songs. Congregations like Levy began to use it every week. The justification given was that people could look up from their song books and "sing to each other instead of to the book." At Levy the overhead projector was unpopular with many of the members. A keystone effect made it hard to read. The song leaders at Levy experimented with making slides and using a slide projector. At the time that I first start *attending* Levy, two projectors were being used each week to project all the songs on the front wall, one on each side of the pulpit area. The songs were black letters projected onto a white wall. New songs as well as the songs in the songbook were projected. The congregation had become used to this practice.

After several years of using slide projectors, Levy invested in two video projectors linked by computer. The songs were now projected onto the wall in a

PowerPoint presentation: Yellow letters on a dark blue background. At the same time, the song leaders started using many more new songs per week. There was considerable complaining about the new system. I believe that the increase in new songs was more of the issue than the change in technology. After a period of a few months, a balance was achieved between using newer songs and older songs.

A potential side effect from using the method of song projection during the song service may be the decline in four-part harmony. Because of the a cappella nature of the *song service*, the average member of the congregation could read music and follow their various parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The newer songs were projected with just the words, not the notes for the music. Now that all the songs are being projected, more people are beginning to sing just the lead (usually the Soprano part). Over a period of time, members of congregations that use projected songs instead of song books may forget how to sing the songs with multiple parts.

The availability of PowerPoint presentations for use during the assemblies brought about a few other changes in the ritual, although none of these have been so frequent as to become permanent. Some weeks the announcements are made by means of Powerpoint presentations. The slides will start when classes end, and continue during the fifteen minute break between class and worship. One interesting aspect of Powerpoint presentations is the different reactions of the audience to text verses pictures. Most of the announcements are just text on a colored background. The audience does not seem to pay much attention to the announcements. Few people focus on the displays on the front walls. But a few times we added pictures of members of the congregation to announcements. A typical picture announcement would consist of the text of a coming

activity, printed below a picture of one or more members participating in a similar recent activity. Whenever a picture announcement would appear on the wall, members would become quieter, focus on the display on the front wall, and call other members attention to the picture. The use of picture announcements may be a way to make the announcement segment more personal, and maybe improve the interpersonal relations among the group.

A few times the preacher has used Powerpoint presentations during the sermon. When the presentation consisted mostly of scriptures projected on the wall, the few comments from the group were approving. When the presentation was of pictures to illustrate the lesson, a few people would express disapproval, equating pictures on the wall with entertainment, which was not perceived as appropriate for the worship, especially the *sermon* segment.

New Traditions: Kids Can. The institution of *Kids Can* at Westlink illustrates the ways in which new components are added to the overall ritual of the worship assembly in the Churches of Christ. One of the *Elders* at Westlink was traveling in another part of the country. On Sunday morning, he and his wife attended the service of a congregation of the Churches of Christ in the city where he was visiting. At one point during the assembly, an announcement was made that it was time for *Kids Can*. A large can was placed on the stage at the front of the auditorium. While a children's song was sung by the congregation, children left their seats and moved to the front of the auditorium and dropped money into the can. The *Elder* from Westlink was impressed with the number of children present in that congregation. When he returned to Wichita, he shared his experience with one of the ministers. The *Elder's* idea was that a similar activity should

be started during the Assembly at Westlink. Justification was that it would 1) demonstrate to both *members* and *visitors* how many children we had at Westlink, and 2) teach the children to *contribute*. A proposal was presented to the combined *Eldership* suggesting that this new activity be started on a trial basis. It was suggested that the best time would be after the *communion service* (to link the children's *contribution* to the adult's *contribution*) and before the *sermon*. This also allowed the children's activity to make use of the slight disruption caused in the worship assembly by the dismissal of the children to their own worship service at that point in the assembly. Another *Elder* donated the large plastic water jug, suggesting that it would be more impressive to the congregation to see how the money mounted up each week.

The first week that this new activity was to be performed, the originating *Elder* stood up at the front of the congregation following the communion service and normal contribution. He explained his idea and the way it would teach the children about giving and allow them to participate in the worship service. He showed the jug to the congregation, and challenged the children to fill it. He asked the *songleader* to start the song "Jesus loves me." Then a few children went to the front and deposited their money.

The next week the same *elder* gave a shortened explanation and again challenged the children to come forward to donate money. This time, about 20 children between the ages of 3 and 10 went to the front of the auditorium and deposited money. The third week, almost twice as many children went to the front to deposit money. Several parents even took their small children (one and two years of age) to deposit money. By the sixth week, almost 70 children, from 1 to 12, moved to the front of the auditorium to donate money.

By this time, a very noticeable amount of money was in the jug. The *elders* discussed what to do with the money. It was decided, and announced at the next assembly, that the money donated would be used to help needy children. Whenever the jug was emptied, and the money used for children, the actual help given to children would be announced in the children's worship. The children would be commended for helping out needy children. This would present a continual teaching opportunity to train the children in their responsibility to help out less fortunate children.

The response from the congregation was frequently comments along the line of: "I never knew we had so many children at this congregation!" The *Elders* were impressed with both the teaching opportunity for the children, and the impression made on the congregation and *visitors* about the youth and family nature of the Westlink congregation. The decision was made to keep the *Kids Can* as a regular part of the assembly. Since Westlink was the only congregation of the Churches of Christ in Kansas with this new element in their ritual assembly, it became a part of the identity of the members. "We promote <u>family</u> because we have *Kids Can* in our worship."

So the process of adding a new element to the assembly tends to follow the steps of: 1) notice a meaningful component at another congregation, 2) propose the addition to the *Elders*, along with the justification (message that will be taught by the addition) for the activity, 3) prepare the congregation by explaining the activity and the meaning to be drawn from the activity, 4) add the activity, 5) continue to explain the activity until the majority of the congregation either accepts or rejects the addition, and 6) practice the activity repetitively, occasionally reminding the congregation of the meaning, until the tradition is established.

Ritual as a Communication System

The times when ritual actions are being considered for change seem to be the time when their intended meaning and the efficiency with which that meaning is communicated are most openly considered and discussed (at least by the leaders of the church). These times also seem to be accompanied by a state of instability on the part of the congregation. Many congregations of the Churches of Christ have polarized during a time of change in ritual. The members of the congregation sort themselves out into those pro-change and those pro-tradition. Many congregations have split during this time of instability. Those that weather the storm end with new traditions that become meaningful in ways similar to the old traditions. I believe that the ritual practiced during the assembly should be seen as a communication system. The system can exist in one of two states: Stable and unstable. The unstable state is temporary, characterized by changes in ritual, and results in a new stable state with a traditional ritual with expected activity and commonly understood meanings.

Chapter 8:

A Theoretical Model of the Communication Process in Group Identity Creation and Maintenance

So – what does this mean for communication? This chapter will summarize the arguments presented in Chapters 4-7. In each case a short discussion of implications for theory will be presented. I will compare and contrast the explanatory value of Communication Accommodation Theory, Social Identity Theory and Social Construction theories as applied to my observations. I will present a theoretical model of identity construction and maintenance in religious assemblies based upon the observations recorded in this paper. Based upon this model, I will propose suggestions for application to problems of community building, as well as suggestions for further research.

