

Identification and Identity Building in/by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Identification and Identity Building in/by the
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

by

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ABSTRACT
IDENTIFICATION AND IDENTITY BUILDING IN/BY THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

David H. Torres

Marquette University, 2014

This study explored the identification process of employees within the national offices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This research explored identification as an attachment process to particular identity structures (e.g., individual, work group, occupational, and organizational). Findings illustrated particular tensions that emerged during the identification process. The role of faith-based organization, as well as, non-traditional organizational structures was accounted for in the identification process. Results of this study provided some immediate and practical implications for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in their identity building efforts. Most notable, was the relevance of uncovering the identity resources in the attachment process of identification. That is, by realizing to what employees attach the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will be able to collectively form an established and relevant organizational identity.

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David H. Torres

This thesis is dedicated to my family – my father and mother, Luquin, Becky, Lily, and William. This thesis is also for all those – like my father – who dedicated their life’s work to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). May the Lord bless you with peace and endless joy.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“The mission of the church is only possible where Christian identity is affirmed and expressed”

Mark G. Toulouse, 1997, p. 268

Joined in discipleship: The shaping of contemporary Disciples identity

Mainline protestant denominations are in a state of crisis. Denominations across the country are experiencing steady declines in membership (Allen, 2011). Consequently, individual giving is dipping threatening the long-term vitality of congregations (Markoe, 2012). Furthermore, decline in corporate loyalty has left a society with low levels of religious affiliation and even lower levels of trust in institutionalized religion (Wacker, 2012). The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a primary mainline protestant denomination. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), or Disciples Church, alongside the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the American Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America represent the primary mainline denominations within the United States (Toulouse, 1997).

As Toulouse’s opening statement intimates, the Disciples Church currently faces significant challenges in establishing and articulating its Christian identity to both its internal and external stakeholders. The Disciples have attempted to address this concern in various formats. In 2010, a consulting group was approached to develop an organizational-wide communications plan. Unfortunately, the plan was met with limited enthusiasm. This failed communications plan was, in fact, a point of reference when developing a portion of the current study’s rationale. That is, why does the Disciples Church struggle to build its own identity? Moreover, there seems to be an internal struggle within the national offices of the Disciples Church of what it means to be truly

Disciples. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to explore how employees of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) identify with the Church as an organization.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

In this section I present key elements of the Church that are applicable to the current study. The Disciples Church traces its tradition to the early nineteenth century and formed as one of the country's first protestant movements (Disciples, 2014). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century several reorganization efforts and partings occurred, the most prominent being the Restructure in 1968. The Restructure was the Disciples' bid as a mainline protestant denomination (Toulouse, 1997), no longer solely a movement of Christian faith. As a result, the majority of the national offices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) currently reside within the Disciples Center located in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Disciples Church presently represents 660,719 members throughout 3,685 congregations nation-wide (Disciples, 2014).

The Disciples church comprises one of the more unique organizational structures among the mainline denominations. There are two central descriptions that help describe this structure. The first description is the covenantal relationship (See Appendix A). This relationship, simply put, is the accountability mechanism that binds all expressions (i.e., congregational, regional, and general) of the Church. Thus, each expression is bound to one another not by authority but in covenant. The second description includes The Design. The Design addresses the overall structure of the Disciples Church, accounting for each expression. The congregational expression refers to the individual Disciples congregations of the Church. These congregations reside within the thirty-three

geographical regions of the Disciples Church (i.e., the regional expression) (Cummins, 2010). These regions – and the congregations therein – are supported by the national offices of the Disciples Church (i.e., ministries – the general expression) (See Appendix B for full list of ministries). These ministries – adhering to the covenantal relationship – maintain the position that no unit resides over the other. That is, there is no central governing body that dictates procedures, policies, or official viewpoints. Each ministry is accountable for its own individual structure and serves as a distinct legal entity. Following this premise, each ministry consists of its own board of directors. Additionally, each ministry is represented in the General Board of the Disciples Church. Thus, each ministry includes a board and the Disciples as an organization includes a board (i.e., the General Board).

Therefore, contrary to traditional hierarchal structures – top-down approaches – the Disciples Church represents more of a cooperative of ministries that work in covenant with one another. For the Disciples, the *covenant* represents a promise, a mutual understanding and shared sense of meaning around their *purpose*. The Disciples identity statement illustrates this *purpose*, it states:

We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us - Disciples of Christ identity statement (Disciples, 2014).

As this study uncovered, this statement represents key identity structures for Disciples employees. That is, this statement provides particular resources of identification for this particular group of organizational members. The idea of the Lord's Table is of particular relevance in that it signifies an open table for all people to partake. The value of an open table thus represents certain values of wholeness, community, and welcome.

The unique nature of the Disciples Church does present certain challenges. First, the organizational structure, as described, lends itself to primarily identify to an individual ministry. That is, due to the flatter and dispersed nature of the Disciples' structure, employees are more likely to attach to their ministry above and beyond the organization (i.e., the Disciples Church). Second, the Disciples structure contributes to the complexities of facing multilayered social issues. An example includes the Disciples' stance toward the LGBT community. Due to the Disciples structure, there is no one governing body that can establish an official stance toward to this particular concern. Therefore, certain groups may be at odds with a denomination that openly embraces *all* groups. Third, the Disciples structure affords susceptibility for a deafened organizational voice – *voice* in this instance is viewed as the collective organizational identity. Within a flattened and dispersed organization, such as the Disciples Church, the propensity to identify with the ministry over the organization may weaken the strength of an overall organizational identity. In order to mitigate the challenges this structure presents – in particular the possibilities of a weakened organizational voice – the Disciples developed The Identity Initiative. The Identity Initiative was established as the Disciples' attempt to construct a collective organizational voice (i.e., a collective organizational identity).

The Identity Initiative

The Identity Initiative was a process started in 2009 when the Disciples' General Board adopted the current Disciples' identity statement (Disciples, 2014). With the identity statement in place, the Council on Christian Unity – one of the Disciples ministries – and Communication Ministries worked together in order to realize the

identity statement throughout the Disciples Church. The Identity Initiative addresses certain questions regarding the Disciples' identity. Some of these questions include: *How can you explain if you don't have the words? How do you get the words and concepts? How can you reinforce the words and concepts? How can you convey the concepts to others?* (Disciples, 2014). These questions directly aim at uncovering ways in which Disciples' can communicate the identity of the Church. In 2013, at the General Assembly – a gathering of all Disciples' stakeholders – in Orlando, FL., the Disciples introduced the materials for the Church's identity-building efforts in form of The Identity Initiative. These materials include a compilation of short videos, discussion guides, library of writings and resources, and ready-made layouts for advertising campaigns. All together these materials serve to provide Disciples with the words and concepts to articulate the identity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Furthermore, The Identity Initiative, as an identity-building tool, also provides Disciples stakeholders (e.g., Disciples employees) with identity resources in which to identify. The relevance of The Identity Initiative to the current study, therefore, is in the relationship this effort has with Disciples' identifications. For this reason, The Identity Initiative will be revisited in the quantitative portion of this study.

The Identity Initiative materials have begun to surface throughout the denomination but its impact is still uncertain. These efforts in combination with the current study indicate the Disciples' ongoing resolve to remain relevant in the new millennium. With this in mind, I now turn this study's rationale.

Study Rationale

In order to maintain relevance in the 21st century the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) needs to devote careful and deliberate efforts toward developing its collective identity. That is, the Disciples Church needs to uncover one unified narrative that tells the life story of what it means to be inherently Disciples. Given that members are key authors of such narratives for any organization, one fruitful step in understanding the story is exploring the identification process between Disciples employees and the organizational identity of the Disciples Church at large. In this study, I follow Scott et al.'s (1998) definition of identification as the attachment process toward a particular identity target (e.g., individual, occupational, work-team, and/or organizational). In order to clearly articulate the Disciples' identity, the Disciples Church should account for questions, such as, *who are we?* More specifically, to *what of our Disciples identity do we attach ourselves?* Addressing these areas of identity will ultimately allow Disciples, at all levels, to clearly articulate its story of Christian identity to future generations. This collective narrative shall, thereby, shape the Disciples' consciousness, one that is grounded in the fundamental principles of faith, theological reflection, wholeness, and community.

There are, however, several obstacles that threaten this process of collective identity. In addition to the oft-cited challenges such as, decline in religious service attendance (Allen, 2011; Toulouse, 1997) and waning financial health (Markoe, 2012) are several less often discussed organizational threats. These include characteristics of 21st century American culture, the emergence of nondenominational churches, and Disciples-specific organizational concerns (Toulouse, 1997). Mark G. Toulouse (1997), in his book *Joined in discipleship: The shaping of contemporary Disciples identity*, addresses the

connection between modern American culture and the emergence of nondenominational churches (i.e. meta- and mega-churches). Toulouse argues that mainline denominations are negatively affected due to predominant American values, such as, consumerism, self-fulfillment, and the success ethic. These characteristics of modern day American culture have created a “what can you do for *my* spiritual needs?” perspective on religion as opposed to “what can *we* do together in faith?” This viewpoint, according to Toulouse (1997), has led to an emergence of nondenominational churches that address basic virtues of honesty and morality but lack in any sort of theological conviction where strong communities can flourish.

In addition to these social threats, are the internal struggles within the Disciples Church. The Disciples’ organizational structure (i.e., the Design), as discussed previously, provides one of the Church’s most significant challenges. The Design lends itself to fragmentation – that is, the covenantal relationship to which the ministries adhere has in fact created an organization of individual siloes. This fragmentation produces identity uncertainty that leads to confusion and inaction among internal and external Disciples stakeholders. Toulouse (1997) commented on the gap between denominational offices and its congregations, he stated: “The gap between laity and clergy among Disciples, therefore, is probably similar to the gap that exists in most mainline churches, one that is based upon the conflict of cultures that exists between congregations and their denominational offices” (p.256). This, I believe, addresses one of the many internal challenges the Disciples Church faces. In essence, the Disciples’ structure could be structuring the identification process of its stakeholders. That is, an organizational structure that was created to unify and create wholeness may be the very factor that is

impeding unity throughout the Disciples Church. The absence of a clearly developed and coherent organizational voice from the Disciples – as an organization – may be leaving stakeholders devoid of any material or social resources to attach to. In order to capture this compelling rationale, the Disciples must examine the process by which their stakeholders identify.

This present study focuses primarily on one group of the Disciples' stakeholders, the employees of the Disciples' national offices. By uncovering the process by which these employees identify, the Church will have a better understanding of its overall identity and more specifically how to communicate this identity throughout the organization. For these reasons, this study focuses on faith-based organizing, identification and tensions, and the Disciples ongoing identity-building efforts (e.g., The Identity Initiative).

Current communication scholars have explored identification within various organizational settings (Cheney, 1983a; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Williams & Connaughton, 2012). Only until recently have identification studies begun to address the context of faith-based organizations (FBOs) (See McNamee, 2011; Silva & Sias, 2010). The current study, however, addresses certain gaps within the identification literature. This current study examines the attachment process of employees within an alternative, non-traditional organizational structure. That is, the present study investigates the complexity of identifying within an organization that lacks a central governing body or authoritative voice. Furthermore, this research considers the context of a faith-based organization as a place of work. This study considers implications of attaching to an identity target that is both spiritual and administrative in nature. Specifically, this study

complicates the process of identification by examining possible distinctions between employees who are also members of the Disciples Church and those Disciples employees who are not. Thus, in such an organization, I examine the resources to which Disciples employees attach. Examining identification in the described faith-based organization provides an opportunity to also address the call put forth by Cheney, Christensen, and Dailey (2014). Cheney and colleagues argue for more research that examines how identification shapes the work people do. Therefore, this study discusses the implications certain attachments of Disciples employees may have on the work they perform. An example would be instances where employees strictly attach to immediate work-group policies over competing organizational policies (e.g., the failed communications plans), resulting in identity/identification tensions.

Furthermore, this study builds on the call for more applied perspectives of tension research (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). This perspective views tensions in general and identification tensions in particular as an essential process of organizing. Therefore, this study contributes to identification tension scholarship (Morgan et al., 2004; Williams & Connaughton, 2012) that emphasizes living *in* tension as opposed to dealing with tension. Lastly, this study adds to the limited number of identification studies that embrace a true mix of engaged scholarship and mixed methods approaches. According to Garner (2013), engaged scholarship studies are better positioned to address the complex problems of organizational life. In the end, this applied study is posed to contribute to scholarship in the areas noted above, and offer practical implications for the Disciples Church as well as for similarly structured organizations.

Preview

The following sections introduce the main theoretical components, methodology, and results of this study. First, I discuss the central premise of identity and identification, alongside key elements of Scott, Corman, and Cheney's (1998) structurational model of identification. Next, I review tensions in communication research and their role in identification studies. Based on this review of literature, I present three primary research questions that help guide this study. I then review the mixed methods portion of the study and discuss both the interview and survey data collection procedures. The results of the study follow along with a discussion of this study's theoretical and practical contributions. Lastly, I provide the national offices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with practical recommendations based on this study's results.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this section of the literature review, I present central elements of the theoretical concepts of identity and identification. In addition, I examine certain components of a structural model of identification (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998) as a guiding framework for this research study. Similarly, I explore an applied perspective of tension-centered research and its implications on identification. Finally, I examine the interplay of identification tensions within the context of faith-based organizations.

Identity and Identification

The identity and identification body of work is extensive. The concepts of identity and identification have historical roots from the fields of psychology, sociology, and biology (Cheney, Christensen, & Dailey, 2014). The focus on identity across these several fields represents a unifying force that serves to characterize all living systems (Cheney et al., 2014). In other words, identity helps disciplines in and outside of communication make sense of the work they do. Identity can be found in *distinction* and in *sameness*; in who we are and who we are not (Cheney et al., 2014; Feldner & D’Urso, 2010; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Identity, then, can be defined by statements, such as, “I am because I am different” (*distinction*) and “I am because I am similar” (*sameness*) (Feldner & D’Urso, 2010).

Perspectives on Identity

There have been several definitions of identity. Identity has been viewed as central and enduring characteristics for individuals and organizations (Czarniawska-

Joerges, 1994). For individuals, for instance, identity is the core of one's being (Gioia, 1998; Smith, 2013). Identity has also been described as "core beliefs or assumptions, values, attitudes, preferences, decisional premises, gestures, habits, rules, and so on" (Scott et al., 1998, p. 303). Historically, identity has been viewed as a *fixed* notion of 'self' (Godley, 2003; Smith, 2013). This perspective of identity, however, separates the 'self' from social context and influence (Collinson, 2003; Smith, 2013), therefore discounting contextual elements that play a role in shaping how an individual understands the notion of his/her identity (i.e., 'self'). This perspective essentially assumes stable characteristics of identity (Scott et al., 1998). That is, this *fixed* view of identity does not account for social and contextual factors.

This present study, however, takes a discursive perspective on identity, one that is contextually situated (Godley, 2003; Smith, 2013). That is, I account for contextual elements (e.g., religion, faith-based organizations, spirituality, and organizational structure) and the role they play in identity and identification. This perspective views identity as formed by various contextual discourses (Alvesson, 1994). These discourses are not exhaustive, but simply offer brief insight into the multiple contexts that play a role in shaping identity, particularly in terms of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Thus, these discourses may play a role in shaping specific elements of particular identity targets that individuals attach to.

Godley (2003) argued "we can see ourselves and be seen in a variety of ways depending on where we are, what we are doing, and with whom we are speaking" (p. 275). Conceptualizing identity as such provides an opportunity to explore the dynamic and pluralistic nature of organizations and work (Smith 2013). For instance, there is room

to build on extant identity research by exploring how individuals attach to specific identity targets while accounting for multiple and contextual discourses, such as, religion, spirituality, and structure. Additionally, not only is there room to explore how individuals identify within these terms, but equally relevant is to explore the attachment process within non-traditional, less hierarchal organizations. In other words, there is a void in the current identity literature that examines (a) which identity targets individuals identify with considering faith and other religious elements *and* (b) to what degree individuals attach to these targets within alternative organizational structures. In order to address this gap in the identification literature, I further examine the attachment process toward specific identity targets. The following section, therefore, will cover the relationship between identity sources and identification.

