The Mediating Role of Disciple-Making Process in the Relationship of Church Ministry Programs and Church Membership Retention

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Abstract: The church needs to grow to accomplish its mission. In the past 14 years, the churches at East Indonesia Union Conference (EIUC) have added 56,984 members. However, 23,106 members have dropped out or have been missing in that duration of time. It appears that there is a need to determine the factors that contribute in the retention of members at EIUC. To approach the issue of church retention, a theory emerges indicating that church ministry program (CMP) with the mediation of disciple-making process (DMP), can explain church membership retention (CMR). This research employs step-wise regression and correlation method with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). In the predictive model, the study has found that among the dimensions of CMP explain 33.7% of the variance in. Furthermore, DMP explains 35.8% of the total variance of CMR. Lastly, a structural model is developed to determine the final path diagram of CMR model. The indirect effect of CMP to CMR through DMP has a total effect value of standardized coefficient at .285. CMR increases as CMP is mediated by DMP. Hence, the role of DMP is to enhance the relationship between CMP and CMR.

Keywords: discipleship, church ministry program, membership retention, nurturing

Introduction

Jesus is the Initiator of disciple making. He started to make disciples when He called Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:16-17) and invited them to come and follow Him. He invited more disciples until He completed the Twelve. He appealed to them and they followed Him in His ministry. To produce more disciples, Jesus continually and persistently fully equipped His disciples for ministry. He trained and showed them His own example of disciple making which prepared them in making disciples of others. At the very end of His presence with them while He was still on earth, He firmly commissioned them to make disciples (Matt 28:19-20).

The texts confirm that disciple making is imperative. The commission of Jesus directs His disciples with a purpose to make disciples and with a promise of His guidance through the Holy Spirit. Thus, the disciples have the responsibility to produce disciple makers through the ages. It is not a calling to make converts, but it is “about the multiplication of other faithful followers of the King among the nations” (J. Lewis, 2012, p. 104).

To fulfill Christ’s great commission, the SDA Church has been working from the early movement up to the present day. The growth of church membership through baptism and profession of faith contributes to the growth of the church. According to Trim (2014), the church has added 31,853,032 members through baptism for 50 years (1964 to 2013). However, 11,383,483 church members have left the church during those years. The net loss of the membership is 35.37%.

Being part of the worldwide church, the East Indonesia Union Conference (EIUC) of the SDA Church seems to be in the same situation. The records show that EIUC has the same challenge in having the membership commitment to stay in the church. Based on the church records, for the last 14 years, 56,984 members have joined the church through baptism and profession of faith. However, the statistics shows that 23,106 members have dropped out and have been missing from the church (General Conference of SDAs, 2000-2010a; SDA Church, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). The church experiences numerical membership growth, but retaining it has been a big challenge. It indicates that the work of church membership retention (CMR) and discipleship is important.

A number of studies (Cress, 2000; D. P. Smith, 1990, 1992; Wielhouwer, 2004) have attempted to clarify some variables contributing to membership retention. In this article, church ministry program (CMP) is considered as one of the variables. This study determines the impact of CMP to CMR and disciple-making process (DMP). Furthermore, DMP serves as a mediating
variable. Through the influence of CMP, DMP has an impact to CMR and it explains how CMP influence CMR. Furthermore, DMP in the church determines the level of CMR. DMP links to the expectation of members to grow spiritually and do ministry outside the community (Sider, Olson, & Unruh, 2002).

Biblical and Theological Review

Church Membership Retention

The concept of CMR is closely related to the theology of the church. The establishment of the church in the NT is the extension of God’s mission to restore human salvation in the OT. The theological and historical order of plan of salvation for human beings is the sending of Jesus as the Redeemer. Then, He gives the message to be proclaimed and God has a group of people throughout history to bring the message (Ferguson, 1996). The organization of the people of God is the result of the person of Jesus and His message.

The church as the body of Christ. Paul describes the church in an imagery as the body in Christ (Rom 5:1-5) and the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27). The church is the body of Christ that is composed of several members. It indicates a unity of the body, but it is made up of diverse members. The church as the body of Christ brings some implication that relates to the concept of CMR. Coenen (1981) viewed that the expression of Paul refers to the idea of belonging to Christ. It means becoming like a member from which each part of an organism holds a special function to the whole body. Erickson (1985) emphasizes the connection of the church as a group of believers with Christ and the interconnectedness among all people who make up the church in terms of an individual relationship. That is, members are not only dependent on Christ but also on the other members of the church. According to Ferguson (1996), “The body finds it wholeness in Christ, and Christ has his fullness in his people” (p. 94).

