

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Case for Closing the Contagiously Conflicted Church: Three Reasons Why it is Necessary

A thesis project submitted to  
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for the degree Doctor of Ministry

by

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LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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## **ABSTRACT**

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT

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“The Case for Closing the Contagiously Conflicted Church: Three Reasons Why it is Necessary”

The topic of this thesis focuses on the harm of severely conflicted congregations and necessary reasons for their existence to cease. The rationale behind this choice is that there are numerous congregations that are contagiously conflicted and harming the lives of vocational ministers, the name of Christ, and the witness of the church. This issue needs to be addressed. Having served as pastor of two contagiously conflicted congregations, it is this writer’s hope that this document will help others discern if and when such an unpleasant decision is necessary.

The research for this Thesis was derived from surveys of pastors who may have experienced this extreme conflict, as well as an analysis of those surveys for an understanding of the effects of contagious church conflict.

Abstract length: 125 words.

## **Chapter One – Introduction**

The author calls himself a “double bus kid.” He came to Christ at the age of six as a result of the bus ministry of the Capital City Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. The author was invited to ride the big blue bus to church during the summer of 1980 and was excited at the possibility since he had never been on a bus before. After attending the children’s church for several months, he responded to what he now knows to be an invitation where he was taken into a separate room with a small group of other children and had the gospel explained in a way that they could all understand. The author prayed that Sunday morning and began the life long journey of following Jesus wherever He may lead.

The author was baptized two weeks later at the church during a regular Sunday morning service and attended the church for several more weeks before the bus stopped showing up on Sunday mornings with no explanation. The author’s parents could not find out any information as to why the church stopped coming and even though the author was disappointed that he could no longer attend church, there was no immediate remedy. The author learned later in life that the church had folded due to unknown conflict within the church. A decision was made by the people that made up that congregation to simply cease to exist as a formally organized church.

The young boy may not have realized what was happening until he was a teenager, but this realization would play a small part in affecting his emphasis in his later pastoral career.

The author’s designation of being a double bus kid is due to a second church inviting him to ride a bus to their church. The author and his parents had moved into a new home on the other side of his hometown of Montgomery, Alabama when someone from the Lighthouse Baptist Church of Montgomery knocked on their door and offered to pick the author up the next morning

to ride to church. Excited at the possibility of being able to go church after nearly five years, he quickly agreed with the permission of his parents and started riding the bus to the church the next morning.

After a year and a half of attending the Lighthouse Church, the author recommitted his life to following Christ and surrendered to a call to vocational ministry. He was eventually one of the first 20 students enrolled at the new Lighthouse Christian Academy and was becoming even more involved in all of the activities of what would become known as Lighthouse Ministries, Incorporated.

As a result of this involvement, the author was included in a mentoring group known as the “preacher boys” which was comprised of 12 other young men who had also expressed a desire or call to serve in vocational ministry. The Senior Pastor, Dr. Mickey Kirkland, and the Youth Pastor of the church met regularly with this group of young men to give them practical training to help equip them for serving as the pastor of a local church. This training included topics such as preaching, administration, sermon preparation, and pastoral care.

The author still considers this to be one of the biggest blessings in his life in regards to preparing for service in the kingdom of God. The author was treated as a full-time associate pastor of a church that had an average attendance of over 700 individuals during his teenage years, but without any pay. In many ways, the author considers this training absolutely invaluable and directly connected to his intense commitment to be as genuine as possible in his relationships with the people he serves alongside.

After five years of being on the church property every day of the year except Christmas, the author suffered from what he now knows to be burn out. This happened primarily because of two reasons in the author's life.

The first reason was the conflict that developed within the church when he was asked by the Senior Pastor to be the leader of a second youth group. The youth group was rather large at the time, and more than two-thirds of the youth were unhappy with the youth pastor and wanted their parents to leave the church because of how he interacted with them. The Senior Pastor felt that there needed to be a change in the position of Youth Pastor, but did not wish to simply fire the Youth Pastor. He wanted to give him an opportunity to find another position so that he and his family would not be harmed for something that was not a moral or theological issue. The solution that the Senior Pastor had was to make the author a Youth Pastor in addition to the then current Youth Pastor. There were essentially two youth groups under the umbrella of the larger church body. This, of course, led to conflict that was destructive not only for the youth group, but for the church as a whole.

Once the author graduated from the Lighthouse Christian Academy, he dropped out of church almost immediately. He decided to pursue a career in law enforcement and enrolled in the local University with a declared major in Criminal Justice. He ran for and was elected to the office of Chief Constable for Montgomery County Alabama Precinct 5E, the youngest person in the history of the state of Alabama to be elected to that office or any similar to it.

During the next two years, the author thought he was happy doing what he wanted to do and ignored anything to do with church, though he always had a nagging deep inside of him that he tried his best to ignore. He was invited by a friend to attend church with them and he agreed

to go. He attended a Southern Baptist Church for the first time in his life and was asked on his second Sunday there to have his name added for consideration of being a Deacon, even though he was not a member.

The author did not go back to that church, but he could no longer ignore the Holy Spirit trying to bring him back into fellowship where he should be. He tried as best as he could to communicate with the Senior Pastor of Lighthouse Baptist Church, which he still considered his home church. After a short time of prayer, the author realized that in order to get in line with where God wanted him to be and to better prepare for future ministry, he needed to go to a Christian college and major in Pastoral Theology.

In the fall of 1995, the author moved to Birmingham, Alabama to attend Southeastern Bible College. Here, he declared a major of Pre-Seminary Studies. He also met his future wife on the first day of registration.

The author began attending the home church of his future wife since she was from the area originally and he did not know anyone else. This was the second time the author was exposed to a Southern Baptist church. Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church was a small country church with a pastor who was not professionally trained. Even without training, he was a man who walked with God and who had a heart for helping the author develop and mature for his future in vocational ministry.

Reverend Tommy Bates worked as a lineman for the local power company during the day and studied, visited, prayed, and prepared in the evenings to be ready to share God's word with his people. Brother Tommy influenced the author in numerous ways and it was the Pleasant Grove Church that licensed the author for the gospel ministry in May of 1996. Since this was just

licensing and not ordination, there was no council to stand before. The author's fiancé, her family, and the author's parents attended a special licensing service where the pastor preached a message to the author and his fiancé and then gave the author an opportunity to preach as well. This was of special meaning since the author lost his father to lung cancer less than a month later.

The author married the former Christy Parsons in June of 1996 and over the course of the next three years, they both finished their undergraduate work in preparation for their life together. The author then enrolled at an extension center campus of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in Birmingham, Alabama, but had to withdraw during the second semester due to extreme health issues with his wife and newborn son.

From August of 1992 until March of 2007, the author also worked in the transportation and logistics business. The author enjoyed much financial success and had constant promotion offers during his 15-year tenure with the same company. This served to keep the author conflicted over a desire for success versus what he knew God had called him to do.

In March of 2002, the author was called to be the bi-vocational pastor of the Clay Baptist Church of Clay, Alabama, a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama. The author was ordained by the Clay Baptist Church and served there as pastor for six years before he moved to his first full-time pastorate. During his tenure as pastor, the church enjoyed tremendous growth, but there was also some trouble with the treasurer stealing church funds. The next two churches would be where the author would begin to understand how conflicted churches can be.

The author's first full-time assignment lasted 51 weeks due to a family that was in control of everything at the church and refused to allow any real change to take place that they did not

personally approve or desire. There was tremendous growth from conversions, as well as some transfers of membership. Once the realization was made that nothing was going to change and the author was informed that he needed to find another church to serve, he began searching for a new place to serve.

Another church in the area learned of the author's desire to move and contacted the author to discuss the possibility. The author moved to this new assignment full of excitement and big dreams, though it would quickly become just over two of the roughest years of his life.

He was told that there was no conflict at this church and that the former pastor had caused a great deal of trouble before he was asked to leave. The author quickly learned that nothing could be further from the truth. This church was contagiously conflicted and had a generational pattern of tremendous conflict that went back at least 25 years.

While more details will be provided later in regards to this conflicted congregation, the author began to realize that there may be a time when a local congregation ceases to be a church and would serve the cause of Christ best by ceasing to exist.

### Statement Of Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to raise a discussion about those organizations known as churches that have ceased to be a Biblical example of a local church based on their history of contagious conflict and therefore would serve the cause of Christ better if they would simply cease to exist. This paper will examine the impact that this type of conflict has on various concepts and on certain people such as the name of Christ, the church itself, and those who attempt to serve it so faithfully. There will also be attention given to a possible solution to this

problem. The author will share his personal story of conflict and how it affected his family in addition to examples of how individual pastors and their families are affected by this through the inclusion of survey results.

This author has seen first-hand how the effects of such conflict can be negative for the community in which the congregation is located. It also has an impact on the pastors and their families, as well as the families that make up the membership of these churches, and can have several negative implications for generations to come. The purpose is not to try and fix a problem that cannot be fixed, but rather to stir a desire within the heart of believers to be a part of solving the problem within these local churches that have experienced or are experiencing spiritual atrophy. These churches are dead and all that they spread for the most part is death on a spiritual level. They are in danger of judgment and if they are not willing to take the necessary steps to turn themselves around, then they will continue to prove to be of no use for the sake of the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

### Statement Of Problem

According to Stetzer and Dodson, a church that is Biblical has scriptural authority, Biblical leadership, preaching and teaching, observes ordinances, and is clear in their mission.<sup>2</sup> If that is the case, then the churches that experience contagious conflict are not meeting the Biblical

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible says in Revelation 3:1-3 (NKJV), “These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”

<sup>2</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2007), 2-3.

definition of what constitutes a church and must takes steps to correct themselves or be willing to close their doors if there is not a genuine desire to come in line with God's word on the part of the leadership of the local church.

The primary problem is getting those who are at best in a spiritual position where they are not as close as they should be in their walk with Christ and are perhaps not even believers to begin with to be willing to take the painful, yet necessary steps to improve the ultimate witness of the entire Christian family in their communities and beyond. Rediger points out that there can be people are inadvertent instruments of evil for conflict and that in addition to this there are people who intentionally advocate evil, but that both are essentially a spiritual issue.<sup>3</sup> Scripture is clear that those who are genuinely walking with God will respond to His word as they hear it or read it for themselves.<sup>4</sup> Just because someone makes a case for closing a church does not mean that those who are firmly entrenched in the traditions of that church will be willing to take the necessary steps to shut it down and allow others to attempt to reach the community in their place. There is clear warning in scripture against getting caught up in the ways of the world when it comes to Christians conducting themselves in communities of faith.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 91.

<sup>4</sup> The Bible says in John 8:47 (NKJV), "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." And in John 10:27 (NKJV), "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

<sup>5</sup> The Bible says in Colossians 2:8 (NKJV), "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

### Basis For Topic Choice

The author has spent the better part of 11 years directly involved in pastoral ministry, either personally experiencing churches that have been contagiously conflicted or guarding against that virus for one reason or another. In addition to those 11 years of direct experience, the author has been indirectly involved in this type of conflict in his own home church, as he has seen the conflict decimate the effectiveness of that once vibrant congregation.

The author has also seen first-hand and through conversations with close friends in pastoral ministry the effects this type of conflict can have on the minister and their families who are serving or have served in various roles within the local church. There is a great deal of emotional, physical, and spiritual stress that is encountered by those who are in vocational ministry and their families and there is a desire to contribute somehow to a discussion of how to combat this. While it is common knowledge that those who follow Christ will be hated for His sake, these attacks are not expected from within the group of people who profess to also be following Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The author also takes the position that if the genuine believers who are a part of these conflicted congregations would leave and unite with a body of genuine believers in another congregation, both the believer and their new church family would be more effective together as they seek to spread the gospel and tell people about the love of Christ. Simply put, the author holds to the position that followers of Christ do not have the luxury or the time to worry about the things of this world and should instead be focused on eternity.

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<sup>6</sup> The Bible says in Mark 13:13 (NKJV), “And you will be hated for by all for My name’s sake.”

### Statement Of Limitations

This thesis serves as a suggestion or a rally cry for churches and the people of which they are made to be aware of the need to strive for unity and avoid unhealthy conflict.<sup>7</sup> If it is important enough to have warnings and encouragements in scripture against the damage of disunity and conflict, then it is important enough that Christians be on guard to make sure that this cancer does not affect the local congregation any more than humanly possible.

It is not possible for one work to address every aspect of this issue in depth and come to a definitive conclusion on each part. Instead, the author has chosen to focus on three aspects of the contagious conflict that affects local congregations. There will be attention given to how contagious conflict affects the name of Christ, and the church itself. This paper will reflect on how this level on conflict affects some who try and serve the church faithfully, including personal reflections by the author. There will be a discussion regarding the “theology” of church conflict as well as the offer of at least one potential solution to the problem of contagious church conflict.

This problem of contagious conflict is one that will most likely never go away until Christ returns. It has certainly existed since the days of the early church, because people are involved in every local church that ever has or ever will exist and scripture is clear that above and beyond everything else, all humans have one thing in common, and that thing is called sin.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Bible says in I Corinthians 1:10 (NKJV), “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

<sup>8</sup> The Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV), “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

This paper will not address directly what Charles Stone calls “Five Ministry Killers” in his book *Ministry killers and how to defeat them*. He provides a five part list of: head in the sand mentality, misdirected emotional investment, unhealthy responses to ministry killers, and attitude that “God and I can handle this”, and lonely hurting spouses.<sup>9</sup>

### Major Assumptions

If the old saying that possession is nine-tenths of the law were considered, then it could easily be argued that perception is nine-tenths of reality. Neither one, however, is necessarily true. Just because a person is holding an object in their hands does not mean that it belongs to them. Likewise, a logical person would not assume the person’s ownership of the item without any prior knowledge of an individual claiming ownership rights to the object in question.

The way many people perceive church conflict is based on similar assumptions, however. There is a type of people who seem to have the perception that there is no conflict in the life of a true church. At the same time, there is another group of people who have the perception that every church has severe conflict and is a lost cause. The assumption from both camps is unfounded and without any credibility. Since some level of conflict can be healthy if it keeps communication lines open between the actual people that comprise the church, it would seem to be safe to say that not every type of conflict is to be seen as destructive, or even something that must be avoided at all costs.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Stone, *Five Ministry Killers and How to Defeat Them* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 11.

<sup>10</sup> G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 48.

An additional assumption is that the best approach to church conflict is to ignore it, but that is unhealthy as well. It must be dealt with in a proper, Biblical manner in order to grow through the conflict and for the church to be able to remain effective in reaching their local community.<sup>11</sup>

This work will not directly address the issue of what might be understood to be regular church conflict or perhaps minor church conflict. This project will focus on what is to be understood as contagious conflict. This type of conflict is that type which reaches from generation to generation through the life of a local congregation and does not seem to ever go away. The people involved are not able to follow the Biblical example of transgressions being moved as far away as possible from humans once they are forgiven.<sup>12</sup>

This contagious conflict is similar in effect to a physical infection.<sup>13</sup> This type of contagious conflict spreads past just one or two people, or even one or two groups of people, and has a growing negative effect on the name of Christ, the community, the local church, and even the universal church. The effect on the leadership of the church will be felt for decades and perhaps even longer if nothing is done about it to stop its harmful influence.

Another assumption is that such contagious conflict is so harmful and such an antithesis for advancing the gospel that it would actually be best for the churches in question to close their doors, with the hope that this would put a stop to conflict that is so egregious that it is doing more harm than good to everyone that is involved. This is the assumption that comprises the

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<sup>11</sup> Norma Cook Everist, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 91.

<sup>12</sup> The Bible says in Psalm 103:12 (NKJV), “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

<sup>13</sup> Richard A. Swenson, *Margin* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2004), 54.

foundational argument of this project. This is the assumption from which the author is writing in support of the issue of closing the contagiously conflicted church.

Perhaps the most import assumption is how the author defines a contagiously conflicted church. For the purposes of this project, a contagiously conflicted church is a local congregation that has a history of extreme conflict that can be traced through the history of multiple generations of the local church in question.

### Theoretical And Biblical Basis For Topic Choice

The author chose the topic based on a theoretical and Biblical foundation. They are presented here. First is the theoretical basis followed by the Biblical basis.

Anyone who has driven on the back roads of rural America has seen buildings that once were the meeting place for local congregations. Perhaps the buildings are now a Masonic Lodge, or a community center of some type. There are some that have been repurposed into offices, storage facilities, and even private homes. Then, as will always be the case, there are buildings that once housed a congregation and have been left vacant for one reason or another. These buildings do not represent the church and are no longer serving the purpose they were originally intended to serve, yet communities seem to function just fine without that congregation being active.

It also is not out of the question for some of those same drives on back roads and even on neighborhood streets to find buildings that are used for meeting places of denominational congregations and non-denominational congregations alike that do not meet on a regular basis. It is particularly common in the Southern United States to find buildings that appear to be

abandoned and have a sign with a notice of a once or twice a year meeting time at that particular location. These buildings do not represent the church and are not being used as a regular meeting place for the people who make up their congregation, and the community seems to continue unaffected by the lack of their regular influence.

There are also congregations that do meet regularly in an out-of-the-way building or even as a house church, yet little to nothing seems to be known about those congregations in the communities where they are located, and those communities also seem to be unaffected. The presence of these groups does not seem to fill a void simply because they are there.

Finally, there are congregations that have become large or “mega” churches. They may have limited conversion growth, and have grown primarily because of what is known as transfer growth since they are influencing communities far beyond where they are geographically located. A potential argument for closing the conflicted congregations is that the larger churches are able to take over making a positive impact in the community anyway, so it is not as much of a loss as one would think for the smaller local church to close.

The author also has been taught, and has tried to operate on, sound principles of Biblical interpretation. One basic principle that has always stuck in the author’s mind is that in Biblical interpretation, and most studies as well, when the positive is stated, the negative is implied and vice versa. With that in mind, if the positive of new churches being planted is that they have a positive impact on their community, then the negative implication would be that declining or “contagiously conflicted” churches have a negative impact and should, by default, be closed.

Biblically speaking, the author lists six separate passages in scripture that lend credence to the idea of closing a contagiously conflicted congregation. Both the Old and New Testaments support this.

In the Old Testament, there are numerous passages that speak of the need for Israel and Judah to turn their hearts back to God and their apparent refusal to do so, but none that stand out as much as Jeremiah 3:8, “Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.”<sup>14</sup> The pattern is seen even in God’s relationship with Israel, before the church was established. There is the potential of reaching a point where God will “put someone away” or remove the possibility of a continued relationship with Him. The fact remains that there is a possibility for a renewed relationship or God would not have had Jeremiah communicate the possibility, but as was so often the case with Israel, many conflicted churches have long since lost the desire for a genuine relationship with their creator.

Then there is the passage in the first chapter of Romans where Paul is writing about God’s wrath on unrighteousness. Romans 1:28 states, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.” If God is willing to turn individuals over to a debased mind, then the argument could be made that He would be willing to turn a local congregation over in much the same way. If that is the case, the argument could perhaps be taken a step further that the local congregation would be better to close than to be an agent against the things of the kingdom.

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<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version of the Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982.)

Next is the series of verses in the book of Revelation where Jesus is talking to the seven churches and four of them seem to be referencing what could be considered to be the closing of the church, at least from Christ's perspective.

The first is Revelation 2:5, where Jesus is speaking to the church at Ephesus, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent." Then later in the same chapter Jesus is speaking to the church at Pergamos in 2:16 and says, "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth." For the third time in the same chapter, Jesus gives a similar statement when He addresses the church at Thyatira in 2:23. John records Jesus' words as, "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works."