Identification

Organizational identification refers to the extent to which organizational members share and express an organization's values (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987; Silva & Sias, 2010). Mael and Ashforth (1992) also defined organizational identification as the "perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization" (p. 104). Kuhn and Nelson (2002), more directly foregrounding communication, defined identification as a "*discursive process* implicating, shaping, expressing, and transforming identity structures that occurs during coparticipation in coordinated (i.e., organizational) activity" (p. 7, emphasis in original). Organizational identification has also been viewed as the communicative process by which members align *or* distance themselves from sources of identity such as organizations (Larson & Pepper, 2003). Identification has links to

concepts, such as, *belongingness*, *attachment*, and *membership*. For example, Patchen (1970) considered *belongingness* as a key feature of organizational identification.

Scholars in fields ranging from psychology to economics have viewed identification as the *attachment* with a particular group or organization (Cheney et al., 2014). The current study views identification as the attachment process to a particular identity target (Scott et al., 1998).

From a communication perspective, identification emphasizes the process by which personal identity is shaped by interaction (Cheney et al., 2014). Scott and colleagues (1998) stated “the story we tell of ourselves in interaction...is the essence of identification” (p. 305). This view paves a way for discourse-oriented studies of identity and identification by examining the communicative expressions of interaction within group contexts (e.g. decision-making or recollections of past decision-making processes). Similarly, the process of identification, according to Simon (1976), can be viewed when an individual considers options in terms of the possible consequences for their group (Cheney et al., 2014). The communicative emphasis on identification provides an opportunity to view the identification as a process rather than as a product or end-state (Cheney et al., 2014).

Many studies have explored identification as a communicative and dynamic process, one that is constantly negotiated and co-constructed (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003; McNamee, 2011; Silva & Sias, 2010). Chaput et al. (2011), as cited in Cheney et al. (2014), examined identification as a process unfolding through everyday interactions. Frandsen (2012) similarly explored identification as a communicative process in her study examining negative organizational image and

identification among prestigious, high-profile financial professionals. In this study, Frandsen (2012) concluded “that employees may not be threatened by a tainted organizational image when the employer is able to support other social identities from which the employees can gain a positive work identity” (p. 372). These results relate to the current study in three ways. First, Frandsen illustrates the attachment process employees experience in the workplace. That is, Frandsen explores the particular elements of social identities (e.g., professional and work-group identities) employees within this low-prestige organization attached to. Second, Frandsen presents the implications of supporting this attachment process for organizations. Employers may mitigate lower organizational identification by uncovering and investing into their employees’ attachments. Third, Frandsen’s results show the benefit of acknowledging the process of distancing (i.e., dis-identification) from negative elements of the organizational identity (i.e., low prestige organizational image). The professionals in this study showed little negative impact by distancing themselves from the unattractive image and instead embracing their professional and work-team identities.

Scott and colleagues (1998) provided a seminal piece in organization identification scholarship, one central to the current study. Their structural model provides identification scholars an opportunity to examine the communicative process of identification as it unfolds in situ. A situational perspective takes into consideration contextual elements that shape and influence the process by which individuals identify. This framework affords that ability to isolate and examine various sources of identification, in essence, diverging from the notion that identity is fixed. These identity sources serve as targets to which organizational members attach. The current study

contributes to the body of research that explores the relationship among multiple identity targets within organizations (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003; McNamee, 2011; Morgan et al., 2004; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998; Silva & Sias, 2010; Stephens & Dailey, 2012). However, there remains room to build on this scholarship by exploring identification with identity targets within a faith-based organization. That is, the current study addresses questions, such as, what role does a faith-based organization identity target (i.e., a target that represents both spiritual values as well as administrative values) play in the attachment process among employees? Furthermore, this study expands our understandings of attachment with identity targets by examining this dynamic within a non-traditional organizational structure (e.g., the Design and covenantal relationship).

Exploring identification, in essence, is examining the discursive activities members express during the attachment process toward a particular identity target. Therefore, as Larson & Pepper (2003) stated, “identities are expressed through language” (p. 529), identities are being produced and reproduced in the process of identification. Identities as discursive creations influence how members negotiate meanings and make sense of the world (Larson & Pepper, 2003). In other words, the discursive process of identification explains the process by which members attach to these identities. The interplay between identity and identification is such that organizational members select among these multiple identity sources (Larson & Pepper, 2003). The identification process therefore becomes a process by which members negotiate which targets or sources of identity they select and which they reject.

As mentioned, Scott and colleagues (1998) provided a foundation for studying a situated perspective of identification, one that considers multiple sources of identity

(Larson & Pepper, 2003). Stephens and Dailey (2012) added to a communicative-based identification perspective in their study of new employee orientation. This study provided insight into the situated and changing process of identification. Findings from this research indicated that prior experiences primed new employees which influenced their identification with the organization. Thus, these results suggested that prior experiences for new employees played a role in the attachment process of certain identity targets.

Similarly, Larson and Pepper (2003) examined how members communicatively managed multiple sources of identification within a company during transition. Results revealed three discursive strategies - comparison, logic, and support – members used to negotiate multiple identity sources. Their results illustrated how discursive accounts showed the attachment process toward multiple identity sources. This study contributed to the importance of discourse in illustrating how organizational members negotiate various identifications.

To that end, Kuhn and Nelson (2002) explored the multiplicity and duality of identification during a planned organizational change. Results illustrated members' discursive resources as claims to identity structures. Some examples of these discursive resources included superior vision and role definition. These resources were used discursively to alleviate conflict during organizational change. Furthermore, their findings expanded on Scott's (1997) claim that members tend to prefer identity structures that are more local rather than distant. Additionally, Kuhn and Nelson's (2002) results are similar to the current study in that both explore the discursive claims of the attachment process toward specific identity structures (i.e., sources, targets).

Morgan et al. (2004) also contributed to identification scholarship in their study of agribusiness employees and the multiple sources of identity used in the process of identification. This study explored the process by which employees embraced certain sources and rejected others. Some employees connected to the identity source of ‘organization as provider’ while others used the same as a source to dis-identify. The latter was a process of detachment from the organization as a provider. This study, similar to Frandsen (2012), illustrates the process of dis-identification as a detachment with certain elements of an identity source. In this instance, the identity source was the organization identity and specifically the identity of the ‘organization as provider’. The notion of dis-identification is relevant to the current study in that it shows the potential for non-traditional structures (e.g., the Design) to manage complex social and organizational issues.

The Disciples Church, therefore, as well as similar organizations, can benefit from uncovering and realizing the identity structures to which their employees attach. By so doing, these organizations may better realize opportunities to create space to negotiate complex problems associated with their non-traditional organizational structures. In order to fully capture the interplay of identity structures and identification I now turn to a more robust account of Scott and colleagues’ (1998) structural model of identification.

A Structural Model of Identification

In order to accomplish the central aims of this current study, the structural model of identification served as a primary theoretical framework (Scott, et al., 1998). This model, as stated, affords an evaluation of the attachment process by which

organizational members identified with specific identity targets (i.e. a person, a group, a vision, etc.) (Pratt, 1998). Specifically, this model allowed me to explore what targets and to what extent employees of the Disciples Church identified. The following section will briefly explain the basic elements of this model beginning with structuration theory, followed by briefly revisiting the identity-identification duality, and concluding with the two central components of this model, regionalization and activity.

Structuration Theory

The structurational model of identification is based in Giddens' (1984) structuration theory where structures are defined as the rules and resources available for an individual within a given situation. Systems, accordingly, refer to the process by which individuals produce and are mediated by structures. This duality reflects "the process by which human action both produces and is mediated by structure" (Scott et al., 1998, p. 301). Structuration theory as a basis for this model of identification therefore allows for exploring how identity serves as a resource in social settings such as organizations (Scott et al., 1998).

Identity – Identification Revisited

Moving from structuration theory towards the model of identification, identity serves as the resources for interacting with others. Scott et al. (1998) argued that identity is the anchor of the individual or collective self. Furthermore, individuals may identify with anchors or targets such as person, groups, and collectivities (Cheney, 1983b). For example, employees may identify with the values (e.g., compassion and tolerance) of

his/her particular department. In this scenario, employees may specifically attach to values of compassion and tolerance that their department identity represents.

Furthermore, these values could be expressed communicatively in the various interactions that occur within the department. That is, it is through communication that these values manifest themselves throughout the department. Thus, the department identity anchors the person as an employee of this particular group based on the attachment between the employee and the departmental values of compassion and tolerance.

As stated, identification is the attachment process toward a particular identity target (e.g. the identity as a member of a particular ministry). Furthermore, identification, according to Scott et al. (1998) is “the forging, maintenance, and alteration of linkages between persons and groups” (Scott et al., 1998, p. 304). Similarly, Scott et al. (1998) view identification as the process of emerging identity” (p. 304). According to Pratt (1998), identity addresses the question “Who am I?” (p. 171), whereas identification addresses, “How do *I* come to know who I am in relation to *you*?” (p. 171). Cheney (1983a) stated identification “is an active process by which individuals link themselves to elements in the social scene” (p. 342). The current study follows these perspectives and strictly adheres to a view of identification as the linking or attachment between an organizational member and an identity source or target.

Following the earlier example, identification can occur between the employee and specific values that a department espouses. However, this attachment process may also be toward a greater organizational identity that promotes a conflicting set of values. The

presence of multiple identity sources illustrates what Scott and colleagues (1998) define as regionalization.

Regionalization

Regionalization and multiple identities are components of the structural model of identification that are particularly relevant to this study. Regionalization refers to the multiple groups of identities that are present in an organization. According to Scott et al. (1998), there are four core organizational identities including individual, work group, occupational, and organizational identity. Table 1 provides a brief description.

Table 1
Descriptions of identity targets

Organizational Identities	Description
<i>Individual</i>	Refers to the personal interests that put the individual's well-being above more social considerations
<i>Work group</i>	Refers to where the interest of an immediate and interacting group are strongly considered
<i>Occupational/Professional</i>	Refers to where consideration is made about the effects of one's actions on their industry, professional associations, unions, or job types
<i>Organizational</i>	Refers to where the interests of the employing or primary organization are most salient

Source: Scott, C. R., Corman, S. R., & Cheney, G. (1998). Development of a structural model of identification in the organization. *Communication theory*, 8(3), p. 313.

Each identity, therefore, provides a distinct set of rules and resources that members draw upon as they interact with one another. Each identity also engages in an interplay of primacy, creating particular identity tensions. Cheney (1983b) stated that “an individual comes to have a variety of ‘corporate identities’ that are sometimes concentric and other times in conflict” (p. 145). For example, the tension of individual versus organizational identity is well-documented within both popular and academic literature. In this tension we see a jockeying of primacy between the individual identity that emphasizes the individual’s well-being, and the organizational identity that primarily values organizational interests.

The convergence of identities speaks to what Scott et al. (1998) referred to as overlapping regions (identities). Overlapping regions addresses the degree of compatibility and tension between multiple identities. For example, an organizational member’s individual identity may be central as s/he begins a new position within an organization, but as they progress through the socialization process this identity may become less relevant compared to their emerging organizational or work team identity. The communicative activities that organizational members perform are ideal for examining the attachment process toward multiple identity targets.

Activity

The communicative activities that organizational members perform show how multiple, converging organizational identities emerge and collapse within various settings. A situated-action perspective of identification within this model (Scott et al., 1998) focuses on *when* an individual identifies with one or more identity targets. Thus, a

situated-action perspective accounts for the discursive activities that illustrate the identification process (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). Moreover, the intersection of activity and contexts affords the opportunity to explore the communicative manifestations of identification tensions.

Scott et al. (1998) believed that “a useful model of identification must be one that allows for some variation from situation to situation and a view that accounts for the enduring and shifting aspects of identity and identification” (p. 321). Thus activity, identity, and communication are linked as expressions of identification. Simply put, an organizational member’s communicative expressions can illustrate the identification process toward particular identity targets within various organizational circumstances. Identification can be observed within the communicative messages (i.e. talk) that occur in social interaction (Cheney, 1983b). Therefore, activity provides space to explore language or communication as a significant element of examining identification.

Silva and Sias (2010) utilized the structurational model of identification in their study of groups within a large religious organization. Moreover, they explored the role of groups within the identity and identification relationship. Their results revealed three ways – connection, restructuring, and buffering – in which groups mediated the process of identification. These three categories of discursive accounts illustrated the attachment process of organizational members toward a religious organizational identity, mediated by groups. McNamee (2011) similarly explored the situated nature of identification within the context of a large Baptist church. Her work examined the negotiated nature of church member’s interactions and provided an understanding of how this process shaped identities for pastors and non-pastors. Ultimately, McNamee (2011) concluded

congregational members' sense of faith was at tension with his/her identity as church member. These results are similar to the current study in regards to the role faith and religion play in identification among organizational members. That is, in the current study I address how Disciples employees attach to identity targets that are both spiritual as well as administrative. In order to further explore this dynamic, I examine the nature of tensions from an applied perspective.

Tensions in Communication Research

To capture the complexities of identification and multiple identities targets, I draw on perspectives of tension within communication research. To begin, it is important to explain several terms commonly conflated in existing scholarship. Tension refers “to the clash of ideas or principles or actions and to the discomfort that may arise as a result” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 353 – 354). In their review of the paradoxes of employee participation and workplace democracy, Stohl and Cheney (2001) also provided definitions of two related concepts. Contradictions are “situations in which one idea, principle, or action is in direct opposition to another” (p. 354). Whereas, paradoxes are “situations in which, in the pursuit of one goal, the pursuit of another competing goal enters the situation...so as to undermine the first pursuit” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 354).

This study's emphasis on tensions follows Trethewey and Ashcraft's (2004) call for the development of applied perspectives on tension in organization studies. As such, I situate this project as an applied study that views tensions as an enduring element of organizing (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004), one that is inherently tied to the study of identification. As presented in Scott et al. (1998) and other related structural studies

(Silva & Sias, 2010; McNamee, 2011), organizations include multiple identity targets (e.g., individual, work-group, occupational, and organizational). These identity targets are not only inherent to most organizational settings but, as I have argued, compete and clash for primacy creating certain tensions. Thus tensions that result from identifying with multiple identity targets are inherent to organizational life and the process of organizing. Therefore, by situating my study as such I hope to extend the utility of applied perspectives of tensions. Furthermore, this perspective provides an opportunity for “rich understandings of actual practice and thereby aid in theory building” (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004, p. 82). Accordingly, the significance of organizational tensions resides in the everyday negotiations members experience between formal and informal social systems found in organizations (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). The process of identification can be seen as one example of such social systems. The tensions that arise in the identification process can therefore be examined through the discursive accounts of such negotiations. In the current study, I examine employees of the Disciples Church and accounts that illustrate the identification process within this unique organizational setting. By doing so I will not only be able to explore the attachment process between employee and multiple identity targets but also examine the discomfort (i.e., tension) that arises from clashing ideas or principles.

In order to extend Trethewey and Ashcraft’s (2004) call I address two critical assumptions of organizational tensions. First, is the suggestion that tensions are solely created by global and complex organizations (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). In this study, I follow the belief that tensions are in fact the character of organizing, they are not simply “anomalies” (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004, p.82) or characteristic of alternative

organizations. The second assumption calls into question the frame of rationality in the process of organizing. That is, the nature of organizing has been framed as an orderly and rational process. Following Trethewey & Ashcraft's (2004) lead, I purport that tensions, a significant element of organizing, do not follow "routine features of organizational life" (p. 83) but rather adhere to complex and at times contradictory processes of organizing. This process of (dis)organization is apparent in communication "where organizational members struggle for the primacy of various meanings of truth and identity" (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004, p. 83).

