



Church Communication Preferences

Justin Huibregtse, Josh Parsons, Patrick Rohr, Josh Toufar, Jon Weise
 Department of Communication & Journalism ♦ Dr. Martha Fay, Ph.D. ♦ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



Abstract

Research has shown that more than 100 million Americans rely on the internet to deliver some aspect of their religious experience (Campbell, 2006; Last, 2005). Despite this widespread use, little is known about which spiritual needs Christians prefer to meet online versus face-to-face. Specifically, studies on which computer-based communication applications (CBCA) churchgoers prefer to use for specific needs and the influence they have on desired behaviors have not been conducted. People who attend church and those who do not attend church were surveyed to examine the potential relationships between church-related behavioral changes and CBCA preferences of churchgoers. Because preference for mediated versus face-to-face communication may be related to communicative apprehension (CA), this study also tested the relationships between CA and media versus face-to-face preferences for various spiritual needs. McCroskey's (1970) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension was used, along with questions related to CBCA preferences and behavioral influence.

Research Questions/Results

- RQ₁: Which application do Christian lay people prefer when receiving faith-based messages: CBCA or Traditional
 - Laypeople preferred to receive *traditional* faith-based messages over CBCA for achieving their desired behavioral changes (See **Figure 1**)
 - Laypeople preferred to receive *traditional* faith-based messages over CBCA for meeting their desired needs (See **Figure 2**)
- RQ₂: Is Communication Apprehension related to preferred communication applications?
 - There is no association between CA and preferred communication applications

Other Findings

- CA was not related to preferences regarding behavioral change, however, a relationship between CA and overcoming an addiction neared significance: $p=0.07$, $r=0.09$
- In general, the participants who attend church once a week or almost every week have less CA; there were not enough respondents who said they seldom or never went to church to compare their CA to those who do attend church (See **Figure 3**)
- The majority of our participants chose Traditional communication applications over CBCAs in desiring behavior changes that the church has the potential to fulfill