In the final reference in the book of Revelation, Jesus is speaking directly to a church and it seems to be a reference that could be equated with something much worse than just closing the doors to a building. It comes in 3:16, "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth."

An additional reference from scripture that is worth mentioning is where Solomon reminds the reader that there is a time for everything. Even churches have life cycles. Note what he writes in Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die".

In each of these passages from both the Old Testament as well as the New, the reader can sense a tone of judgment from God that is far more severe than a group of people not meeting in

a particular building. This project is not speaking in favor of the universal church closing, but rather a local group of people who have long since failed to meet the Biblical definition or requirements of what it takes to be effective for the kingdom of Christ.

## Review Of Literature

### Books

*Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Heart of His People* by Jim Cymbala speaks to the need of God's people to experience a personal revival and reconnection in their walk of faith.<sup>15</sup> There is mention in the book that this need is also the source of a good deal of the ineffectiveness on the part of so many believers.

*Don't Call it a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day* by Kevin DeYoung addresses how churches may be in need of a "comeback." Many congregations need to return to usefulness, and he stresses that the foundation of the Christian faith is just as relevant today as it has ever been.<sup>16</sup>

*Doing Church as a Team: The Miracle of Teamwork and How it Transforms Churches* by Wayne Cordeiro provides real life examples of how much difference a church can make when the congregation will join together to reach their community. The impact can be greatly expanded when they work together as a team.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Heart of His People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Don't Call it a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, *Doing Church as a Team: The Miracle of Teamwork and How it Transforms Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2009).

*Surviving Friendly Fire: How to Respond When You're Hurt by Someone You Trust* by Ronald Dunn is a guidebook of sorts for the pastor or other pastoral staff members who have been the victim of abuse at the hands of the very people they thought were their biggest supporters in the church. It provides steps on how to recover from this abuse and to continue to serve effectively.<sup>18</sup>

*Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* by Norma Everist deals with the possible directions for a congregation that wishes to move away from conflict to a place of genuine partnership among the individuals who make up the local church in question. Everist reviews both how many churches end up in these negative situations, and how the congregation can move together.<sup>19</sup>

*The Wounded Minister: Healing From and Preventing Personal Attacks* by Guy Greenfield is a personal work from a pastor who has walked through the pain of being wounded in ministry. He shares his wisdom, as well as the advice of others, on how to recover from the wounds that go deep into the lives of the ministers who have been hurt by their congregations.<sup>20</sup>

*Weird, Because Normal Isn't Working* by Craig Groeschel addresses the individual, personal need for believers to be different than the rest of their society. It is meant to encourage Christians who may not be leading lives that are making an impact for the gospel on the world.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald Dunn, *Surviving Friendly Fire: How to Respond When You're Hurt by Someone You Trust* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Norma Everist, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing From and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Craig Groeschel, *Weird, Because Normal Isn't Working* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

*Managing Church Conflict* by Hugh Halverstadt is a work on how to walk productively through the conflicts that will inevitably arise in the life of a local congregation. The author argues that conflict is to be expected and the role of leadership is not to avoid conflict, but to manage it in such a manner that it does not get to a point where it is out of control.<sup>22</sup>

*Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why it Matters* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons is essentially the delivery of a series of interviews and studies that were conducted around the United States. These studies sought the answer to what the general population thinks about Christianity and the church in America.<sup>23</sup>

*The Church of Irresistible Influence* by Robert Lewis speaks to how churches can reach their communities where they are by showing them the love of God in practical ways.<sup>24</sup> The author writes of the need of a local church to be able to break down cultural biases and impact the people of their community with the life changing gospel of Christ by building relationships with them.

*Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* by Stephen Macchia provides examples of what a healthy church should look like. The author strives to encourage the readers to implement any changes that may be necessary in order to return to health, or to at least make strides in that direction.<sup>25</sup>

*When Sheep Attack* by Dennis Maynard is a list of 25 case studies of how individuals or groups of people in congregations were able to get rid of their pastor and what could have been

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<sup>22</sup> Hugh Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> David Kinnaman, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

done to prevent it.<sup>26</sup> It provides the reader with real-life, eye-opening stories of what goes on behind the scenes and helps to make them aware of the problem and potentially be a part of the solution before the trouble can go too far.

*The 10 Most Common Objections to Christianity* by Alex McFarland provides a list of the most common reasons people give for their opposition to Christianity.<sup>27</sup> Among the items on this list is that they consider most Christians to be hypocrites. How Christians treat one another is what seems to most drive this reasoning.

*I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude That Makes the Difference* by Thom Rainer addresses the core of the issue of church conflict and lack of participation, as well as support in most churches.<sup>28</sup> In this short, but insightful work, he discusses the importance of a right attitude and approach to being a part of a New Testament Church.

*Surprising Insights From the Un-Churched and Proven Ways* by Thomas Rainer provides exactly what the title declares. He shares surprising insights from people who would be considered “outside the church.”<sup>29</sup> The individuals who are mentioned in the book have things both good and bad to say about the local church that would be very helpful for members of a congregation to read if they wanted to reach their community for Christ.

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<sup>26</sup> Dennis Maynard, *When Sheep Attack* (Charleston, SC: Booksurge Publishers, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Alex McFarland, *The 10 Most Common Objectives to Christianity* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude That Makes the Difference* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights From the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

*Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* by Thom Rainer is a study on various churches that meet the author's specified criteria.<sup>30</sup> He provides a list of local congregations that have made a turnaround and either returned to a point of viability or gained new ground long after it would be expected that they should be declining.

*Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* by G. Lloyd Rediger is a ground-breaking work on the subject of individuals and groups who seek to destroy a pastor and his ministry, and perhaps even the local church itself.<sup>31</sup> The author provides some case studies, as well as insights from his own personal experience in the details of extreme church conflict and the fallout when pastors and churches are attacked.

*The Church in God's Program* by Robert Saucy is a book that would be beneficial for the conflicted church and for the relatively healthy church that may want to make sure that they are in line with what God's word. Saucy details what it takes to be a Biblically sound local congregation of believers.<sup>32</sup>

*Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* by Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson is an easy and encouraging read about churches across the United States who were able to reverse their trend of decline.<sup>33</sup> The authors provide insight into some of the individual stories of the congregations that make up their list and how those churches went about turning themselves around. The authors also build on the assumption that just about any

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<sup>30</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program (Handbook of Bible Doctrine)* (Wheaton, IL: Moody Publishers, 1972).

<sup>33</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2007).

local church can turn around if the people that make it up are willing to take whatever steps may be necessary.

*Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* by Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer is an attempt by the authors to encourage local congregations to determine their spiritual health in what a more Biblical manner.<sup>34</sup> They list and discuss criteria other than finances and attendance numbers to determine the overall health of a local church.

*Five Ministry Killers and how to Defeat Them: Help for Frustrated Pastors* by Charles Stone provides a how-to guide to walk through the frustration of ministry that is experienced by so many pastors. It reflects on how a pastor can come out on the other side as a healthier and more effective minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup>

*Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* by Richard Swenson is a book that is written with the general population of American Christians in mind, but it can certainly apply to the wounded and hurting minister and their family, as well as a church and the individuals that make up its membership. It focuses on how they are pushing themselves past the point of no return in every area of life.<sup>36</sup> The author's basic point is that too many people fill their lives with too much activity and as a result are more subject to trouble and stress when they do not have any extra room when the unplanned issues in life arise.

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<sup>34</sup> Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Charles Stone, *Five Ministry Killers and How to Defeat Them: Help for Frustrated Pastors* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004).

## Magazines

“Do We Really Need Another Church?” by Aaron Coe is an article in the quarterly magazine *Deacon* that speaks to the impact that only new churches are able to make on a community where they are planted.<sup>37</sup> Here, the authors espouses that there is a large segment of the population that only a new church can reach and part of the reason for this he says is that older churches are not only seen as stuck in tradition, but as severely conflicted.

“Seven Updated Trends on Mega-Churches in America” by Thom Rainer is a short article on the trends of the mega-church in America. It speaks to the trend or perceived trend away from not only the smaller church, but from personal involvement in the organization and support of the church as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

“A study of the conflicts within churches that lead to the termination of pastors within the Southern Baptist Convention, accompanied by a proposal of preventive and interventional solutions” by Don Hicks is a Thesis project that he submitted towards the degree of Doctor of Ministry for *Liberty Theological Seminary*. In this project Hicks presents his findings of a study he conducted of conflict within SBC churches that ultimately led to the termination of the pastor or some other staff member.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Aaron Coe, “Do We Really Need Another Church?,” *Deacon* (Spring 2013): 8-11.

<sup>38</sup> Thom Rainer, “Seven Updated Trends on Megachurches in America,” *Christian Post*, September 19, 2012, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/seven-updated-trends-on-megachurches-in-america-81860/>.

<sup>39</sup> Donald Hicks, “A Study of the Conflicts Within Churches That Lead to the Termination of Pastors Within the Southern Baptist Convention, Accompanied by a Proposal of Preventive and Interventional Solutions” (DMin diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 22.

## Internet Sources

“The Plateaued Congregation and the Lore of Church Growth” by Jeff Christopherson is a post on his blog *For the Kingdom* where the author discusses the importance of focusing on church health before, and perhaps even instead of, church growth, at least from a numerical standpoint.<sup>40</sup> The author points out that the focus on numbers has seemed to affect, at least from his viewpoint, the overall health of the local church. He seems to imply that the local church has sacrificed the spiritual health of the church for the temptation of larger attendance numbers.

“Trapped: The Church Vocation Issue We Don’t Talk About” by Gordon Atkinson is an article on the blog entitled *The High Calling* that discusses how so many of the men and women in the professional clergy are only remaining there because they are trapped for economic reasons.<sup>41</sup> This fact can certainly lend itself to conflicted congregations as well as wounded ministers and their families.

## Statement Of Methodology

The design of the project consists of five chapters. These chapters will be presented in sequence regarding the discussion of the reasons why closing a contagiously conflicted church is necessary, and even beneficial, to the overall kingdom of Christ. This will include a list of the people or groups of people that are most directly affected by the conflict in question. Below is the chapter outline for the project and a summary of each chapter.

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<sup>40</sup> Jeff Christopherson, “The Plateaued Congregation and the Lore of Church Growth,” *For the Kingdom* (blog), September 10, 2013, accessed September 7, 2013, <http://www.namb.net/Christophersonnambblog.aspx?id=12884907210&blogid=12884902019>.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon Atkinson, “Trapped: The Church Vocation Issue We Don’t Talk About,” *The High Calling* (blog), September 6, 2013, accessed September 9, 2013, <http://www.thehighcalling.org/work/trapped-church-vocation-issue-we-dont-talk-about#.Uje2tD8sYQj>.

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

The introduction of this project will consist of the proposal for the project. It informs the reader of the author's awareness of the issue being discussed, as well as rationale for the project and what will be expected from the project as a whole. This includes a theological basis for the project, a statement of methodology and review of literature.

## **Chapter 2 – The Theology Of Church Conflict**

Chapter two will discuss what the "theology" of church conflict is. This section will contain a treatment of the definition of church conflict with the hope of providing a better understanding of exactly what that is.

## **Chapter 3 – Christ And The Church**

Chapter three will address the issue of the effect of church conflict on the name of Christ and the name of the church. In addition, it will also address the issue of how the conflict effects the actual congregation. There will be information provided on how church conflict affects denominations and potentially the name of the universal church, as well.

## **Chapter 4 – The Author's Personal Account And The Minister And Their Family**

Chapter four explains the issue of how church conflict impacted, and still affects, the author and his family. This chapter will also address how church conflict affects those who attempt to serve the church so faithfully through the inclusion of survey results. The author comes from a Southern Baptist tradition that does not see a Biblical precedent for a female senior

pastor, but does realize that this is becoming increasingly more common. With that in mind, there were no respondents that represented females in vocational ministry.

## **Chapter 5 – A Potential Solution To The Problem**

Chapter five will involve a detailed analysis of one possible solution to the problem of contagious church conflict. The author will provide a plan to properly train and develop leaders within the local church. Through proper training and development, leaders will be better positioned to properly guide the local churches in a healthy direction which will be better equipped to properly address conflict as it arises in the life of the church.

## Chapter Two - The Theology Of Church Conflict

What is conflict? The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines conflict as “a state of disagreement or disharmony between persons or ideas; a clash.”<sup>42</sup>

Does anyone truly want or desire conflict? The sad realization is that there are some people who are so disturbed that they genuinely thrive on conflict. They seek it, and even go as far as using it as an opportunity to grab power for themselves.

In an online article entitled “*Theological Foundations for resolving Church conflict*”, Kenneth Newberger states “what is not realized by the majority of clergy and lay persons alike is how unprepared the church is to deal with conflict in its midst”.<sup>43</sup> The author’s stance is that there will be conflict in any church much like any other organization and the primary issue is that the leadership is not prepared to handle and do not understand the makings or “theology” of Church conflict.

Greenfield defines such people as “pathological antagonists.”<sup>44</sup> The sad fact is that these types of personalities must exist if someone has seen the need to not only give them a name, but to define the term for proper understanding. They do exist and will not rest or find any pleasure in anything other than a constant state of conflict and trouble.

There are those who take their desire for conflict to the point of attempting to physically harm those who have no other goal than to lead the church towards healthy growth and outreach in the community that they are planted in. One such story is told in the book *The Devil in Pew*

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<sup>42</sup> “Conflict,” *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd college ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982). 309.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Newberger, “Theological Foundations for Resolving Church Conflict,” Mediate.com (2001), accessed April 20, 2014, <http://www.mediate.com/articles/newberger.cfm>.

<sup>44</sup> Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 36.

*Number Seven* by Rebecca Nichols Alonzo. She writes to tell the story of what occurred to her family when her father served as the pastor of a Holiness church in North Carolina. Their trouble was just getting started when her father received a letter stating that he would leave town “walking, crawling, or dead.”<sup>45</sup>

There is also the classification “clergy killer.” according to the book *Clergy Killers* by G. Lloyd Rediger. In it, he essentially states that not all of those who grew up in the homes of ministers are clergy killers, but nearly all clergy killers grew up in the home of someone in full-time ministry.<sup>46</sup>

It is also a safe assumption that not all church conflict is dramatic and does not always become an explosive situation. There is what the author calls average and daily conflict which occurs at some points in the life of any church, even the healthiest of them. One of the goals of this portion of the thesis project is to explain how to have a workable action plan already in place for dealing with all levels of church conflict. The theory is that if it is handled properly at the right time and at the right level in the chain of command, then the potential conflict will either never mature or it will be minor in nature.

With all of this in mind, the importance of scripture should not be overlooked. There is the classic passage that, if followed, would avoid most conflict that occurs in the church.

Matthew 18:15-17 says:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matt. 18:15-17).

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<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Nichols Alonzo, *The Devil in Pew Number Seven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 57.

<sup>46</sup> Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 2.

Perhaps an even more appropriate passage is Ephesians 4:31-32: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” If believers would obey what scripture clearly says, then churches would not have to worry about conflict in the first place. When this is understood, they realize that it is more of an issue of where people place their priorities and allegiances. If scripture really has first place and does guide all that we say and do, then this passage should end all conflict immediately.

Through all of this, there is at least one fact that must be kept in mind. Scripture also states that it is not people we are to be battling. Ultimately we are not doing so, even when we may think we are. Ephesians 6:12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” This too should aid in changing our perspective on how we navigate church conflict.

The desire is for this project to be something that can not only be used by the author in the future, but something that he might be able to pass along to other pastors who may be new to the ministry. It may also help those who may be seeking advice and even encouragement in how to handle those difficult situations that often arise in ministry.

With the realization that there is truly no perfect church or local congregation of believers, it must be accepted that conflict will arise for one reason or another. Norma Everist points out that conflict exists in both a positive and negative form.<sup>47</sup> To aid in the overall theme

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<sup>47</sup> Norma Cook Everist, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 27.

of navigating church conflict, the author thought it appropriate to give an account of his personal experience with church conflict in greater detail.

### The Author's Story

The author has dealt with conflict within the life of the local church from various perspectives. There will be greater detail about this at a later point, but for sake of context, a brief treatment of those perspectives will be mentioned here.

When the author was a bus kid in a vibrant, growing church in Montgomery, Alabama, he saw and heard adults who were extremely critical of the pastor. They tried to gather enough support to oust him as the pastor from the church that he had planted a few years before. The members of the younger generation could not understand why people were so upset at someone who was trying to serve the church where he had been planted and remain faithful to preaching and teaching God's word.

Five years later, the author was involved in church conflict at the same church from the position of volunteer level staff. The same founding pastor that was mentioned earlier asked the author, who was 16 at the time, to start an alternative youth group in the church and be the youth pastor of that group, even though the church already had a full-time paid youth pastor. The pastor's intention was to give the youth pastor time to locate another church position instead of being dismissed immediately. The author remembers reluctantly agreeing to what his pastor asked him to do, but wondering why the pastor would give his blessing to a situation with so much potential for extreme conflict.

The author has heard numerous stories from friends, colleagues, and family members also in vocational ministry of church conflict and wondered how so many people are able to claim the name of Christ and treat one another in such a horrible manner. This is one of the author's least favorite perspectives.

As a pastor of four different Baptist congregations, this author has experienced various levels of church conflict. These incidents have ranged from somewhat healthy examples of conflict to dysfunctional breakdowns.

While these perspectives have served to shape the author's understanding of church conflict, they have also served to help shape the author's theology of the church in conflict. Theology is often seen as the study of a religious system or set of beliefs. The intention of this portion of the thesis project is to gain an understanding of the author's perspective of "theology" as it is related to church conflict.

Perspective is similar to context. When studying scripture, it is prudent to make sure the text in question is being viewed and studied in a proper context. Context can involve things such as the theme of the entire work or book of the Bible. Context can also involve cultural influences, since a word may have one meaning in one part of the world and a different meaning in another, or it may have one meaning at one point in history and a different meaning at another point in the timeline of history. It is because of this that it is important to understand the author's perspective.

## Identification

It is fair to point out that conflict is not always a result of negative factors, but often it is seen that way. It can be considered conflict if someone is confronted about a belief they are espousing that may not line up with the church's beliefs. According to Norma Everist, in her book *Church Conflict*, there are at least seven different types of conflict. She lists intrapersonal conflict, interpersonal conflict, conflict over issues (beliefs), conflict over facts (truth), conflict over values (worth), conflict over goals (mission), and conflict over means (ministry).<sup>48</sup>

It would be extremely beneficial to identify what type of conflict is being dealt with so that one better knows how to approach the issue in the most effective manner possible. While every type of conflict does not stick to evenly divided lines, it is important to know the general idea in order to manage it properly.<sup>49</sup> The impression that Everist gives is that the identification of the type of conflict is as important as identifying what type of spices are being used in a recipe to cook a favorite meal.

It just makes sense that one would want to know exactly what is being dealt with in order to know how to address it. The author thinks of working on the engine of a car. One would not be able to put any alternator on the engine of a car unless it is known exactly what kind of car it is. The alternator must be made specifically for that car. The same applies to a conflict situation. One is not able to know how to help repair a situation unless the details are known.

If there is a manhunt for a felon who is wanted for committing a crime in a community, it is important to have a description of the potential guilty party. In an effort to round up the correct

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<sup>48</sup> Everist, *Church Conflict*, 15-21.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 15.

person, the proper authorities may take the wrong person or persons into custody if they do not have a good description of who they are looking for.