I have presented evidence that the micro processes during the assembly (word connotations, kinesics, vocalics, etc.) create a sense of group identity through the process of categorization, identification, and comparison. This is in accord with Social Identity Theory (Deaux, 1996; Hogg, 1992, pp. 88-99; Tajfel, 1981, pp. 254-256; Turner, 1982). The use of some words identifies the speaker as a member of the in-group, or may cast doubt upon the speakers membership with the in-group. Many nonverbal behaviors also work to indicate in-group or out-group identity. Most of the terms a speaker uses are neutral in identifying membership. The ones that carry membership association can be positive or negative. People who desire to be considered members of the group will attempt to assimilate by accommodating to the behaviors of the in-group. This is in accord with Giles' Communication Accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland, 1991).

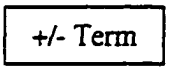
Both of these theories also explain some of the nonverbal behaviors observed in the assembly. Some kinesic behaviors carry a very strong message that includes a perception of being of us, or not of us. People who employ a kinesic behavior with a negative group value, such as raising hands during a song, will tend to either conform to the behaviors of the group (by ceasing to raise hands) or will move to some other congregation.

Proposal for a Theory of Group Identity Construction

Verbal Elements

Figure 3. Basic level: The Term

Word choice within the group defined choices, carrying group defined connotations, either positive or negative.



Terms

Berger (1967) presents a concept of world construction that is a collective enterprise. The interactions of people in a community provide the materials for building an understanding of the world in which the individual exists. Although there is an objective world, the individual perceives only that part which is experienced by some sensory means. In turn, these experiences are given meaning by comparing one's own perceptions with those of others. "One may add that the individual appropriates the world in conversation with others and, furthermore, that both identity and world remain real to himself only as long as he can continue the conversation" (Berger, 1967, p. 16).

The language used in this conversation with others provides the building blocks of

world construction. In the assembly, the words as well as the actions are part of the ritual. From the expected "Good Morning," even on cold, gray, dreary days, the audience begins to perceive that in reality it is a good morning. Terms such as family, body, the Church, member, and congregation build the perception that the member is a part of a group effort, interdependent on each other. Phrases such as "this world," "this life," "promised land," "home in heaven," and "passing on" place this physical life in relation to the total life of the person of faith that includes eternity.

The individual's identity as a part of the group is derived from the expressed perception by the group of that individual. According to Berger, "It is possible to sum up the dialectical formation of identity by saying that the individual becomes that which he is addressed as by others" (1967, p. 16). In this way, the group socializes the individual into their world. In the Church, this world has been under construction for millennia!

The language used has a long history of creating and changing people's view of the world. When members are referred to as *the saints*, a perception is created that the individual in the pew has something in common with the great heroes of the faith. A member selected to be an *elder* builds an identity as a spiritual leader with responsibility for the group. The identity of this member is further defined by referring to him as a *shepherd*, an *overseer*, and as a *bishop*. Each term carries a different connotation, but applies to the same group of individuals.

Even the simple term *Christian* is used and often defined to show that people by that name are followers of Jesus Christ. Further, it indicates that their life should continually be changing to show the behaviors exhibited by Jesus. The person hired by the church to work with the members is referred to as a *minister*, a *preacher*, and as an

evangelist, indicating certain responsibilities expected of the role. This person may have limitations placed on the expectations of that role by the terms *youth minister*, *education minister*, *singles minister*, *family minister*, etc.

This socialization process into the group is seen vividly in the teaching of children and new converts. One of the first items explained to a new convert is the appropriate designation for certain leaders in the church. The leader that delivers the *lesson* may be referred to as the *preacher*, *minister*, or *evangelist*, with *minister* being the preferred term in urban and suburban congregations, and preacher more commonly used in rural congregations. It is improper to call the minister a pastor, *reverend*, or father even though this is the accepted mode of address in other groups of people of faith. Much of this instruction is nonverbal in the form of shocked facial expressions, raised eyebrows, making someone the center of attention, a pause in the conversation, whenever a new member makes the mistake of improper reference to the minister. Usually a kind member explains that "we don't use that word for him." Frequently, the member(s) continue by explaining that pastor is supposed to refer to the *elders* (although we don't use that term). reverend is not used at all, and father is reserved for use to refer to God.

The members' desire to conform their verbal and nonverbal behavior to group norms is explained by Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles and Coupland, 1991; Giles, Coupland, and Coupland, 1991). The members' desire to be part of the group, and be perceived as part of the group, leads them to adopt the communication practices of the group.

The importance of the group controlling terms can be understood based on the theory that an individual's ability to perceive and make meaning from sensory

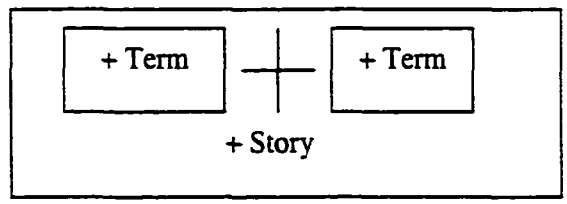
impressions of the world is limited by the words available to them to describe those impressions (Whorf, 1956). Limiting the terms available to describe experience, feelings, beliefs, etc., limits the individual's ability to perceive those same experiences, feelings, beliefs, etc., according to the limits set by the group. The reverse is also applicable here--expand the vocabulary of the individual and the individual has a greater capacity for perception and understanding.

Controlling terms is useful for the group as a means of controlling beliefs. Designating the acceptable and unacceptable terms based on group values and beliefs allows the group to categorize self and others based on the appropriateness of terms, a quick way to determine whether someone is in the group or out of it.

The positive and negative values associated with group specific terms are useful in shaping opinion when a potentially divisive issue develops. The difference in referring to a member on the conservative side of the group's beliefs as a *traditionalist* (+ value) instead of as a *legalist* (- value) might be the difference in whether that person continues to be accepted as a member of the group!

Figure 4. Second level of analysis: The Story

The story of the congregation, composed of many individual stories, carrying a value message, either positive or negative, and using group specific terms with positive or negative values.



Stories. Stories serve to give meaning to the behaviors of others, enable individuals to make sense of their own lives, and maintain common values in a society (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 14). Stories share values across a group by exemplifying behaviors t o be emulated or avoided (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 139. Boyce (1996) links the study of narrative in organizations with Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality (1967), placing story within the theory as the mechanism in the process of legitimation, where a socially constructed reality is passed on to a new generation. Boyce (1996) summarizes the research in organization story telling and social construction:

> The salient aspects of the research explicitly linking social construction, story, and organization are that: (a) stories are useful for new member socialization and generating commitment, (b) familiarity with dominant organizational stories can be an indicator of adaptation, (c) story can be a vehicle for social control, and that (d) meaning can develop consciously and/or unconsciously.

The second level of analysis is the story or narrative that occurs when the terms are connected into a meaningful text. Stories start as individual or group experiences that are shared with the group through verbal communication. These stories may then be incorporated into the on-going story of the congregation. These individual stories may come from the Bible -- told from the pulpit in sermons, referred to by prayer leaders (especially during the communion time), taught in Bible classes, or read by individual members and shared with others to explain or advocate certain beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors.