Theoretical development for an applied perspective on tension is necessary in order to account for the nature of organizing that is *not* at times rational, clear, or orderly. Common perspectives focus on resolving or "fixing" tensions as a barrier to productivity (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004; Wendt, 1998). It is my contention, however, that this approach is counter to the essence of organizing – that is, applying "rational" frameworks to irrational processes (i.e. organizing) does not contribute to the field of organizational communication. Rather, as Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004) suggest, tension-centered studies should focus on appropriate forms of living with tension, or living with "necessary incompatibles" (p. 84). The perspective of living *with* tensions creates space to account for faith-based identifying in addition to non-traditional organizational structures (e.g., the Design and covenantal relationship). That is, identification within a non-traditional, faith-based organizational structure requires a perspective that views organizing as not always clear and orderly.

Faith-based Organizations

Given that the present study explores identification in the national offices of a denomination, it is important to consider faith-based organization (FBO) perspectives to properly contextualize the research. Indeed, although this study is not exclusively an FBO study (e.g., McNamee, 2011), the context cannot be ignored, as it paves the way for understanding key tensions. The cultural institution of “The Church” is an example of a macro level tension. Chaves (1993) stated the Church is comprised of dual structures: religious authority and the agency structure. The religious authority structure is concerned with the process of maintaining a desired spiritual ‘good,’ whereas the agency structure is concerned with the processes of running an organization (e.g. administration, finance, strategic planning, etc.); there is the religion side, then there is the administrative side (McNamee, 2011).

The Church as an organization is in constant tension between the religious authority and agency structure. Organizational members, employees of a Church for example, may have to negotiate between the administrative responsibilities of running an organization and the religious obligations that distinguish the Church from others. Hoffman (2007) stated there is a constant tension between the professional and spiritual identity. Employees experience tension between *being* and *doing* within the Church (Gribas, 2008). The *being* in this case represents the spiritual whereas the *doing* is the instrumental. Again, this tension, in addition to the macro religious authority tension, serves as a contextual backdrop in which the Disciples Church, and employees therein, reside. This is important to address so as not to conflate the tension presented in the current study to a mere clash between professional and spiritual identity. Rather this

study extends our understanding of tension and identification by accounting for the Disciples' unique organizational structure (e.g., the Design). That is, the Disciples organizational structure complicates the presence of tension above and beyond any clash between *being* and *doing*, between professional and spiritual identity, and between religious authority and agency structure.

Because of the spiritual nature of faith-based organizations (FBOs), the Church – as a cultural institution – are in fact an ideal organization to manage and negotiate tensions (Hoffman, 2007). The relationship between spirituality and values plays a significant role in this negotiation process. Spirituality, with its emphasis of relationships and connection, thus affords values to be included in the process of organizing (Hoffman, 2007). This process is present in everyday communication practices such as decision-making, work assignments, and relationship development (Hoffman, 2007, pg. 205). In these instances, the values of spiritual organizations are produced and reproduced through the discursive interactions among its members. Therefore, in order to negotiate tensions organizations should uncover key connections between its members and the values they espouse. Stohl and Cheney (2001) added if tensions do occur then “identifying key values, and looking for points of coherence between those values and those of the larger institution” (p.354) are ideal for negotiating such tensions. In the process of managing tensions, discursive resources have the potential to illustrate identity structures and identification within the organization (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). These discursive resources express something about both the individual identity and what is valuable within the collective identity (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). That is, the discursive resources illustrate identity structures and corresponding values to which members attach. These values in

many instances are elements of a greater collective identity (e.g., values of an organizational identity target). Therefore, discursive resources provide an opportunity to uncover a.) what values organizational members attach, b.) the attachment process to these values, and c.) any potential connections of values between competing premises (e.g., competing identity targets, faith-based tensions, the Design tension). The spiritual nature of FBOs, thus, seems to provide an ideal setting to negotiate tensions (Hoffman, 2007).

Negotiating Multiple Identifications

The identification or attachment process that I explore resides in the context of faith-based organization. For the reasons previously mentioned, elements of religion, spirituality, and faith complicates our understandings of identification toward multiple identity targets. That is, these faith-based contextual elements problematize tensions in the identification process above and beyond the competition of traditional organizational identity targets (e.g., individual, work-group, occupational, and organizational) and contextual faith-based elements (e.g., *being – doing*; professional – spiritual identity; religious authority – agency structure). For example, questions that may arise include, *what does it mean to identify with an identity target that represents both a place of worship and a place of work (i.e., faith-based identity target)?* Complicating our notions even further is the role of organizational structure. In terms of the current study, the role of the Design and covenantal relationship. Therefore, additional questions may include, *what does it mean to identify with a faith-based identity target within an organizational structure that lacks a central and authoritative organizational voice?* Accounting for

these various contextual elements (i.e., faith-based and structural) extends the utility of identification approaches in organizational communication research. For the reasons mentioned, I therefore examine the extent to which organizational members identify and negotiate multiple identifications.

In terms of this study, I explore identification tensions that occur at the intersection of religion, faith-based organizing, and organizational structure. Tensions provide an opportunity to explore the extent to which organizational members identify with organizational values (Pepper & Larson, 2006). The notion of regionalization within the structural model of identification affords the possibility to explore not only multiple identities but also overlapping identities (Scott et al., 1998). Overlapping regions or identities, in this instance, addresses the possibilities of negotiating emerging tensions and how organizational members make sense of their world (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). Simply put, multiple sources of identification present the possibility of identity tensions to emerge (Pepper & Larson, 2006). Identity tensions are therefore seen as conflicting premises that may arise as they compete for an organizational member's definition (Pepper & Larson, 2006).

Williams and Connaughton (2012) examined organizational members' accounts of identification in a struggling organization. Specifically, they examined how these accounts illustrated emerging tensions in the identification process. This study identified three distinct tensions of identification: framing organization, ambivalent voluntary membership, and identification with local versus national organization. The results of this study are similar to the present study in that both address the dynamic of organizational members and their attachments to both local (e.g., work-group identity target) and distant

targets (e.g., organizational identity target). Williams and Connaughton (2012) found in their study that organizational members tended to attach to the more esteemed of the two targets. In their case, and departing from traditional identification viewpoints (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott, 1997), these members seemed to identify more with the more distant, organizational identity target. Although, the current study reflects more traditional instances of identification (e.g., identifying with local over distant targets), the present study's results do complicate our understandings of identification by illustrating the extent that having local identifications in a non-traditional structure (e.g., the Design) have toward inhibiting a collective identity. Pepper and Larson (2006) similarly examined identity tensions among organizational members within a post-acquisition organization – new versus old philosophy as the conflicting premise. Results revealed three identity tensions used to resolve identification conflict: collaboration/competition, assimilation/autonomy, and consensus/command. Although Pepper and Larson (2006) emphasized identity tensions as a mode to *resolve* identification conflict, the current study again aims at examining ways to live *with* tension. However, aside from this position, the results from Pepper and Larson's study relate to the current study in significant ways. Most notable is their study's contribution to the area of dis-identification. As stated, dis-identification, as an alternative form of identification, emphasizes the feelings of separateness and disconnection from the organization (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Elsbach, 1999; Pratt, 2000). Dis-identification addresses the process by which organizational members detach from certain elements of particular identity targets (e.g., organizational identity target). This detachment process may include distancing and disconnecting from espoused organizational values, policies, and – most

relevant to this study – organizational stances (e.g., the LGBT debate). Although dis-identification does not assume a complete separation or break between the member and the organization, it does, however, present possibilities of living *with* tension. In other words, by distancing from a certain organizational viewpoint a member – or a group of members for that matter – may still remain very much part of the organization, mitigating the possibilities of any absolute partings.

Referenced earlier, McNamee (2011), in her study of the communication practices of a large Baptist church, also explored tensions in the identification process. The results of her study contributed to examining the conflicting nature of identifications within faith-based organizations. In this study, McNamee (2011) examined the tension between the religious/spiritual identity of members and their organizational identities (i.e., church member). The results of this ethnographic study revealed three competing speech codes as well as the processes used by members to negotiate the emerging tensions.

McNamee's research provides a grounding for the present study, while leaving room for inquiry. The current study expands on these results by exploring the attachment process of employees in an environment that is both strictly administrative – the Disciples as a functional source – and strictly faith-based – the Disciples as a spiritual source.

Furthermore, the current study builds on McNamee's results by extending her implications from a traditional faith-based organizational structure (i.e. a large Baptist congregation) to the non-traditional organizational structure (e.g., the Design) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This study aims at examining the possibilities of the Disciples structure as a complicating mechanism within the attachment process between employee and identity target.

Summary and Research Questions

In this review, I presented the denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as my primary object of study. I examined the Disciples' unique organizational structure – the Design – and the covenantal relationship to which the various stakeholders of the Church (e.g., congregations, regions, and ministries) adhere. Furthermore, I presented certain challenges that this organizational structure presents with a particular emphasis of its role in Disciples identification. I briefly discussed an immediate social topic area that the Disciples Church faces in the LGBT debate. This conversation is one that offers rich insight into the ways a non-traditional, faith-based organization approaches complex viewpoints. I furthermore, discussed the possibilities that identification plays in living *with* tension rather than resolving tension. I also presented identification as an attachment process toward a particular identity target. I accounted for contextual factors that play a role in this identification process (e.g., faith-based organizing and the Disciples structure). I introduced a structural model of identification (Scott et al., 1998) as a central framework for this study. This model addresses key elements related to this study's central aims in identity targets, regionalization (i.e., multiple targets), and overlapping regions (i.e., identity targets).

Many of the presented studies have examined the communicative, social, and dynamic process of identification (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; McNamee, 2011; Pepper & Larson, 2006; Silva & Sias, 2010; Williams & Connaughton, 2012). Concurrently, many of these studies have explored this process as an attachment to particular identity targets. However, there is paucity in the identification literature that addresses the attachment

process within the context of faith-based organizations. Furthermore, as I have presented, organizations – particularly non-traditional, faith-based organizational structures (e.g., the Design) – may benefit from uncovering the attachments of their employees. Examining discursive accounts of the identification process, according to Kuhn & Nelson (2002), illustrates toward what identity structures employees attach. In order to address these critical areas of faith-based identification, I first explore how employees of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) describe themselves. For this reason, I ask:

RQ1: How do employees of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) identify as employees of the Church?

Additionally, much of the identification scholarship has not explored the influences identification may have on employee's sense of work (e.g., their commitment to the organization, their position as part of a collective body). Cheney et al. (2014) argued that more research needs to focus on how "identification shapes the work that people do and how the complete context of work shapes identity" (p. 708). In order to answer this call, in this study, I attempt to address how employees of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) view the work they do. For this reason, I ask:

RQ1a: How do these identifications shape the work of Disciples employees?

Similarly, there have been a limited number of studies that have explored how members negotiate organizational tensions in their everyday lives (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2007). Furthermore, only until recently (Koschman & Laster, 2011; Martin, 2004; Tracy, 2004) has research explored the everyday organizational tensions from an applied perspective. Therefore, this study aims to contribute toward tension-centered approaches, and asks:

RQ2: In a non-traditional, faith-based organizational structure, what identification tensions emerge?

Furthermore, Cheney et al. (2014) argued organizational communication scholars interested in identity and identification research should also focus on official expressions of what organizations posit their work stands for. They argued researchers could examine situations in “terms of identity formation, transformation, and narratives of work” (p. 708). In this vein, I pose my last research question:

RQ3: How do identifications affect the Disciples Church’s ongoing identity-building efforts (e.g. The Identity Initiative)?

This current study addresses voids within the identification tension literature by taking a multi-methodological approach within the context of a faith-based organization. The central goal of this study is to evaluate the identification process of Church employees by examining Disciples employees’ accounts of social interactions. Scott et al. (1998) suggested that examining these communicative expressions offers an opportunity to explore the identification process as it appears in everyday practice.

Chapter Five: Methodology

In order to answer the research questions outlined above, a mixed methods approach is most suitable. Myers (2014) offers two key advantages of mixed methods approaches. First, is the opportunity to provide multiple perspectives and a more thorough understanding of issues under investigation. A single perspective or paradigm can constrain researchers and force scholars to exclude elements of social phenomenon. Second, and regarding the field of organizational communication in general, empirical studies can benefit from mixed methods approaches “by probing sensitive organizational issues, replicating and expanding previous studies, and increasing the visibility of the field” (Myers, 2014, p. 313). This present study expands on several quantitative and qualitative organizational identification studies, therefore contributing to the overall development of the organizational communication field.

Myers (2014) argued that organizational identification studies, once defined by post-positive and survey research, are beginning to employ interpretive and qualitative methods. The combination of qualitative (e.g., interviews) and quantitative (e.g., surveys) methods provides an opportunity to explore many cultural elements of an organization and the extent to which they exist. For example, Myers (2014) argued “qualitative research...could examine how task-created environments produce different political subcultures while a quantitative follow-up through surveys could assess their pervasiveness” (Myers, 2014, p. 314). This latter point is particularly relevant in regards to this current study. As stated, this study aims at exploring the process by which employees identify *and* the pervasiveness of these identifications. It is specifically the ‘pervasiveness’ that the quantitative portion of this current study aimed to explore – that

is, to what extent do employees identify with their particular ministry and/or with their organization, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

With this in mind, in this study I triangulated qualitative (i.e. interviews) and quantitative (i.e. surveys) methods in order to capture nuances of how members identify and tensions that emerge from overlapping, conflicting identifications. According to Myers (2014), triangulation research allows for “a more complex understanding than analysis of one type of data would permit” (p. 305). In this case, I capitalized on the advantages of quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, the convergence of these two forms of data can provide stronger claims and support for research findings.

Participants and Context

The site for this study took place at the Disciples Center in Indianapolis, IN. The Disciples Center currently functions as the national hub for the majority of the Disciples Church national operations. This facility contains the primary operating units (or ministries) of the Disciples Church and serves as an ideal site to conduct a study of identification. I chose this organization due to my personal history with Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). My father was a Disciples minister for over 60 years and worked at the Disciples Center as the National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries. The Disciples Church, therefore, holds a significant place in our family’s history. Consequently, my family and I maintain several personal relationships with many employees at different levels of the national Church. Thus, conversations with these family acquaintances afforded access to a site with significant organizational communication concerns (e.g., internal communication, mission, identity).

I selected participants for the qualitative portion of this study from a sample of the following ministries: the Christian Church Foundation, Disciples Home Missions, the National Convocation, the Central Pastoral Office of Hispanic Ministries, and the Office of the General Minister and President. These groups represented some of the core ministries of the Disciples Church and provided an ideal depiction of the Church as an organization (See Appendix B for organizational structure). Interview participants (n=6) were selected through purposive sampling. That is, these participants were chosen based on personal contacts, and provided rich data and insight toward the identification process within the Disciples Church.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data collection for this project occurred in multiple stages. Initially, I had a phone conversation with my executive sponsor from the Disciples Church, in order to discern a level of interest and/or need. Based on this conversation, we agreed on the need for an organizational communication approach to the Disciples Church and agreed to move forward with conducting interviews as an initial step. Specifically, they were interested in my expertise in uncovering communicative processes that could be potentially inhibiting the Disciples Church. We then coordinated six interviews with representatives of the aforementioned ministries.

In addition to the qualitative interview data, I administered a survey via online questionnaire. For this quantitative phase of the project, I partnered with an additional executive sponsor close to the Disciples' identity-building efforts. I received approval from IRB for the online survey and distributed this tool to a census of all national

Disciples employees (n=173) (See Appendix C). Participants' (n=58) anonymity was maintained as presented within the IRB approval process. The survey itself was presented in two separate emails. The first email was sent as a notification of the upcoming survey and included the overall purpose of the study (See Appendix D). The second email included additional information regarding the study along with a link for the survey and related instructions (See Appendix E). Opinio served as the host survey management database.