As already mentioned, church conflict can fall along the lines of several different categories. This makes the proper identification of the conflict that much more important, so that one can properly understand what it is that needs to be done to reach a healthy and Christ honoring resolution.

As counterproductive as it may seem to take the time to first identify the situation of conflict, it is of utmost importance in order for the church to come to a point of understanding. By doing so, all of those involved can be ministered to and directed in the right way towards a healthy and final conclusion so that the conflict does not continue for multiple years or even multiple generations.

### Training

The most telling statement on the need for training is, “It has taken awhile for denominational and congregational leaders to recognize the reality of intentional, destructive attacks on pastors. This means we must teach ourselves the skills needed to survive these attacks..”<sup>50</sup> Rediger suggests that there are at least five skills needed in this arsenal for the proper handling of church conflict. They are: a personal support system, personal health management, professional competence, professional consultants, and continuing education.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 131.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-138.

Even if the type of conflict to be dealt with is known, one would be far better off if with some idea of how to approach the situation. One may be able to know what something is, but if one does not know what to do with it when it appears, it becomes a setting for failure.

When it comes to training and preparation for ministry, the seminary of today does little, if anything to prepare the student for the reality of ministry. There are people who will be trouble makers and attempt everything they can to sidetrack the well-intentioned pastor or staff member from the task at hand. Even when there are not people who are looking for trouble, there are people who, just by their very nature, can be hard to deal with and tend to only see things their way. There are also times when two different well-intentioned people or groups of people will have times of conflict, with both of them feeling their position is best. The possibility for other types of conflict or scenarios is nearly endless.<sup>52</sup>

Training is absolutely necessary in any endeavor or career. God's word even speaks to the importance of the man of God being equipped to do ministry. While Paul is speaking of the importance and inspiration of scripture, the implication is clear that training is vital to the effectiveness of anyone who is serving God in the context of paid, vocational ministry. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes in Second Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

If the obvious need for something is not only seen through common sense, but spoken to directly in God's word, then why are churches not doing everything in their power to make sure

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<sup>52</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 37.

they are as prepared as they can be for their calling? If the church is not doing this, then it is quite simply failing at our God-given responsibility. Christians need to fall flat on their faces before a holy God, beg for His forgiveness, and run towards the proverbial goal of correcting the problem, no matter the cost.

There should be training in the typical seminary regime, but until that day comes then those of us who are in ministry should do everything we can not only to make sure we are prepared, but to also support our peers and colleagues who are enduring some of the same things we are going through as well.

The type of training is directly related at times to the denominational tradition that one comes from, but training of some sort would certainly be beneficial to say the least. Professionals of numerous backgrounds prepare themselves to be better equipped to help people by regular training in order to be more effective at what they do. Those involved in church ministry should certainly be involved in this culture of training as well.

Church ministry, no matter what the perspective involves the lives of people. People are who Christ died for and the entire reason he came to earth in the first place. If people are this important then it stands to reason that those who lead the church should be as prepared as possible in order to be able to affect those lives in a positive manner.

This training is vitally important in the life of those in paid, vocational ministry, but it is also vitally important in the life of anyone who is involved in the leadership of the local church. Training should be available for lay people to handle conflict properly as well in order to help navigate it well or perhaps even to avoid it all together.

## Research

Ken Sande in his book *The Peace Maker* states “Conflicts generally involves two kinds of issues: material and personal.”<sup>53</sup> One of his points that he goes on to express and imply is the importance of not just knowing what you are dealing with but also in understanding it as well.

This is best done with a little investigation and research. If you know as much about the situation as possible then you will stand a much better chance of being able to properly manage the conflict situation before it blossoms into something totally out of control. There are many different types and levels of conflict and this proper understanding of them is absolutely essential if there is any hope of it being taken care of in a Christ honoring manner.

We are promised in scripture that if we want to understand something we can ask God and He will give it to us, James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

Proper research of a situation can be much like proper armament for a battle.<sup>54</sup> If you know what you will be facing then you will be able to better approach the situation with the proper amount of defense or offense. You would not want to take a water pistol to a three alarm fire any more than you would want to show up with a fire hose to wash a little mud off of the family car.

The better the conflict is understood prior to directly addressing it, the better the chances are for a peaceful resolution. In researching the situation an understanding may arise which would greatly affect how you would approach the topic and this will save a tremendous amount

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<sup>53</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 80.

<sup>54</sup> Rediger, *Clergy Killers*, 48.

of time, effort, energy, and emotion both on the part of the parties involved in the conflict as well as those who are attempting to help resolve the issue before it get any worse than it already has.

Church conflict as with most forms of conflict involves so many emotions that it is easy for the facts of a situation to become confused at best, often left out, and sadly miscommunicated even purposely at times. Proper research will help to establish the facts correctly so that there is less of a chance for anyone who is an antagonist being able to improperly guide a situation to their own desired outcome.

It is vital that anyone who is hoping to guide a conflict situation be as prepared as possible through as much research as possible to that they can put those fact in their proper context in an effort to understand them with the hopes of interpreting those facts towards the direction of a resolution that is both Christ honoring and perceived by all as being as fair as possible for everyone involved in the situation.

### Leadership

In order to properly manage conflict as well as other aspects of church life a proper understanding of leadership and how it works and is developed is key to resolving the conflict.<sup>55</sup> This is an overlooked need in many local churches and this vacuum of true, biblical leadership is often filled by people who are either ill equipped for the responsibility or may have ulterior motives in mind from the beginning and sadly, in either case the result is often contagious church conflict.

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<sup>55</sup> Dave Early, *The Eight Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*. (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2001), 31.

Leadership is something that requires action on the part of those who are doing the leading. They must be constantly aware of what is going on within the organization that they are responsible for leading. This is certainly the case in a local church as well. Whether it is professional, paid ministerial staff or dedicated volunteer leadership, they should be aware of what is happening in the lives of the people who make up the church so that they have a proper understanding of any issues that may arise. In addition to having a genuine involvement in the lives of the people and a concern for their well-being, those in leadership should also have the ability to guide the organization in the direction that it needs to be headed in order to stay true to the teachings of scripture and be most effective in communicating the gospel to a lost and dying world.

A leadership development chart, Figure 1, is included in the hope that it provides a proper perspective on leadership in a Biblical manner. This chart will show how Christ is at the center of all that is done in the life of the local church and in everything that is communicated through that same local church even when it comes to the subject of developing leaders.

## Conclusion

While no one wants to see church conflict come, it is a fact that there will be a certain level of conflict anytime a group of people are involved. It will happen, so be prepared for it. Satan is determined and effective at what he does best, which is cause trouble for believers in an attempt to rule the universe. We know that in the end he will lose, but until that time comes Christians have to aware of everything that will come our way. Scripture clearly tells us to be on the lookout. I Peter 5:8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

## Leadership Development Diagram

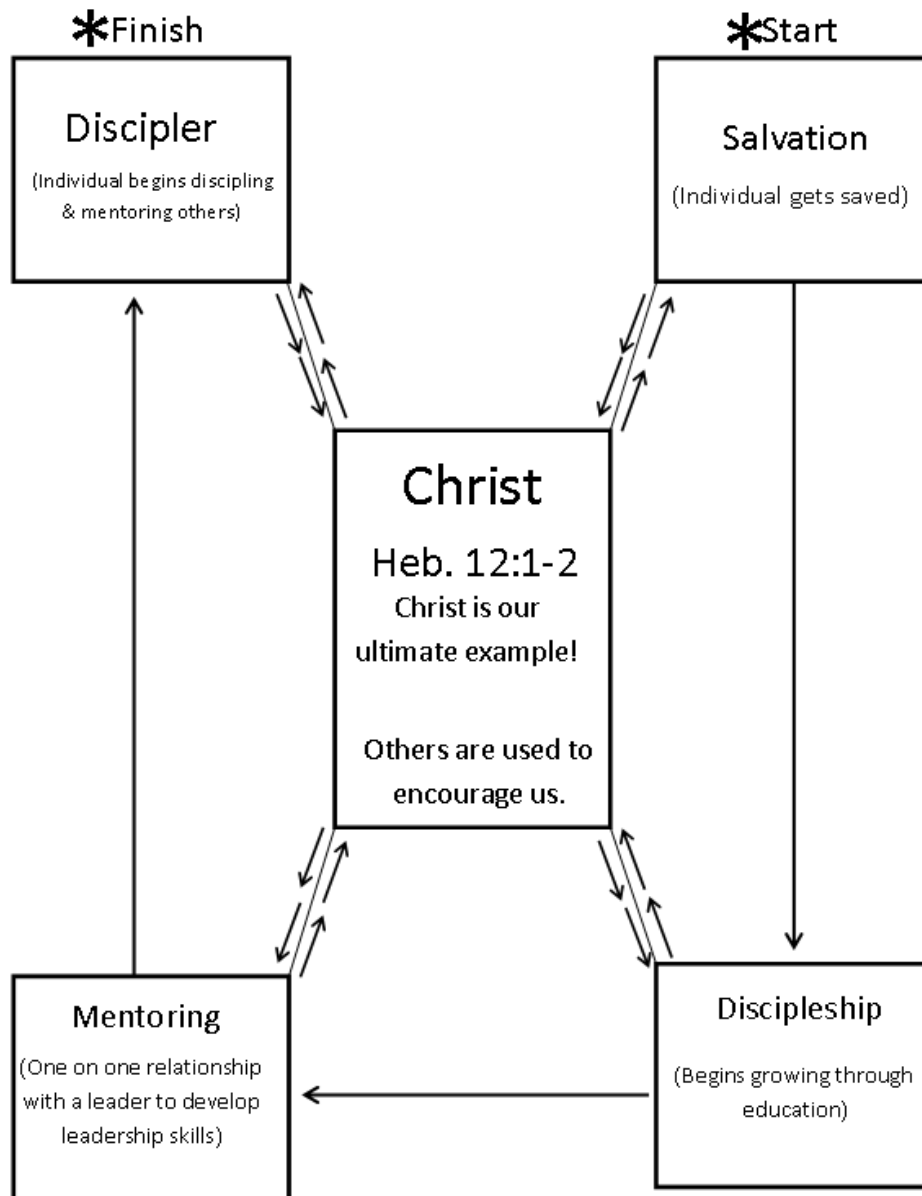


Figure 1, Leadership Development Diagram, designed by the author

Another perspective is that preparing and thinking ahead towards the possibilities that could cause conflict, is a good thing in that it is a matter of being Christ honoring in everything we do. And Paul reminds us through the power of the Holy Spirit of the importance of conducting

ourselves in a Christ honoring manner when he writes Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy meditate on these things.”

Hopefully the theology of church conflict is something that is worthy of being thought about or mediated on in order to be as prepared as possible to address the issue of conflict as soon as it arises and well before it becomes something that may seem to be out of control.

While it seems like that are not enough resources on the issue of church conflict, there are certainly some well thought and productive works on the issue. The author has included on the next page a list of additional resources on the topic of church conflict. While this list is by no means a complete list, it is a starting point for anyone who is interested in the topic of church conflict either by necessity or concern.

## Additional Resources

*Surviving Friendly Fire* by Ron Dunn ISBN # 9780785266389

*Too Soon to Quit* by Warren Wiersbe ISBN # 9781936143009

*Church Conflict* by Charles Cosgrove ISBN # 0687081521

*Managing Church Conflict* by Hugh F. Halverstadt ISBN # 0664251854

*How to Lead in Church Conflict* by Dan Moseley ISBN # 9781426742330

*Five Ministry Killers and How to Defeat Them* by Charles Stone ISBN # 9780764208546

*Transitioning the Church* by Zach Williams ISBN # 9780615920047

*Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* by Norma Cook Everist ISBN #

0687038014

*The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* ISBN # 9780801063695

*Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* by G. Lloyd Rediger

ISBN # 9780664257538

*The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande ISBN #

9780801064852

*A Study of the Conflicts within churches that lead to the termination of pastors within the Southern Baptist Convention. Accompanied by a proposal of preventive and interventional solutions* by Donald Hicks. Available through proquest Thesis & Dissertation database

## Chapter Three - Christ And The Church

### Christ

Who is Jesus Christ? That is a question that will bring about a vastly different answer based on who it is that is asked. For the purpose of this project it is important that a definition be given as soon as possible. The best explanation of who Jesus Christ is found in the pages of scripture itself. When asked who Jesus Christ is Simon Peter is quoted as saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”<sup>56</sup> In order to understand the perspective of the author as well as the perspective of evangelical Christians it is crucial that the reader realize what is a Biblical response to the question of Jesus’ identity.

Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. According to the account in the book of Matthew his birth was even prophesized ahead of time.<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere in the same book it is learned that Jesus’ earthly father was a carpenter by trade.<sup>58</sup>

In what is perhaps the most telling passage in scripture that addresses who is Jesus, the reader of scripture learns that he is the beginning and the end and that he was present before time began and he will be present after it is over.<sup>59</sup> Essentially Jesus is God himself and is a full member of the trinity and it is be considered that no matter what anyone may say or do and no

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<sup>56</sup> The Bible says in Matthew 16:16 (NKJV), “Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

<sup>57</sup> The Bible says in Matthew 1:22-23 (NKJV), “ So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

<sup>58</sup> The Bible says in Matthew 13:55 (NKJV), “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?”

<sup>59</sup> The Bible says in Revelation 1:8 (NKJV), “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

matter how badly those who claim his name may behave he will still be just as much in control as he always has been and always will be.

He is the very foundation of the genuine church. Jesus told Peter that he himself is the very foundation upon which his church would be built.<sup>60</sup> It is important to realize that the effects on the name of Christ as well as a local church or the community do not effect and degrade the power of Christ in any way. It is also important to realize that there are times when people question the importance of following Christ based on the behavior of those supposed Christians.

In the book *Unchristian*, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons discuss an interesting perspective. They quote a young, thirty-something believer from California who essentially says that Christians have become weak in their stances and off balance and that they need to speak more to the power of Christ or in other words, they realize that Christ is just as powerful or radical as ever, but that the Christians who make up the church leave this to wonder, based on their behavior.<sup>61</sup> In short, the name of Christ itself has not taken a direct hit as a result of the actions of those who claim to be Christians, but it has taken an indirect slam to the meaning of its power.

If scripture itself says that even the rocks will cry out to his glory if his followers do not, then believers should realize that they need to strive to make their actions bring glory and honor to the name of Christ and that they live as if he is to them who they say he is (Luke 19:40). One of the standard reactions that non-Christians have as seen in the previously mentioned quote is that the way supposed Christians live and act leave a direct impression on the feeling both of

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<sup>60</sup> The Bible says in Matthew 16:18 (NKJV), “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

<sup>61</sup> Kinnaman & Lyons, *Unchristian*, 35-36.

non-Christians and Christians alike as to how genuine they are in their faith and whether or not that faith is something worth sharing or having in one's own life.

While there is little comfort to be found in the result or fall out of contagious church conflict, Christians who have a genuine desire to reach people with the good news of the gospel message can find some comfort in the fact that while the impact, as well as the relativity of the organized church, may be brought into question by the people who are outside the walls the name and power of Jesus Christ is still seen as viable by those same people and actually would seem to be interested in hearing more about him and the power of his name and less about personal preferences or political agendas. It is an important lesson for the Christians in the twenty first century to learn when it comes to the importance of focus and priorities as seen by the opinion of those such as the respondent to that particular question seen earlier.

### Rise Of Other Religions

The sad fact is that current generations do not see Christians in a relevant light because they do not bother to address the issues that are important to Western Society in a manner that is Christ honoring. According to research published in the book *Unchristian* by Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman, America is seeing a dramatic culture shift in areas that were previously societal norms. For example, the setting of society itself is three times more unbiblical today that it was during the generation of the Boomers. Family structures have undergone dramatic change as well. Currently more than one-third of children born in the United States are born to unwed mothers.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Kinnaman & Lyons, *Unchristian*, 126-127.

In addition to the shift in cultural norms, or perhaps as a result of what is now considered normal, Christians are increasingly being seen as judgmental. One respondent in the Lyons and Kinnaman book is quoted as saying, “I’ve had conservative Christians criticize me for being involved in geology because it has incendiary connections to ‘old earth’ and ‘evolutionist’ views.”<sup>63</sup> Another, when asked their take on being overlooked by many especially Christians states, “What is God? Simply put, God is a figment of our minds grasping the sad fact that we have nothing else to believe in. I live alone. I am alone. I will always be alone. So why should I lie to myself about a God that let me live a life where the only people I care for treat me like s--?”<sup>64</sup>

Earlier in the work the same authors state a two pronged reasoning for what they call the hijacking of Jesus. First, they state that theologically conservative people are increasingly perceived to be aloof. And then second, in years to come, without major alterations to what they call the unchristian faith, they expect that, the “create your own savior” mindset or the “hijacking of Jesus” will become even more popular with young adults.<sup>65</sup>

Marvin Olasky in his book *The Religions Next Door* discusses the rise of three fast growing religions in America. The entire book is given to the discussion of the rise of Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam in recent decades particularly in America. He gives various statistics and examples throughout the pages of his book. As the reader progresses through the pages there is an increasingly disheartening feeling about the status of Christianity in America. Each of the religions is growing at increasingly faster rates while Christianity growth rate seems to be

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 135-136.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 33.

slowing. All of this is prefaced by a statement that Olasky makes in the introduction of his book. He states, “James Sire’s fine book *The Universe Next Door*, was a response to a generation’s run from religion. Many students brought up in mainline churches were finding preaching meaningless. It seemed that the demise of Christianity was not far off.”<sup>66</sup>

He goes on to argue that there was seen an increase in church growth in the 1990s but that there was still a bad taste in the mouths of younger Americans for the established church, in part due to those who claim the name of Christ not living their lives as if the Bible is God’s message and deciding to do what pleases them or quite simply to live not in line with the teaching of scripture itself.<sup>67</sup>

What each of these resources point to is that other religions that do not preach and teach the truth, are growing in America and beyond because Christians are increasingly seen as hypocritical and hate mongers. They are perceived as simply looking for their next meal or as being too busy fighting one another to care about the problems of their friends and neighbors to have any information of news worth sharing with them.

While there are certainly examples to be seen throughout the country of churches that are growing and making an impact on their communities, there are also examples to be seen of other religions being accepted in their communities and being perceived as having a positive effect. Unity seems to be a common theme among those that are perceived as positive. This is a lesson that is taught in the pages of God’s word. Jesus Christ said it best when He stated, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). Unity is

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<sup>66</sup> Marvin Olasky, *The Religions Next Door: What We Need to Know About Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam-- and What Reporters Are Missing* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2004), 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 222.

something that will fight against controversy every time. Other religions are growing because Christians today are not showing love for one another. Based on the words of Christ, if believers do not display love for one another then the implication is that the non-believing world will not know that they are disciples of His and therefore will not have a desire to listen to anything they say because they are only seeing what they do in how they treat each other. This will naturally lead to the growth of other faith systems that may be seen as having that sense of unity and community that is so important to a lost and dying world that is searching for answers. This disunity among people in contagiously conflicted churches leads to the growth of other religions.

In the absence of truth, the loudest voice usually leads the way. If Christians are not communicating the truth of the gospel effectively then whatever voice may be speaking in the vacuum of real truth will be what is heard and perhaps even followed by the people who are looking for meaning in their lives. These people are often even unaware of the fact that we are created by a God who loves us and has set an innate desire within each of us to have a relationship with our creator and without anyone showing them the correct path, they will take whatever path may seem to be headed in the direction they are seeking to go.