The individual stories may be events that happen to a member, who then relates the story in such a way that it represents the beliefs of the congregation. An example of this is the former deacon at Levy who was seriously ill and in great pain. The family had

all gathered at this man's side when the doctor came in to the hospital room. The doctor said that there was no cure and the deacon had only a few days to live. The only medicine that the doctor could give for pain would probably cause the man to slip into a coma from which he would never wake. The deacon decided to take the medicine, told his family good-bye, and lay back in his bed to sleep. The next morning he woke up. When his wife asked how he was feeling he replied, "I am just pretty disappointed! I thought I would be in Heaven by now!" This story was related to the congregation in the way that many individual stories are – as a *sermon* illustration by the *minister*. If the congregation accepts this story as part of their congregation story, then this shapes the attitudes of the group towards death and dying.

The congregation's story is composed of many sub-stories. Some are from the larger group, such as the Bible stories that are shared not only by other churches, but even by other religions. Some are from the traditions of the larger group--Churches of Christ. Some are from members' experiences told to emphasize a group value, such as illustrated above. Some of the most powerful seem to be the stories based on an event experienced by the congregation as a group. (See Hopewell, 1987, for many examples of congregational stories and the effects upon the group of the stories).

An example of a common group experience incorporated into the congregational story is found among the many stories at Levy that make up the story of Levy's identity. A number of years ago, some members at Levy perceived a need for an inner city ministry in North Little Rock. They promoted this work to the congregation, to other congregations in the area, and to community groups. At first, only the original group was involved. Over the years, the ministry has grown and many others have become

involved. Levy is still a part of the work, but is not near the force that it used to be. Even though only a small number of Levy's members actually were involved in the inner city work, the ministry became part of Levy's self-concept. Levy sees itself as an open and accepting congregation, welcoming all races and socio/economic classes. When the Levy story is told to a newcomer, the story of the inner city ministry is often included to prove how accepting Levy is of others. Now, Levy is a diverse congregation racially and socio-economically. Harre' (1989, p. 22) quotes an aphorism that applies here: "People are what they believe they are." (To be fair, Harre' then challenges this statement as it applies to individuals.) In the construction of group identity, the story contains the belief and the evidence to support the belief about what the group believes of itself. Then, believing this concept to be so, they go forth and act in ways that continue to reaffirm this belief.

Stories can be positive or negative (see Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 139). The Bible stories are a good example. Stories contain beliefs about how people should be. But the stories may be positive about people acting right, or negative, about people acting in wrong ways. The stories told about members can be the same way.

According to Social Identity Theory, people develop group identity largely through comparisons of their group with other groups (Deaux, 1996). This can be seen in the stories told about us versus them. The us stories present positive images of our group. The them stories contrast with the us stories, justifying why we should be part of us and not them. So stories can have a positive or a negative value similar to terms.

Reframes. A Narrative view of social interaction focuses on the stories that people choose to make sense of their life. These stories are written or constructed

through social interaction. Each person's story has parts written by many people (see Gergen, 2000). Rewriting a part of the story changes how a person sees self. Changing how a person sees self results in a change in interpretation of the events in their life. Within the congregation, the group story becomes a part of the individual members' stories. Changing the interpretation of an event can change the story. When someone offers a new interpretation of an event in a person's life, the person may choose to accept the new interpretation over the existing interpretation in their story. The various interpretations are the ways in which people write events into their personal story. These interpretations are known as frames. Goffman (1974, p. 345) explains:

> Thus far, the individual considered is someone who has perceptions, frame-accurate as one possibility, deceived, deluded, or illusionary as the other; he also takes action, both verbal and physical, on the basis of these perceptions. And it has been argued that the individual's framing of activity establishes its meaningfulness for him.
> Frame, however, organizes more than meaning; it also organizes involvement. During any spate of activity, participants will ordinarily not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also (in some degree) become spontaneously engrossed, caught up, enthralled.

Accepting a new interpretation is known as re-framing. Post-modern forms of psychotherapy make extensive use of reframes to change a client's interpretation of the events in their life, thus changing their life (Watzlawick, 1996).

These same interpersonal processes can work at the group level when a group member or leader offers a new interpretation of an event in the group's life. This reframing changes a part of the group's story, thus changing the group's attitude and actions towards the events.

An example of reframes as an element of communication affecting identity is the minister's interpretation of minor annoyances during the worship ritual described in

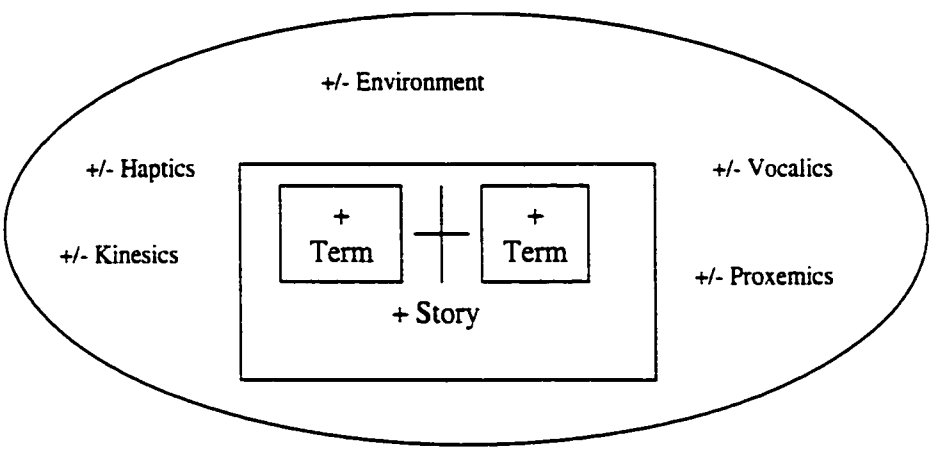
chapter 4. Reframing during the assembly can unite the group with a clearer common identity, as exemplified by the minister interpreting the unpleasant noise of a crying child to mean something positive for the group, based on their agreed upon value of family.

If a person's perception of reality is considered subjective, with more than one possible interpretation of events, and the choices of interpretation are considered to be limited by knowledge gained from and by society (based on my understanding of the social construction of reality as formulated by Berger and Luckmann, 1966, and explained by Searle, 1995), then reframing is a powerful communication tactic to lead an individual or group to accepting an interpretation considered to be more useful by the reframer.

Nonverbal elements

Figure 5. Third level of analysis: Nonverbal behaviors

Story occurs within a Context full of perceived Nonverbal signals, with a positive or negative value for group identity.



I categorized the observed elements of nonverbal communication in the assembly into eight categories: kinesics, vocalics, physical appearance, haptics, proxemics, chronemics, artifacts, and environmental features. This taxonomy is similar to systems of

classification used by other researchers to sort and examine components of nonverbal human interactions (Burgoon, 1994; Goffman, 1959, p. 24; Knapp, 1980; Mehrabian, 1972; Ruesch & Kees, 1956/1970; Weitz, 1974).

Members can interpret meanings from these nonverbal behaviors that have substantial implications for group identity. Perceptions of these behaviors for group identity can be positive or negative in value. The strength of the positive or negative value assigned to the behavior seems to be determined by whether the behavior is associated with an important belief concerning the group (such as clapping during singing in a *traditional* congregation).