Figure 1

Preferences for Traditional Applications versus CBCA for Behavior Change

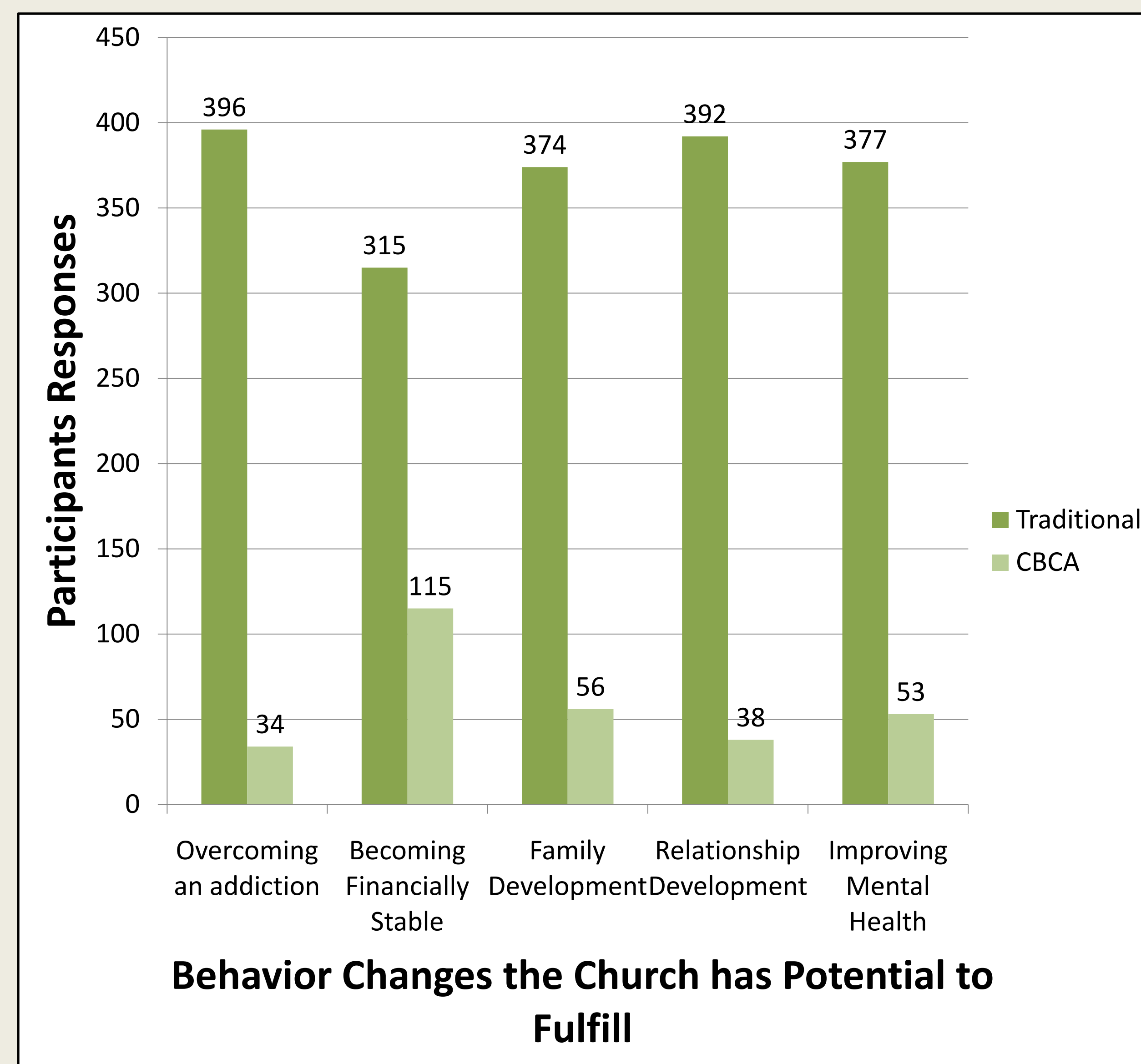


Figure 2