As Olasky and others point out that other religions are among the fastest growing in America and beyond, a point of embarrassment should arise for Christians who know that they are in possession of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>68</sup> The Christian community as a whole should be ashamed that they have allowed this to happen on their proverbial watch.

While debate could rage endlessly as to what the Christian church is to be busy doing while they are present on earth, it is clearly reflected in the words of what is known by so many as the Great

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<sup>68</sup> Marvin Olasky, *The Religions Next Door*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 34.

Commission. Jesus Christ states, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 18:19-20).

If there is an assignment that is so obvious, then perhaps the question should be as obvious as well, in addition to the solution. If more Christians were busy fulfilling the Great Commission instead of focusing on whatever it may be that distracts them, then there would be no doubt that Christianity would return to being the fastest growing religion and would continue to.

### Church

A proper understanding of what the church is would certainly be in order as part of the foundation of this section of this project. When referring to the church whether it be a local congregation, a national denominational body, or the universal, international, world-wide group of people who are Christians, it is imperative to point out that the word “church” refers to the people themselves and not the building or meeting places where they gather for regular worship events or Bible studies.

The church (the people) is a living, growing organism that will continue to be a vital part of God’s plan and timeline until Jesus returns again as prophesized in scripture. Jesus himself clearly stated that hell itself would not defeat His church.<sup>69</sup> In this passage of scripture He is addressing Peter and while some often interpret this as Jesus saying that He would build His

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<sup>69</sup> The Bible says in Matthew 16:18 (NKJV), “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build MY church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

church on the rock of Peter, Jesus is actually telling Peter that the church will be built on the foundation of Christ as if He were pointing to Himself while He was making this statement to Peter.

If the church is part of God's plan, is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and is something special, then something should be done to protect what actually constitutes the church; the people of God. Protection often comes from within the ranks of an organization that is made up of people.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35 ). Love generates team work unlike anything else. Thom Rainer points out that the concept of love and teamwork are a major factor in nearly all of the church that he classifies as a "Breakout Church" and that they are fostered most effectively when done so by the leadership of the local church.<sup>70</sup>

If the old saying about a church needing to be a hospital for sinners instead of a museum for saints holds true, then people should be doing everything in their power to get inside those church buildings in an effort to discover what all of the excitement and peace is about, based solely on how they see the people who call themselves Christians conduct their own lives and relationships with friends, family, and other believers. The rest of the world faces issues that are beyond tough and they are looking for an oasis in the middle of the desert of life. Where better should they be able to find this place of rest than among a group of regularly congregating believers in Jesus Christ?

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<sup>70</sup> Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 62.

Multiple places throughout scripture there are promises to those who follow Christ for protection and eternal security. There could be a debate that would fill the pages of a separate project built around that subject alone, but the fact of the matter remains that the crux of the appeal of the gospel to the lost and dying world is a rescue from the punishment of their sins and imperfections through no action of their own past simply placing their faith in Christ and receiving his grace as a result of the faith.

Speaking toward this idea of protection and security Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). This protection that is found in Christ is certainly appealing to someone who realizes they are missing something and are in search of it. That is, as previously mentioned, one of the primary tasks of Christians and the church as a whole. If those who claim the name of Christ live their lives in such a way that they are radically different from the rest of society while still being an active, contributing member of that society, then they will be breaking down barriers sometimes before they are even put up against the idea of becoming a Christian.

There is a comfort to be found for someone who may be searching for peace as they see the example of calmness in the everyday routine and life of an individual who unashamedly follows Christ while admitting to their own weaknesses and shortcomings. This is best seen in the life of a group of Christians living out their lives and faith in a community known as the local church. The problem, however, is that the majority of groups of people calling themselves a church are not only failing to function as a New Testament church, but they are providing a poor to non-existent model of what it means to genuinely care for one another and support one

another in the journey of life. The people let their own personal needs or desire for importance or some other selfish excuse get in the way of being what it is they are supposed to be, a living, breathing example of the love of Christ to a world that stands in awe of genuine love and concern because they struggle to understand anything other than the idea of doing whatever it may take to get what a person wants or whatever it may take to get ahead in any given life situation whether that be in their career or their personal life.

The local church is to also function as a means of encouragement and protection for its members from the world while being an agent of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup> Like other Biblical authors the Apostle Peter was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he penned these words,

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you (I Peter 5:6-10).

The analogy is seen of Satan as a roaring lion or in other words as a predator, so it stands to reason that he would condone that same approach to any who would come against the individuals who make up the church. With this concept in mind the local church should be a protection of sort from predators. There should be a certain degree of safety found within the local church family from the pressures of society and the temptations that are so commonly found in everyday life in one way or another.

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<sup>71</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Don't Call it a Comeback*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 76.

Those individuals who make up the church should know that when they need encouragement, prodding, or even discipline to help them endure the pressure of the predators that are attacking them that they are able to get these much needed resources from their church family. If the local church is not functioning as this source of strength, encouragement, and protection for the believers as it should be, then it will quickly become spiritually weak and culturally irrelevant.

### Church Covenant

The author previously held to the personal belief that the document commonly known as the Church Covenant that is so widely accepted among local churches of all sizes and denominations is outdated and irrelevant. However; the author has come to a position that if this covenant were truly committed to, and lived out in the lives of the members of any particular local congregation then not only would that body of believers be healthier in numerous ways, but they would have a built in outreach tool for their community.

While there are certain aspects of this covenant that would not be agreed upon based on minute doctrinal or theological issues it is intended to serve as a template for the concept of a group of people agreeing together to live in community while attempting to be a positive, gospel centered impact on the community in which they are planted. Certain points or phrases may even seem outdated, but again the overall concept is most definitely still of value for the local church today.

While there are varying opinions on the origins of this document, it is difficult to determine exactly where it came from or who may have been the original author. Anyone who

has been a part of an evangelical church has most likely been exposed to this document by seeing it hanging on a wall, or printed in a copy of a local church constitution, or perhaps even laminated and given as a bookmark to serve as a reminder of what it is that is being agreed to when you agree to be a part of a local body of believers. With the importance of this document in mind and with the hopes of encouraging believers to return to the seriousness of this commitment, a review of this document is warranted at this point in the understanding of the importance of the protection and family structure of the local church.

The covenant is included here in its entirety:

#### *Church Covenant*

*Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.*

*We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality and to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.*

*We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.*

*We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.*

*We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite*

*with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.*

A paragraph by paragraph discussion of this covenant is included here, starting with:

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body of Christ.

If the local church was only comprised of individuals who actually fit the description given in this opening paragraph there would perhaps be a lot less conflict to begin with, but they would hopefully agree on a common ground for authority and guidance which is the word of God. If they were truly following the leading of God in and on their lives then there would be an element of respect and determination that does not exist in too many local churches in the modern era. Further, if the individuals that make up the local church would enter into a contractual covenant with one another and purposely make that agreement in the presence of God, who of course is someone you want to keep your promise to, then they would also be less likely to simply walk away when there is conflict or disagreements among themselves.

The next section of the church covenant:

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of the church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality and to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

In this paragraph the concept of being empowered by the Holy Spirit is seen. Believers simply put, should not try to do anything that they do in their own power. They should constantly be looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance in every aspect of their lives, whether that is

individually or corporately in the life of the church. There is also the concept of working for the betterment of the church in numerous areas, or in other words looking out for what is in the best interest of the entire congregation and not just a small group of people or perhaps even an individual. If these same people were also actually seeking to “promote” the welfare of the local church there would be less opportunity for conflict among them. The idea of engaging to do all of this also shows that it is something in which they would be actively involved in, to the detriment of less important or selfish endeavors.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

Again the idea of active involvement is seen in this paragraph with the use of the word “engage.” The individual church members are to be active about each part of this agreement into which they are entering. Here the covenant touches on the idea of personal and family Bible study and commitment to the truth of God’s word. It goes further in actually agreeing to apply the teaching of God’s word to one’s own life as well as actively obeying the commandments that are laid out within the pages of scripture. While some may not agree with everything that is spelled out in this paragraph, it speaks to the desire to conform the believer’s personal life with God’s word or in other words be an effective witness of how God’s word should be applied to your personal life and walk as you go about your daily activities.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

What would it look like if the majority of local churches in western society actually watched over one another in love? If they actually prayed for each other and helped one another when they were sick or had some sort of calamity in their personal lives? If they actually showed kindness toward one another and did not wear their feelings on their sleeves? If they stood at the ready to be at peace with one another and did so based on how Christ teaches it to be done in the pages of the Bible? More churches would be healthy and growing and reaching people in their communities. More churches would be less conflicted and would consequently have more time, ability, and resources with which to do the work that the local church is supposed to be doing in the first place. They simply would not have the time on their hands to be involved in idleness, arguments, and general pettiness. They would have the time and energy to be the salt and light that they are supposed to be and they would be more Christ honoring in the process.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

If the wording and concept of this covenant were truly followed then believers would be so committed to the concept of living in Biblical community that they would be looking immediately to unite with another body of like-minded believers, should the need ever arise to move from where they are to another congregation for whatever reason necessary. This would lead to further unity and common ground which would also pave the way for a more productive, less conflicted local congregation.

In short, while this covenant does not possess the level of authority that the Bible does in the life of a Christian, it does contain Biblical concepts and would be a fairly decent standard to apply to the agreement one enters into when they unite as a member of a local congregation

regardless of the particular denomination with which it may be affiliated. Using this as a rough guideline or template would serve to reduce the level and recurrence of church conflict which so readily side tracks the church from effectively reaching the community in which it has been placed.

### Definition Of The Church

For a better understanding of just how important the local church is and how significant it is in the lives of the people that make up the membership as well as the local community, a good look at a proper definition of the church is justified.

A rather lengthy definition of the church is offered in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology second edition*, “Our word church, comes from the Greek adjective, to kuriakon, used first to the house of the Lord, then of his people. The New Testament word, ekklesia, is used of a public assemblage summoned by a herald; in the LXX, however, it means the assembly or congregation of the Israelites, especially when gathered before the Lord for religious purposes. Accordingly, it is used in the New Testament for the congregation which the living God assembles about his Messiah Jesus. Thus the church is the spiritual family of God, the Christian fellowship created by the Holy Spirit through the testimony to the mighty acts of God in Christ Jesus. Wherever the Holy Spirit unites worshiping souls to Christ and to each other there is the mystery of the church. More fully stated, the one church of God is not an institution but a supernatural entity which is in process of growth towards the world to come. It is the sphere of the action of the risen and ascended Lord. All its members are in Christ and are knit together by a supernatural kinship. All their gifts and activities continue the work of Christ by the power of the

Holy Spirit, originate from Christ, and are coordinated by him to the final goal. Then the church will appear in the age to come as the one people of God united in one congregation before the throne, as the one celestial city, the New Jerusalem.”<sup>72</sup>

If the average Christian who is a member of a local congregation that fits this Biblical definition of the local church realized exactly what the church is and what it should be doing in society and the world, then there would be another argument for there being less conflict occurring within the life of that local congregation. If the realization was there of just what is entrusted to, and expected of the local church, then perhaps there would be less conflict and less energy and attention given to personal preferences and hopes of power and more times given to advancing the kingdom of Christ as mentioned earlier in the church covenant.

The definition of the church would serve to arrive at a better understanding of the holy purposes of the local church and speaks to the importance of her task. The individuals that come together to make her what she is would do well to study this definition and use it as a regular reminder of how important it is that conflict be avoided when it is unhealthy and handled correctly when it is healthy, in order to put all of the necessary attention and energy into the calling at hand, given to her by God himself. A proper understanding of the church is not arrived at simply by guessing and hoping, but by taking time to reflect on just how and why she exists.

### Decline In Southern Baptist Numbers

At least among the Southern Baptist Convention in America there is a decline in the majority of the numbers of which they keep records. These numbers speak to who that particular

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<sup>72</sup> R.G. Clouse, “Church,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 246.

denomination is and how they measure their own health. It is part of the author's hypothesis that one of the primary reasons for a decline in the numbers of this and other evangelical denominations has a direct connection to the continued rise in church conflict that is either unresolved, unhealthy, or handled in an unbiblical manner. When the church is not focusing on its primary task at hand, which is evangelism and discipleship, then ground will be lost in the ever challenging goal to grow numerically and spiritually as seen in the examples of the local church throughout the pages of the New Testament.

As shown in Figure 2, total membership declined in their latest available comparison of statistical years. The chart shows numbers in decline between 2011 and 2012. Membership fell 0.66% while baptisms fell 5.52% and weekly attendance fell by 3.06, in addition to those numbers giving fell by over fourteen million dollars.

While numbers alone is not what the church, whether local, universal, or denominational is supposed to be focusing on they are indicative of trends that can not only speak to influence and growth, but to negative trends as well such as loss of effective communication or trust that was often placed on them in generations past. Loss of influence or impact can be detrimental to the spreading of the gospel.

### Conclusion

Church conflict will certainly has an impact on the Christian faith in the twenty first century and beyond. It has certainly had an impact on the church since the very beginning of church history or scripture would not speak in various places to the need for brotherly love and cooperation.

### Southern Baptist Convention Statistical Summary – 2012

Item/Statistic	2012	2011	2012-2011	2012-2011
			Numeric Change	Percent Change
State Conventions	42	42	0	0.00%
Associations	1,169	1,174	-5	-0.43%
Churches	46,034	45,764	270	0.59%
Total Membership	15,872,404	15,978,112	-105,708	-0.66%
Baptisms	314,956	333,341	-18,385	-5.52%
Ratio of Baptisms: Total Membership	1:50	1:48	--	--
Weekly Worship Attendance	5,966,735	6,155,116	-188,381	-3.06%
Church-type Missions Operating (1)	4,992	4,952	40	0.81%

**Notes:**

1. Some state conventions no longer use the designation of Church-type mission to categorize congregations which are not self-determining, self-sustaining, and self-propagating. This practice has impacted the number of churches and church-type missions.

### Other 2012 Items--Not Asked by All State Conventions<sup>1</sup>

Cooperative Program as reported on the Annual Church Profile is not included in this table. CP, based on the actual amount given through the state convention is provided in other resources.

Item/Statistic	2012	2011
Other Additions (2)	293,951	303,881
Undesignated Receipts (2)	\$8,891,673,582	\$9,023,216,896
Total Receipts (2)	\$11,521,418,784	\$11,805,027,705
Total Mission Expenditures (2)	\$1,314,875,376	\$1,328,672,872
Great Commission Giving (3)	\$744,043,625	\$695,694,322

**Notes:**

1. Totals for items in this table have incomplete data for 2012 due to the fact that not all state conventions asked the item or did so in a way not comparable with the standard definition. Similar actions occurred in 2011. Thus, comparisons between the two years may not be appropriate. See the Notes in the 2011 SBC Statistical Summary for specific details to determine if a comparison is desirable.
2. The California Southern Baptist Convention did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.
3. The Arkansas Baptist State Convention and Illinois Baptist State Association did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item. In 2011 there were 4 state conventions that did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.

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Figure 2, Southern Baptist Convention Statistical Summary, 2012<sup>73</sup>

The reassurance for anyone who is a follower of Christ is at least twofold. First, that Christ is the same for all time according to scripture itself. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8 ). No matter what may come or go in regards to the opinion that society has on the church of the individuals who are supposed to be a part of its membership,

<sup>73</sup> Paula Hancock, email message to author, March 26, 2014.

that does not affect who Jesus Christ is and who He will be proven to be to all mankind at the appointed time.

The second source of security is that for all of her flaws, because humans are involved, the church is a part of God's great plan and will remain intact according to His standards throughout this period of time until His plan culminates in the eventual return of Christ.

Individual believers may become discouraged from time to time because of what seems to hard time for the local church, but they can find solace in the knowledge that the faithful will be strengthened and will see the day that the evidence of their faith is portrayed for all to see when Jesus Christ brings all things to the ultimate conclusion according to His plan.

## **Chapter Four - The Author's Personal Account And The Minister And His Family**

In this chapter, the issue of how contagious church conflict impacts those involved in vocational ministry will be addressed. This is an issue that is sadly often overlooked or forgotten about altogether. However, it is an issue of utmost importance if there is going to continue to be a healthy, productive pool of church leaders.

There is certainly a group of lay members who are negatively affected by contagious church conflict as well, but for the purposes of this chapter and overall project the focus remains of those who are considered to be professional ministers. As has been previously stated the author comes from a Baptist tradition where it is not the norm for most ministerial staff members to be anything other than men he does realize that there are. It has been previously stated that the author comes from a Baptist tradition where it is not the norm for most ministerial staff members to be anything other than men he does realize that there are certainly ladies serving well within the ranks of ministerial staff among other church and denominational traditions. For the purposes of this project and more specifically this portion of the project the general reference to ministers will be masculine in nature, however there may be places where a female was surveyed as part of the research for this project.

The author includes here in greater detail his personal story of contagious church conflict and how that affected him as well as his family. The hope is that in sharing this personal insight a better understanding will be gained by any reading this project so that they can help navigate the water of church conflict within their local church context.

This is also the section of the thesis project where the author shares the results of a survey that was shared with a number of pastors and others ministers in an effort to gain more knowledge and insight into how contagious church conflict affects others in vocational ministry as well as the church themselves.

Whether it is a personal story or the charted results of a series of survey questions the desire is for a picture to be painted for the reader to be able to see first-hand the effects of church conflict on the people that are serving in vocational ministry.

### Personal Story

I am a double bus kid. I started riding the big beautiful blue bus to the Capitol City Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama when I was six years old. I grew up in a loving, moral home, but not a Christian home. After riding the bus for a number of weeks I responded to an invitation at the end of a children's church service. I went to a side room and listened as two adults explained to me and some other kids what the gospel was all about. I prayed and received Christ that morning and was baptized sometime soon after that.

The church stopped showing up on Sundays and it was not until years later after some research that I learned that the church had folded shortly after I was baptized. I had years of a normal, healthy, and fun filled childhood, but never really grew as a Christian.

I call myself a double bus kid because when I was eleven years old my parents bought their first home and we moved to the other side of town. The first Saturday we were there someone from the Lighthouse Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama came by our house and

asked if I would like to ride the bus to church. I started riding the next morning and God immediately started working in my life.

At the age of twelve I sensed God's call on my life for service in full time vocational ministry. I responded to that call by surrendering my life to whatever and wherever God would lead me. I have been pursuing that call ever since, except for a period of two years in my late teens which took several years to recover from some bad decisions. These decisions were primarily financially related.

When I was in the youth group at Lighthouse there were several other young guys who had responded to God's call on our lives for ministry. The pastor and youth pastor of the church saw the importance of making sure we had a proper foundation to be as prepared as we could be for ministry so they began what they called a preacher's boy class. We met every Saturday for several months and then off and on throughout the years. There were thirteen of us and all but three of us fell to the side shortly after the classes began, but the interesting thing is that the three of us who stayed faithful to the classes and service during our teen years, we are all serving as Senior Pastors and are seeing God bless our ministries as a direct result of the time and effort put into our lives by those two men.

In that class we covered such things like practical preaching tips, the importance of Bible study, and how to handle issues when they arise and to expect them in the first place. I personally credit this class as preparing me better for ministry than any class I took in college or seminary.

I preached at youth rallies, revival meetings, street corners, jails, missions, nursing homes, and pulpit supply until I was twenty seven. My first three churches each had some form

of major conflict resurface while I was there. I handled each situation with varying degrees of wisdom, maturity, immaturity, and dumb luck.