The description of Paul on the analogy of the church as Christ’s body implies the significance of CMR concept. According to Arthur (1973), “A body is a unit of members functioning together, or it does not exist” (p. 16). The members of the body have their own function. To function well, the member must stay and remain in the body and must develop obedience in Christ (Eph 4:15). If the member departs from the unity of the body, it can lose its function because it must be connected with the whole body. Furthermore, the design of the church is corporate in nature. The members’ interconnectedness and dependence help them function and grow. Each member has a contribution to make for the growth of the whole body (Eph 4:16). In order to grow, the member should relate to others and becomes subordinate to Christ as the Head of the body in all things (Eph 1:22). Paul suggests that only the members who retain and hold fast “with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow” (Col 2:19, NIV).

The church as a family of God. Another imagery of the church is illustrated as the family of God. The Scripture gives several dimensions and roles of an ideal member in the family of God. God is the Father of the church family ( Eph 1:3; 3:14; Gal 1:3, 4; 1 Thess 1:1). In another sense, God is the Father of spiritual children and prayer (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; Matt 6:6-9; Rom 8:18). By believing and receiving spiritual birth in Jesus, believers have the right to become children of God (John 1:12-13). Jesus is by nature the Son of God while Christians are adopted to be sons and daughters of God (Gal 4:4-6) who should treat each other as brothers and sisters in Christ (Col 1:2; 1 John 3:14-18; Rom 7:4; 1 Thess 2:14). On the other hand, Paul suggests a different analogy of family by presenting Jesus as the husband and the church as the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-23).

The pattern of ideal family members’ relationship reveals members’ life in the church which promotes the importance of the concept of CMR. Retention in the family life means being faithful in maintaining a harmonious relationship with the family members; Grudem (1999) emphasizes that the analogy of family encourages more love and fellowship among the members. Love and fellowship should be observed with the notions of respect and intimacy that strengthen the cohesion of diverse members to build a strong church in unity (Towner, 2006). Being sons and daughters of God, they understand their role and function in the family. Naturally, children
imitate the nature of their parents (Ferguson, 1996). Paul counsels children to obey their parents (Eph 6:1). Accordingly, the children of God remain in Him by imitating His love (Eph 5:1-2) and faithfully doing “the will of the Father in heaven” (1 John 2:29, NIV).

Disciple-Making Process

The Gospel of Matthew ends with Christ’s great commission emphasizing His kingly declaration as the One who has “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18, NIV). As discussed earlier, Matthew places the message about the kingdom of heaven or the reign of God as the central point to the Jewish people. Jesus is the King and the Messiah who has defeated the power of sin and death. He has been resurrected and holds the authority of the King. Furthermore, the imperative to make disciples follows the authoritative declaration of Jesus. Matthew puts the disciple-making commission based on the authority of Jesus.

The term disciple making comes originally from the noun disciple. The NT renders it to the Greek word mathētēs and talmîd in the OT which means learner, disciple, or pupil (Rengstorf, 1983). It is associated with the verb manthanō which refers to gain knowledge “as life experience or deliberate effort in study or practice” (Silva, 2014, p. 220). The meaning of disciple as a learner indicates that a person learns certain principles from another person and keeps those principles on the other’s authority (Unger, 1988). It is common in Greco-Roman world to describe the relationship between a master and a student (Ferguson, 1993).

The learning of a disciple from the master is in the context of a relationship (Moreau, Corwin, & McGee, 2004). Rengstorf (1983) views the master-disciple relationship in two forms: the relationship in the sphere of philosophical culture and the cultic and religious activity. In relation to the term disciple making, he argues that it comes from the verb mathēteūo which means to be or become disciple or to make disciple (Rengstorf, 1983). In addition, the verb akolouthein which means to follow is associated with the crowd who thronged Jesus. It is closely related to discipleship in the Gospel and the book of Acts (Longenecker, 1996). Furthermore, Pratt et al. (2014) confirm that the technical usages of the expressions discipleship, discipling, or disciple making are in the same meaning and interchangeable.

This study considers four dimensions for DMP. These are calling, integrating, equipping, and involving. They are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Calling. Calling is important in the disciples’ journey of faith to a mature DMP. By responding to the invitation, a new disciple begins to follow Him. It is a moment of spiritual birth when a disciple is in a state of a mental acceptance that Jesus is the One who is in charge of the disciples’ lives (B. Hull, 1988; Putman et al., 2013). It is a state when the disciples believe and accept the calling. In addition, it includes the elements of obedience to the call, repentance from the past life, submission to Christ, and commitment to follow Him (Boice, 1986). The disciples are ready to follow wherever the Leader leads them and they obey whatever the Master expects. According to Guinness (2003), “Calling has been a driving force in many of the greatest ‘leaps forward’” (pp. 4-5). The biblical-theological perspective understands that when a person responds to Jesus’s call to discipleship, he/she has faith to follow Him.