Qualitative Data Collection

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) stated that a major purpose of qualitative interviews is to gather information “about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means” (p. 173); identification, in this study, is the process under observation. Therefore, in order to present a deep understanding of the identification process within the Disciples Church, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted (See Appendix F for interview guide). Fontana and Frey (2003) argued, that such interviews “can provide a greater breadth of data...given its qualitative nature” (p.74). Qualitative interviews establish the human relationship element of research that provides an opportunity to understand the complex realities of individuals (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The use of language is particularly significant where language and specific terms is important in the creation of “sharedness of meanings” (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 86). Language, therefore, becomes a critical element of data necessary for exploring the meanings associated with the identification process.

Scott and colleagues (1998) also stated that incorporating qualitative techniques, (e.g., interpreting accounts of decision-making) could uncover the identification process within a particular situation. Within these Disciples ministries, six employees were recruited to participate in this qualitative study. In order to maintain confidentiality each participant in this study is referred to by his or her pseudonym (Bob, Jeff, Frank, Chris, Mike, and Steve). Each participant served in an executive role within their given ministry. To further ensure confidentiality of participants, I do not indicate their specific roles within the Disciples Church. Length of employment for these participants ranged from two to sixteen years. Each participant was selected based on his or her ability to provide rich insight regarding the identification process within the Disciples Church. I conducted a total of six interviews, using a semi-structured approach and allocated 1 – 1.5 hours per interview. Interviews ranged from 48 – 70 minutes. Interviews and partial transcripts were later analyzed for accuracy. Interviews were digitally recorded and stored on my personal computer. In-depth notes were also used to analyze interviews and later cross-referenced against audio files.

A set of interview questions addressed recollections of past interactions as well as decision-making approaches (See Appendix F). An example includes; *explain to me how you make decisions during group projects?* This particular item provided insight into the process of identification. As Scott and colleagues (1998) note, recollections on decision premises and decision-making processes are key indicators of the identification process. Furthermore, such recollections also afford insight into the ways in which other contextual factors important to this study such as spirituality affect identification (Hoffman, 2007). Spirituality reflects an inculcation of values; values influence decision

making. Examining recollections of interactions between organizational members can provide instances of identification with specific identity targets (Scott et al., 1998).

Another example of a question used during the interviews was, *what impressions do you think those outside the Disciples Church have of the Church?* This item provided another opportunity to explore the attachment process of employees of the Disciples Church. By revealing how they felt about how others thought of the Church, participants showed to which targets they themselves identified with.

Quantitative Data Collection

Based on this qualitative data I uncovered that employees identified to a certain degree with their immediate work group (i.e., their ministry) while at times identifying with their organizational identity (i.e., the Disciples Church). In order to highlight this communicative phenomenon I conducted quantitative data collection and analysis in order to explore the extent to which employees identify with their ministry versus with the organization. I, furthermore, explored the relationship of these identifications with identity-building efforts (e.g., The Identity Initiative). In this way, I was able to explore the extent to which these identifications played a role in the Church's attempts to develop and maintain an overall identity.

Scott et al. (1998) argued that compatibility and tension throughout the identification process could be assessed based on statistical correlations of identification scores. These scores, typically found in survey design, have been used to evaluate identity size and importance. Correlations may also indicate the identity regions and

positions relative to one another (Scott et al., 1998). Therefore, I conducted an online, survey design as my quantitative method of data collection.

Instrumentation

Participants for this study completed a 67-item online survey (See Appendix G) that included a modified version of the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ) (Downs, 1994). A section of the survey was also dedicated to the Disciples Church Identity Initiative. Items addressing The Identity Initiative assessed various dimensions of cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels of measurement. The survey instrument also included six demographic items including; gender, age, employment tenure, department (ministry), employment status, and employment type. All items, excluding demographics, adhered to a 7-point likert scale, ranging from (1) very strongly disagree to (7) very strongly agree. The OIQ portion of the survey tool included items that related to both the Disciples Church and to the employee's particular ministry. Thus, the scale was created to examine attachment toward both work group (i.e., ministry) and organizational (i.e., Disciples Church) identity targets. The example below provides an illustration of this design:

Organizational identification:

I am very proud to be an employee of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Ministry identification:

I am very proud to be an employee of my ministry.

According to original pilot study data used to assess the organizational identification scale, a unidimensional composite score was used to measure identification

(Downs, 1994). Similarly, for this study I used a unidimensional composite score to assess organizational identification (OiS) and a unidimensional composite score to assess ministry identification (MiS). This instrument of organizational identification, according to original pilot study data, in comparison to related instruments of organizational commitment consistently reported high alphas contributing to the overall reliability of this measure (Downs, 1994). Additionally, scores for the OIQ and scores for similar organizational commitment instruments have also reported high correlations addressing the validity of this instrument.

Data Analysis Procedures

I used constant comparative method for analyzing the qualitative data (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001). This analytical method combined inductive category coding and the meanings associated with individual units of data (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001). “As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed” (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001, p. 134). These analytical features allowed me to unpack the elements of discourse as they related to the identification process within the Disciples Church. Specifically, this qualitative data allowed me to examine the identification overlap and the tensions that emerged.

Moving toward quantitative measures, I constructed a Difference of Identification score (DI) in order to explore the distinction of identifications (organizational – ministry) among Disciples employees. This score was calculated as, Organizational Identification

score (OI) – Ministry Identification score (MI) = Difference of Identification score (DI).

In order to examine these identification tensions in the workplace, I then conducted independent-samples t-test using the OI and MI scores and basic employment demographics variables (employment status and employment type).

The final two statistical tests used in this study addressed identification scores (i.e. OI and MI) and susceptibility of the Disciples' Identity Initiative. That is, in this study I was concerned with the relationship of identification and learning susceptibility toward The Identity Initiative. In order to explore this relationship I first constructed three Identity Initiative subscales using all related survey items. These subscales represented cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects of measurement. Bloom's taxonomy of learning represents a general framework that accounts for a thorough understanding of education across multiple fields (Krathwohl, 2002). This is relevant to the presented subscales because it provides the extent to which Disciples are susceptible to learning the Church's identity-building efforts.

The Identity Initiative cognitive subscale (COG) demonstrated very good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .95. The Identity Initiative affective subscale (AFF) also demonstrated very good internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of .94. The Identity Initiative behavioral subscale (BEH) similarly demonstrated very good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89. By developing such subscales I was able to account for a thorough explanation of Identity Initiative receptivity among Disciples employees. That is, these scales assisted in examining the extent to which Disciples employees were receptive to The Identity Initiative. From here, I conducted Pearson product-moment correlations (r) between identification scores (OI

and MI), and The Identity Initiative subscales (COG – AFF – BEH). The final statistical test, Multiple Regression, was used in order to determine the predictability of identification scores (OI and MI) toward behavioral intentions (BEH) related to the Disciples' identity-building efforts.

In summary, I implemented a mixed methods approach to this study of identification. The data collection procedures were conducted in two steps. First, I conducted six in-depth interviews with employees of the Disciples Church. These employees represented five core ministries of the Church. Second, I administered a survey in form of online questionnaire. This survey was disseminated to all employees of the Disciples' national offices (n = 173). Qualitative data was analyzed using Maykut and Morehouse's (2001) constant comparative method for analyzing data. Additionally, this study's quantitative data was analyzed using a combination of index scores, independent-sample t-tests, and multiple regression statistical tests. The following section will explore the results stemming from these data collection methods. Furthermore, I provide an integration of these findings accounting for the complex nature of identification within faith-based organizing.

Chapter Four: Results

Qualitative Results

One aim of this study was to explore how employees of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) identified as employees of the Church. Based on in-depth interviews with six employees of the Church, three central themes emerged. They included *ministry identification*, *community and welcome*, and *nobody knows and nobody cares*. Within each theme were subthemes that further elaborated on these results. Together these themes depict a sense of how Disciples employees identified with the Church, as well as emergent identification tensions and complexities associated with non-traditional, faith-based organizational structures.

Ministry Identification

I begin with identification toward a specific ministry. The Disciples Church's ministries represented the immediate work group target identity with which employees primarily identified. That is, the Disciples' ministries illustrate Scott et al.'s (1998) description of work group identity targets. Each ministry represented certain elements (e.g., values, philosophies, policies, etc.) to which employees attached. Specifically, the ministries of the Christian Church Foundation, Disciples Home Missions, the National Convocation, the Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries, and the Office of the General Minister and President were all examples of work groups within this faith-based organization. Following analysis of interview data, two subthemes emerged related to the process of work group identification or ministry identification: *ministry identification that*

gives us strength and *ministry identification that holds us back*. As these subthemes suggest, the extent to which employees identified with their work group provided both strength and challenge in the workplace. Importantly for this study, this interview data illustrates a prevalent and significant identification tension within the organization.

Ministry Identification That Gives us Strength

Prior to sharing their stories, all Disciples employees (i.e., Bob, Jeff, Frank, Chris, Mike, and Steve) made sharp distinctions between their experiences as an employee of their ministry and those as an employee of the Disciples Church. When asking about their experiences regarding decision-making processes, I needed to clarify the area of their employment to which I was referring, either their ministry or the Disciples Church. The Disciples organizational structure (e.g., the Design) enabled the identification process toward the work group (i.e. ministry), creating primacy toward this identity target. Each ministry served as its own legal entity, with its own administrative, financial, and payroll structures. This organizational structure, therefore, reinforced the employees' attachment to their immediate work group.

When speaking about his experiences regarding the decision-making process, Bob referenced the unique culture of his particular ministry (Bob, November 11, 2013), which provided a key source of identification. This culture, in his estimation, was disparate to all other ministries. According to Bob, his ministry emphasized an environment in which employees were encouraged to challenge and question. This value, in Bob's mind, separated his ministry from others. He stated that the *DNA* of his ministry was much different than others. According to Bob, this was reflected in the ministry's overarching

philosophy (i.e., value or set of values) that emphasized the ministry over the individual. The value of challenging others within Bob's ministry was in a spirit of encouragement and not of criticism. Employees within this ministry, according to Bob, often identified with the work group over other identities such as individual, occupational, or even organizational. Bob's overall attachment to the unique nature (i.e., one the values challenge and trust) of his ministry provided a sense of strength and support as a Disciples employee. Scott et al. (1998) argued that identification is the attachment process toward a particular identity target (e.g., attachment to the work-team identity). Bob illustrated a direct example of the identification process at work. Bob identified with the philosophy and values for which his ministry stood for. That is, Bob attached to his ministry's philosophy of challenge in a spirit of trust. These values of challenge and trust were the specific elements of the work group identity target that Bob attached. The attachments to these values anchored Bob as a member of his ministry. The attachment process, moreover, guided his work and how he made sense of his role in the organization.

Identification toward the work group identity was present in other ministries as well. In explaining a recent transformation within his ministry, Frank stated that his team was charged to make decisions together; accordingly their work needed to be synthesized (Frank, November 11, 2013). This transformation was unfortunately due to an unhealthy financial climate. Because of this significant challenge, Frank felt it was critical that every decision be made with the immediate work group in mind. Employees, according to Frank, followed this philosophy in their everyday interactions. Using the decision-making process as an example, all decisions were made with the ministry in mind. This

provided another example of work group identification in action. Frank and his employees attached to the ministry's (i.e., work group identity target) philosophy of synthesizing every decision and function together. Again, this example illustrates the attachment toward a specific element of the work group identity target, in this instance a philosophy of making decisions together. The attachment to this philosophy anchored Frank and his employees in the work group identity, this process guided the work they did as a result. This attachment process is also very much a communicative process. That is, the philosophy of 'synthesizing work' manifested itself through the daily interactions of the employees. These discursive resources created a group structure that work would at all time be synthesized together. This dynamic reflects the process by which human action produces and is produced by structure(s), a fundamental element of Scott and colleagues' (1998) structurational model of identification.

Both of these scenarios presented a case whereby identifying with the ministry provided the employees with strength and affirmation that their work was contributing to the mission of their work group. Bob, when asked about how his work contributed to the mission of his ministry, stated: "Well, I, in particular...we're working with individuals...that will bless the future generation of the Church...its allowing us to enhance our outreach. Which is feeding their passion".

An interesting note is that by identifying with the work group, an overlap with occupational identity occurred. In sharing successes within his ministry, Jeff shared several areas of his occupational identity (Jeff, November 11, 2013). He identified with challenging the old mindset regarding administration processes. He talked about

implementing streamlining procedures that saved money that was later re-invested in the Disciples Church:

Definitely the administrative streamlining. The fact that we're turning back about 400,000 dollars a year that was going to administration that's now going to ministry...whether that's taking over the management of the building, which saved about 250,000 dollars a year...and is helping us operate more efficiently and effectively and in more modern ways.

These areas were directly related to his specific occupational role, as an administrative executive, but were also linked to his particular ministry. That is, “administrative streamlining” represented a specific element of his occupational identity target that he attached to. Thus, Jeff provided another illustration of the identification process at work. Jeff attached to the elements of “administrative streamlining” not only in his occupational but also in his work group identity target. The administrative functions of his occupation, in addition, to the policies his work group enacted (e.g., assuming management over the building – a streamlining activity) were specific elements of both identity targets that Jeff attached to. In this instance, attaching to this specific element of his occupational and work group identity targets provided a sense of accomplishment and strength in his work as a Disciples employee.

Chris provided another example of overlapping identities. Chris, identifying with the work group, stated “I see myself as a connector trying to get it so people understand that each other are out there. And also an inviter. Inviting people to be in touch, involved with...feel a part of this larger expression of the Church” (Chris, November 12, 2013). While identifying with the immediate ministry, Chris also attached to specific elements of the occupational identity target (e.g., being a “connector” and an “inviter”). Jeff and Chris statements echo Scott and colleagues' (1998) definition of identification as the

attachment process toward a particular identity target. While identifying with their specific work group identity target, however, both Disciples employees also attached to the occupational targets of administrator and connector, respectively. Both Jeff and Chris's comments illustrated the nature of overlapping identities, in this instance occupational and ministry identity targets.

Together, the interview data presented in this subtheme revealed the nuanced attachment process of identification. The accounts of these Disciples employees illustrated the ways in which attaching to specific elements of their immediate work group (i.e., their ministry) provided a sense of strength and support. This was seen through identifying with the distinctiveness of their ministry as well as through occupational proficiency.

Ministry Identification That Holds us Back

The second subtheme within ministry identification speaks to the areas of ministry identification that produces challenge rather than strength. Throughout the interviews many employees referenced the unique culture of their respective ministry. They repeatedly expressed the distinct nature of each ministry using various metaphors to illustrate these differences. Bob, for example, previously provided the metaphor of *DNA*. In that instance, the unique *DNA* of the ministry was in reference to the environment where employees were free to challenge in a spirit of trust. Again, Bob in this previous example was attaching to the values his work group identity target represented (e.g., the values of challenge and trust). Interestingly, the use of the *DNA* metaphor was also used

to describe instances where the distinct nature of the ministries was an obstacle to overcome. Bob elaborated on this dynamic:

...playing further on the siloes, we each are such an independent organization. We're structured differently, there's a different culture in each...a different DNA within each ministry, here in the building...the dress code's different, the pay scales are all different. Everything from top to bottom. You could put each one of us into a different building somewhere...and we could function as an independent business.