My first church was a small white wood framed country church that was surrounded by explosive growth but had never itself seen more than about fifty in average attendance. At first I could not understand why they were surrounded by three mega churches and five churches with attendance of more than two hundred on Sunday mornings. Then one Wednesday evening during one of those infamous Baptist business meetings the idea of an evangelistic block party was being discussed. My answer to the growth issue came quickly when the Chairman of Deacons voiced his opposition to the idea of an outreach event by stating “People would just come for free food” with a hateful tone in his voice and a visible grimace on his face. It was then obvious what the conflict issue was for most people at this church.

An additional issue that arose during the first few months at this church happened when I discovered that the treasurer was stealing money from the church accounts. I was only two months into my first pastorate and while I did not know much at all about leading a congregation of believers, I knew based on my experience in law enforcement that I needed some time to build my case as well as earn the trust of the congregation. I was very new to them and the treasurer was not only someone who had been there for a number of years, but who was also related to some of the other members.

After being confronted with the indisputable evidence the deacons and consequently the entire congregation moved towards resolution that was not a long term solution and amounted to a slap on the wrist for the guilty party. It was learned that this had happened to the church with at least two prior treasurers.

That situation was handled as best as it could have been in that atmosphere and we moved on to the primary task at hand. While the church never did see the type of explosive growth that its neighboring congregations saw, we did see tremendous growth based on where the church was when I arrived there. When I came to the church the average attendance was between ten and twelve and when I left seven years later the attendance was averaging between sixty and seventy.

The second church I served as pastor was my shortest tenure to date and could not have ended soon enough for me. I was at that church for fifty one Sundays and saw a tremendous movement of God and exceptional growth. The church exploded with new conversions and returning members and saw an increase in attendance from an average of forty to nearly ninety. The conflict arose here when one couple who had a firm hold on the control of the church felt they were losing that grip and were not willing to let “their” church change from what they wanted it to be.

Near the end of my time at that church I had sent my resume to a few churches in another part of the state that were looking for a pastor. Two of them were actively pursuing the possibility of me being their pastor. I was contacted by a third church that happened to be in the same county where I was living and they were anxious to talk with me and to make a move towards joining together for ministry. This seemed appealing to me because I had my mother living in the area who was in bad health and as an only child I felt the need to remain as close as possible to her as I could for as long as I could.

My mistake at this point was not leaving where I was serving, but in being impatient and jumping at the first opportunity that came about without making sure it was God’s hand working

things out. The other two churches were much better situations and I knew it, but the one that contacted me was a quick out from where I was and I took it. This set my family and me up for the longest two years of our lives.

In August of 2009 I became the pastor of what I thought was an extremely promising church with a desire to revitalize themselves in their community and quickly realized that I had made a mistake so big that there is not a sufficient enough of a word in the English language to convey just how big it was.

Shortly after becoming the pastor of the New Elkahatchee Baptist Church in Alexander City, Alabama the trouble started (six months to be exact). The list of what went wrong could fill numerous pages that would simply take up too much time and space to go into detail.

I discovered that I had been lied to about a plethora of events in the history of the church that would have directly affected my decision to go there in the first place and I learned that members of the search committee and all of the deacons knew this. I was lied to about events that took place at a deacon's home in order to get me to confront him which led to him and his family leaving the church out of hurt and anger. I learned later that his wife knew details about the wife of another leader in the church and her extra martial affair and they were being targeted in order to discredit them.

I also learned that a previous pastor two or three before me had been forcibly terminated two weeks prior to Christmas and the water lines to the parsonage were cut leaving him and his wife and young children without water. I was told that none of the people involved in that incident were even at the church anymore which proved to be completely wrong. Within two weeks of my arrival my immediate predecessor died of a heart attack at the age of thirty seven

and it is believed that it was a result of the emotional strain that he and his wife endured during their time there. His widow and their children still suffer some after effects as a result of what they endured while there.

There was also a history of moral failures in the history of the church and three current issues were discovered while I was there. One of which involved the music and youth minister and homosexuality. One of the others was the previously mentioned issue involving one of the members of the leadership and his wife having an affair.

The list goes on including financial issues with a former treasurer and others all of which were common knowledge in the community and this left the church standing as a laughing stock in the area with hardly anyone being willing to darken the door of the church.

In spite of all of this the church blossomed with new converts as well as old members coming back and attendance grew from an average in the low forties to an average of just over one hundred in a little over a year. At about the point of fifteen months I was blindsided in a special called deacon's meeting on a Saturday which was called by a man who was not even a deacon, but was the real power broker in the church. I was presented with a list of ridiculous complaints ranging from my dog being in the wrong place in my yard to my parking in the wrong space in the parking lot and those are the items on the list that are anywhere near sensible.

This was all done while my mother lay near death in the hospital less than two miles up the road. I spent that night in the emergency room with what I thought was a heart attack, but thankfully was only an anxiety attack. I had no support from the Director of Missions, but had tremendous support from my wife and a fellow pastor in the area.

My wife was also affected by this in a negative manner. She and I both had serious conversation about leaving vocational ministry and even had attractive offers from a company that I had previously worked for that was much more financially rewarding than serving in ministry. My wife's emotions were raw which left her feeling weak and hurt as a result of how the people of the congregation treated us. Thankfully she is a very Godly, strong woman who with some time has been able to heal a good bit from the wounds that were inflicted on our family. While there are some wounds and nervousness that will be ever present they will continue to lessen even more over time.

Thankfully our children have had no negative effect from any of the conflict we have been involved in, due, in part, to our being determined to never talk negatively about the church or any of its people around our children. The fact that they are all so young has certainly been beneficial as well. They are all under the age of thirteen and this certainly has made it easier to help give them a strong foundation on God's word as we prepare them to face the reality of harsh treatment from people who claim to be people of God.

After a week of prayer and thought I presented the chairman of deacons and the chairman of the trustees of *New Elkahatchee* with a one page contract guaranteeing me six months to find another job or church position with an agreement that I would leave at that time even if I did not have anywhere to go.

I learned the personal application of the verse of scripture Isaiah 54:17 "No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the lord, and their vindication is from me, declares the Lord."

God is His perfect timing orchestrated events to where my last Sunday at that church was one Sunday shy of the maximum time agreed to before my departure.

I have been at the Immanuel Baptist Church in Pikeville, Kentucky for nearly three years now and have loved every minute of it. I am stretched to the limit and realize that I am just one person, but the people are supportive and have gone above and beyond to make sure my family and I are taken care of and that we feel at home. We are seeing a genuine movement of God and the church and I both are growing by leaps and bounds.

There has already been some issues of conflict but for the most part they were approached calmly and in a level headed, Biblical manner by all involved and has since, hopefully become a thing of the past. I have learned through that incident that conflict can be handled in a healthy manner even when it did not start in the right way and even when some of those involved may not choose to handle it in a healthy manner. There are times when you simply have to let the Holy Spirit take care of some of the individuals who may not be making an effort to be in line with God's word and what it teaches about how to live in community with one another. When the majority seem to have a desire to work through things and operate in a Biblical manner, God will honor that desire with his strength, grace, and blessings.

I share this detailed personal account of what my family and I have been through in the hopes that it will not only speak to the personal nature of church conflict, but that it may help others realize they are not alone. While our situation and what happened to us is nowhere near the worst example of the pain inflicted on pastors and their family it is an example of the fact that the pain is real. I did not share every detail of our story here out of a concern for personal

privacy and even more so because I do not feel my wife and I are quite ready to share some of those details publicly.

### The Minister And His Family

We move now to the section of the Thesis project that will discuss the results of the research done for this work. There were over fifty surveys sent out with a request from the respondents to reply to a dedicated e-mail account with the completed surveys. There were six complete responses so each of the charts that will be included in this section will represent one hundred percent of the responses received. Each question will have a corresponding chart or graph to help explain the responses.

Question 1: *How long have you been in ministry?*

As will be seen in the chart the average for this response was just over nineteen years of service in vocational ministry. Those who chose to respond seem to have some level of commitment based simply on the numbers of years of their own lives that they have invested into serving others through serving God in the ministry of the gospel.



Figure 3, Years in Ministry

Question 2: *How long have you been at your current church?*

The chart for this answer will reveal that the average respondent has been serving their current church for roughly four years. One of the respondents is not currently serving in a church to that response was counted as zero for the sake of averages. An additional respondent responded that they had only been at their current church for ten months, so their response was counted as one year for the sake of averages.

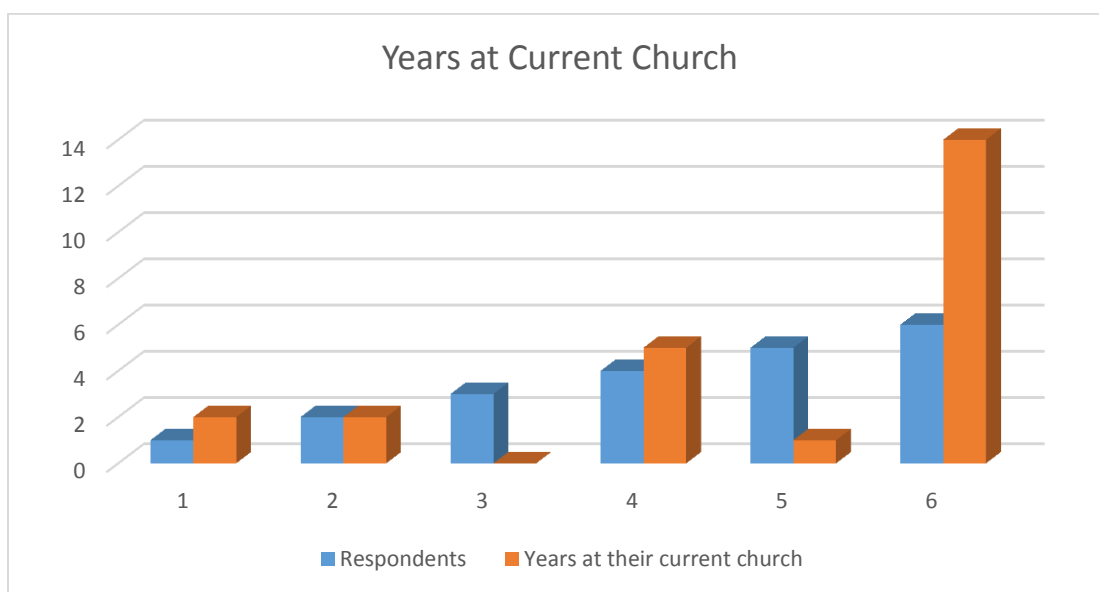


Figure 4, Years at Current Church

Question 3: *What is your highest level of education?*

As will be seen in this response fifty percent of the respondents possess a four year Bachelor's degree with no post graduate degrees. 17% of the respondents possess a Master's degree while 33% of them possess at least one Doctorate.

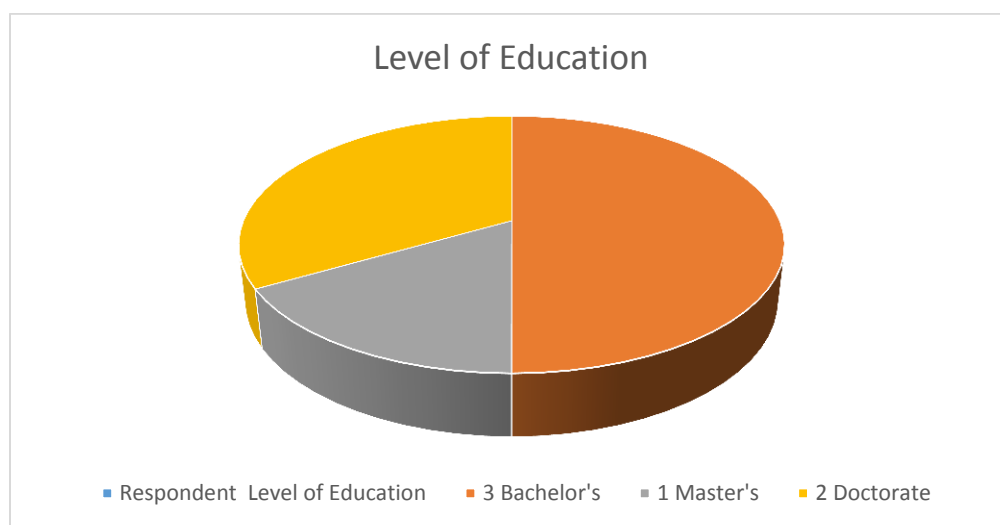


Figure 5, Level of Education

Question 4: *What if any denomination do you identify with?*

All but one of the respondents identified themselves as members of the Southern Baptist Denomination. The one who was not Southern Baptist identified themselves as Baptistic, but non-denominational.

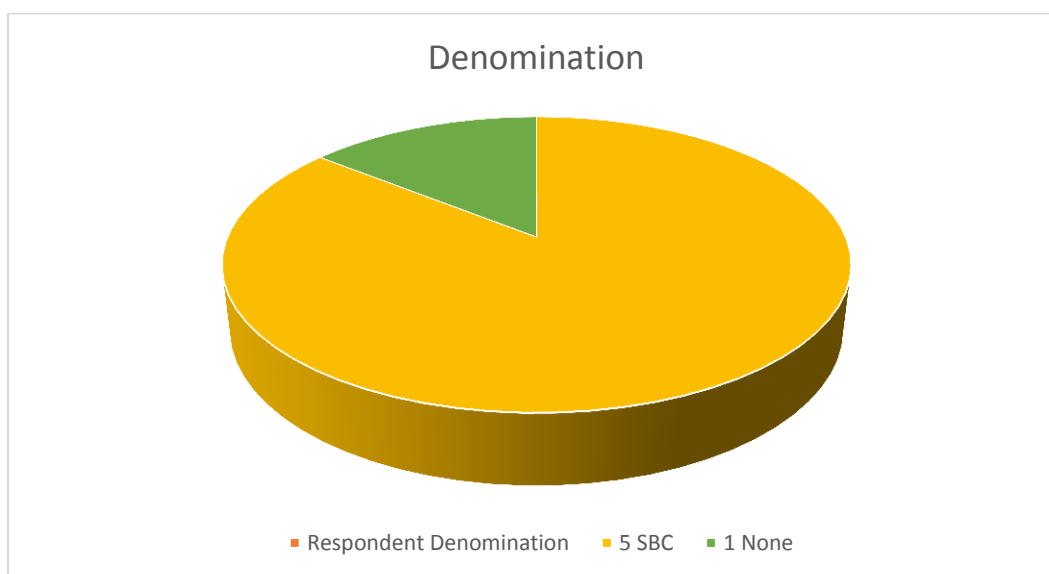


Figure 6, Denomination

Question 5: *How many churches have you served in? What were the positions and length of service, size of the membership, etc.?*

As will be seen in this chart representation of the first part of this question the average respondent has served an average of just over five churches during their time in the ministry.

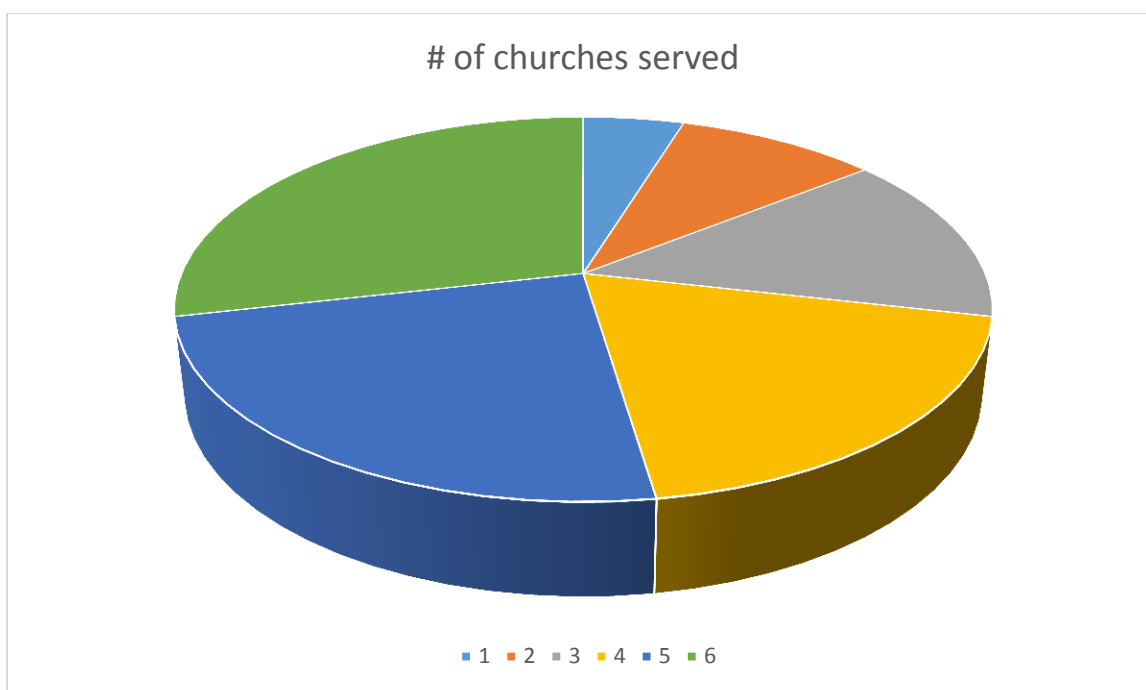


Figure 7, Number of Churches Served

As is shown in the following chart, the vast majority of the positions were that of youth pastor among those who responded to the survey.

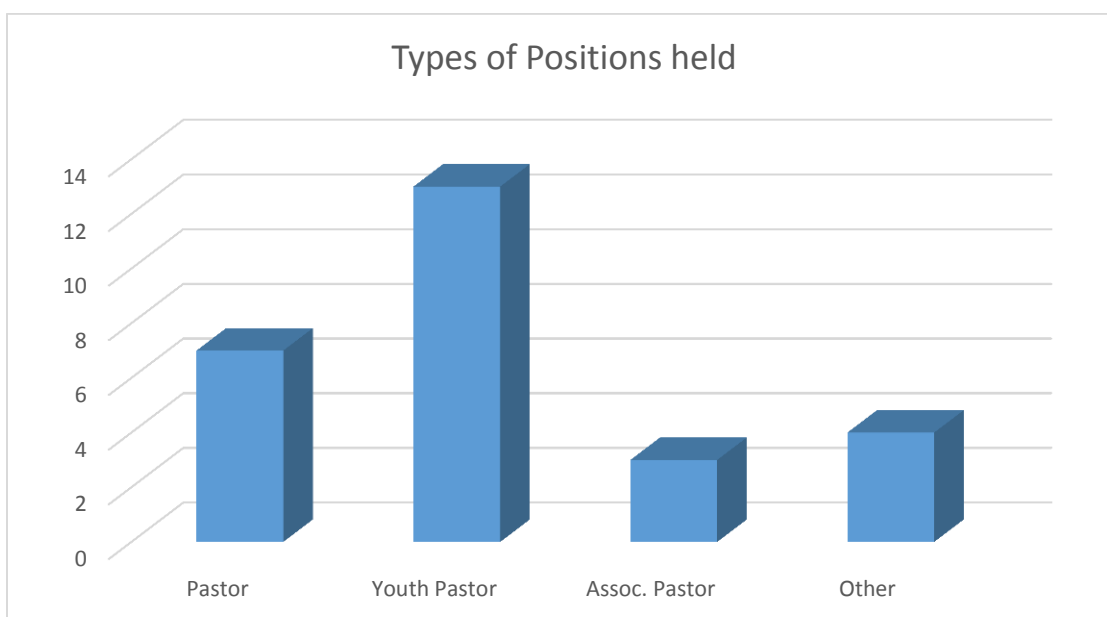


Figure 8, Types of Positions Held

Part three of this question will reveal the average years of service among the respondents. It will show that the average tenure in any given position is just less than four and a half years.