Integrating. The new disciples’ integration towards God and the body of believers is a critical point in DMP. In Acts 2:42-47, Luke portrays the integrating of new disciples to God and the church community. The disciples are immersed to the new life of believers’ behavior and experience a closer relationship with God. How the community of believers behaves to other people, especially to the new members, contributes to their retention behavior. Integrated new members have a sense of acceptance and belongingness to the church. Integrating into “friendship with other church members is the first step toward a new member’s assimilating into the church” (Rainer, 1993, p. 282). Schaller (1978) has found that many church members lose a sense of belongingness in the church. Formally, they hold membership of the church but they feel unaccepted to the fellowship (Schaller, 1978). Cress (2000) points out that new believers stay in the church because of their connection with their friends who are church members; however, those who are disconnected from their friends leave the church.

The second element of integration is assimilating to God. Understanding and connecting with God through the spiritual formation process helps the new disciples grow spiritually. On the other
hand, the connectedness of other members nurtures them. It helps the disciples experience spiritual growth which is the key to membership assimilation (McIntosh & Martin, 1992). By nature, a disciple is a learner. Christ’s disciple should be a learner to be more like Him by observing spiritual disciplines (Foster, 1978; Willard, 1991), which is a disciple-making model in the area of spiritual development. This is the transformation stage of the heart which includes “a process of transformation in which a work takes place in our heart and affections” (Putman et al., 2013, p. 48). The growth of the disciples and their spiritual transformation are the consequences of having a relationship with God that involves the attitude, behaviors, and experiences of a disciple-divine relationship (Ott, 2004).

**Equipping.** The third dimension of DMP is equipping. It helps church members discover their spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities. It is a ministry preparation wherein believers undergo training, coaching, and mentoring to be able to do church work and ministries and its assignment in God’s mission (Barnett, 2012). This element fulfills the goal of disciple making by developing the character of the disciples and equipping the believers to make other disciples (L. N. Jones, 2000). Church leaders and members help new converts exercise their own spiritual gifts and involve them in ministry training. When a qualified leadership is recognized, further development and empowerment are necessary (Davis, 2015). Thus, the ultimate goal of equipping new believers is “to give them the competence and the confidence to do the work of ministry” (Bonifacio, 2012, p. 166).

**Involving.** The call to be disciples of Jesus includes doing His ministry and mission. Ministry involvement enables the growing maturity of Christ’s disciples. Cress (2000) points out that the conversion of new believers has not completed yet until they are involved in personal ministry. The participation in the ministry is “an integral part of a wider strategy of utilizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit to their fullest potential for the salvation of the lost” (Cress, 2000, p. 77). In other words, the Holy Spirit enables the disciples from the state of just being disciples to doing or acting disciples as they carry out their task in church ministry and mission. It means that the disciples grow more like Jesus by becoming more fully involved in church ministry (J. D. Jones, 2006). It is a transformation of being spectators to be participators. The fullness of disciple making can be seen when the disciples are prepared and involved to be disciple-makers. Thus, the Great Commission can be fulfilled and the established disciples can produce other disciples who are ready to make more disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching.

**Church Ministry Programs**

The ministry practice of the early church shows the implementation of this nature (Acts 2:42-47). Luke portrays believers’ daily basic ministry at house churches (vv. 42-45) and daily meeting activities at the temple court (vv. 46-47). The context suggests a complete direction of church ministry activities that involves God’s ministry (studying apostolic teaching, praying, praising, and worshiping) and believers’ ministry (having fellowship and reaching out to unreached people).

The functions of church ministry are based on the biblical nature of the church. The church has three basic functions to lead people to love their God and their fellow people, teach them, and reach out to them to be His disciples. Malphurs (2007) elaborates these basic functions into five general functions of the church that cover worship, evangelism, teaching, fellowship, and service. These functions serve the foundation of church ministry and mission. Ideally, all the church ministry activities lay on the functions’ framework. According to Lee (2003), “The church’s characteristic activities, derived from its transcendent dimension, are applicable to the church’s organizational life and needs” (p. 179).