Preferences for Traditional Applications versus CBCA in meeting Needs

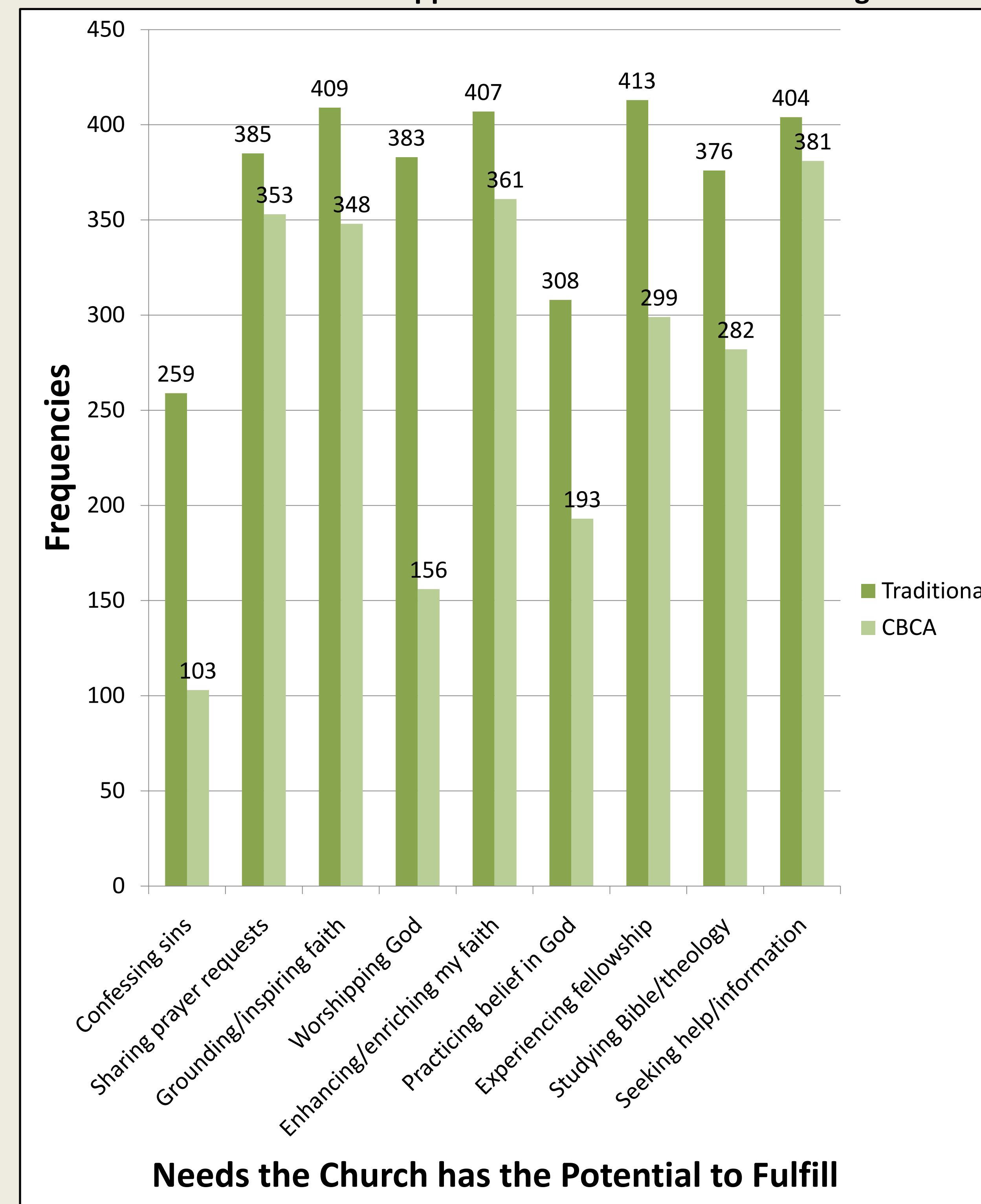
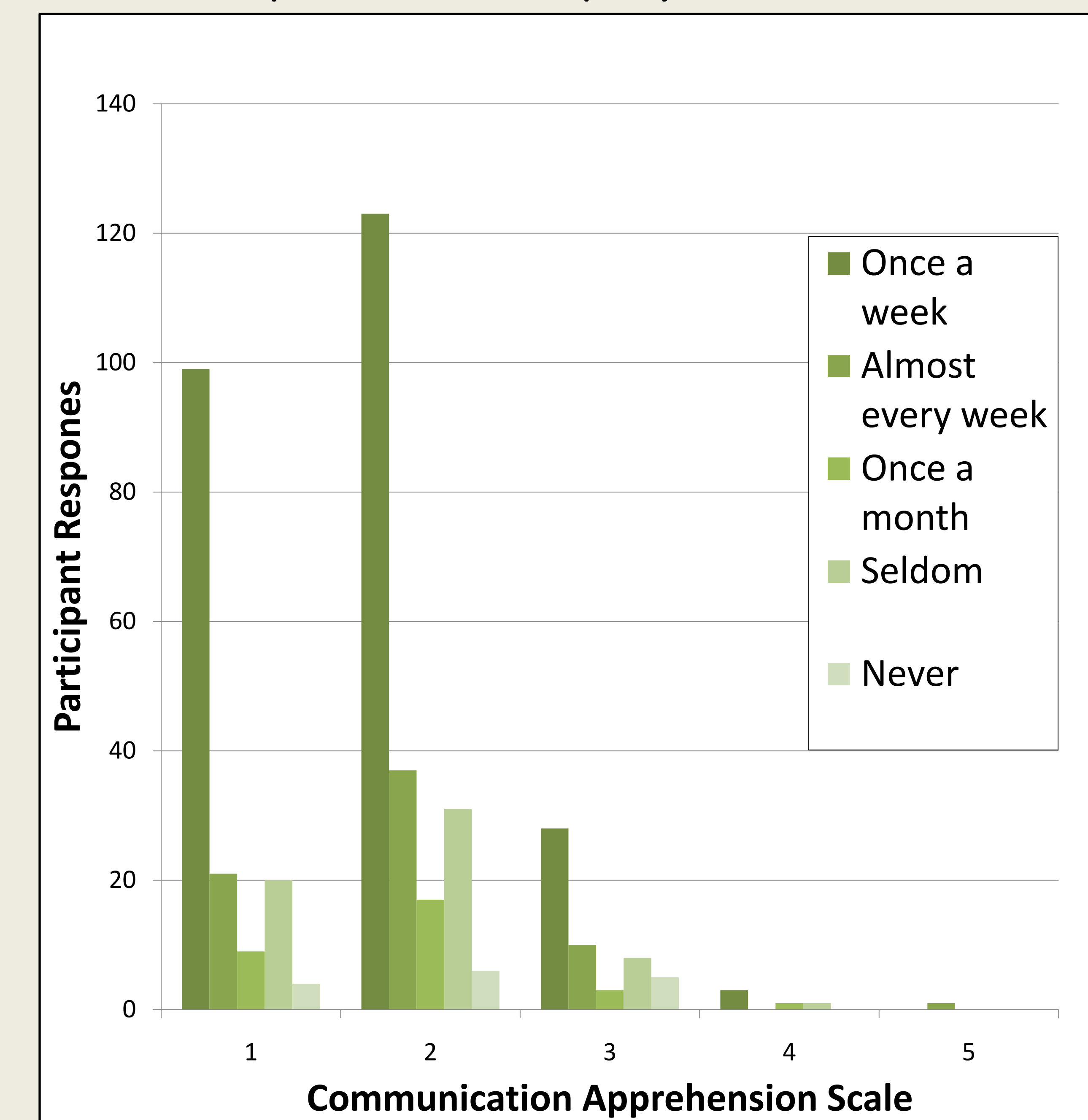