Identifying with the ministry in this instance introduced a conversation surrounding the silo nature of each unit. That is, maintaining a significant level of primacy to their immediate work group limited the ability to consistently attach with elements of the organizational identity target. This process contributed to silos of individual work group within the Disciples Church. Based on these accounts, organizational structure and organizational voice begins to enter the picture. That is, these accounts illustrated the relationship which identification – or attachment – has with the seemingly lack of coherent organizational identity. Based on an organizational structure that lends itself to ministry identification in combination with the lack of central organizational voice, employees are left to attach to the elements that are most immediate (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott, 1997) and most prominent. The result of such a dynamic is a fragmented organization composed of individual siloes.

When addressing how they would describe working at the national offices of the Disciples Church to others, many employees again spoke primarily regarding their particular ministry. Chris's introduction provided an example of this phenomenon; "I am (role) for the (ministry). And I say that because I am not the guru of all (function) for the entire denomination." These accounts illustrated one employee's inclination to distinguish between working in a ministry from working at the Disciples Church. Chris

illustrated a primary attachment to the work group target above and beyond the denomination or organizational identity. Specifically, Chris attached to specific work-related functions of a specific role. These work-related functions, specifically tied to Chris' ministry, were specific elements of the work group identity target that Chris attached to.

Chris accounts also illustrated an example of the immediacy of identifying with the work group over the organizational identity among Disciples employees. Chris attached to the work-related functions of this particular work group identity target. The organizational structure, however, could be structuring Chris away from attaching to similar work-related functions at the organizational identity target level. Chris' accounts showed the sharp divide between ministry and organizational identification. These comments not only reflected Bob's 'silo' comments but also presented that extent that ministry identification has been embedded throughout the organization. The embedded nature of this particular identification could possibly be limiting the Disciples Church in fostering cross-functional work teams throughout the Church – evident in Chris' propensity to attach more directly to the ministry's work-related functions. That is, by identifying primarily (or even solely) with a particular ministry, the opportunities for ministry collaboration may be restricted.

The ministry identification theme in general confirms similar findings within identification scholarship. This theme is similar to Scott's (1997) comments that organizational members most often identify with their most immediate or local targets. Similarly, Kuhn & Nelson (2002) in their study of planned organizational change found organizational members to prefer local rather than distant identity structures. However,

the current study complicates and extends these findings because it illustrates the extent to which identifying with the immediate work group identity structure has contributed to sharp siloes within the organization. Implications for such a divide could lead to stagnant decision-making processes and limited collaboration. Aside from the various nuances associated with ministry identification, this theme also illustrated the tension that arose from competing premises. As Stohl and Cheney (2001) argued, tension refers “to the clash of ideas or principles or actions and to the discomfort that may arise as a result” (p. 353 – 354). Regarding this theme in particular, the emergent ‘clash’ was apparent in the process of attaching to elements of the work group identity target (i.e., the ministry). That is, attaching to the work group identity provided both support and simultaneously created obstacle. The tension therefore resides in the ‘discomfort’ that occurred as employees identified with their ministry. The employees’ illustrated this ‘discomfort’ in their accounts of how their ministry provides them strength and also produces challenge in their work.

Values of Community and Welcome – the Open Table

The theme of *community and welcome* speaks to specific values to which Disciples employees attach. These values were revealed in two forms of identification: attaching to the organizational identity and attaching to the individual identity (e.g., personal values and beliefs). The results indicated that Disciples employees identified with *community and welcome* as elements of the organizational identity target as well as elements of their own individual identity target. That is, employees’ accounts expressed *community and welcome* as distinguishing elements of the Disciples organizational

identity, as well as, distinct elements of their own personal identity. Employees felt that *community and welcome* were values they personally adhered to, as well as, values the Disciples Church represented. For this reason, I examine how Disciples employees (i.e., Bob, Jeff, Frank, Chris, Mike, and Steve) attached to the values of *community and welcome* at both the organizational and individual identity level.

As Organizational Identity

This subtheme examines the ways in which Disciples employees identified with *community and welcome* as elements of the organizational identity target. During a conversation about the future direction of the Disciples Church, Bob shared that due to the sense of *community*, Disciples congregation would always be around:

The belief is that the Disciples are dying, we have congregations out there that are doing tremendous things...ministry that will sustain the Disciples...I think the Disciples will always be around, just because you have so many good congregations out there (Bob, November 11, 2013).

The value of *community* in this instance was an example of a particular element of organizational identity that Bob attached to. For Bob, the many “good” congregations of the Disciples Church represented the value of *community*. This particular value, according to Bob, would ultimately sustain the denomination for future generations. He attached to the *community* value of the organizational identity that, in this example, was represented in the lives of the many “good” Disciples congregations. An interesting observation in this particular finding is that the organization that is the Disciples Church is not necessarily enabling these attachments to occur but rather the ideals for which the denomination is supposed to stand. This point is particularly relevant as I later discuss the

Church's organizational structure and its implications toward a prominent organizational identity.

The Disciples Church, however, did represent an idea that was relevant to Bob as an employee. As it related to his work, Bob went on to share what area of his job he felt contributed to the Disciples Church. He stated: "That was one of the other things that attracted me to (specific ministry) in particular, is that...it's not about us...it's all about providing the resources for other ministries of the Church." Bob attached to the ability to express the communal nature of the Disciples Church in his work. Not only did he attach to *community* as a distinguishing element of the Disciples identity but also as an element of his occupational identity. This latter attachment example illustrates how identification shapes the way Bob made sense of the work he did.

Similarly, Jeff identified directly with the Disciples' identity statement of *wholeness in a fragmented world*. In this instance we can see an example of *community* as a central element of the organizational identity to which Jeff attached. For Jeff, the ability to work toward wholeness, or in other words toward *community*, was important for him as an employee of the Church:

Christian unity, that we're all invited into the family of God, all part of the family of God...that's what I preach when I'm on the road. That's my job is to represent that. To represent what it means to be a movement for wholeness in a broken and fragmented world...so when I am out on the road with congregations or with regions I try and bring those principles to life. And every sermon, at the end of the day, comes back to what does it mean to be a movement for wholeness...so then trying to embody that and represent that to the Church (Jeff, November 11, 2013).

Jeff's account illustrated an immediate example of identification in the form of embodiment. Jeff attached so fully to the idea of *movement for wholeness* that he strove to embody these values of the organizational identity in the very work functions that he

performed in a daily basis. Here again, is an example of how identification is shaping how employees make sense of the work they do.

The idea of *community and welcome* were not only specific values inherent to the Disciples' organizational identity but were also seen as an opportunity to create a stronger national Disciples Church. Frank referred to these values as a venue for creating a unified Church, he stated, "see all of us can do a little bit. And put together...make these big differences. But alone everybody's paralyzed to act" (Frank, November 11, 2013). Regarding identification, Frank's comments implies that by attaching to the purest form of *community and welcome*, leaders and members of the Disciples Church can unleash the maximum potential of the Church's structure. According to Frank, this could be done through inquiry, transparency and vulnerability. These functions (i.e., inquiry, transparency, and vulnerability) – represented as discursive practices – could provide leaders and employees a platform to adhere to the purest forms of *community and welcome*, thereby creating a stronger national Church. Jeff echoed this sentiment when addressing the nature of the Disciples Church's structure:

The power and authority is in the willingness of leaders to be mutually accountable to one another. But it's not an organizational accountability...in our covenantal accountability, it's really driven by how willing the president or chief executive of a ministry is willing to be vulnerable to their colleagues.

In essence, Frank and Jeff's vision of the Disciples Church depends on the willingness to be vulnerable to one another. Therefore, accounting for the values of *community and welcome* are essential to forming any sort of coherent and prominent Disciples organizational identity (i.e., organizational voice). Frank stated:

If we can build the relationships and if we could together...build together that dream, that plan, and then we get buy-in from throughout the denomination. I think all of our regions, all of our congregations, should be giving input into this

right now in a process that evolves. So that by the time we get done unfolding whatever it is that God's leading us to, we have people that say, "yea, I participated in this, I helped create this, I remember that"...and that we define our *own* future.

Based on this interview data, these elements of organizational identity are critical to a unified and cohesive Disciples organizational identity.

In addition to the organizational identity, *community and welcome* were central to each employee's individual identity (i.e., Bob, Jeff, Frank, Chris, Mike, and Steve). It needs to be stated that all employees were either raised in the Disciples Church or could trace their family history to the Disciples Church. Therefore, there is an immediate overlap of these identities – that is, their upbringing influenced the personal appeal of *community and welcome* that they in turn identified with in the organizational identity of the national Church.

As Individual Identity

This second subtheme examines the ways in which Disciples employees identified with *community and welcome* as parts of their individual identity. The welcoming spirit of the Disciples Church, for example, resonated with Bob as he reflected on his personal values. Bob viewed *welcome* as a central and enduring personal value that he attached to. Jeff contributed to this idea and stated that love and *welcome* were always present in his life as he grew up. Frank, not an active member early on his life, provided another example of the nuanced nature of identification. He stated:

And I was a 9 year old and I sat there and listened to someone read scripture and speak about life and death and giving meaning to that journey. And I made a pledge to myself, as a 9 year old, when I grow up I want to be and do for people what that person has just done for me.

It was because of the Disciples' *welcoming* spirit that Frank chose to assume or embody this value in his personal life and vocation. Frank, like Jeff, full identified with a central Disciples value – *welcome*. In this instance, Frank endeavored to embody this value in his daily interactions with others. Additionally, Frank attached to this value of his personal identity target because he realized the momentous impact that modeling this principle could have in other people's lives, in and outside of the workplace. Frank's accounts illustrated *community and welcome* as elements of individual identity to which Disciples employees attach.

Similarly, taking communion was a practice of the Disciples Church that Chris identified with:

The Disciples were a good match for me in that I grew up...Lutheran and I always wondered why they didn't have communion every Sunday. And I always thought that if communion is supposed to be such a big deal why don't we do it every Sunday.

The act of taking communion, in this instance, embodied the value of an open table (i.e., *community and welcome*) for Chris. This practice represented a value of both the organizational and identity target. Chris attached to the practice of communion as an element of *welcome* represented in the organizational identity. The symbol of an open table was also an element of Chris' Christian faith that was a source of Chris' personal identity structure. That is, Chris attached to the values for which Christian faith stands for – the values of The Open Table.

Community and welcome was similar to Silva and Sias' (2010) "Connection" theme in their faith-based study of Seventh Day Adventist church (SDA) organizational members. The "Connection" theme in their study concluded that group settings – in form of group classes –enabled simultaneous identification with personal, group and

organizational identity targets. The SDA's value of *doing* rather than *giving* was an attribute that members identified with across the three identity targets – personal, group, and organizational. This theme was similar to *community and welcome* because Disciples employees, similar to SDA members, attached to values of the organization in both their personal and organizational lives. However, the current study extends their findings by illustrating the identification process as it occurs within the context of the workplace, thereby contributing to the way employees make sense of the work they do.

Additionally, the *community and welcome* theme provides insight into the role the faith-based context plays in the identification process. Accounts from Disciples employees illustrated the overlapping nature of both the targets – organizational and identity. That is, *community and welcome* were central values of both identity targets. Furthermore, the notion of embodiment is important to address in terms of faith-based influences. Repeatedly, accounts showed where and how Disciples employees expressed a desire to embody these values in their daily interactions in and out of the workplace (e.g., Jeff and Frank's comments of embodiment). This process of embodiment therefore extends our understandings of identification where faith-based work contexts afford the possibilities of full notions of identification for their members therein.

This theme also extends the results of Frandsen's (2012) study of employees in a low-image organization. In this study, Frandsen concluded that employers may mitigate lower organizational identification by uncovering and investing into their employees' attachments. In terms of the current study, the attachments uncovered are the values of *community and welcome*. Based on the data presented, these values seem to be significant resources in both organizational and individual identity structures. Moreover, Frandsen's

(2012) results showed that professionals showed little negative impact by distancing (i.e., dis-identification) themselves from the unattractive image and instead embraced their professional and work-team identities (i.e., these employees' particular attachments). Therefore, the Disciples Church can invest into its employees' strongest attachments (e.g., *community and welcome*) allowing these members to embrace these particular identity resources. Thus, support of these attachments will provide space for groups throughout the organizations to detach – if necessary – from elements of the organizational target that ultimately negatively impacts their organizational identification.

Nobody Knows and Nobody Cares

The final theme that emerged from this qualitative data explores how Disciples employees identified with the organization as an “unknown” entity. This final theme provides insight that will lead toward immediate practical applications and potential theoretical contributions, to be discussed later. There were several common responses from all participants (i.e., Bob, Jeff, Frank, Chris, Mike, and Steve) regarding the perception of the Disciples Church from those outside the Church. In sharing how they felt others would describe the Disciples Church, employees implicitly provided insight into how they themselves identified with the Church. This especially was the case when identifying with particular premises that represented the organizational identity. There were many instances where employees simply stated, “others don't know us”. Some even shared they encountered those who thought the Disciples Church was an anti-drinking organization (due to the Church's logo of a cross on a chalice, See Appendix H for logo). Jeff illustrated this point, “Even our logo is so internal. People are like ‘I don't get

it...you're against liquor by the drink? You don't drink wine?...what's with the X on the cup?" (Jeff, November 11, 2013).

Generally speaking, responses centered on the idea that nobody outside of the Church knew of the Disciples. Identifying with this narrative or collective thinking (i.e., “nobody knows who we are”), however, is a critical point regarding employees and the work they do. If employees attached to the collective story – “nobody knows who we are” – of the organizational identity then they may not be internally accountable for the work they do. Frank succinctly summarized this argument:

I'm not sure when I hear, “well, nobody knows who we are”...that that's a real truism. We may be hiding behind that and that's maybe what's keeping us from doing the work that God's called us to do, you know...if nobody knows who you are, you don't have to meet any standards, you don't have to have any accountability...because nobody knows and nobody cares.

By projecting this collective thinking of the organizational identity as a truism, employees are susceptible to apathy and inaction. As Frank stated, Disciples being “unknown” may not necessarily be a real element of the organizational identity but more of a projected collective pattern of thought that organizational members – at all levels – over time have created. This is reflected in the decision-making process and the authority structures of the Disciples Church. Bob spoke briefly to the relationship of accountability and structure; “the accountability structure is so weird in this Church because, you know...who's accountable to anybody when you start dealing with the general Church issues” (Bob, November 11, 2013).

These insights revealed some critical elements of the organizational identity with which employees attach. In essence, attaching to the collective thinking that the Disciples Church is an “unknown” denomination could lead to limited accountability that in turn

reduces the overall impact of the national Church. Jeff summarized this idea by directly addressing the need to change the very organizational identity structure of the Disciples Church (i.e., the self-image of the Disciples Church):

I think we've got to change our self-image. I think we...I think we like to spend too much time saying "oh yea, we're the best-kept secret", "nobody knows about us"...you know, because we have so forever defined ourselves by what we're not rather than who we are.

Jeff's comments of what he perceives the Disciples organizational members attach to, illustrate an attachment process toward an identity structure that is "unknown" – the organizational identity target of the Disciples Church.

The *nobody knows and nobody cares* theme compares to two identification studies in particular. This theme is similar to Larson and Pepper's (2003) "Support" theme in their case study of multiple identifications. This theme built on Cheney's (1983b) assumed "we" in that members followed a mode of collective thinking, following the assumption that it is ok to think a certain way because others think the same way. In the current study, the collective thinking (i.e., *nobody knows and nobody cares*) is in fact one of the Disciples Church's greatest threats. As the interview data illustrated, embracing a collective rationality of not being known could have far-reaching implications for the Church in form of limited accountability.

This theme is also similar to Pepper and Larson's (2006) theme of "Consensus – Command" in their study of identity tensions in a post-acquisition organization. In their findings they concluded that management by consensus resulted in not having anybody ultimately accountable. The current study's theme, however, complicates our understandings in that accountability is compromised due to the collective thinking of the Disciples Church as an "unknown" entity, and not due to management philosophy.