Kinesics. Kinesics is a class of nonverbal communicative behaviors comprised of body movements. Gestures, posture, facial expressions, and other similar movements of the body are included in this category. Kinesic behaviors identify members as part of the group or outsiders in ways similar to that seen with terms. The most noticeable way that kinesic behaviors communicate identity is when someone violates an unwritten rule of behavior. This works very similar to using terms that are acceptable in many religious situations, but not in the Church of Christ. Just as using the term "sanctuary" for the auditorium marks someone as an outsider, some commonly accepted religious movements mark their user as "not one of us." Examples of kinesic behaviors perceived as having a positive or negative meaning to the group: Raising hands up during the song service; not bowing during a prayer; standing during a sitting song, or sitting during a standing song, etc.

Proxemics. Proxemics are a class of nonverbal signals relating to the use of space and distance. The nonverbal communication behavior that seems most relevant to identity

is the seating behaviors of the members and visitors during the assembly. Proximity is associated with liking or affiliation (Burgoon, 1994; Knapp, 1978; Mehrabian, 1976; 1981). Observations of seating behaviors give indications of the subgroups within the congregation, the interpersonal relationships within the congregation, and even the degree of affiliation towards the congregation by individuals and family units. All of these behaviors have implications to the ways people identify with the group and subgroups. Positive values in proxemics communicate liking or affiliation. Negative values in proxemics indicate an emotional distancing from the group.

Haptics. The category of haptics includes nonverbal behaviors that communicate through touch. The haptic behaviors observed at Westlink and Levy were hand shakes, shoulder touches, and hugs. The touching behavior seems to represent a ritual action that reaffirms the community relationship on a weekly basis. The behavior can have a positive or negative value, depending on whether the touch is expected or considered appropriate. Expecting to receive a handshake, and not receiving one could communicate a negative relationship message. Receiving a hug (especially a man hugging a woman) could easily be considered negatively if the person receiving the hug considered it to be inappropriate touching.

Environmental factors. Environmental perceptions, primarily associated with the design and seating arrangement of the auditoriums. The environments of both Levy and Westlink were positive for relationship development and inclusion messages due to the semi-circular arrangement of the auditorium seating. Members were enabled to look at each other as well as the speaker at the front of the auditorium. Congregations with auditoriums that are rectangular with only forward facing pews are limited in the

environmental relationship messages they can send. Design features also indicate relative importance of certain aspects of the congregational ritual. The high position of the baptistery at Levy could be understood as a statement about the importance of baptism to the congregation. The long pews lining the back walls of Westlink could be understood to show consideration for families with small children, who often try to sit on the back row.

Vocalics. Vocalics are vocal features of speech other than the words. This includes the volume of the voice, the pitch, rate, inflection, and pauses. Although these items are constantly adding meaning to the spoken word, I observed little evidence of vocalics working in ways that related to identity. This is probably due more to my lack of perception of the vocal cues than to the absence of vocal cues relating to identity creation and maintenance. I have observed in small group settings at Levy and at Westlink that the members can listen to a tape recording of a sermon and suggest whether the speaker is from the Church of Christ, a Southern Baptist, or a Pentecostal by the vocal cues. According to Communication Accommodation Theory, members of the group will begin to speak in ways similar to the perceived style that is the norm of the group (convergence), as long as they seek to be identified with the group (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991).

The nonverbal behaviors have the potential for being understood as meaningful for group identity. The meanings can be positive or negative. These behaviors work together to form the context for the verbal elements of the assembly. The verbal and nonverbal elements together form a message, although the message could be understood differently depending on the week that a person attended the service. Consistency of the

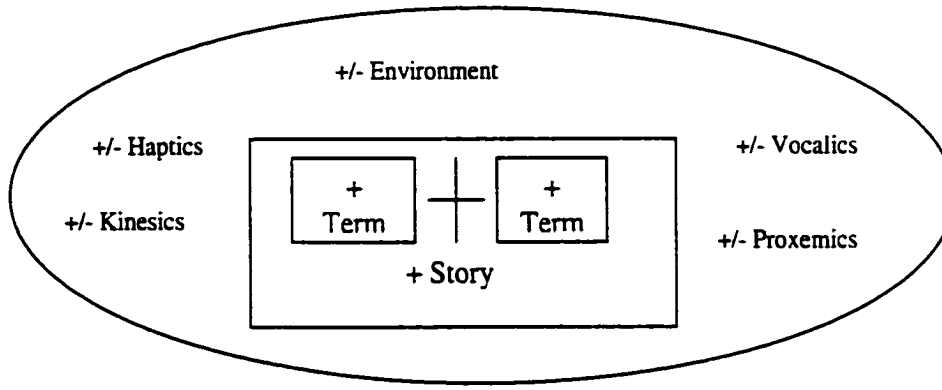
behaviors over time should strengthen the meaning perceived by the member. This leads to the consideration of the weekly ritual as a system perpetuating itself through the consistency and repetitiveness of the meaningful behaviors.

Ritual: Communication in a System

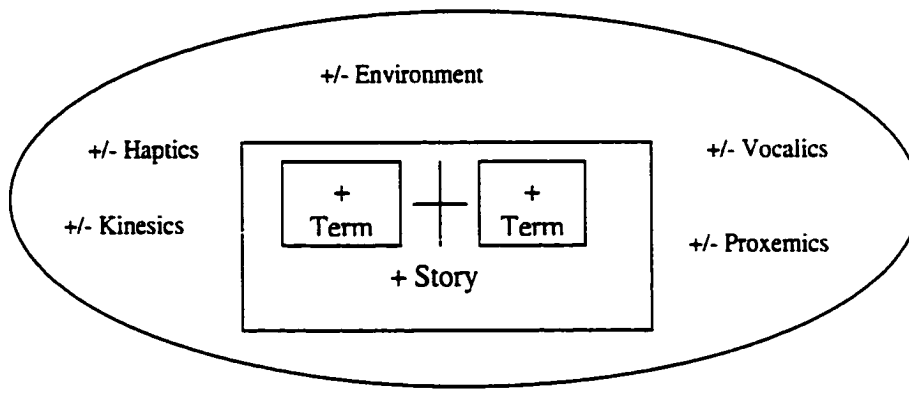
The verbal and nonverbal elements in the assembly account for some understanding of the process by which identity in the group is constructed and revealed. These activities are not acted out in isolation. Rather, the combination of these activities into a whole--referred to by the members as the "worship"--provides a powerful time of group meaning-making. But the true power of the assembly is seen in the weekly repetition of these activities. I propose that the verbal and nonverbal items are elements or units that interact to help the individual members and the group to develop and maintain an identity (as well as demonstrate both that identity and the individuals perceived relationship to it.) The assembly as a whole works as a system, a dynamic interrelationship between elements and interactions that seeks a balance. Further, I see the system as existing in two possible states: A stable state in which the ritual actions are considered traditional, so that they link the members in a strong way to their history and ancestry; and an unstable state in which the group is seeking to make more explicit the meaning to be perceived in the ritual by intentionally changing some of the components of the ritual.