**Worship service.** Worship service is a foundational ministry that relates to the worshipers’ connection with the Creator. It is not a set of theory about God and humanity, but practice and experience of a relationship with God (Saliers, 2014). Worship ministry activities focus on God. It is not the ministry itself or the worshipers. The design of the service is not to satisfy the feelings of the worshipers, but to signify what and who God is as the Lord of the ministry (Erickson, 1985). The designation of the forms of worship “should conform to the will of God rather than to
the whims of fallen humanity” (Block, 2014, p. 6). On the other hand, although worship is focused on God, it still brings edification function to the worshipers (Peterson, 1992).

The early Christian community worship portrays the service that involves the apostles’ teachings, communion, and evangelism components. The word of God is the basic substance and central to the Christian worship. Getz (2007) emphasizes the importance of learning and the implementation of the Scriptures in worship that embrace the spiritual growth of believers. It promotes to worship participants to devote themselves to teachings of the word of God. The second element is communion. Worship serves as an access to the communion between God and among the worshipers (Humphrey, 2013). A true worship service provides feelings and experiences of both communions to the participants. Warren (1995) believes that there is an “intimate connection between worship and evangelism” (p. 242). He observes the evangelism efforts of the church to bring people to worship the true God (Warren, 1995). Thus, application of these elements in the worship service provides a holistic impact to church ministry.

**Evangelism.** Evangelism is a church function to reach out to the lost and equip believers to be mature disciples. It is the core task of the church. To measure the effectiveness of evangelism in the church, three elements (vision, evangelism attitude, and evangelism practice) should be considered. First, the church should have a vision on evangelism work since it gives the directive picture of the future of the church (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Vision helps church members understand the long-term goals, theology, philosophy, and values of the evangelism ministry.

Second, attitude toward evangelism contributes to motivation of believers to be committed and involved in church evangelism. Church members feel the need to respond to beliefs, values, and vision of evangelism because their attitude is closely related to cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (George & Jones, 2012). A clear understanding of values and beliefs make them believe in evangelism effort and respond to it. They have positive feelings and intended behavior to the intended purpose (Schermernhorn, Hunt, Osborn, & Uhl-Bien, 2010).

Third, evangelism practice makes the vision happen by applying it in real ministry that involves the leaders and members of the church. Church evangelism ministry practice is a result of people’s belief that generates them to have a certain behavior to act on it (Malphurs, 2013). Evangelistic practice is the task of personal believers and the corporate body to establish programs that express the practice (Welch, 2005). The basis of ministry application may implement planning, organizing, leading, and evaluating the ministry process. The directive guideline of the ministry helps the implementation of the evangelistic theory become manageable and measurable. Thus, both church members and leaders can easily monitor the ministry progress.

**Fellowship.** The ministry of fellowship presents the nature of church function to have fellowship with God and with one another. However, since fellowship with God has been discussed more in the worship dimension, this ministry is more focused on the horizontal fellowship among believers. According to Welch (2005), fellowship ministry refers to the “actions and activities that nurture and express care, concern, and love for one another” (p. 327). This operational definition is in accordance to the nature of the church as a community that involves practical participation to give and share something. Similarly, it also involves a mutual association of church members. Although this ministry focuses on fellowship among the disciples, the basis of fellowship is on communion with God that enables believers to share their faith. It is expressed by love and excludes a competing community (Milne, 2010).

The early Christian church provides authentic fellowship ministry characteristics. The feature of fellowship is the sharing of common life together. Ferguson (1996) points out that the community observes deep brotherly feelings of supporting one another and sharing material goods as an expression of love. The community experiences family love that cares for each family member’s physical, spiritual, social, and spiritual needs. Milne (2010) summarizes fellowship principles by exploring the fellowship practices in hospitality, responsibility of bearing the burdens of others, encouraging fellow church members, and mutual and personal praying. Another practical characteristic is the “agreement in doing the Lord’s work” (Ferguson, 1996, p. 371). The basis of community trust and friendship cohesion in the church is in the unity and agreement to extend church mission and ministry. Consequently, believers are strengthened by mutual relationship and responsibility of fellowship (Stott, 2007).
Community service. This suggests that the church has a function to do social community service as part of the evangelical and social mandate. According to J. B. Smith (2010), one of the successful characteristics of church ministry is its service to the people of the surrounding communities. Sider et al. (2002) believe that community service should be holistic and social since it is a means to communicate the Gospel to respective communities. They suggest four types of ministry approaches—relief purpose, people’s development, community development, and structural changes in the community entities (Sider et al., 2002). In relief purpose, the church provides the immediate and urgent needs of the community by distributing goods in times of crisis or natural disasters. However, the church function promotes the church to show its concern and action as part of the regular ministry. In people’s development, individuals should improve their capacity and ability through spiritual and psychological empowerment.

