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**Paper Proposal/Abstract**

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**Title: Building Community Among “Followers of the Way” for Vulnerable Times**

**Abstract:**

“I’m dreading what I will face the day my mother dies.” As the family’s only daughter and its only believer, the young woman in Malaysia knew she would be pressured to do certain rituals to assure her mother’s soul gets safely into the next world. Her dread stemmed from her new allegiance to the One True God, putting her in conflict with traditional beliefs and expected conformity to the requirements of the spirit world. Given the strength of kinship relationships and the culture’s demands to participate in such a significant event, this daughter was in a very vulnerable position because of her faith.

Similarly, the New Testament’s early church was also formed in the context of strong kinship relationships as well as deep commitment to the culture’s gods and goddesses. Becoming “followers of the Way” (Acts 9:2) had resulted in a transformation of ideas and interests that affected their traditional relational networks in both the social and the supernatural realms (Romans 12:1-2). Their former ritual responses to significant events would also need to be transformed. But how would they successfully explain and share their new responses? The Apostle Paul encouraged the building of new networks of trusted relationships for the needed support.

This paper will look at ways the first century Greco-Roman cultures met peoples’ needs when a death occurred; but those ways often conflicted with the Christians’ new faith. Then it will give an overview of some of the ways the Christians’ community of practice contributed to helping those believers develop trusted relationships to support each other in such times. It will close with suggestions for applying principles from those practices to contemporary contexts where believers feel similarly vulnerable.