Figure 6. Thesis: Ritual as a communication system

(The combination of verbal and nonverbal elements into a context (system))



Weekly repetition of story and context in the same form



Mol (1976, pp. 14-15) presents a process called "sacralization" that safeguards and reinforces orderly interpretations of reality, rules, and legitimations. Identity represents this stability brought about by the orderly interpretations. Ritual (composed of repetitive actions, articulations, and movements) is one of the mechanisms of sacralization. Ritual is the process where people engage in repetitions of meaningful actions within a religious context. Religious ritual not only reinforces an orderly view of reality (the legitimation of Berger's theory), but also helps the individual to maintain a stable identity in a changing environment.

Berger also addresses the role of religious ritual (1969, p 40) as a crucial instrument in defining and maintaining world and identity. People need to be reminded of the fundamental constructs of society. But this religious ritual takes on a reality of its own as it progresses into tradition, eventually acting back upon human activity affecting the choices of actions in everyday life. In a similar way to the ongoing conversations with significant others that creates and maintains identity, religious ritual works as part of the communication process to create and maintain identity. Further, just as the conversations must continue within society, so religious ritual requires a specific community practicing traditions that become incorporated into the lives of the members (Berger, p. 46-47).

The emphasis in these theories of ritual is upon the stabilizing influence of the religious ritual for the church member. The constant, repetitive ritual not only reinforces the messages that are carried by it, but also carries the additional message of permanence and dependability. When a change in the weekly ritual occurs, the reaction of the members may be out of proportion to the change – their stable world is threatened.

The focus group members, from a congregation that is intentionally trying to be different and non-traditional, reported some discomfort associated with all the changes in their assembly. Repeated changes keep the assembly from developing the dependable ritual traditions that are so meaning-laden for the members. Church leaders need to be more aware of the psychological discomfort associated with changes. Changes to add meaning to the assembly need to be examined carefully for the negative messages that may be interpreted from any kind of change.

Changes in the worship ritual may distance the group from other congregations of the same church if the differences become salient to the member (according to Categorization theory). Changes will almost certainly distance the group from their heritage that has been transmitted through the generations by means of the ritual traditions. These same changes could strengthen group identity of the congregation as they perceive themselves to be more different than alike to other similar groups. This seems to be one of the outcomes of the changes with the congregation of the focus group members.

Changes could threaten the identity of the group in several ways. Changing an important segment may reduce the clarity of the story due to the perception of inconsistency by the group members. Frequent change may change the congregation's story in unanticipated ways. Change in a segment that members rely upon for stability in their life may threaten the stability of their world. All of these areas are worthy of further study, especially considering the popularity of change in the assembly ritual (at least among many congregations of the Churches of Christ).

Conclusion

Prescriptions for Church Leaders. Groups can be united through emphasizing the common story and the values promoted by the story. Be aware of the basic stories of the group, both the congregation's stories and the larger group's stories. Share these stories regularly, especially with new members.

Accentuating similarities among members of the group, and differences among members of other groups should lead to members incorporating the group's identity into their own individual identity. Emphasize the common values of the group. Emphasize

the uniqueness of the group in possessing characteristics associated with the common values.

Pay attention to the members' seating behaviors. Proximity indicates affiliation and relationships. A move on the part of a regular member indicates a re-evaluation of the member's perception of relationship (either to the group, to a sub-group within the group, or to another member). Movement can be positive (towards the front, center of the auditorium) or negative (towards the back, sides of the auditorium). Be more attentive to members who have changed their normal seating behavior. People who sit at the back and sides of the auditorium are probably less involved with the congregation. Leaders should position themselves at the back corners of the auditorium to meet and become acquainted with the people who sit in these areas. Leaders should actively seek to involve these people in the life of the congregation. Encourage visitors to sit towards the middle of the congregation.

Realize the value of ritual. Ritual intensifies the message. Ritual stabilizes the member and the congregation. The traditions that develop from repeated ritual provide a source of comfort and permanence in a rapidly changing world. Be slow to change the rituals of the worship assembly. Make one change at a time. Explain the reason for the change before, during, and after the change. Emphasize the message being taught by the new element of ritual. Allow the new element of ritual to become an expected tradition before changing another element. When making ritual changes, reassure the members of the congregation that the values and beliefs of the congregation remain the same. If the change is due to a change in values and/or beliefs of the congregation, make the new

value/belief explicit before, during, and after the change in ritual. Select a new ritual element that best conveys the message of the new value/belief.

Be sensitive to the cognitive and emotional dissonance that accompanies changes in long held traditions. The members who believe in the change and promote the change will still feel some dissonance until they become accustomed to the new ritual elements. Members who are unaware of the reasons for the change are more likely to be critical of the change due to their emotional and psychological discomfort with the new element of ritual.

During times of conflict within the congregation, emphasize the traditional elements of the worship ritual that convey messages of unity. Explicitly tell the stories of the congregation that promote the values of working together and accepting the uniqueness of individuals while emphasizing the commonality of the values and beliefs that have united the congregation in the past.

Limitations of this research. I was acting in the role of participant/observer. The advantage to this role is the depth of understanding available to an insider of the group. The limitation is the inherent biases and blind-spots associated with a participant. An observer who is not a member of the group might notice different elements and possibly make different interpretations of the observations.

This research is based on observations of two congregations of the Churches of Christ. The conclusions of this research might not apply to any congregations except the two studied. The conclusions may apply to other congregations of the Churches of Christ, but not to other religious groups.

The focus group did not work as anticipated. The decision of the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board to not allow focus groups with members of Levy or Westlink limits the confidence in the reliability of these conclusions. The greater than expected difference between the congregation of the focus group and the two congregations studied limits the application of the results to this dissertation.

The original research plan was to observe group specific terms, nonverbal behaviors, and the ritual elements of the worship assembly. The central role of stories in creating and maintaining the identity of the group was not appreciated until the research was almost completed. The research design specifically omitted observations of the content of sermons. The sermons are consistently the largest ritual element based on the percent of total time in the assembly devoted to the sermon. The sermons are also the primary place in the assembly where stories are located. As a result of the original research design, a large component of the ritual, containing potentially the most powerful element in creating and maintaining the common identity of the group, was largely ignored.

This research limited the observations to the weekly worship assembly. The congregations studied had many activities outside of the weekly worship assembly. Many of the stories associated with the identity of the congregation are told and repeated in the Bible classes that meet on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening each week. Many of the interpersonal interactions occur during fellowship and ministry activities during the week. A complete understanding of the way that the group's common identity is constructed would need to include all the group's interactions, not just the central interaction of the weekly worship assembly.

Future research directions. This research can be continued in several areas. More attention should be given to the role of stories in identity development. A more complete study of the congregation should consider all the activities of the congregation. The interactions between the elements described in this research need to be better understood. The ways in which ritual works to stabilize the congregation's identity need to be better understood. The differences between the stable state and the unstable state in a congregation's identity need to be explored. The relationships between the ritual and conflicts or divisions within the group need to be examined. Validity and generalizability of the results of this research can be improved through the use of multiple methods and observations of different religious groups. Some of the questions that have come to mind while writing this dissertation:

Further study needs to be made of the way that the stories work. Is the congregational story a single unit, or is it several intertwined stories? If it is several, is there a separate story for each value held by the group? Are the stories repeated multiple times during the assembly, or is it one continuous story? Are the segments distinct messages, or multiple channel repetitions of the same message (telling the story through song, then through prayer, then through the sermon, etc.)? Are segments effective in the repetitive way of ritual? Does a change in ritual result in a change in story?