Furthermore, the general idea of the Disciples as an “unknown” organization seems to be more of a projection by leaders and employees rather than a true element of the organizational identity. In any instance, attachment to a viewpoint of “nobody knows us” within the organizational identity has created a structure of “unknown” identity. This “unknown” identity structure is discursively produced and reproduced in every interaction, every story told, and every decision made throughout the national offices of the Disciples Church.

Interestingly, this theme’s findings seem to illustrate some connections with the Disciples’ Design as well as to the Disciples’ organizational identity structure – organizational identity in this instance viewed as a central organizational voice. Based on these findings, it seems that there is a lack of a central voice that says, “*Yes. We are known! And here are some identity structures to identify with...*” These findings suggest that the Disciples’ Design may in fact be inhibiting the Disciples organizational identity structure from providing the necessary social and material resources to which employees and members alike can attach. Jeff’s previous comments reflect this argument, he stated: “...you know, because we have so forever defined ourselves by what we’re not rather than who we are.” These comments illustrate the lack of an organizational identity structure that provides resources for organizational members to attach. In the absence of an established organizational identity members result in attaching to what is prominent – in this instance, the collective thinking that the Disciples are “unknown”. As such, an organizational identity structure that represents established and relevant resources (e.g., values of *community and welcome*, narratives of Disciples as a “known” denomination)

may ultimately enable the Church to grow collectively as the “known” organization it claims to be.

In summary this qualitative data afforded a glimpse into the identification process of Disciples employees. Analysis of interview data revealed three themes: ministry identification – *that gives us strength* and *that holds us back*, values of *community and welcome* – The Open Table: for organizational identity and individual identity, and nobody knows and nobody cares. Furthermore, these themes illustrated a.) the identification process as an attachment to a particular identity target, b.) the tensions that emerged from competing and clashing identification premises, c.) the role of the faith-based context in identification, and d.) the role of non-traditional, faith-based organizational structures (e.g., the Design) in identification. Together these themes provide only one part of the story of identification in/by the Disciples Church. Thus, I now further examine the extent to which these identifications exist as tensions and their implications toward the Disciples Church’s identity-building efforts.

Quantitative Results

A central assumption that can be drawn from this study’s qualitative themes is the significance of ministry identification in comparison to organizational identification. From an empirical perspective this difference was calculated via the Difference of Identification score (DI). A simple test of frequencies confirmed the prevalence of ministry identification, $M = -0.50$. This score represents the distinction among Disciples employees who identified with their particular ministry over the organization as a whole. Therefore, this finding is a direct reflection of the strong ministry identification presented

in the qualitative themes (i.e. ministry identification – *that gives us strength and that holds us back*).

With this theme in mind, an aim of this study was to explore the existence of identification tensions experienced by members of the Disciples Church. Thus, research question two asked, “*In a non-traditional, faith-based organizational structures, what identification tensions emerge?*” In other words, based on the presence of the aforementioned tension (ministry - organization identification), I further examined the degree to which these tensions played out among employees of the Disciples Church.

In order to illustrate the workplace context in which these identification tensions existed I investigated basic employment demographics, such as, employment type (i.e. Disciples member/employee and non-Disciples member/employee), as well as, employment status (i.e. full-time and part-time employee). An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare organizational (OI) and ministry identification (MI) scores and employment type; Disciples member/employee ($n = 35$) and non-Disciples member/employee ($n = 18$). There was no statistically significant relationship between employment type and organizational identification. There was a statistically significant difference in scores between Disciples member/employee ($M = 5.92$) and non-Disciples member/employee ($M = 5.39$) and ministry identification score; $t(51) = 2.40, p < .05$. These results indicated that employees who associated themselves as members of a Disciples congregation identified more with their individual ministry than employees who did not associate themselves as a member of a Disciples congregation.

An independent-samples t-test was also conducted to compare OI and MI and employment status; full-time ($n = 36$) and part-time ($n = 16$) employees. There was no

statistically significant relationship between employment status and ministry identification. There was a statistically significant difference in scores between full-time ($M = 5.43$) and part-time ($M = 4.88$) employees and organizational identification; $t(50) = -2.28, p < .05$. These results indicated that full-time employees identified more with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) than did part-time employees.

Overall, these independent-samples t-test results shed light into how Disciples employees identify with their ministry as well as with the organization. These results confirmed and illustrated the nuances of the ministry identification – organizational identification tension and builds on this study's qualitative themes. Specifically, and in terms of ministry identification, employees who identified as Disciples congregational members showed stronger attachments toward their particular ministry. These results are interesting because, anecdotally, it could be predicted that Disciples members would have stronger organizational identification due to their personal attachment to the denomination. That is, because they choose to personally attach to the values of the Disciples Church to meet their faith needs they would have similar attachments to the Disciples Church as the organization for which they are employed. This finding illustrates the complexities of and tensional struggle within the faith-based context. Individual identity structures (i.e., personal attachments to Disciples-related faith beliefs) are subsumed by the prominence of ministry – organizational identification tension.

Furthermore, employment status did not seem to play a role in ministry identification. However, employment status did account for a certain level of organizational identification. According to these results, full-time employees had stronger overall organizational identification than their part-time counterparts. Therefore, these

results confirmed an assumption that full-time, Disciples member/employees have both stronger ministry *and* organizational identification than other forms of Disciples.

Additionally, these results accounted for certain employment variables (e.g., employment type and employment status) that played a role in both ministry and organizational identification. Moreover, these results reflected, in part, the qualitative theme that speaks to the ministry identification - organizational tension.

The empirical accounts of the ministry – organizational tension were similar to van Knippenberg and van Schie's (2000) study of work group identification relative to organizational identification. In their findings, they concluded that work group identification among government employees was indeed stronger than organizational identification. Both findings again are not surprising based on the literature that confirms this phenomenon (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott, 1997; Williams & Connaughton, 2012); however, in terms of the identity-building efforts, identifications within the Disciples Church tell a different story.

Identifications and Identity Building Efforts

One final aim of this study was to explore the nature of identification in regards to the Church's ongoing identity-building efforts; *how do identifications affect the Church's ongoing identity-building efforts (e.g. The Identity Initiative)?* In order to account for the Church's ongoing efforts, I constructed three individual Identity Initiative subscales that included survey items dedicated to the ongoing Identity Initiative. These subscales were categorized by cognitive, affective, and behavioral measurement levels of learning;

represented as Identity Initiative cognitive subscale (COG), Identity Initiative affective subscale (AFF), and Identity Initiative behavioral subscale (BEH).

The relationship between organizational and ministry identification and the three Identity Initiative subscales was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a moderate, positive correlation between organizational identification and Identity Initiative cognitive subscale; $r = .45, n = 55, p < .01$. This result indicated the higher the employee's identification with the Disciples Church the greater their overall cognitive effect (i.e. overall awareness and knowledge of The Identity Initiative). There was a moderate, positive correlation between organizational identification and Identity Initiative affective subscale; $r = .42, n = 54, p < .01$. This result indicated the higher the employee's identification with the Disciples Church the higher their overall affective effect (i.e. overall feelings of value and benefit toward The Identity Initiative and its impact). There was a moderate, positive correlation between organizational identification and Identity Initiative behavioral subscale; $r = .33, n = 54, p < .05$. This result indicated the higher the employee's identification with the Disciples Church the greater their overall behavioral effect (i.e. related action or intention to act due to The Identity Initiative).

There was no statistically significant relationship between ministry identification and the Identity Initiative affective and behavioral subscales. There was a moderate, positive correlation between ministry identification and Identity Initiative cognitive subscale; $r = .43, n = 53, p < .01$. This result indicated the higher the employee's identification with their ministry the higher their overall cognitive effect (i.e. overall awareness and knowledge of The Identity Initiative). Together these correlation results

show that ministry identification did have a relationship with levels of cognitive effect but organizational identification correlated across all three levels of identity-building measures (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral).

Behavioral Effect Outcome Variable

Based on the correlations illustrated above, multiple regression was then used to determine predictability of these identifications. Specifically, this test was to determine predictability toward the behavioral intentions related to Disciples' identity-building efforts. The behavioral effect was chosen as an outcome variable primarily due to this study's focus of identifications and the Church's ongoing identity-building efforts (BEH). The behavioral effect provided a good indication of the possible factors that lead Disciples employees toward acting on the Church's identity-building attempts and related campaigns. Since the main thrust of this project resulted from a lack of action regarding previous attempts of identity-building (i.e., the failed communications plan), behavior was seen as an appropriate and relevant outcome variable.

Therefore, in this study I investigated how organizational and ministry identification influenced Disciples employees' actions related to The Identity Initiative. Multiple regression was used to assess the ability of organizational identification and ministry identification to predict behavioral intentions associated with The Identity Initiative, after controlling for the employment variables, ministry category and employment status. The employment variables of ministry category and employment status were entered at Step 1, accounting for 9% of the variance in behavioral intention. After including organizational identification and ministry identification at Step 2, the

total variance accounted for increased to 22%, $F(4, 47) = 3.24, p < .05$. These two measures explained an additional 12% of the variance in behavioral intention, after controlling for employment variables, $R^2 \text{ change} = .12, F \text{ change} (2, 47) = 3.56, p < .04$. Furthermore, in the final model there were two measures that were statistically significant, with the organizational identification score recording a higher beta (beta = .48, $p < .01$) than ministry category (beta = .278, $p < .04$).

These results indicated that the employment variables, ministry category and employment status, alone accounted for only a minimal amount of variance of The Identity Initiative behavioral subscale. However, when organizational identification and ministry identification were included the variance accounted for increased. This indicated that organizational and ministry identification accounted for more variance within behavioral intention due to identity-building efforts, above and beyond basic employment variables (i.e. ministry category and employment status). These results indicated that stronger organizational and ministry identification as well as ministry category provided stronger suggestions of the extent to which an employee will act due to the Church's identity-building efforts.

This finding further contributes toward the importance of organizational and ministry identification. According to these results, employees with both strong organizational and ministry identification are more likely to act in some regard due to the Church's identity-building efforts. These results in combination with the positive correlations mentioned above illustrate the amount of significance identification – and specifically organizational identification – carries in regards to identity-building efforts.

Results Integration

No mixed methods study is complete without an integration of what was found through each method, because the point of using mixed methods in a single project is to find something that could not be found using single methods in isolation. (Garner, 2013, p. 13).

Taking Garner's words as inspiration, in this section I provide three key takeaways that illustrate where this study's qualitative and quantitative results converge. First I discuss the ministry – organizational identification tension as a key struggle for Disciples employees. Second, I address the significance of organizational and ministry identification and identity-building efforts. Third, I expand on a surprising finding associated with employment type (e.g., Disciples member/employee and non-Disciples member/employee) and related identifications.

The first integration point addresses the ministry – organizational identification tension. The qualitative theme, ministry identification – *that gives us strength and that holds us back*, introduces an apparent tension but does not account for the entirety of this phenomenon. Quantitative data, furthermore, confirmed the prevalence of strong ministry identification within the Disciples Church (e.g., the Identification Difference score and independent-samples t-tests). These results alone only confirm that employees identify more with their ministry than the organization. However, when synthesizing these results together a better understanding of this identification tension emerges. Qualitative data – the ministry identification theme in particular – contextualized the dynamic confirmed in the quantitative results. That is, qualitative data illustrated specifically how and when Disciples employees attached to their ministry. Furthermore, qualitative data extends our understandings of ministry identification as tension by presenting the accounts in which

this particular attachment process provided strength and also created challenge. As the results indicated, organizational identification, however, seemed to play a greater role in identity-building efforts – thus, this study’s second integration point.

Quantitative data confirmed there is indeed a positive relationship between organizational identification (i.e., attachment to organizational identity target) and the Disciples identity-building efforts (e.g., The Identity Initiative). Furthermore, these correlations demonstrated a consistent relationship across all three identity-building measures (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral). Moreover, qualitative data illustrated the specific resources (e.g., *community and welcome*) of the organizational identity target to which Disciples employees attach. Additionally, quantitative data showed the predictability of *both* organizational *and* ministry identification on the behavioral effect (i.e., intention to act in some way due to Disciples identity-building efforts). Therefore, this integration point suggests to the Disciples Church that, as an organization, Disciples must develop whatever social and material resources necessary to harness the values of *community and welcome* that represent its organizational identity. By so doing, employees will have established and relevant organizational identity resources to attach, thus increasing the receptivity of identity-building efforts. Due to integrating these data results, this study is able to present a more robust and complete account of identification in/by the Disciples Church.

The third integration point addresses a surprising observation regarding employment type (e.g., Disciples member/employee and non-Disciples member/employee). This integration point speaks to the complexity the faith-based context adds in the process of identification – especially within a non-traditional

organizational structure (e.g., the Design). As quantitative results indicated, Disciples member/employees showed stronger attachments toward their particular ministry ($M = 5.92$) than non-Disciples member/employees ($M = 5.39$), above and beyond the organization. These results are interesting due to the employees' personal attachments with Disciples as a source for spiritual worship. That is, an outside observer could postulate that employees who attach with the Disciples organization in their personal lives would similarly attach – more so than others – in the workplace. The qualitative theme of *community and welcome* contextualizes this point further by illustrating the specific resources to which these employees attach. That is, this qualitative theme shows that *community and welcome* were values Disciples employees attached to in their individual identity structures. Therefore, it is interesting that these particular quantitative results illustrate an instance in which even Disciples member/employees compared to non-Disciples member/employees identified less with the organization – bearing of course their own personal attachments to Disciples as a place of worship. This may also confirm the prominence and embedded nature of ministry identification throughout the organization. This last integration point further complicates our understanding of what it means to identify with a faith-based organization that is both a source of worship and a source of work.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

This study presented a number of qualitative and quantitative findings, and illustrated where these findings converged, contributing to mixed methods approaches. First, this study examined the ministry – organizational identification tension. Based on empirical investigations, I uncovered the prevalence of this tension throughout the Disciples Church. Second, I explicated the theme of *community and welcome* as an enduring characteristic with which Disciples employees identified with as both an organizational and personal target. I was able to expand on this theme by investigating the role employment type (i.e. Disciples member/employee vs. non-Disciples member/employee) played within this *community and welcome* theme. Lastly, I explored a vital theme surrounding organizational identification, *nobody knows and nobody cares*. This theme uncovered some critical assumptions regarding to what Disciples employees identify with and the possible implications of these identifications. With the above in mind, this work is posed to contribute to theory and practice in several specific and meaningful ways.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

This project extended theoretical inquiry concerned with the study of identification tensions and faith-based organizations. This section examines a few of the central theoretical and methodological contributions this study offered. Starting with methodological concerns, this study contributed to engaged scholarship research.

Engaged scholarship (Antonacopoulou, 2011; Garner, 2013; Myers, 2010; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) provides a sophisticated approach toward mixed methods studies.

Similar to applied research, engaged scholarship aims at contributing insight to practitioners concerned with the topics under study. However, engaged scholarship extends applied research by moving past transferring knowledge toward integration of academic and practitioner perspectives. This sort of methodological integration affords more thorough insights of complex organizational problems (Garner, 2013). In the current study, I was able to provide insight into the collaborative nature of engaged scholarship. I collaborated with employees of the Disciples Church to comprehensively address their organizational concerns from multiple perspectives. This research project provided a value-add by integrating methodological approaches and perspectives in order to address questions that were important to practitioners (i.e. the national offices of the Disciples Church). Furthermore, this study contributed to engaged scholarship relationship by providing thorough and concrete practical steps that can be used in practice.