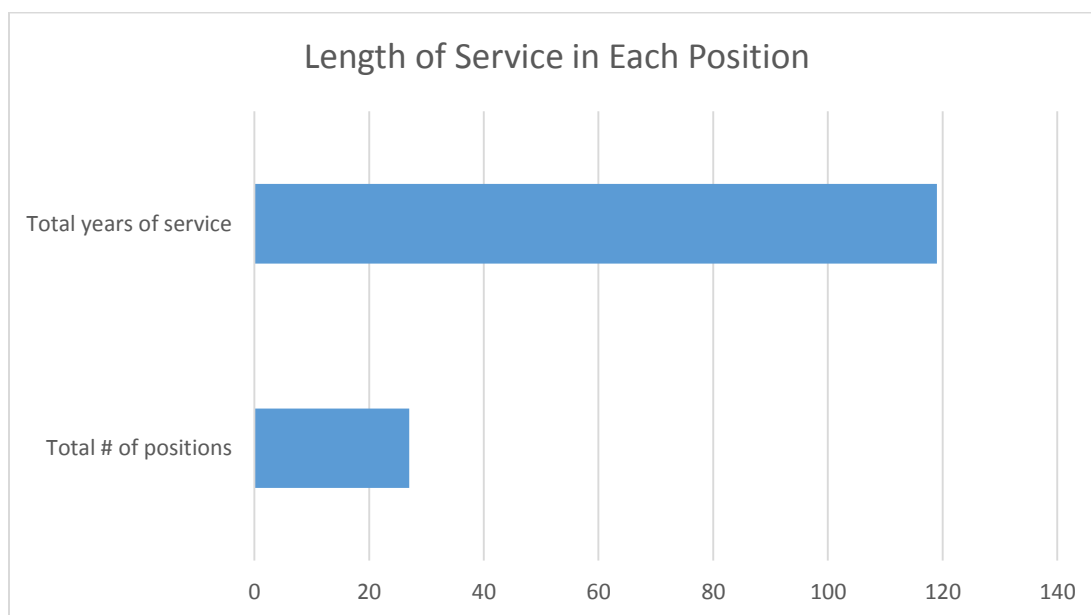


Figure 9, Length of Service in Each Position

Question 6: *What is your marital status? Do you have any children?*

The responses to this question will reveal that 83% of the respondents to this question are married and have children while all 100% are married.

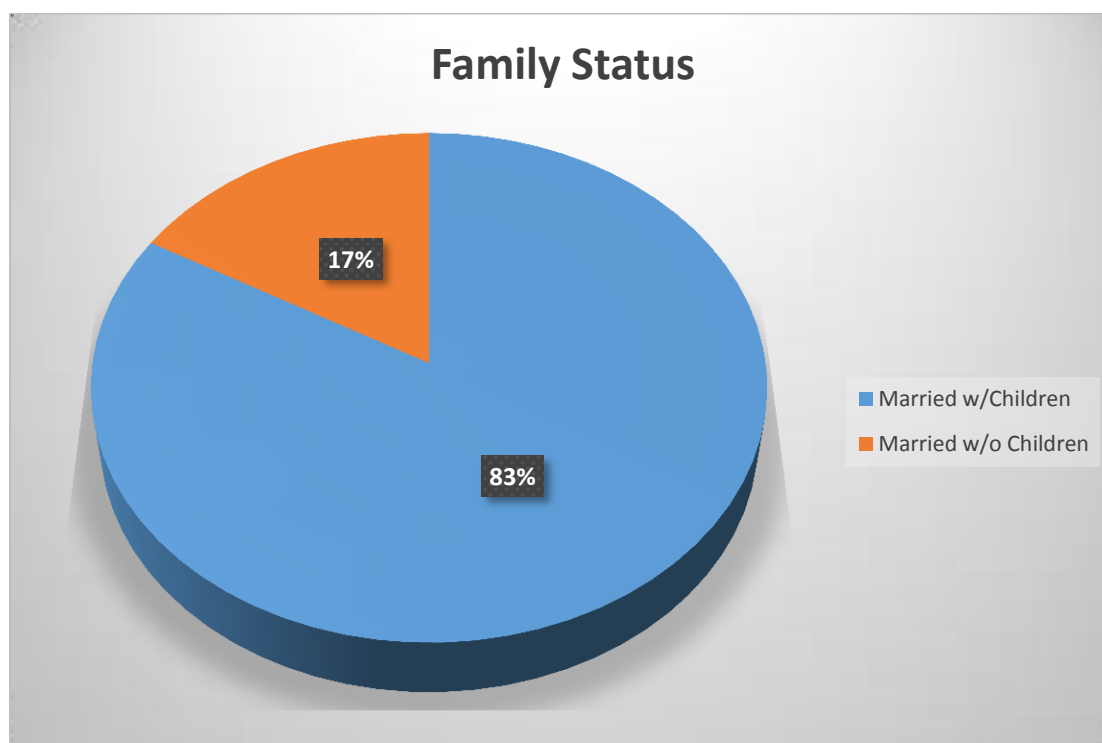


Figure 10, Family Status

Question 7: *How has your marriage been affected within the church you have served? How have your children been affected?*

83% of the respondents said that ministry has negatively affected their family in one way or another while the other 17% had a neutral response. There were no positive responses.

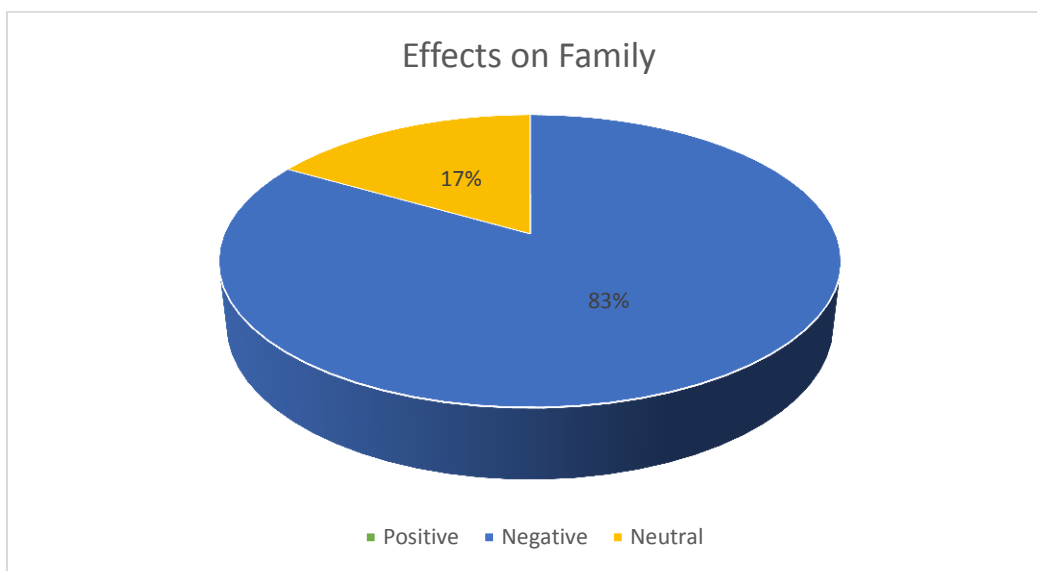


Figure 11, Effects of Family

Question 8: *Have you experienced any serious church conflict during your tenure in ministry?*

The responses to this question indicate that 100% of those who completed the survey have experienced conflict in their ministry at some point with some noting multiple incidents.



Figure 12, Church Conflict Experience

Question 9: *If so, how has the conflict affected your family?*

There is 75% of a response to this question that indicates a negative effect on the family of the respondents. The other 25% stated an indirect positive effect such as causing them to grow closer together.

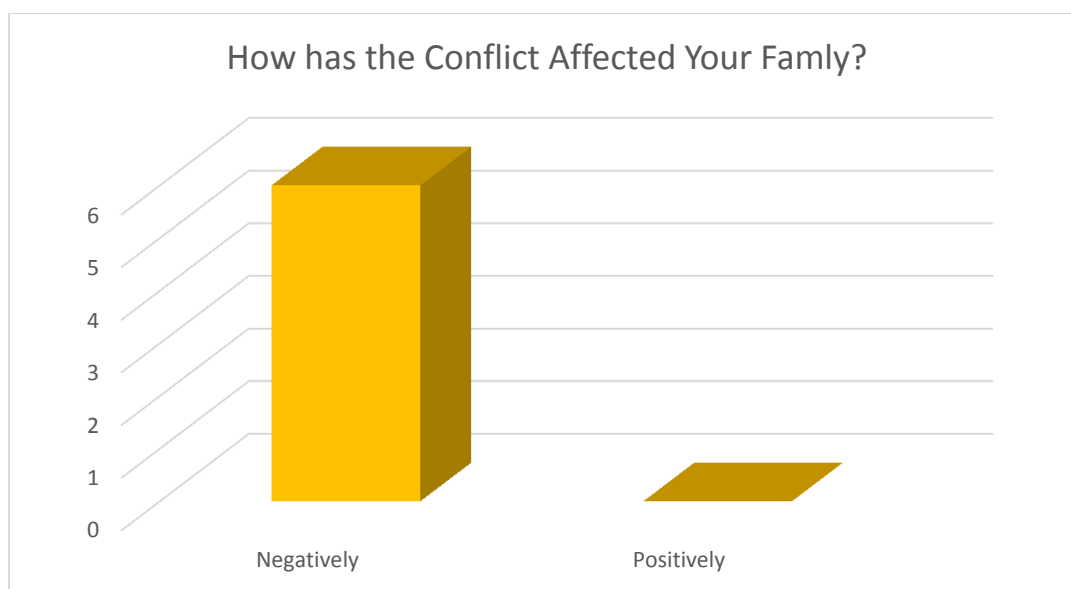


Figure 13, How has the Conflict Affected Family

Question 10: *If so, how was the church affected?*

67% of the respondents indicate a negative impact on the church while 33% indicate a somewhat positive impact.

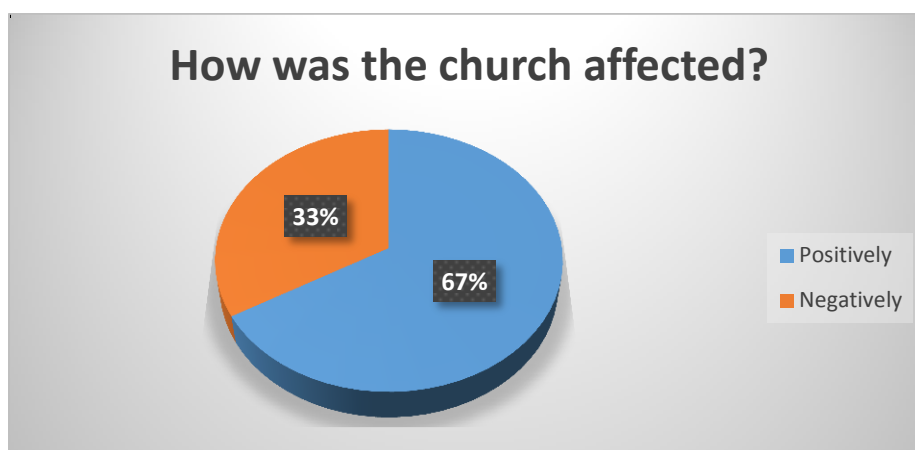


Figure 14, How was the Church Affected

Question 11: *If so, how did it affect your personal health?*

33% of those who responded to the survey indicated that they either had no physical side effects or that they had a regular exercise routine with the intent of trying to either avoid negative side effects or to at least counter act them. The additional 67% indicated in various ways that they did, in deed suffer from negative health issues as a result of church conflict that they had been exposed to.

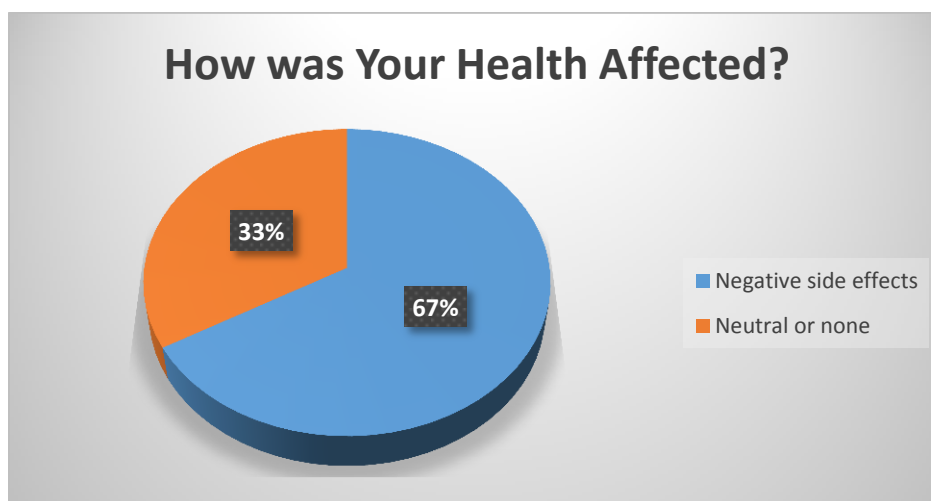


Figure 15, How was Health Affected

Question 12: *If so, how was the community affected and what was their reaction?*

100% of the respondents indicated that there was virtually no effect on the community as a result of the conflict that that experienced.

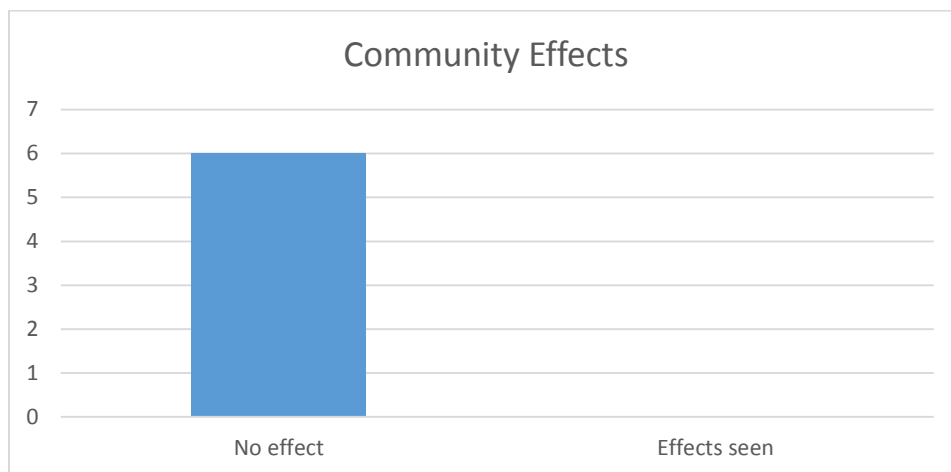


Figure 16, Community Effects

Question 13: *If so, how was the general membership affected?*

There is a direct correlation between the churches that lost members and saw a positive effect and then between the ones that split or had no effect.

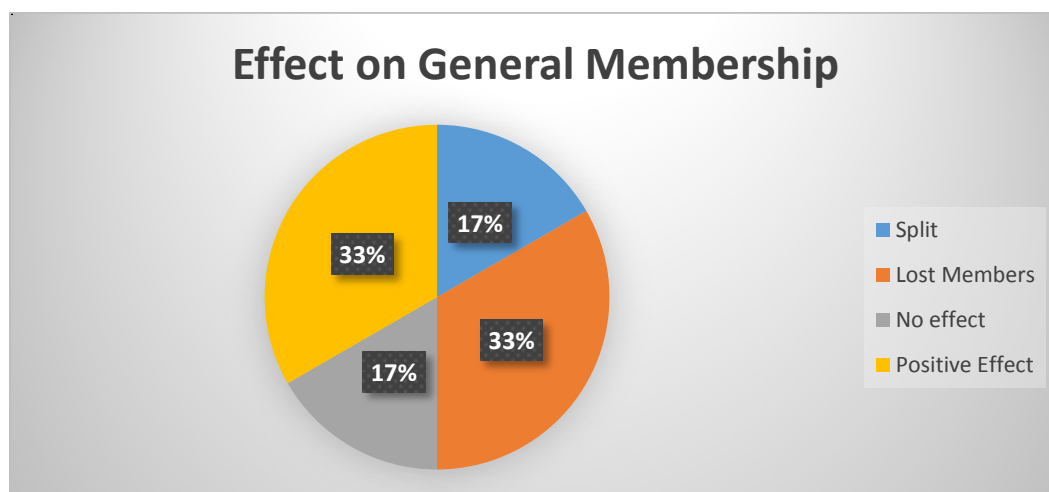


Figure 17, Effect on General Membership

Question 14: *What was the organizational structure of the church?*

And interesting anomaly here is that of the two churches that the respondents indicated were congregationally led were the same two who indicated that the conflict had a positive or neutral impact on the church as a whole.

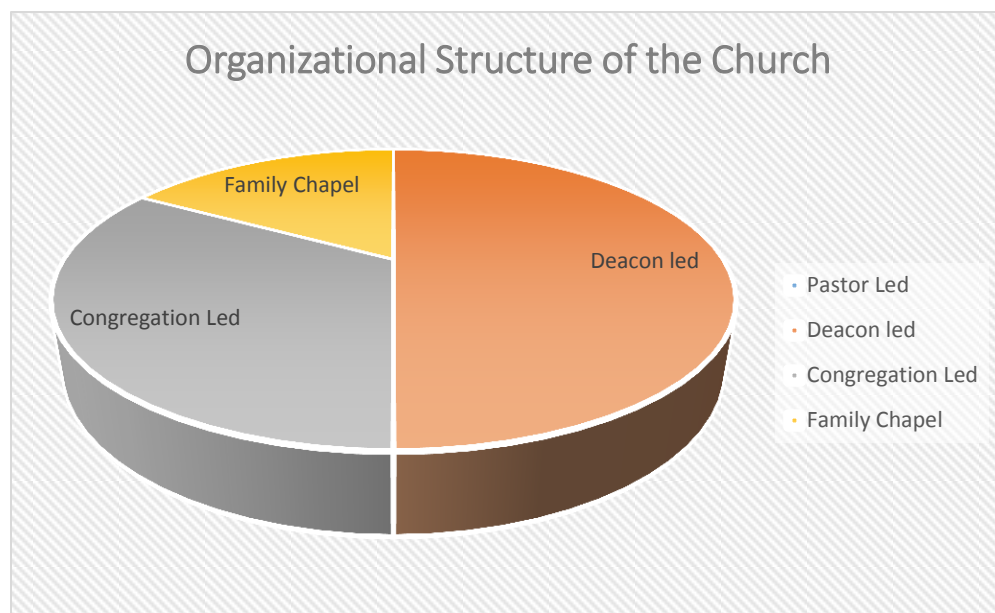


Figure 18, Organizational Structure of the Church

Question 15: *What was the source or sources or perhaps the cause of the conflict?*

50% of the respondents indicated that the source of conflict was from members of the leadership of the church while 30% indicated it was a cliché of people within the church. There was also a response from 20% that the source was a result of moral failure on the part of a member of leadership within the church.