What other interactions within the congregation are important to the creation and maintenance of a common identity. What rituals are associated with these other interactions. Are the meanings from the more informal activities of the congregation (Bible classes, small groups, fellowships, etc.) the same or different than the meanings from the worship assembly?

Are there stable ways of changing ritual? Is instability in the congregation always associated with a change in the ritual?

What effect does conflict among the group have on the perception of meaning from the ritual? Could a reinforcement of ritual minimize conflict? Could an explication of the intent of the ritual components help to minimize conflict and prevent splits? In a conflict situation, does the in-power group use the ritual to distance the group from the out-of-power group?

Could a better understanding of these issues be found by means of multiple research methods? How similar will be the meanings discovered with more focus groups. Will the use of survey instruments developed from the focus groups provide a more complete, reliable, or generalizable result? What empirical methods would best extend this line of research?

Will similar results be found in studying other congregations of the Churches of Christ? Will similar results be found in studying other religious assemblies? Can these results be generalized to apply to non-religious but ritual practicing groups?

Summary. My interpretations of observations of these two congregations of the Churches of Christ support the conclusion that the verbal elements of terms and story work within the context of nonverbal behavior to help build a common identity for the group. This common identity is strengthened through the weekly ritual called worship. Understanding the process by which people perceive meaning through ritual should help leaders who plan the ritual. The traditions associated with worship ritual are important ways for the group members to maintain stability in their life. Change needs to be well thought out and carefully implemented.

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Appendix A

Questions for Focus Groups

Verbal items:

1. What words or terms indicate to you that a person is a member of the Churches of Christ?
2. What words or terms indicate to you that a person is not a member of the Churches of Christ?
3. How do you react when someone uses an inappropriate term (like pastor or father) in the assembly?
4. How do new members learn to use the appropriate terms?

Nonverbal items

1. What behaviors during the assembly mark someone as an outsider?
2. How do you react to these behaviors?
3. What meaning do you draw from the way a person dresses for Sunday morning worship?
4. Where do you sit on Sunday mornings?
5. How likely are you to sit in the same place every Sunday?
6. Why?
7. What does it mean to you when people sit close to the front?
8. What does it mean to you when people sit close to the back?
9. What does it mean to you when people sit close to the center aisle?
10. What does it mean to you when people sit close to the sides?

11. Remember the last time you made a major change in your regular seating location.

    Why?

Ritual

1. What are the primary components of your worship assembly?
2. Which component has the most meaning to you?
3. What does it mean to you?
4. Have your worship activities changed over the years according to your experience?
5. How?
6. How do you feel about changes in your normal assembly activities?

Sub-groups

1. Can you identify distinct sub-groups within your congregation?
2. What are they?
3. What makes them distinctive as a sub-group?
4. Do you think each group gets the same meaning from the assembly?

Identity

1. What is it about your congregation that makes you different from other churches?
2. What does this mean to you?

Appendix B

Questionnaire for focus group members

These questions were presented to each individual in the group on a handout at the same time that they were given the Informed Consent form. The handout did not ask for the respondent' name. Questionnaires were gathered separately from the Informed Consent forms to protect confidentiality.

1. How long have you been a member of the Churches of Christ? _____
2. How long have you been a member at this congregation? _____
3. How old were you the first time you attended a Church of Christ? _____
4. How old are you now? ____
5. Gender: Male Female
6. How frequently do you attend?
   A. Every time the doors are opened
   B. Every Sunday, worship and class
   C. Sunday worship
   D. Several times a month
   E. Less than several times a month
7. As a member of the Churches of Christ, would you describe yourself as:
   A. Traditional
   B. Progressive
   C. Middle of the road
   D. None of the above

8. Within the church there are often subgroups of people with much in common. Do you consider yourself part of a subgroup?

   If so, what group or groups?

   What do the members of this group have in common?

Appendix C

Glossary of Church of Christ terms

A Cappella singing - singing without instrumental accompaniment.

Acts 2:38 - a verse in the Bible that is central to the concept of salvation as understood by the Churches of Christ. It is used so frequently as part of the Church story, that many members come to feel an ownership of this verse. *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*(NIV)

Announcements - a segment of the ritual at most Churches of Christ. Usually occurring near the beginning or end of the service. The announcements consist of a report on the sick (members and family of members), births or deaths occurring during the previous week that affect any of the members (even if they are reported in the weekly bulletin), and coming activities. The announcer may make humorous comments about the activity announcements.

Special announcements -- Special announcements seem to occur whenever an announcement requires an unusual amount of detail, or the person promoting the activity or occasion which is the subject of the announcement is enthusiastic about motivating the audience to participate in whatever is being announced. The speaker is someone other than the regular announcement maker.

Baptistery – an area at the front of the auditorium in many congregations of the Churches of Christ, including all larger congregations, consisting of a large tub of water and adjacent changing rooms. The tub of water is usually about three feet by six feet, and four feet deep, with water filled to a level of three feet. The baptistery is most commonly

found behind the pulpit area, raised above the stage, frequently hidden by curtains, but may be found to either side of the pulpit.

Baptize – the ritual action of inducting a new member into the Church, symbolizing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the promise of eternal life to members of Christ's church. The action requires an accompanying confession of faith, usually just saying or assenting to the statement "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." The person to be baptized is escorted into the water (in a baptistery if in a church building, but could be a pool, a lake, a stream, or even a large bathtub) by the person who will perform the baptism (usually either the *minister* or the *member* who has taught the *new member*). The member performing the baptism will say some close variation of "Because of your confession of faith I now baptize you into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the remission (forgiveness) of your sins." The new member is completely submersed under water for a moment, then helped up out of the water by the baptizing member. The baptized person is now considered a Christian and a new member of the Church.

Bible class – a regular and formal time of Bible study. In many congregations of the Churches of Christ, Bible classes will be offered on Sunday mornings about an hour before the regular weekly worship assembly. Many congregations also offer Bible classes each Wednesday evening. Bible classes may be offered at other times according to the needs and traditions of the congregation. A Bible class usually has a regular teacher and a plan of study. In larger congregations, many of the relationships formed between members occur in the context of Bible class.

Bible Hour – class for younger children, ages 3-8, occurring during the worship

assembly. The children exit from the auditorium after the communion service, while the audience is singing a song. They move to a classroom where several adults and teenagers lead children's songs, tell Bible stories, and present a puppet play. This class lasts until the worship service ends, usually about 30 minutes.

Bible school – organized classes of study concerning the text of the Bible or themes in Christian living. These classes are usually segregated by age or grade in school. Adult classes are usually segregated by stage in the lifespan (i.e. young married, young families, parents of teenagers, etc.). The classes are commonly taught in the hour preceding the weekly worship service. Many congregations, including both Westlink and Levy, offer classes at 7 pm on Wednesday evenings.