Erickson (1985) points out that churches do their social community service in two purposes: (a) to help people find relief from the caused problem and (b) to develop them in order to reduce and overcome social challenges. As a response to this issue, community development is needed since it has a larger social ministry concern. Churches conduct ministry by developing corporate society to enhance the present quality of life. The church can establish skills in training centers, health ministry systems, educational institutions, and other applicable ministry approaches that are fitted to the needs of the community. Lastly, the church helps the community change the structure of their entities. This is “to promote the structural arrangement that nurture the goodness and wholeness of social life intended by the Creator” (Sider et al., 2002, p. 93). However, churches need to clarify and redefine the extent they should be involved in the effort of structural changes. Every effort of structural changes type approach must be critically examined on the strong biblical foundation. Churches and their leadership must understand the primary mission and ministry of the church.

Group Bible study. Teaching ministry is part of the church functions to nurture the members and proclaim the Gospel. It is a ministry that leads people to grow and come to maturity in faith by learning God’s word. This ministry is a critical element to help Christ’s disciples come to maturity in order for them “to think and act satisfactorily in each experience of [their] life” (Gangel, 1968, p. 16). The early church community shows how the teaching and learning process of the Scriptures promotes church growth. Church members dedicate themselves on Bible study that is integrated to other ministry. As the disciple’s terminology confirms, a disciple is a learner; hence, teaching ministry is to produce Bible learners to follow their Master.

Downs (1994) suggests three factors of development (cognitive, moral, and faith) to achieve the goal of faith maturity by learning the Scriptures. In cognitive development of the learners, comprehensive understanding of the Bible is “central to Christian growth and maturity” (Downs, 1994, p. 81). As a result of Bible study, life should be transformed towards spiritual development. J. C. Hull (2006) confirms that the highest stage of cognitive development is discerning the knowledge of the Scriptures and applying it to real life. Thus, Bible study is effective when the learners grasp the knowledge in a sense of being informative that brings a transformative life.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative approach using correlational and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The primary purpose of this study was to test a model that explained CMR. To seek the best predictors of the variables on the level of CMR, this study employed multiple regression under the stepwise method. The purpose of this design was to reduce the amount of predictors that account for the maximum criterion (Pedhazur, 1997). Finally, to test the theory of the relationship of CMP, and CMR with the mediation of DMP, SEM was used. Moreover, the path analysis of SEM was used to take the combined relationship among CMR, CMP, and DMP. The exogenous variables considered in this study were CMP (worship service, evangelism, group Bible study, fellowship, and community service). The mediating variable was DMP (calling, integrating, equipping, and involving). In addition, CMR attitude and behavior served as the endogenous variable.

The population of this study was church members of EIUC. This study applied convenient sampling procedure to get a representative sample from EIUC church members. EIUC has 10
local missions and conferences. The samples were selected from five local missions and conferences. The selection of these five areas was based on the similarity of cultural background, number of church members, and geographical setting. From each local mission and conference, at least 100 respondents were selected. Hence, the total number of the participants is 525. Contact persons were identified to help in questionnaire distribution.

As presented in Table 1, the 572 respondents who participated in the study were chosen from their respective local missions and conferences. However, 47 research questionnaires were rejected in this study because the respondents did not complete their answers to some of the questions. Thus, out of 572, this study considered only the 525 valid questionnaires.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Local mission and conference</th>
<th>Number of retrieved questionnaires</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minahasa Conference</td>
<td>Distributed: 123, Retrieved: 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>South Sulawesi Conference</td>
<td>Distributed: 96, Retrieved: 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maluku Mission</td>
<td>Distributed: 110, Retrieved: 98</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>North Minahasa Conference</td>
<td>Distributed: 122, Retrieved: 119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Papua Mission</td>
<td>Distributed: 121, Retrieved: 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>Distributed: 572, Retrieved: 525</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general report of all the demographic descriptions of the respondents is made to present a comprehensive picture. The demographic profile of church members include gender, age, ministry responsibility in the church, number of years since the respondents were baptized, number of years of being a member of the current church, number of friends in the church, number of attendance to church worship service, involvement in the church, and church size. They are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

This study designed a four-part survey instrument. The first part was used to assess church members’ practice on CMP of their church. The second part was to investigate the involvement of church members in DMP. The third part was for CMR survey assessment. The purpose of the instrument was to assess the level of church members’ retention attitude and behavior in terms of satisfaction, attachment, commitment, and loyalty to their local church. The last part was the demographic profile of the respondents.