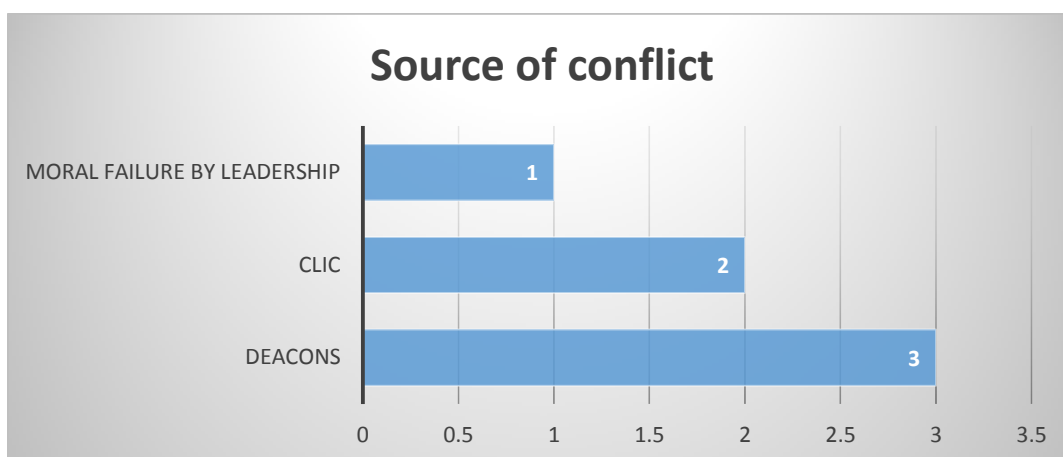


Figure 19, Source of Conflict

Question 16: *Have you ever left vocational ministry for a period of time as a result of church conflict whether by your own choice or not?*

33% of the respondents indicated that they have not left vocational ministry for a period of time while 67% of them indicate that they did, at least for a period of time as a result of church conflict.

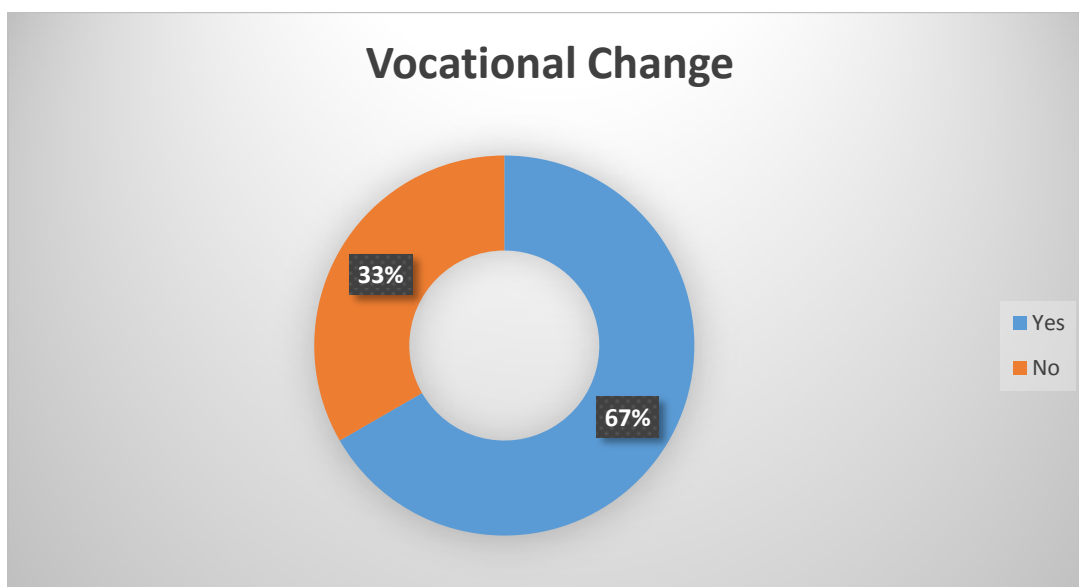


Figure 20, Vocational Change

Question 17: *Do you have any friends, genuine confidants, or support groups who you talk with on a regular basis?*

100 % of the respondents indicated that they do, in fact have a group of friends or someone that they are able to talk to for advice and encouragement.

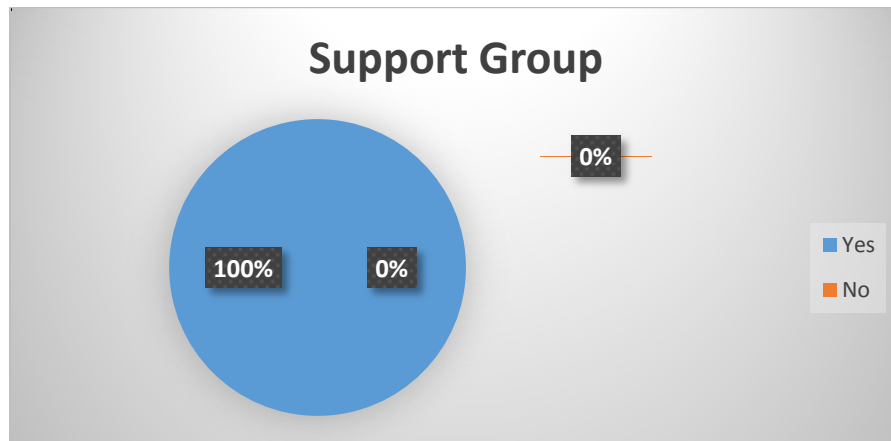


Figure 21, Support Group

Question 18: *Do you have a regular time spend focused on your spiritual health?*

83% of those surveyed said that they do have a regular time where they focus on their spiritual health while 17% said they do not.



Figure 22, Spiritual Health

Question 19: *Is there anything that could have been done to prevent the conflict?*

A vast majority of the responses (83%) indicated that they felt that the church conflict was unavoidable while only 17% felt that it could have possibly been avoidable.

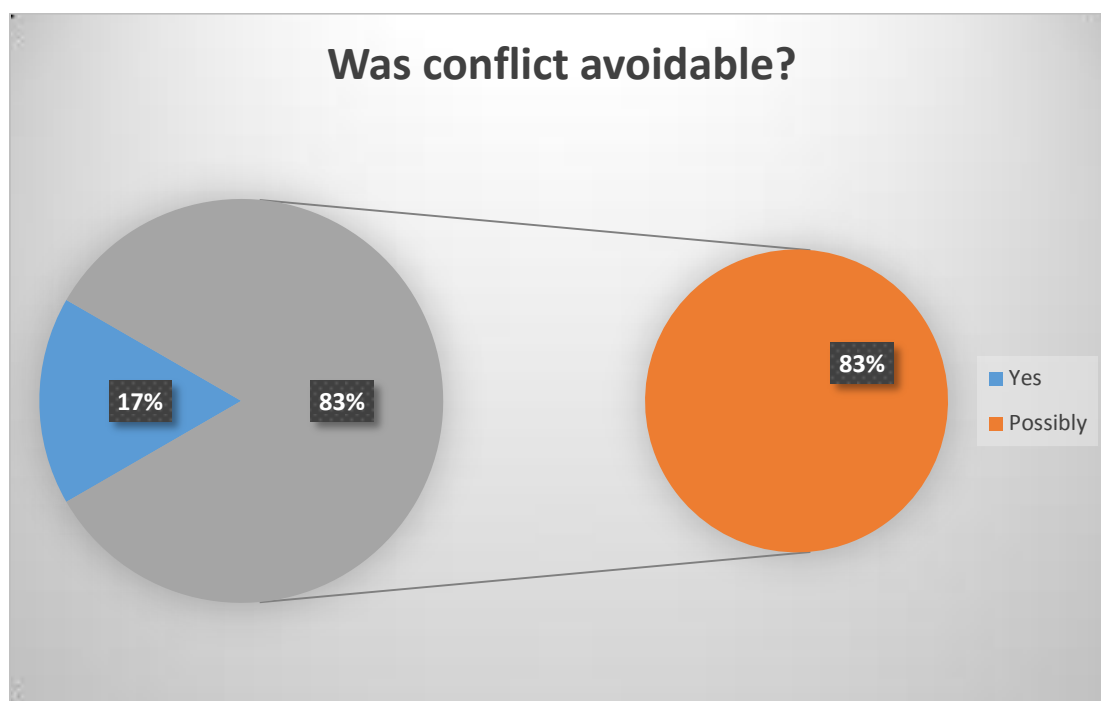


Figure 23, Was Conflict Avoidable

Question 20: *In your opinion can the church that experienced conflict be restored to a point of usefulness where they are planted?*

67% felt that the church that had experience conflict could be restored while 16% felt it could not and only 17% felt there was a possibility.

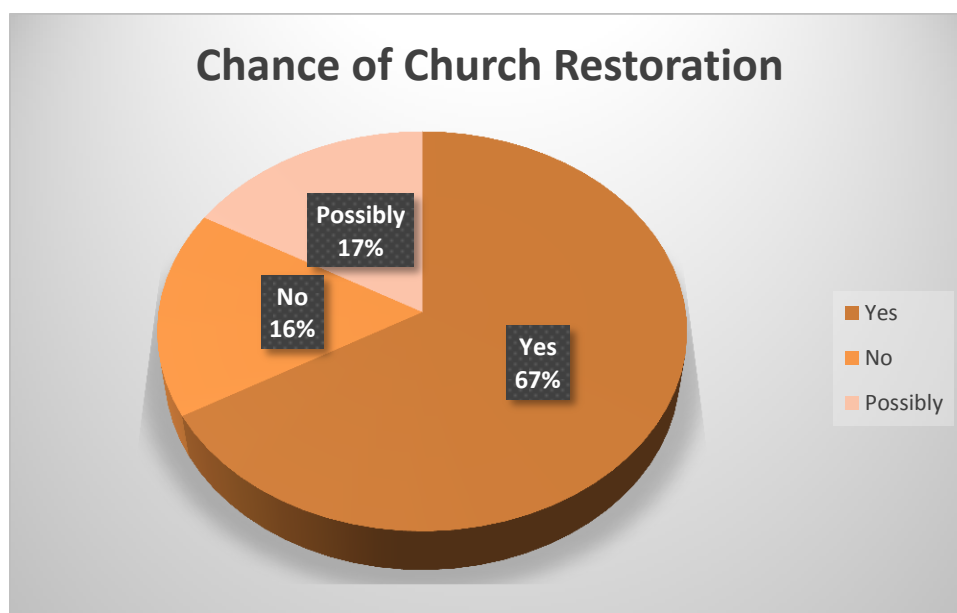


Figure 24, Can the Church be Restored to Usefulness

Question 21: *How many other churches are in the area where the conflicted church is located?*

67% said that there were fewer than 50 churches in the same area while 17% said there were more than 50, but fewer to 100 and then 16% said there were more than 100 in the same area.

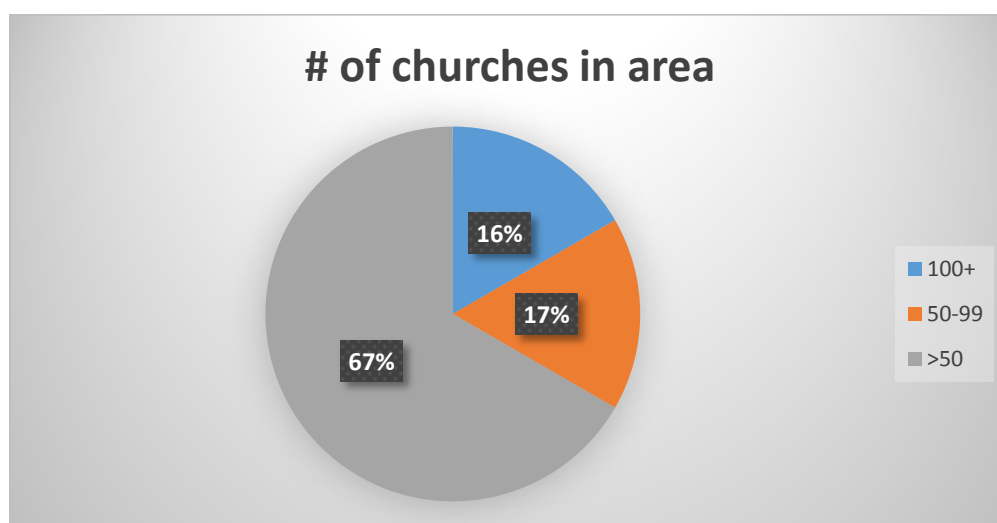


Figure 25, Number of Churches in the Area

Question 22: *What, if any, background in spiritual formation do you have?*

A clear half of those who completed surveyed said that they no experience with spiritual formation and 33% extensive was their response of choice. An additional 17% indicated that they have little experience with the discipline.

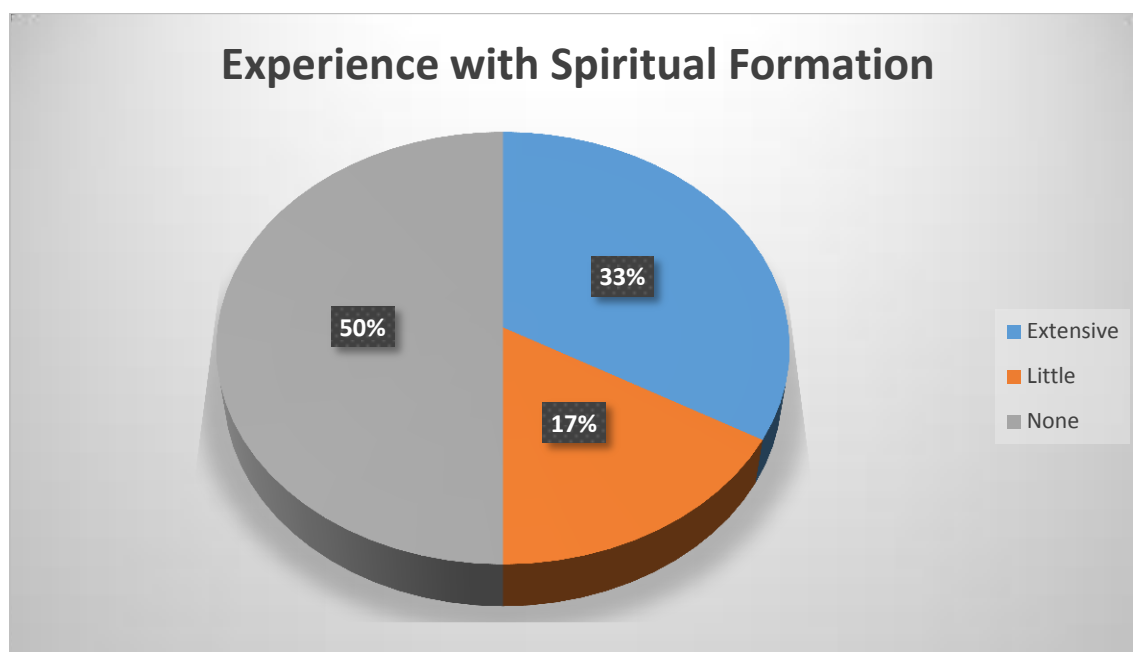


Figure 26, Experience with Spiritual Formation

Question 23: *How supportive do you feel your denomination was during the times of conflict?*

Sadly, 83% of those who responded indicated that they felt that they had absolutely no support from their denomination. Only 17% felt that they were somewhat supported and none of the survey takers felt genuinely supported.

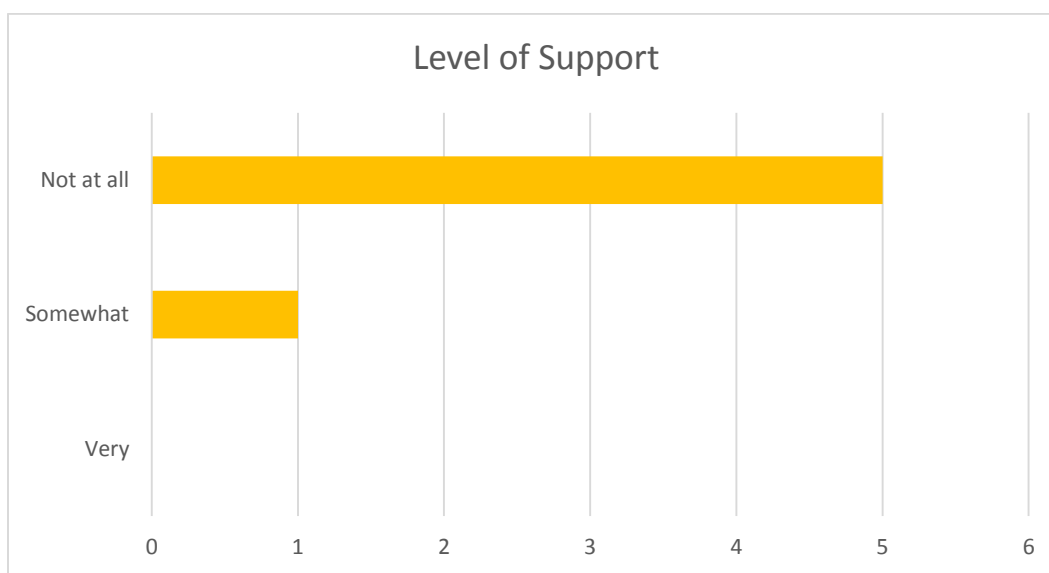


Figure 27, Level of Denominational Support

Question 24: *If you had it to do over again what, if anything would you do differently in handling conflict or conflicts that you faced?*

50% indicated that they would handle the situation differently if given the chance while 33% said they would not and 17% remained indifferent to the idea of doing things differently.

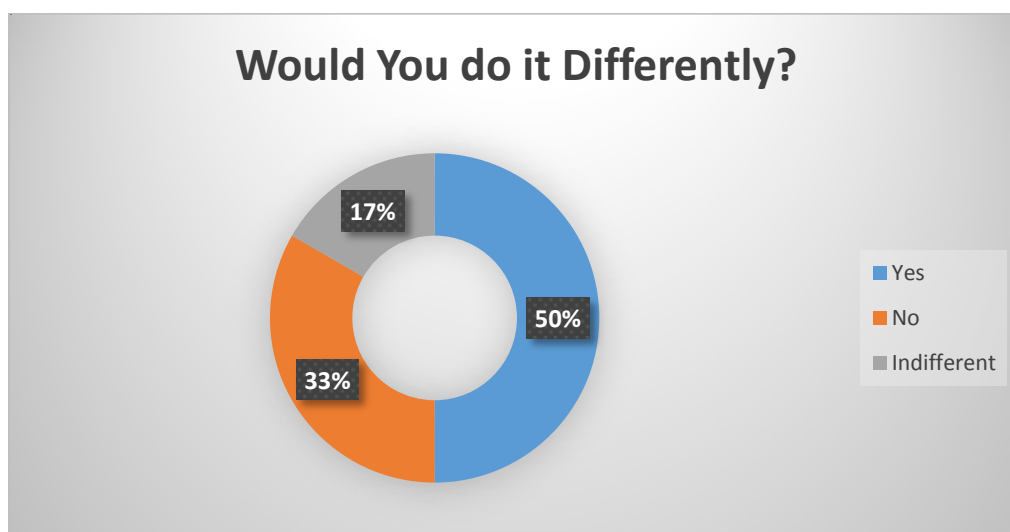


Figure 28, Would You do Things Differently

Question 25: *What process did you use to investigate the churches where you served before accepting the position?*

There was such a wide array of answers to this question that were all based on opinion and personality that there was no viable way to create a chart to display any kind of trend. Each individual had their own approach or lack thereof to attempting to learn something about the church prior to moving onto a respective field. It would seem that the majority had no formal method of attempting to learn anything about the church from any source other than internal sources from the church itself.