A second contribution addresses the identification as the attachment process to an identity target (Scott et al., 1998). More specifically, I examine this perspective of identification and its relationship to tensions as well as to dis-identification. Ministry identification could indicate the possible space where employees may dis-identify with the Disciples Church in certain areas of conflict (e.g., clashing of philosophies). This point coincides with Silva and Sias' (2010) "Buffering" theme. In their study, they found that the immediate group provided a space for Church members to dis-identify or detach from the national Church in areas they did not agree with. Similarly, in the current study, the Disciples may create a space to live *with* tension as the Disciples Church addresses complex, social issues. For example, the ongoing debate within the Disciples Church of

offering an “open table” toward the LGBT community is a prime example where dis-identification may provide the most significant value. Where there may be Disciples’ groups that do not agree with this national stance, the Disciples may in fact have the ability to acknowledge that certain groups may dis-identify while also remaining very much a Disciples entity.

To explore this dynamic further I address the role of identity resources. That is, by uncovering and realizing resources of the organizational identity the Disciples Church may create a space for dis-identification. As Frandsen’s (2012) concluded, employers may mitigate lower organizational identification by uncovering and investing into their employees’ attachments. In terms of the current study, the attachments uncovered are the values of *community and welcome*. Frandsen’s (2012) results also indicated little negative impact by distancing (i.e., dis-identification) while embracing the strongest attachments. Therefore, the Disciples Church can invest into the strongest attachments of *community and welcome*. Therefore, I restate, that support of these attachments will provide space for groups throughout the organizations to detach – if necessary – from elements of the organizational target that ultimately negatively impacts their organizational identification.

The third and final contribution addresses Scott’s (2007) call for research on alternative forms of identification. The insight presented in the *nobody knows and nobody cares* theme speaks to this call. This theme presented a process of identification unique and distinct from other forms of identification. The qualitative data illustrated a process of identification that focused on the organization as “unknown” entity. This is different than dis-identification in that employees are fully identifying with the organization, but with the organization as “unknown”. Similarly, this process is different

than schizo-identification in that members are not necessarily identifying and dis-identifying with the organization at the same time (Scott, 2007). The attachment process presented within this study's illustrated full identification but with the organizational identity target but specifically with the collective thinking of the Disciples as "unknown". That is, collective thinking – similar to the values of *community and welcome* – is a particular element of the organizational identity to which employees attach. Therefore by uncovering this unique form of identification, the Disciples Church and similar organizations (e.g., anonymous and hidden organizations (Scott, 2011) may be able to address a propensity their employees may have toward restricted accountability and stagnant organizational processes. Some of these processes may include, but are not limited to: decision-making, conflict resolution, technology integration, leadership development, talent acquisition, employee retention, and knowledge management. As presented, uncovering the "unknown" element of an organizational identity structure offers identification scholars a separate segment of research from which to contribute.

This study illustrated identification as the attachment process to an identity target (Scott et al., 1998). The results of this study examined various elements of identity targets to which employees attached. Most notable were the values of *community and welcome* – these values were present in both organizational and identity structures. The results also illustrated the significance of uncovering the values as it related to identity-building (i.e., increasing receptivity of the Church's identity-building efforts) as well as to dis-identification. Uncovering the values to which employees attached seemed to provide an opportunity for certain groups of employees to detach from elements of the organizational identity (e.g., policies, organizational viewpoints).

This research also presented certain tensions that emerged in the process of identification. Tensions in this study were illustrated in the complexities of ministry identification (i.e., as strength and as challenge) and in the negotiation of multiple identifications (i.e., ministry – organization). The current study also examined the role faith-based organization played in the identification process. This was particularly evident in the idea of embodiment. In separate instances, interview data showed the process of full identification as embodiment. In this study, Disciples employees determined to embody the values of the organizational identity structure in their daily interactions. The process of embodiment therefore extended our understandings of identification in that faith-based organizational settings afford possibilities of full identification of their employees. The faith-based context was also illustrated by quantitative findings that showed the differences among Disciples member/employees and non-Disciples member/employees and corresponding identifications.

Furthermore, this study examined the role non-traditional organizational structure played in identification – in particular, the Design’s influences on attachment. Results not only indicated to what resources employees attached but how they attached. Instances of strong ministry identification as well as a collective thinking of the organizational identity as “unknown” were of particular relevance. Enmeshed throughout this study’s findings were accounts of how identifications made sense of the work they did – addressing Cheney and colleagues’ (2014) call. Here again, embodiment – as an example of full identification – illustrated this phenomenon. Disciples employees expressed their determination to embody the values represented in the organizational identity structure (e.g., *community and welcome*). Accordingly, these values would be represented in the

employees daily work interactions. Thus, identification shaped the work of Disciples employees. The implications of uncovering elements of the attachment process may unravel critical implication related to the development of an organization's collective identity. Moving from the theoretical to the practical, I now examine some practical implications for the Disciples Church.

Practical Implications

The results of this study, in addition to the discussed theoretical contributions, provide important practical considerations for the Disciples Church and similar organizations. In keeping with this study's emphasis on applied scholarship, practical implications are vital in and outside of the Disciples Church. Therefore, I also include organizations that mirror comparable organizational structures to that of the Disciples Church. Examples of similar organizations may include community advocacy groups, social entrepreneurship business models, and de-centralized healthcare networks.

Empirical results indicated a consistent relationship between organizational identification across all three Identity Initiative subscales. These findings showed that organizational identification positively correlated with employees' multiple levels of identity-building (e.g., cognitive, affective, and behavioral). Considering these results, organizational identification – and particularly the specific elements of the organizational identity structures employees most strongly attach (e.g., *community and welcome*) – should be accounted for. This means developing, initiating, and maintaining identity-building capture the attachments to *community and welcome*. From a practical standpoint, this also means acknowledging the importance of ministry identification in this process.

Thus, uncovering and investing in employees' attachments becomes a critical practical component for the Disciples Church. As this study has illustrated, embracing employees' strongest attachments may mitigate lower organizational identification as well as provide space for groups to dis-identify if necessary (See Frandsen, 2012). This is important in order to manage the complexities of non-traditional structures (e.g., the Design) and challenging social issues.

As vital as it is to review what the results indicate, it is equally important to examine what the results are *not* suggesting. Toward this end, and specifically addressing identity-building efforts, ministries may not be doing enough to promote an established and relevant organizational identity – efforts that express the organizational voice of the Disciples Church. The Disciples' "voice" – in this instance – is representing in the organizational identity values of *community and welcome*. Therefore, identity-building efforts at a national level should account for these organizational identity values. This implication relates to this study's results regarding *community and welcome*. Interview data showed that through inquiry, transparency, and vulnerability the maximum potential of the Disciples' structure could be realized (Frank, November 11, 2013). That is, inquiry, transparency, and vulnerability – according to employees' accounts – were the functions that would enable *community and welcome* to manifest itself throughout the Disciples organization. Therefore, the Disciples – in order to realize its "voice" – should account for these functions and invest in ways to communicate inquiry, transparency, and vulnerability in daily interactions.

Surface level interpretations of these results may suggest that those who identify greatly with the organization are the only employees receptive to identity-building.

However, there may be important lessons gained from those who highly identify with the organization. Related questions that could inform organizational identification interventions could be: what are the attachments of high organizational identifiers? What can we learn from those who identify higher with the organization in terms of identity-building? How can these lessons help those with lower identification?

The case here is that interventions should be focused in developing a collective identity. This is important because increased organizational identification addresses several critical areas. Improved organizational identification can enable streamlined decision-making, allowing for more deliberate choices that lead to practices which may ultimately serve the faith needs for all the Church's stakeholders. By understanding who "we" are, Disciples employees will know where they presently exist and to what end they all strive toward. A strong sense of identification and identity provides the energy source that contributes to the vitality of the organization. Therefore, if the Disciples Church endeavors toward being a movement in the 21st century they should focus their collective energies on forming an established and relevant organizational identity. Not for pragmatism sake, but for the communities to which they represent.

Following this viewpoint, a word of caution to the Disciples Church. As the *nobody knows and nobody cares* theme illustrated, the Disciples Church should carefully monitor how and to what end employees identify. Kuhn and Nelson (2002) argued "members of complex organizations have multiple social groups with which they identify...members' identifications contribute to the construction of collective identities" (p. 6). Therefore, efforts should address attachment to the collective thinking that

“nobody knows us” – represented in the organizational identity structure. Based on these observations, I provide a few suggestions in the form of practical interventions.

Practical Interventions

The following section provides some recommendations, designed as concrete action steps the Disciples and similar organizations can take. These suggestions should serve as a starting point and are not intended to be exhaustive. Therefore, these comments should rather inform and provide a framework for Disciples’ and other organizations in their identity-building efforts. In order to do so, I follow the communicative framework presented in Torres and Fyke (2013). This framework affords an intervention-centered, communicative approach toward constructing organizational resilience and therefore accounts for many of the implications presented in this study.

I suggest an intervention-centered approach as a possible venue to implement some of the current study’s results into action. Given engaged scholarship’s concern with organizational problems (Garner, 2013), an intervention-centered approach seems apropos. The term intervention is used as a broader category that represents several modalities. For example, many of these interventions can be implemented as workshops, seminars, leadership training sessions, or one-on-one dialogue sessions. The Disciples Church and individual ministries should carefully deliberate on the frequency of these proposed interventions. Frequency, consistency, and replication need to be taken into consideration in order to facilitate any sort of sustainable and enduring organizational change. Furthermore, this study’s results revealed strong ministry identification in the national offices of the Disciples Church; therefore, these proposed interventions are

structured from the ministry outward. That is, each intervention theme should be introduced at the ministry level with the ultimate goal of inducing change throughout the organization. I propose two central themes that should guide these interventions. These themes can be addressed individually or simultaneously within single sessions.

The first intervention theme considers providing a space for dis-identification. Similar to Frandsen (2012), the current study's results have shown that dis-identification can ultimately mitigate lower levels of organizational identification. Results have also shown the emphasis of ministry identification and I therefore conclude that the individual ministries acknowledge and accommodate for such dis-identification. This process as stated previously can be done by supporting the Disciples employees' strongest attachments (e.g., *community and welcome*). By doing so, the Disciples Church and its ministries can create a space to embrace identity structures while detaching from elements of the organizational identity that threaten organizational identification. Thus, accounting for dis-identification could ultimately maintain higher levels of organizational identification.

The second intervention theme accounts for identifying with the Disciples Church as an "unknown" entity. This study's results illustrated an embedded collective thinking – Disciples as "unknown" – represented in the organizational identity structure. A few points should be considered when developing these particular sessions. First, ministries should dedicate concerted efforts of organizational identification away from this collective thought process (i.e., the Disciples as "unknown"). This can be done in several formats. For example, leaders can educate and challenge employees to communicate and reference the Disciples Church as a "known" organization. This may sound reductive but,

as we have seen, identity structures are produced and reproduced in discursive interactions. Thus, the Disciples should focus on direct efforts that create identity structures that represent the Church as a “known” organization. Intervention sessions, for example, can begin with overall education of the Disciples Church as a mainline protestant denomination.

Challenging the collective thinking of Disciples as “unknown” is critical in developing established and relevant identity structures (e.g., organizational identity structure). Furthermore, as this study’s results have indicated, the power of the Disciples’ organization resides in the ability to communicate inquiry, transparency, and vulnerability. Therefore, consideration should be taken in order to develop communicative strategies that reflect inquiry, transparency, and vulnerability. This process can start with leaders of each ministry. Leaders are accountable for fostering the culture of their ministry and therefore should be charged with challenging the attachment process. Leadership development seminars can focus on educating leaders on how to communicatively challenge employees and colleagues. Here again frequency and consistency will be critical to unraveling this form of identification, creating appropriate identity structures, and thus allowing the Disciples to collectively create an organizational identity that represents established and relevant values (e.g., *community and welcome*).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Even with the above contributions and implications in mind, there are particular limitations that need to be addressed. First the nature of the sample size is such that results of this study can only be generalized to the national Disciples Church and

employees therein. The sample size represented the population of the national Church and therefore cannot be extended to individual congregations, their members, or other related stakeholders. Furthermore, it must be noted that all of the qualitative interview participants assumed to some degree an executive role within the Disciples Church. This perspective provides a distinct perspective than mid to entry-level employees could offer. An executive position affords unique organizational knowledge and insight into decision-making processes that a lay employee may not access. Lastly, the validity of the OIQ has been scrutinized for addressing affective measures of organizational commitment rather than organizational identification (Miller et al., 2000).

Future research on identification tensions and/or faith-based organizations should implement more engaged scholarship, mixed methods approaches, and could help redress some of the limitations noted above. The dearth of engaged and integrated studies, in addition to limited recent quantitative studies (Knippenberg & Schie, 2000; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Williams & Connaughton, 2012), signal the potential of uncovering important questions regarding organizational life within the 21st century. Future research should also implement more ethnographic approaches (e.g. observational studies) to examine identification throughout the individual discursive activities in situ. This micro view could further expand some of the macro perspectives presented in this study and extend the dynamic nature of identification within faith-based organizing at multiple discourse levels. Furthermore, as previously indicated, future research studies should focus on identifying with “unknown” organizations and the implications these identifications may present.

Conclusion

In sum, this study examined the process of identification within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Results revealed certain tensions that emerged throughout the identification process. Additionally, this study explored the role faith-based organizational settings played in identification. This study also accounted for non-traditional, faith-based organizational structures (e.g., the Design) in identification.

Throughout this study I have presented the Disciples organizational structure as an obstacle, however, it may also be a strength. The Design is itself a tension – two competing premises causing *discomfort* (Stohl & Cheney, 2001) for stakeholders throughout the Church. I say that the Design may be a strength in the context of living *with* complex social issues (e.g., LGBT). Traditional hierarchal structures exist by enforcing regulations and protocols for *every* unit to adhere. These organizations are not set up to handle the complexities of the modern world. In these rigid structures, there is seemingly one way to address a concern and one way alone. As I have demonstrated throughout this study, the value of addressing complexity is not necessarily to resolve the tension but rather how to live *in* the complexity. The Design thus provides space and opportunity for the Disciples to do just that. Free of regulatory protocol and sweeping mandates, the Disciples are able to flexibly navigate through the complexities of life. Some groups may agree and some groups may disagree – and that’s okay. What this study, and the accounts represented, has indicated is that as long we invest and cherish in the resources that mean the most to us the Disciples’ identity will *always* be whole.