The gathered data from the participants were coded using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software. The data was subjected to pre-screening for examining data accuracy, missing, and outliers. After this process, the actual valid data was analyzed and processed. To explain the demographic profile of the respondents, the descriptive statistics was used. It employed the frequencies, percentages, and means. The 22th version of AMOS was used for SEM to be able to determine the model for an enhanced and maintained CMR in the local churches of EIUC.

Analysis and Findings of the Study

Predictors considering the dimensions of church ministry programs.

As shown in Table 2, among the dimensions of CMP, evangelism, worship service, and fellowship explain 33.7% of the variance in CMR and have a strong multiple correlation of 58%. Among the three CMP predictors, evangelism explains the change in CMR by 28.3%. Moreover, as presented in Table 3, evangelism is the highest coefficient of determination ($t = 14.369, p < .001$) of CMR. The positive unstandardized coefficient ($\beta = .441$) of evangelism on CMR implies that when churches are more effective in their evangelism program, CMR rate can be
higher. This finding is supported by Rainer and Rainer (2008) who have found that the churches
that have an effective evangelistic program have a higher membership retention rate. This
indicates that evangelism has a great impact to CMR. This finding should therefore be the basis of
the program of EIUC to enhance evangelism and maximize its benefits to CMR.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
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<td>.283</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td>.283</td>
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<td>.040</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.580c</td>
<td>.337</td>
<td>.333</td>
<td>.014</td>
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</table>

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), evangelism.
   b. Predictors: (Constant), evangelism, worship service.
   c. Predictors: (Constant), evangelism, worship service, fellowship.

The second dimension that predicts CMR is worship service. It has a contribution of 4% total
variance on CMR. This factor has also a positive unstandardized value ($\beta = .244, t = 5.564, p < .001$) which implies that the more church members engage and get satisfied in worship service, the more likely they can be retained in the church. This finding is supported by Dudley and Cummings (1983) who concludes that satisfaction to worship service and its program tend to promote members to stay in the church. The last dimension that predicts CMR is fellowship program. The total variance contributed by fellowship on CMR is 1.4%. Likewise, it has a positive unstandardized value ($\beta = .155, t = 3.266, p = 0.001$) which indicates that fellowship influences CMR. The more effective the fellowship program of local churches is, the more likely it is that members can be retained. This finding is supported by a recent study by Brown (2013) who has found that church fellowship programs significantly influence membership retention attitude and behavior. The fellowship activity that includes young people promotes them to continue in church ministry and mission involvement (Brown, 2013).
Table 3

Coefficients of Predictors Considering Church Ministry Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficient (β)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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</thead>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evangelism .441</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>(Constant) 1.656</td>
<td>14.762</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evangelism .279</td>
<td>6.712</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worship service .244</td>
<td>5.564</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>(Constant) 1.593</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worship service .182</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fellowship .155</td>
<td>3.266</td>
<td>.001</td>
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</table>

Predictors considering the dimensions of disciple-making process

As shown in Table 4, all the dimensions of DMP—involving, integrating, equipping, and calling—explain 35.8% of the total variance of CMR. These four factors are in significant proportion of the variation in CMR that can be assumed as the significant predictors with 59.8% total multiple correlation relationship between these predictors and CMR. Among the predictors from DMP, involving explains the variance of CMR by 29.6% and this is the highest coefficient of determination of CMR \( t = 14.818, p < .001 \).

As presented in Table 5, the positive unstandardized coefficient of involving \( \beta = .501 \) implies that the more members become involved in church ministry, the more likely they can be retained in the church. This finding is supported by Rainer (2001) who concludes that involvement in church ministry and mission serve as glue that held members retain in the church. Furthermore, Walters (2011) confirms that involvement in church ministry is one of the key factors to keep members in the church and enhance CMR rate.

With a contribution of 4.2% total variance on CMR and a positive unstandardized value \( \beta = .241, t = 5.764, p < .001 \), integrating becomes the second significant predictor of CMR. This implies that the more church members become integrated to God and the church body, the more likely they stay in the church. This finding is in accordance to the finding of Barna Group (2013) who has found that young adults who are retained in the church are twice as likely to establish an integrated personal friendship in the church—a finding that also supports the other finding of this study about the contribution of the number of friends to members’ decision to remain in the church.