Figure 3

Relationship between CA and frequency of Church Attendance



Methods

- 407 participants consider themselves to be a Christian, 30 people did not
- 241 females and 184 males participated
- Majority of the participants were single
- Majority of the participants had some college
- Communication Apprehension scale was reliable: $m=39.63$, $SD=12.76$, $\alpha=.96$
- McCroskey's communication apprehension scale (1970) sample questions:
 - Scale 1-5, with 1=low CA, 5= high CA
 - 1. *I am calm and relaxed in participating in a group discussion*
 - 2. *Generally, I am nervous when participating in a meeting*
- Survey sample questions
 1. *Select which CBCA you would prefer for the given need*
 2. *In the following questions, consider yourself to have these issues and indicate your preference on how you would go about enacting these behavioral changes:*
 - 2a. *Overcoming an addiction:* (choose one) CBCA or Traditional communication applications
- Procedure: survey distributed via email and social networking sites; data was collected, organized, and collated using Qualtrics and SPSS
- Variables:
 - Desired behavior changes the church motivates
 - Needs the church has the potential to fulfill

Operationalization of Terms

- CBCA** : Computer-based communication applications (blogs, e-mail, social networking sites, websites, etc.)
- Traditional Communication Applications**: bulletins, mailings, small/community groups, one-on-one pastoral counseling
- Needs**: Something the Christian Church has the potential to fulfill.
- Desired Behavioral Changes**: Going to church can help motivate others to change certain behaviors.
- Laypeople**: an unordained person or somebody without special knowledge
- CA**: Communication Apprehension

Implications

- Our results will be used to help churches communicate effectively to laypeople in terms of traditional applications or newer technological applications, and to understand what needs and potential behavioral changes might be met using both Traditional applications and CBCA
- Churches can benefit from this data by knowing the laypeople's CA and how the church should use these applications regarding behavioral changes and desired needs