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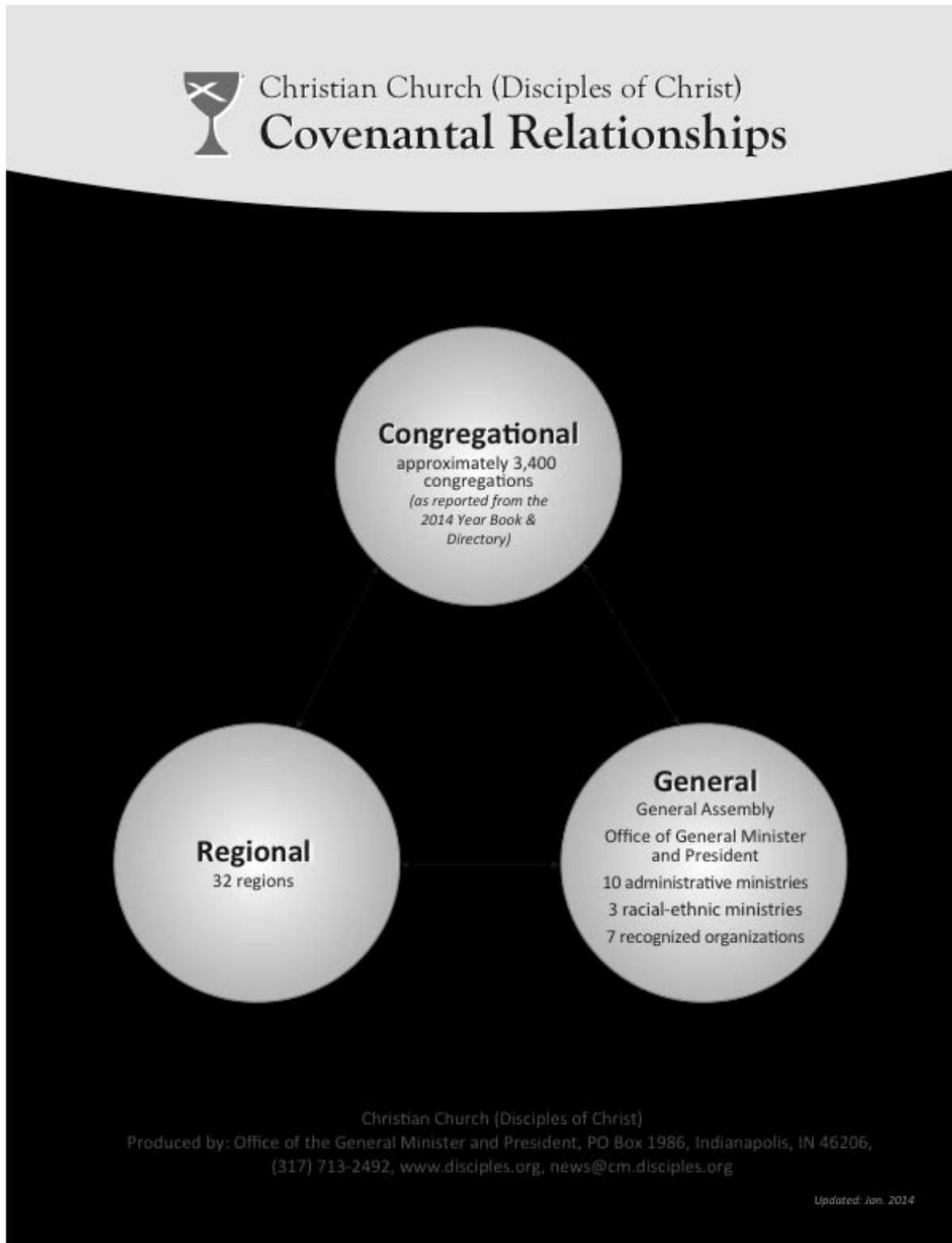
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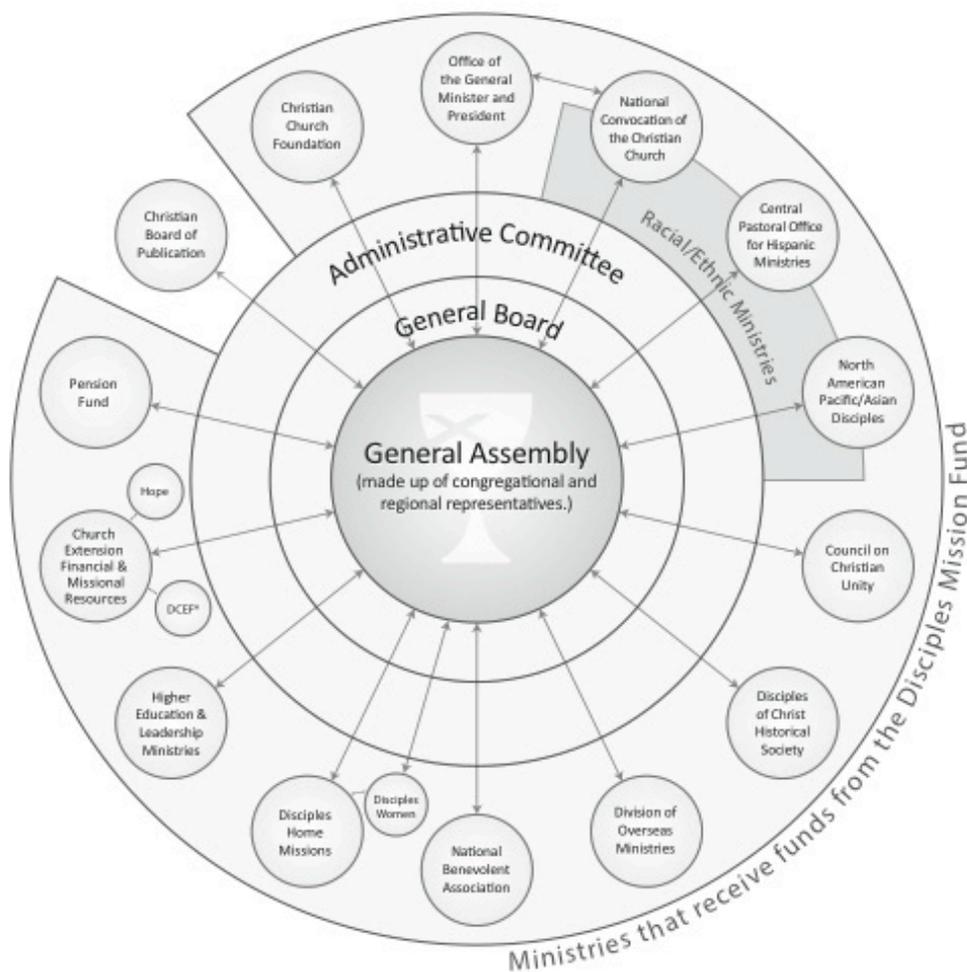
APPENDIX A: Covenantal Relationship



APPENDIX B: List of Disciples Ministries



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
**General Assembly and General
 and Racial-Ethnic Ministries**



* Disciples Church Extension Fund

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 Produced by: Office of the General Minister and President, PO Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206,
 (317) 713-2492, www.disciples.org, news@cm.disciples.org

Updated: Dec. 2012

APPENDIX C: IRB Approval



Benjamin Kennedy
Office of Research Compliance

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Date: January 10, 2014

PI: David Torres, PhD
Dept: Communication

Cc: Jeremy Fyke, PhD

Title: Wholeness in a fragmented world: 21st century identity building in/by the Christian Church
Disciples of Christ
MU #: HR-2735

Thank you for submitting your protocol. On January 10, 2014, the Marquette University Institutional Review Board granted exempt status for this protocol under Exemption Category #2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations.

Any changes to your protocol affecting participant risk must be requested in writing by submitting an IRB Protocol Amendment Form which can be found here: <http://www.marquette.edu/orc/>. These changes must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before being initiated, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the human subjects. If there are any adverse events, please notify the Marquette University IRB immediately.

Please submit an IRB Final Report Form once this research project is complete. Submitting this form allows the Office of Research Compliance to close your file.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Kennedy".

Benjamin Kennedy
Research Compliance Officer-Human Subjects & Radiation Safety

APPENDIX D: Email Notification

Hello,

My name is David Torres and I am a graduate student in the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette University. I want to make you aware of an upcoming survey that will serve as the basis of my thesis project currently in progress. I am currently studying identification within faith-based organizations, particularly the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). I am looking for participants who are willing to share insight toward working within the Disciples Church as an organization.

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how employees of faith-based organizations, in general, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in particular, identify with the organization for which they work. Specifically, the survey will look at how Disciples employees identify with their respective ministry in addition to the Disciples Church as a whole. In addition, this survey will explore the extent to which the recent Identity Initiative has facilitated identification with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This research aims to not only inform my thesis project but hopes to uncover what it means to work at the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). By so doing, it is my aim that this research will be used for the advancement of the Church and its employees therein.

Please note: The projected launch date for this online survey will be Monday, January 27th. The survey will remain open until Friday, **February 7th**. On the launch date you will receive an email from me with survey directions and related information. The survey should take no longer than 10 – 15 minutes and will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions about this study, or would like any additional information, please contact me either at 773-963-3173 or david.torres@marquette.edu.

Thank you for your time and effort in assisting this research project.

David Torres
Diederich College of Communication
Marquette University
Phone: (773) 963-3173
E-mail: david.torres@marquette.edu

APPENDIX E: Survey Email

Email sent to Potential Participants

Hello,

My name is David Torres and I am a graduate student in the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette University. I am currently studying identification within faith-based organizations, particularly the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). I am looking for participants who are willing to share insight toward working within the Disciples Church as an organization.

There are a couple of key things you should know about this study:

- The study takes about 10 – 15 minutes to complete and should be completed in a single sitting.
- Please complete the study in a location that is quiet and free from distraction.
- You ***cannot go back*** to a previous section of the survey during the study. Once you leave a page you will not be able to return to it.

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how employees of faith-based organizations, in general, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in particular, identify with the organization for which they work. Specifically, the survey will look at how Disciples employees identify with their respective ministry in addition to the Disciples Church as a whole. In addition, this survey will explore the extent to which the recent Identity Initiative has facilitated identification with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This research aims to not only inform my thesis project but hopes to uncover what it means to work at the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). By so doing, it is my aim that this research will be used for the advancement of the Church and its employees therein.

Please note: The survey will close on Friday, **February 7th**.

To begin the survey, simply click on the link provided below. You will be taken to an intro page, which will inform you of your rights as a participant. Once you consent to participate by clicking on the ‘Start Survey’ button, the survey will begin.

Please go to the following web address to respond to the survey:

If you have any questions about this study, or would like any additional information, please contact me either at 773-963-3173 or david.torres@marquette.edu.

Thank you for your time and effort in assisting this research project.

David Torres
Diederich College of Communication
Marquette University
Phone: (773) 963-3173
E-mail: david.torres@marquette.edu

APPENDIX F: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

The Person

What is your current occupation?

How would you describe your current marital status? Married? Single?

Do you have any children?
If so, how many?

What was your family experience like as when you were growing up?
Did you grow up in a small or big city?
Are you from a small or large family?
Do you have any sibling?
If so, how many?
What did your parents do?
What were the schools like? Etc.
Was going to church part of your family life?

How do you think your family experiences shape what you value now?

What are some core principles that you try to live by?

How would you describe yourself to others?

Tell me about a something that you are most proud of.
Why?

The Employee

How long have you been an employee of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ?

How did you become an employee of the Disciples Church?

What was your idea of the Disciples Church before becoming an employee?

Share with me your thought process as you considered joining the Disciples Church

Why did you decide to become an employee of the Disciples Church?

What particular elements of the Disciples Church spoke to you personally?

Can you tell me about your job?
What do you do?

What about your job are you the most proud of?

Do you work directly with an immediate work group or work team?
If so, can you share with me a little about this group and your role in the group?

How do you make decisions in your job? During routine tasks? During projects? During larger departmental initiatives?

What departments within the Church do you most frequently work with?

Can you explain to me, or run down in as much detail as possible, what is involved when working with other departments?

What is a typical interaction with supervisor/employee like? Formal/Informal?

In your own words, what is like to work here? What is your favorite part? What is your least favorite part?

How do you feel when approaching other departments? When addressing a supervisor/employee?

The Church

If you had to describe to a friend what it is like to work at the Disciples center, what would you say?

What do you think are some key characteristics of the Disciples Church?

Do you think the work you do contributes to these characteristics?
If so, how so?

What role do you feel the Disciples Church should play in the life of all communities?
What role should it play?

How do you think those outside of the Disciples Church describe the Church?

Final Thoughts

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Is there anything you would like others to know or understand about what is like to be an employee of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ?

APPENDIX G: Survey

General Information

Instructions: For each item below please select the best answer.

1. Gender Male Female
2. Age _____
3. How long have you worked for the Christian Church Disciples of Christ?
 - 1 0 – 3 years
 - 2 3 – 5 years
 - 3 5 – 10 years
 - 4 10 – 20 years
 - 5 20 years plus
4. Within which category would you place your specific ministry?

Program Financial
5. How would you describe your employment status?

Part-time
Full-time
Intern
Volunteer
Other (please describe): _____
6. Which of the following best describes you?

Disciples member and employee
Non-Disciples member and employee

The Christian Church Disciples of Christ

Instructions: Think of your role as an employee of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ and your role as an employee of your particular ministry. For each item below select the answer that best represents your belief about or attitude toward the Christian Church Disciples of Christ and then select the answer that best represents your belief or attitude toward your particular ministry. Please respond to all items. The alternative responses are:

- 1 Very strongly disagree
- 2 Strongly disagree
- 3 Disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Agree

- 6 Strongly agree
- 7 Very strongly agree

After reading each item carefully, please circle your response.

- 5. I would probably continue working for the Christian Church Disciples of Christ even if I didn't need the money.

I would probably continue working for my ministry even if I didn't need the money.

- 6. In general, the people employed by the Christian Church Disciples of Christ are working toward the same goals.

In general, the people employed within my ministry are working toward the same goals.

- 7. I am very proud to be an employee of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I am very proud to be an employee of my ministry.

- 8. The Christian Church Disciples of Christ's image in the community represents me well.

My ministry's image in the community represents me well.

- 9. I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for the Christian Church Disciples of Christ" or "I am from the Christian Church Disciples of Christ."

I often describe myself to others by saying, "I work for [particular ministry]" or "I am from the [particular ministry]."

- 10. I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I try to make on-the-job decisions by considering the consequences of my actions for my ministry.

- 11. We at the Christian Church Disciples of Christ are different from others in our field.

My ministry is different from others in our field.

- 12. I am glad I chose to work for the Christian Church Disciples of Christ rather than another company.

I am glad I chose to work for my ministry rather than another company.

- 13. I talk up the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I talk up my ministry.

14. In general, I view the Christian Church Disciples of Christ's problems as my own.

In general, I view ministry's problems as my own.

15. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the Christian Church Disciples of Christ be successful.

I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help my ministry be successful.

16. I become irritated when I hear others outside the Christian Church Disciples of Christ criticize the company.

I become irritated when I hear others outside my ministry criticize my ministry.

17. I have warm feelings toward the Christian Church Disciples of Christ as a place to work.

I have warm feelings toward my ministry as a place to work.

18. I would be quite willing to spend the rest of my career with the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I would be quite willing to spend the rest of my career with my ministry.

19. I feel that the Christian Church Disciples of Christ cares about me.

I feel that my ministry cares about me.

20. The record of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ is an example of what dedicated people can achieve.

The record of my ministry is an example of what dedicated people can achieve.

21. I have a lot in common with others employed by the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I have a lot in common with others employed by my ministry.

22. I find it difficult to agree with the Christian Church Disciples of Christ's policies on important matters relating to me.

I find it difficult to agree with my ministry's policies on important matters relating to me.

23. My association with the Christian Church Disciples of Christ is only a small part of who I am.

My association with my ministry is only a small part of who I am.

24. I like to tell others about projects that the Christian Church Disciples of Christ is work on.

I like to tell others about projects that my ministry is working on.

25. I find that my values and the values of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ are very similar.

I find that my values and the values of my ministry are very similar.

26. I feel very little loyalty to the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I feel very little loyalty to my ministry.

27. I would describe the Christian Church Disciples of Christ as a large “family” in which most members feel a sense of belonging.

I would describe my ministry as a large “family” in which most members feel a sense of belonging.

28. I find it easy to identify with the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I find it easy to identify with my ministry.

29. I really care about the fate of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ.

I really care about the fate of my ministry.

The Identity Initiative

Instructions: For each item below select the answer that best represents your belief about or attitude toward the Identity Initiative of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. Please respond to all items. The alternative responses are:

- 1 Very strongly disagree
- 2 Strongly disagree
- 3 Disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Agree
- 6 Strongly agree

7 Very strongly agree

After reading each item carefully, please circle your response.

30. I am aware of the Identity Initiative.
31. I understand the purpose of the Identity Initiative.
32. The Identity Initiative is needed right now.
33. I think the Identity Initiative will make a difference.
34. The Identity Initiative will be valuable toward the Church's mission.
35. The Identity Initiative will make the Disciples Church known.
36. The Identity Initiative helps me better understand my role within my particular ministry.
37. The Identity Initiative will help me understand my role in the Church.
38. The Identity Initiative will help me articulate the Church's mission to others.
39. Understanding the identity of the Church will help me perform my duties.
40. The Identity Initiative will help the Church become a stronger presence in the community.

APPENDIX H: Chalice Logo