Bible study - A Bible study is a lesson or series of lessons on the basic elements of membership in the Churches of Christ. A Bible study may consist of a dyad: the teacher and the student. It may consist of a small group: the teacher and several students. It is always a personal application of the beliefs of the group to the actions of the student(s). The Church of Christ is placed within a historical context of *God's plan for humans*. The steps of the *Plan of Salvation* are taught. The essential expectations of a new member in the Church are explained.

Bible Time – the term for the class for children conducted during the worship assembly at Westlink. See Bible Hour.

Bread – also called the Loaf. The first half of the communion service. Trays containing unleavened bread (similar to saltine crackers, without the salt) are passed out to the congregation after being blessed with the first of two communion prayers (the prayer for the loaf). The bread symbolizes the body of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the

sins of humanity, including the group that has assembled together to partake of the communion service. Only Christians are supposed to take a piece of bread. Although the person taking the bread is supposed to be responsible for knowing that they are qualified to take the bread (i.e., they are a Christian), members who have invited guests usually explain the significance of the communion, and the limitation of the communion to Christians.

Bulletin – a weekly newsletter of the congregation. The bulletin usually includes a list of people to remember in prayer, a list of coming activities, information about important events, short teaching articles, and information about the current week's assembly. The Westlink congregation mailed out a weekly bulletin to members early in the week, and handed out a one page announcement sheet on Sunday mornings. The Levy congregation handed out the bulletin on Sunday morning. The Levy bulletin usually contained an order of worship for the morning.

Cards – registration cards consisting of printed lines requesting name, address, etc. on 3" x 5" card stock, sometimes colored (i.e. yellow, blue, etc.). A weekly announcement at both Levy and Westlink requested members and visitors to complete a registration card. At Westlink the cards were to be dropped in the contribution plate as it was passed down the pews during the assembly. At Levy the cards were to be passed to the ends of the rows and laid on the pew arm during the closing song so they could be picked up by the men who had served the communion.

members' – a card labeled members, and a different color from the visitor cards. The members' card asked for less information, since the address, etc. was already on file with the church. These cards were used to keep a record of the member's attendance.

visitors' – a colored card labeled visitor, usually longer and a different color from the member's card. This card had spaces for name, address, phone, reason for visit, and spaces to check if the visitor wanted to make a request of the congregation (i.e. please call me, send me information about this church, etc.). Visitors are considered anyone who is not a member of the local congregation. Visitors may be members at other congregations, or someone who has never been inside a church in their life.

Church, The – the common term used by members for the Churches of Christ. Use of this term indicates the belief in ONE church and that the Churches of Christ are associated with the original Church of the first century AD.

Communion – a segment of the weekly worship assembly devoted to remembering the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for humanity. The communion service segment is considered one of the five acts of worship by traditional members of the Churches of Christ. The segment consists of the sub-segments of processional of servers and prayer leaders to the front of the auditorium, prayer for the loaf, distribution of the loaf, prayer for the cup, and the distribution of the cup. Although the offering appears to be the third act in this segment, it is theologically separate, and is often separated from the communion service by a statement that the communion service is concluded, made before the prayer for the contribution. With the exception of the prayers, the communion service is a time of quiet meditation.

Congregation – the local group identified with the Churches of Christ. A congregation is expected to meet at least once a week on Sunday for a worship assembly. Many congregations of the Churches of Christ meet more than once a week.

Contribution – also referred to as the offering. The contribution is collected every week

during the assembly, usually at the conclusion of the communion service. A prayer is said for the giving of funds and the wise use of the funds given. Metal plates or wicker baskets (depending on the congregation) are then passed down the rows of assembled worshippers, who are expected to drop in money in the form of checks, cash or change.

Cup – the second act of communion. The cup symbolizes the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross for the sins of the world. After the loaf has been blessed and passed, the men return to the front of the auditorium and stand behind tables while the prayer leader says a prayer for the cup. Metal trays containing small plastic cups (large enough to hold about one ounce) half full of grape juice are distributed by the communion servers to the audience by passing them down the rows of people seated in pews.

Deacon – a leader in the local congregation responsible for some ministry. A deacon is supposed to be a servant to the congregation. Most congregations in the Churches of Christ limit the office of deacon to men, married, with children, who have demonstrated the ability to serve others in the congregation (i.e., organize prayer leaders, clean the building, drive the church bus, etc.). Deacons are expected to work under the oversight of the elders.

Elder – the official leaders of the local congregation. Elders may also be referred to as Pastors, Bishops, or Shepherds, but are almost always called Elders. A congregation should have a plurality of elders (at least two) or none at all. Elders are considered to be responsible to God for the welfare of the souls of the members of the congregation. The Elders interview, hire, and oversee any paid staff, such as ministers, secretaries, and custodians. Most congregations of the Churches of Christ limit the office of Elder to men, married, with children who are Christians, who have demonstrated the heart of an

elder through leadership in the congregation (usually be outstanding service as a deacon). Elders are expected to model the life of a Christian.

Evangelist – a term sometimes used for the preacher. This term emphasizes the responsibility of the preacher to teach the Gospel (the good news about Jesus Christ) to unbelievers.

Gospel meeting – a term specific to the Churches of Christ that is synonymous with Revival, although the term Revival would never be used within the Churches of Christ (definite outsider term). A time of special assemblies devoted to preaching the Gospel.

Gospel preacher – similar to use of the term Evangelist. Often used to distinguish an approved preacher (considered doctrinally correct) from other preachers.

Immersed – used as a synonym for baptized. Emphasizes the complete immersion under water of a person during baptism. See baptism.

Invitation – a segment of the weekly assembly at the conclusion of the sermon. Most sermons attach an invitation message after the conclusion or as the conclusion, which calls upon the audience to make a specific response to the message of the sermon. When the preacher concludes the sermon, the traditional last words of the sermon are "will you come now, while we stand together and sing." At this time, people in the audience that want to respond to request baptism, prayers, or to formally place membership are expected to walk down the aisle to the front row and sit down during the song. The preacher sits and talks with them quietly while the congregations sings. After the song is finished, the preacher announces their request. If it is for baptism or prayers, this is acted on immediately. If it is to place membership, then the closing song is sung and the closing prayer said. Then the audience will come forward and meet the new members.

An invitation may be offered at other times of the week, but at Levy and Westlink an invitation is only expected at the end of a sermon on Sunday morning. On special Sundays when the lesson is associated with a special activity, such as honoring someone or a special contribution, the invitation may be offered as a stand alone segment of the worship, removed by several segments from the lesson.

Kid's Can – a special segment at the Westlink congregation for children to participate in the assembly by contributing funds to help needy children. After the Communion service and before the Sermon the song leader will announce Kid's Can and lead a song special to children. The children of the congregation move to the front of the auditorium and drop money into a large container, then exit the auditorium to Bible Time.

Lectern – the speaker's stand used to support notes and the Bible of a *preacher* or *Bible class* teacher.

Lesson, the – also called the sermon. A segment of the worship ritual when the preacher preaches a sermon on a Bible text or topic with application for Christian living. This segment usually lasts 20 – 30 minutes, the longest single segment of the assembly.