Equipping \( \beta = .130, t = 2.965, p = 0.003 \) is the third significant predictor of CMR. It contributes 1.1% of the variance to CMR. This positive correlation indicates that the program for equipping members
Table 4

**Significant Predictors of Church Membership Retention Considering the Dimensions of Disciple-Making Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.544$^a$</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>.294</td>
<td>.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.581$^b$</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.591$^c$</td>
<td>.349</td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.598$^d$</td>
<td>.358</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), involving.*
*b. Predictors: (Constant), involving, integrating.*
*c. Predictors: (Constant), involving, integrating, equipping.*
*d. Predictors: (Constant), involving, integrating, equipping, calling.*

Table 5

**Coefficients of Predictors Considering Disciple-Making Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients ($\beta$)</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.723</td>
<td>15.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involving</td>
<td>.501</td>
<td>14.818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.278</td>
<td>9.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involving</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td>10.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>5.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.253</td>
<td>9.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involving</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>6.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>5.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equipping</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>2.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.048</td>
<td>6.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involving</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td>4.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>3.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equipping</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>3.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calling</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>2.747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, helps the church maintain and enhance CMR. That is, the more members become equipped for His work, the more they become motivated to carry on ministry. This finding is supported by the study of Worthington (2014) who has found that the equipping process in the church helps new converts understand their spiritual gifts that encourage them to be involved in church ministry. Consequently, the participants have an attitude to long-term retention (Worthington, 2014). In addition, the study of Nixon (2013) has found that members who become
equipped through self-discipline in spiritual participation help enhance faithful membership retention.

As the last significant predictor of CMR among the dimensions of DMP, calling ($\beta = .137$, $t = 2.747$, $p = .006$) contributes 0.9% of the variance to CMR. This positive correlation implies that when members experience and understand Jesus’s call to discipleship, they are more likely to stay and be retained in the church. This particular finding contributes to the literature regarding the direct prediction of calling dimension of DMP to CMR. It is important to note that calling that involves faith of new disciples to follow Him are a starting point to the commitment of becoming Christ’s disciples.

In conclusion, all the dimensions of DMP—involving, integrating, quipping, and calling—are significant predictors of CMR. These dimensions positively contribute to members’ decision to remain faithful and stay in the church. This finding implies that a better practice of DMP among members at EIUC promotes a higher CMR rate among local churches.

**Predictors considering demographic variables of church members**

Apart from determining the contribution of CMP and DMP to CMR, this study also considers determining the contribution of church members’ demographic variables. Among the different categories of the demographic variables, this study finds that members’ involvement in church ministry and their number of friends in the church explain 11% of the variance of CMR. As shown in Table 6, these factors have 33.2% strength on their correlation with CMR. Thus, they are considered as significant predictors of CMR.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.282$^a$</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.332$^b$</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), involvement in the church.*

* b. Predictors: (Constant), involvement in the church, number of friends.*

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients ($\beta$)</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement in the church</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>6.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement in the church</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>5.697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of friends</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>4.252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the regression analysis, members’ involvement in church ministry explains 7.9% of the variance of CMR. Moreover, as presented in Table 7, members’ involvement ($\beta = .154$, $t = 6.713$, $p < .001$) shows a much higher coefficient of determination of CMR. This indicates that members’ active involvement in church ministry activities helps the church maintain CMR rate. This finding is consistent with the result of involving in DMP dimensions that help predict CMR. This finding is also supported by the study of Dudley (1993) who concludes that the active participation in witnessing and in other church ministries enhances commitment and loyalty to the
church. Consequently, this attitude promotes the enhancement of members’ retention behavior (Dudley, 1993).

The second element among the categories of the demographic variables that helps predict CMR is the number of friends inside the church. With a positive unstandardized value (β = .068, t = 4.252, p < .001), the number of friends contributes 3.1% total variance to CMR. This positive correlation indicates that when members have more friends inside the church, they are more likely to remain in the church. It appears that friendship bounds the cohesion of church fellowship. This finding is in accordance to the study of D. V. A. Olson (1989) who concludes that members who have many friends within the church community are less likely to leave the church when they have challenges from other areas of ministry.

The Mediating Role of Disciple-Making Process

_Evaluation of the model’s goodness of fit_

![Figure 1](image)

Figure 1. A structural model of church membership retention.

\_Note._ WS = worship service, GBS = group Bible study, F = fellowship, CS = community service, E = evangelism, C = calling, I = integrating, Equ = equipping, Iv = involving.

The SEM analysis of the mediating effect of DMP on the relationship of CMP and CMR finds a structural model as presented in Figure 1. In relation to this, an evaluation to the goodness of fit of the model is needed. This study finds the model to have a chi-square value of 3.286 which indicates that this study has a good fit model. In terms of RMSEA, the hypothesized model is 0.050, with the 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.35 to 0.65 at p = .48. This indicates that the 90% confidence with true RMSEA value was within the bounds of 0.35 to 0.65 which reveals a good level of accuracy. Given the value of RMSEA at 0.050, it is within the ≤ 0.05 range for a close fit. Therefore, the structural model of CMR as presented in Figure 1 has a close and good fit.

Moreover, in terms of GFI and AGFI, the model has a good fit since the result shows that GFI (.973) and AGFI (.947) fit under the cut-off for GFI (≥ .95) and AGFI (≥ .95). In determining the SRMR, this study finds that the SRMR value of the model in this study is 0.0259. This means that the model of this study is a good fit.
Based on the findings, the hypothesized model has a TLI point of 0.979; thus, the model is well fit. In determining the NFI, this study finds that the NFI value of the hypothesized model is 0.978 and is therefore a good fit. Moreover, the CFI value point of the tested model is 0.987. Therefore, the hypothesized model is a good fit.

Figure 2 shows the final model of the mediating role of DMP on the relationship of CMP and CMR. In the next sections, the role of DMP in explaining the effect of CMP on CMR is discussed in detail. In addition, this study provides Table 8 to present the summary of effects in the final model.

**Direct effect of the variables**

![Figure 2. The final model of church membership retention.](image)

**Table 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Direct effects</th>
<th>Indirect effects</th>
<th>Total effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMP</td>
<td>DMP</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMP</td>
<td>CMR</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMP</td>
<td>CMR</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.597</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 8, the final model reveals a positive significant relationship to all variables. CMP has a direct effect to DMP with the coefficient of .69. This means that a 1-point increase on CMP predicts a .69 on DMP. Furthermore, the squared multiple correlation of CMP on DMP is $R^2 = .478$ which indicates that CMP significantly influence DMP. The finding reveals that the 47.8% change in DMP is due to the change in CMP. This implies that the increasing performance of CMP, the more members observe DMP. On account of the relationship to CMR, both CMP and DMP variables have a direct effect. Thus, CMP (.597) and DMP (.691) have a direct effect to CMR.

**Indirect effect of the variables**

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 8, CMP has an indirect effect to CMR. Through DMP, CMP has an indirect effect to CMR. The coefficient of the direct effect of CMP to DMP is .691 while the indirect effect value of DMP to CMR is .413. Thus, CMP has an indirect effect point of .691 x .413 = .285. That is, the indirect effect of CMP to CMR through DMP has a total effect value of standardized coefficient at .285. CMR increases as CMP is mediated by DMP. Hence, the role of DMP is to enhance the relationship between CMP and CMR.

The squared multiple correlations of CMP and DMP to CMR is $R^2 = .623$. This indicates that the 62.3% change in CMR is due to change in CMP and DMP. In other words, from the change in
CMR, 62.3% of the change can be attributed to the influence of CMP and DMP. The findings of this study imply that as CMP and DMP are authentically practiced or implemented, CMR correspondingly increases or is enhanced. The findings of the study point out the significant contribution of DMP in explaining the relationship of CMP and CMR. Therefore, DMP significantly contributes to explain the effect of CMP on CMR.

Summary and Conclusion

Implementing multiple regression analysis, the predictive model for CMR is determined. The result shows that evangelism, worship service, and fellowship of CMP can explain 33.7% of the variance in CMR. Similarly, all dimensions of DMP (calling, integrating, equipping, and involving) can explain 35.8% of the variance in CMR. Moreover, the demographic variables also help predict CMR. In particular, church members’ involvement in church ministry and their number of friends in the church explain 11% of the variance in CMR. All these predictors from CMP, DMP, and from the demographic variables help predict a model for CMR.

Using SEM, the significant contribution of DMP to explain the effect of CMP on CMR is determined. The result shows that CMP have a direct effect to DMP wherein 69.1% change in DMP is due to the change in CMP. Moreover, CMP and DMP have a direct effect to CMR. The model shows that through DMP, CMP has an indirect effect to CMR. That is, a change of 62.3% in CMR is due to CMP and DMP. Thus, DMP significantly contributes to explain the effect of CMP on CMR.

In conclusion, based on the major findings of this study found: The predictive model for CMR has 9 predictors—evangelism, worship service, fellowship, calling, integrating, equipping, involving, members’ involvement in church ministry, and their number of friends. The variances of the predictors from CMP and DMP explain a fair contribution to CMR while the variance of the predictor from the demographic variables has a little contribution to CMR. However, the predictive model has still helped this study in designing a program that can help the churches at EIUC enhance and maintain their CMR rate. DMP plays an important mediating role to explain the effect of CMP on CMR.

References