Loaf – see communion.

Lord's Supper -- see communion.

Member of the Church – a common term used to denote a member of the Churches of Christ.

Minister – most commonly used to refer to a paid staff member of a congregation. When the minister referred works with a congregation with multiple ministers on staff, the preaching minister may be referred to as the pulpit minister of simply the minister. Other staff members frequently will have their roles qualified by attaching a descriptive

term before minister. such as youth minister. associate minister. family minister. etc. In the Churches of Christ the use of the term minister frequently denotes a member of a larger congregation. The smaller congregations who only have one staff member. if any. usually refer to this person as the preacher.

New Testament Christian – a term used to identify a member of the Churches of Christ. This term refers to the attempt by the Churches of Christ to restore the form of the church of the New Testament.

New Testament Church – a term to identify the Churches of Christ. This term refers to the attempt by the Churches of Christ to restore the form of the church of the New Testament.

Offering – see contribution.

Pastor -- see elder.

Pew - bench seats in the auditorium. Usually padded. May range from 6' to 20' in length.

Plate -- Utensil used to collect the contribution. As in "pass the plate." See Contribution.

Podium – see pulpit.

Prayer – the formal message presented to God by a believing human. The prayer should consist of praise and thanksgiving as well as a petition for help. Prayers may be spoken orally or silently thought. Formal prayers in public assemblies are led by a Prayer-leader who acts as spokesperson. representing the group to God. Most public prayers are spoken orally by the prayer leader. At the conclusion of the public prayer. group members may signify their assent to the content of the prayer by saying *amen.*

Closing – the formal prayer that signals the end of the assembly. Most

congregations of the Churches of Christ conclude their assemblies with a *closing prayer.* The contents of this prayer usually include requests that the assembly has been pleasing to God, that the people in attendance will now live a better life because of being in attendance, and that God will protect the group members until the next time they meet together.

Communion – in most congregations of the Churches of Christ, the communion service requires at least two prayers, one for the loaf and one for the cup. Many congregations have begun to use the same prayer leader to lead both prayers. In addition, a prayer is often led for the contribution, considered a separate act, but usually performed at the end of the communion ritual. It is common for there to be three prayer leaders at the communion table, one for each prayer. The sequence is: pray for the *loaf*, distribute the trays containing the *loaf*, pray for the *cup*, distribute the trays containing the *cup*, then pray for the contribution, and distribute the containers to receive the contribution (*passing the plate*).

Opening – the formal prayer early in the assembly. Although called the opening prayer, it is not unusual for it to be the second prayer in the worship service. The opening prayer is a prestige prayer, usually the longest of the ritual prayers and led by a member of high reputation (usually an elder, deacon, or former elder or deacon). The content usually includes extensive praise and thanksgiving, requests for health and healing for sick members, and a request that the actions of the assembly *be pleasing in thy sight, O God*, or some variation of this sentiment.

Prayer-leader – the person (male, in public assemblies of most Churches of Christ) who speaks (says) a prayer during public assemblies such as *worship* or *Bible class*. The

prayer-leader is usually an active member of the congregation, and is assigned the role of prayer-leader for a particular prayer (such as opening or communion) at a particular assembly (such as this week's worship assembly). Although a prayer-leader may be assigned the role of leading a prayer at a particular assembly with as much as one month's notice, the usual practice is to ask a person to lead a prayer a few minutes before the prayer is actually to be led. In Bible class, a person may actually be called upon by the teacher to lead a prayer with no prior notice, as in "Jim, would you lead us in prayer now as we begin this class?"

Preacher – the person (male, in most Churches of Christ) who presents the lesson (sermon) during the worship assembly. In most congregations of the Churches of Christ, one person has been selected to fill the role of *preacher* on a weekly basis. In larger congregations this is a full-time ministry position that includes many duties in addition to delivering the sermons. The person in this role may also be referred to as the *minister* or *pulpit minister*.

Pulpit – the area where the preacher (minister) stands to deliver the sermon during the weekly assembly. This is usually on a raised stage at the front, center of the auditorium. The exact position where the preacher is to stand is usually denoted by the position of the lectern or *podium* where the lesson notes and Bible may be placed during the sermon. Since the advent of cordless microphones, preachers will often roam around the stage in an area centered about the lectern.

Response – the term for the action of a person moving to the front of the auditorium during the invitation song. May be used as a noun (in reference to either the person responding or the act of responding) or as a verb (referring to the action that begins with

the decision to go to the front (called *going forward*) of the auditorium and ends with the request for baptism, prayers, or membership.

Scripture reading – a segment of the worship assembly consisting of a man moving to the front of the auditorium and orally reading an assigned text from the Bible. This is an accepted segment in most congregations but used irregularly.

Shepherd - Most commonly referred to a Elder, but could be called a Pastor. Leadership office in the congregation.

Song – a segment of the worship ritual consisting of the song leader calling the number of a song (omitted when the song is projected on the wall) then beginning to sing the lead part of the song while the audience joins in singing. A traditional assembly of the Churches of Christ will have at least 5 songs: opening song, middle song, song before the communion, invitation song, and a closing song. Many congregations add a song before the sermon. Modern congregations will have more songs. A progressive congregation may have more of the assembly time devoted to songs than to any other segment.

Closing – the last song in the worship ritual, usually sung before the closing prayer, although some congregations end the assembly with a closing song.

Invitation – the song sung during the invitation segment. The content of this song usually emphasizes obedience to God.

Opening – the first song in the worship ritual. The use of the term *opening song* is not common except among the people who plan the worship assembly.

Song books – Books containing a collection of songs. Most song books will have the words and the music, usually in four part harmony. Traditional congregations will use

books with *shaped notes*, musical notations indicating the notes relation to the scale according to the key. The song books can be strong indicators of a congregations position on a continuum from traditional through moderate to progressive, according to the ratio of new to old songs included in the song books. The song books are kept in song book racks attached to the back of the pews. Each song is numbered. A song leader is more likely to identify a song to be sung by number than name.

Song-leader – The person assigned the responsibility of starting each song during the worship assembly. The song leader functions as a master of ceremonies, indicating by word or action the movement from segment to segment. The song leader may direct the congregation in singing by signaling the beat of the song through hand and arm movements.

Trays -- utensils used to serve the communion.

Visitors - generally, anyone who is not a member of the congregation. Visitors are of two classes: First-time and repeat. A visitor who attends regularly soon ceases to be considered a visitor by the other members, although this person would still be expected to complete a visitor's card each week instead of a members' card.

Welcome - a segment of the ritual at the Westlink congregation, occurring early in the service. The minister will address the visitors, offering them a special Westlink welcome. Then the minister will ask all of the Westlink members to stand (pause) and to welcome the visitors (who are the only people left seated). There is much movement of the members around the auditorium. This segment usually lasts for about two minutes. The "welcome" developed as a means to locate and greet shy visitors. It has become a regular part of the service because of the informal, person-centered atmosphere that it creates.

Worship service -- The only time during the week when the majority of the members are together at one place, involved in a common interaction, is the Sunday morning assembly. This assembly is usually referred to as the "worship."