Question 26: *What advice would you give anyone looking to go into vocational ministry?*

Again, the answers to this question were so varied and personal that it was not realistic to create a chart to display any kind of trend or percentages. There were responses such as “run” or “don’t do it” to “make sure you are called”.

### Conclusion

As seen in the results of the author’s personal story and even more so in the results of the survey questions, church conflict takes a heavy toll on the pastor and their family. It would be safe to say that the actual results of church conflict on their personal lives are simply immeasurable this side of heaven. Anyone who serves Christ whether in full time vocational ministry or outside of vocational ministry but still faithfully serving Jesus knows well that the only promise scripture gives regarding conflict and suffering is that it will happen. Jesus actually said that your own family will turn on you and that you will be hated and the best thing to do is to go to another city as a result of the suffering:

Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:21-23).

Again, the hope of this paper is to express that conflict is hard on families and individuals as well. It is to provide reasons that closing a particular church is necessary, but also how it can be avoided. There will further discussion in the next chapter regarding a possible solution to this problem.

## **Chapter Five - A Potential Solution To The Problem**

The purpose of this portion of the thesis project is to present a plan for developing leaders within the context of a local church ministry who are both effective and relevant in their approach to their particular area of service.

Why does there need to be a plan in place for something like this? From one perspective it would seem to be an assumption that when someone is involved in a local church that they have a desire to not only grow in their personal walk of faith, but that they want to lead others to not only begin a personal relationship with Christ, but that they would also want to see these same converts come to a place where they are learning skills and disciplines that enable them to continue the trend in order to make the maximum impact possible for the purposes of the kingdom of Christ. From a different perspective, there is a valid argument that proper training and development is necessary for the church to move forward and continue in a pattern of healthy growth since those in leadership positions are properly trained and knowledgeable regarding this own purposes and responsibilities. From yet another perspective it would be easily argued that if people are properly trained for the job that that they are either paid for, or that they devote so much of the volunteer time and energy to then there would be a much lower rate of conflict arise in the life of the church since these leaders are prepared to handle the stresses and responsibilities that will inevitably come from time to time when there is a group of people involved in something and attempting to live together in community.<sup>74</sup>

If for no other reason in an effort to be obedient to scripture there should be a plan in place for a proper development of leaders in all levels of the local congregation and beyond. In

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<sup>74</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling your Tank and Renewing your Passion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 20-35.

what is commonly known as the Great Commission clear cut instructions are seen to make sure that Christians are not simply “getting people wet”, but are doing what they can to ensure those people’s spiritual growth. Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Then there is also the direct answer to one of the original questions posed in regards to the necessity of a plan for this to take place. Scripture also speaks to that issue directly. In Corinthians 14:40, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

For anyone who is a planner by nature this should come easily and for those who are not it is something that is quite simply worth the time and effort it takes to put a plan together. According to John Maxwell in his book *Developing the Leader Within You*, for every minute you spend planning and organizing you save at least ten minutes of work and effort later.<sup>75</sup>

Although serving Christ and making a kingdom impact does not always have to be about efficiency in lieu of effectiveness there is certainly nothing wrong with having a workable plan that will enable the individual believer who God has put into a leadership position striving to be as efficient as possible in accomplishing the task at hand of developing their own leadership abilities as well as those of even more leaders.

### Nature Of Developing Leaders

Developing leaders within the life and context of the local church is not the same as it would be in within the confines of the vast majority of secular organizations. One primary difference

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<sup>75</sup> John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Wheaton, IL: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 9.

between the two is one that is so obvious that it often escapes the reasoning of those who are seeking to develop the leaders in the first place. The majority of the people who are potential leaders in the life of a local church have one glaring difference between themselves and those who are filling leadership roles in the faith environment. Humanly speaking they do not have to be there. They can go down the street to any number of others organizations that use the title of church with virtually no personal ramifications at least in the immediate future. The leaders in the life of a church are not paid for the most part, so there is not the same incentive to cause them to want to strive for improvement in their roles within the family of faith.

In a secular environment a pay check is often incentive enough to get someone to not only do what you want, but to continue to improve how they are doing it in order to continue to receive that pay check and be able to provide for their family. An additional incentive for improvement and honing of their leadership skills is career advancement and increased income as their salaries rise with their increased abilities, effectiveness, and efficiency.

The question of the nature of leadership become even more interesting and confusing when you realize that many senior pastors do not feel that they have the gift of leadership.<sup>76</sup> So if so many do not feel that they have the gift or ability to provide quality, Biblical leadership then how does this affect the nature of developing leaders in the first place?

It stands to reason that if the ones who are primarily responsible for developing leaders do not feel adequate enough to do just that, they will not be fulfilling this responsibility as well as they could or should. This creates an environment of stress and pressure and can easily lead to an unhealthy nature of developing leaders. There simply must be a better preparation for those

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<sup>76</sup> Henry Blackaby, and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People On to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2001), 31.

who are charged with growing leaders so that they can do their job better in the first place. Also, so that can help to develop the next generation of leaders, and so that there can be a lesser incident of contagious church conflict.

The foundation must be laid that God will provide what is necessary in the life of the leader if they are willing to seek His face and put the effort into the task before them. I Peter 5:10 “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.”

If the leader in the church, or even in a secular organization who is a believer would treat the issue of developing leaders with the perspective that is given by the Blackabys in their book *Spiritual Leadership* then there would naturally be a less stressful approach when it is realized that the issue of developing leaders is not one of personal talent, ability, or even popularity, but rather a spiritual issue whose outcome is ultimately to be entrusted to the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>77</sup>

With this perspective then it would easily be seen that the nature of developing leaders takes on a spiritual dimension instead of anything else. For the Christian it is not simply a matter of desiring to perform better, or achieve a new position, or a title that seems loftier than another. It is a spiritual matter that should center around Christ and all that He has done for us through His work on the cross.

As will be seen in the diagram on the next page, Christ should be the focus or center of everything that is done not only in the believer's general life, but throughout the process of

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<sup>77</sup> Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 9.

developing leaders as well. This diagram was shared at a previous point in this Thesis project, but for the purpose of discussion at this point the author felt it prudent to include it once again. Even though for the sake of understanding and the natural flow of the diagram there is a start and finish, the believer never really finishes this process until they see Jesus face to face. The process of developing leaders as well as developing one's own leadership abilities is one that continues throughout life and will constantly be something that is added to and increased with time, wisdom, and maturity.

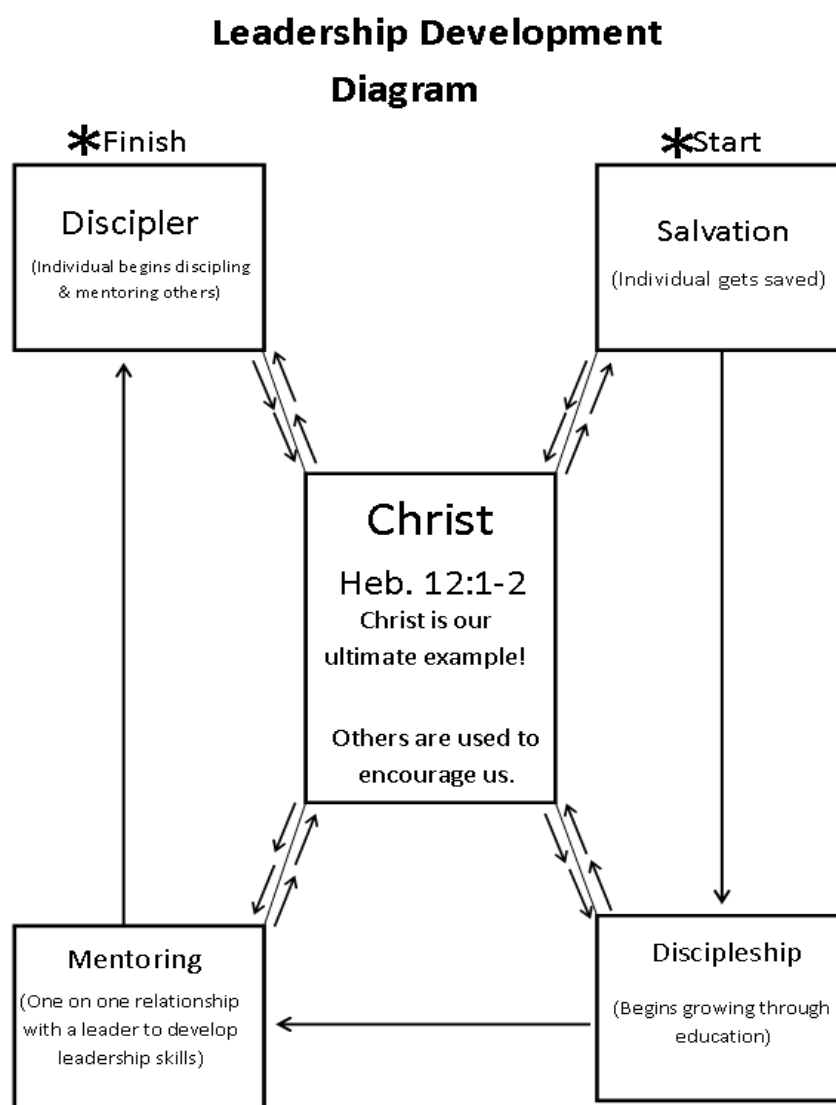


Figure 29, Leadership Development Diagram, designed by the author

### Purpose Of Developing Leaders

What is the purpose of developing leaders? Why is it worth the time and effort it takes to properly help others get to the point where they are able to rise to the challenge and help tackle the proverbial task for a maximum kingdom impact? Aren't leaders born with the ability and giftedness they need to be able to lead in the first place? All valid questions that if answered correctly will help the reader and or researcher come to a better understanding of what the purpose of developing leaders is.

The first question to be examined: Why is it worth the time and effort it takes to properly help others get to the point where they are able to rise to the challenge and help tackle the proverbial task for a maximum kingdom impact?

One good answer is best provided by looking at Lee Iacocca's philosophy of management. He writes "I'll show you how it works. I'm not saying you have to do it my way. But if you don't, you better find something else that produces the same results."<sup>78</sup> In other words, not everyone will do it the same way as you and that is perfectly acceptable. They may be able to think of other avenues to get the task done that you did not think of that are actually more efficient than you ever thought possible. Or perhaps their method is not more efficient, but it is more creative and brings about more desired results than you originally imagined.

Another potential answer to the question is that as something becomes larger, it may take more attention, effort, and energy than one person can give it. Wayne Cordeiro brings light to this perspective when he states "It is a gift to be able to launch an inspiring vision. But unless

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<sup>78</sup> Lee Iacocca and William Novak, *Iacocca: An Autobiography* (New York: Bantam, 2007), 53.

you manage it along the way, it can turn on you, and soon the voracious appetite of the vision consumes you.”<sup>79</sup>

There is only so much one person can handle no matter how talented they are. Superman is not a reality and no human is anywhere near as strong as they probably think they are. That is perhaps the reason we have a clear cut example in scripture of team work. I Corinthians 3:3-8:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

If scripture itself shows us that God uses people in teams then certainly we should realize the need to raise up leaders who are able to help accomplish the Great Commission, guide the church towards overall health, and help navigate through conflict that will arise before it becomes contagious conflict.

The second question that will hopefully contribute to the main question for this section being answered is: Aren't leaders born with the ability and giftedness they need to be able to lead in the first place?

While the author was not able to find any clear cut statistics to agree or disagree with this question it is an interesting fact that a well-known pastor of a mega church who is a renowned leader speaks to this directly. This pastor is someone whose name is recognized on nearly all continents and whose books and writings on leadership are sought after by leaders from all walks of life. This leader is someone who had a handle on the necessity of quality leadership before the

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<sup>79</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading On Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 21.

vast majority of the technology available today was even a dream. Charles Spurgeon stated “The best leadership is acquired, not that which is sired.”<sup>80</sup>

It has been a proven fact for generations that leadership is an ability that can be learned and developed in people as they progress and work at being more effective at leading within their respective sphere of influence. John Maxwell is a well-known proponent for growing leaders and writes about it in multiple books. In his book *Developing The Leaders Around You* he writes “Grow a leader, grow the organization.”<sup>81</sup> It would seem that the argument from these two, and others, is that while there may be some measure of natural ability, everyone is capable of being developed as a leader in order to be a stronger and more effective leader in the long run.

It stands to reason based on the evidence of those with experience in the realm of leadership as well as some common sense that more can be accomplished by a larger number people who are focused on a task than by an individual. In what is seen as a reference to the qualification of pastors, deacons, and overseers in the life of the church scripture addresses the issue of having some training of some kind. I Timothy 3:1-6:

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?; not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

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<sup>80</sup> Larry J. Michael, *Spurgeon On Leadership: Key Insights for Christian Leaders from the Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2003), 24.

<sup>81</sup> John Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You: How to Help Others Reach Their Full Potential* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 4.

God's word itself speaks to the importance of knowing a little bit about what you are doing when it comes to leading within the life of the local church, so that alone gives the veracity necessary to make sure the church as a whole is doing everything we possibly can to make sure that we are developing leaders who are both competent and Biblically sound in everything they do. If this task is being done properly then there will great health and a tremendously reduced occurrence of contagious church conflict.

This all comes together to show that the purpose of developing leaders is no less than to fulfill a Biblical mandate.

### Recruiting

What is recruiting? The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines recruiting as "To supply with new members or employees."<sup>82</sup>

If there is not a steady flow of new people into an organization it stands to reason that growth will not be sustained. If new people are not coming into the church and growing to a point where they are actively looking for more new people come into the church (evangelism) and grow to a point where they are doing the same (discipleship) then the life expectancy of the body of believers is short lived at best. When the church becomes inwardly focused then growth becomes stagnant and death becomes a possibility and even apparent if something different is not done.

The author and his children worked on a project this past season for the first time. They planted a garden and as a result of the effort they put into their little garden they were able to

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<sup>82</sup>"Recruiting," *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd college ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 1035.

harvest tomatoes and squash and even see a pumpkin growing that was ready to be harvest in just a few weeks. But had they never put in the new topsoil with the new seeds then they would have never had the vegetables that were so good when they cooked them for supper after harvesting them. It took some patience, effort, cultivation and elbow grease on their part to be able to reap the benefits. With the work that they put into the project they were able to enjoy those benefits because they followed the steps of developing the garden properly much like the benefits that would be enjoyed in the life of a church if the steps of properly developing leaders are followed.

The same can be said of recruiting new leaders. It takes a little time, effort, patience, but in the end it is certainly worth the energy it takes. When there is a continuous flow of people coming on board to serve in an organization then there is a natural feeling of excitement and hope that is felt by everyone involved. By bringing in new leaders and recruiting them to serve in various capacities you are able to indirectly bring about change. And as Ed Stetzer put it in his book *Comeback Churches*, “change is necessary and change is painful.”<sup>83</sup>

### Enlisting

What is enlisting? The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines enlisting as “To engage the support or cooperation of.”<sup>84</sup>

While on some level it may seem to be very similar to recruiting, there are some minor differences if in no other way but focus. Simply signing someone up to fill a job or hold a title is

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<sup>83</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2007), 176.

<sup>84</sup> “Enlisting,” *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd college ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 455.

not enough. You must get their support if there is going to be any real success in the organization that is seeking to develop the leaders in the first place.

The potential new leaders that are to be developed will accomplish more if they have a desire to take on the challenge ahead of them as opposed to being coerced into something that they are not naturally excited about. Enlisting must include creating a desire in the life and heart of the leaders to join together for the common goal that is being sought after by the church or organization in order for them to be as effective as possible.

If the people who are on board with the mission of the church and have a desire to be there instead of just a feeling of fulfilling an obligation then there will be better team work and more success in the life of the church in question.

### Training

What is training? The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines training as “To make proficient with specialized instruction and practice.”<sup>85</sup>

So from this definition it is easy to ascertain that recruiting and enlisting is not enough. There has to be a process where the potential leaders are being taught how to do their job as effectively and efficiently as possible. Being able to do their job at a minimal level is not good enough; they have to be taught how to do it well.

There must be a system where this happens if the church or any other organization gets off of the ground and continues to thrive for more than just a few years. People have to be taught

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<sup>85</sup> “Training,” *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd college ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 1285.

how to do what it is they have to do or someone or something else will do it better and effectively lessen the impact of what you were trying to accomplish in the first place.

There is a multitude of training tools available in the area of leadership and even more specifically church leadership. There will be a page included at the end of this chapter will a brief list of quality church leadership resources available for anyone who may have the desire to continue to develop their own leadership abilities as well as those of other leaders or potential leaders in the life of the church.

### Developing

What is development? Another look at the *American Heritage Dictionary* reveals this: “To aid in the growth of.”<sup>86</sup>

As we look at the process there is no doubt that recruitment, enlistment, and training are necessary, but development is equally as important if not more so. Once you have gotten the potential leader to take on the responsibility of their respective task you fail them if you do not help them to get better at it as well as learn more skills and abilities that will ultimately make them more comfortable at what they do and perhaps even be able to take on additional tasks down the road. Cross training is a form of development since in training for additional areas you are adding depth to the person and thus allowing them to grow as a leader and contributor to the overall mission of the organization.

A regular time of review and encouragement and even correction if need be is beneficial to help guide the leader towards the overall desired goal of the organization as it pertains to their

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<sup>86</sup> “Development,” *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd college ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 389.

Biblical mandate of reaching people with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A personal involvement in their abilities and ministry will also serve to strengthen the church as a whole.

### Conclusion

Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer write in their book *Perimeter of Light* regarding evangelism that “Culture has changed, including the way people think and arrive at conclusions. People have different goals, attitudes, and reasons for living. The church can’t use yesterday’s methods in today’s changing world and expect to be in ministry tomorrow.”<sup>87</sup>

While these authors are clearly speaking to evangelism and church programs, there is a wealth of caution to be learned from their statement regarding the development of a leader or leadership in general. Those already in church leadership have to get out of the rut of tradition and look for new ways that are effective in preparing more lay people to be all that they should be for the sake of advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ministry will be for effective, more efficient, and simply accomplish more if more people are develop and empowered to fulfill the ministry of the local church. It is not enough, nor is it possible or even Biblical for a select few who are considered professional, paid ministers to try and guide the church on her journey. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the entire membership of the local church should join together and help one another develop into the leaders they have the potential to be.

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<sup>87</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 163.

Additional Leadership Training and Development Resources

*A Master Plan for Leaders: a Biblical Perspective* by Gilbert Peterson ISBN # 9780982859407

*Spiritual Leadership: A Commitment to Excellence for every Believer* by J. Oswald Sanders  
ISBN # 9780802467997

*Biblical Leadership: Develop Church Volunteers* by Kenneth O. Gangel ISBN # 9781929852802

*Doing Church as a team* by Wayne Cordeiro ISBN # 9780830736805

*Developing the leader within You* by John Maxwell ISBN # 9780785281122

*Personal Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High Impact Leaders* by Dave Early ISBN #  
9780899570327

## Summary

Do the local churches mentioned in the Bible still exist today? The most likely answer is no. There are certainly local churches in existence in the areas or cities that were mentioned in the Bible, but the likelihood that any of the specific congregations are still around is quite unlikely. The debate could include the fact that the local churches at that time were house churches or some other facet of church history, that might take debate in a different direction and the perspective of each individual involved in the debate could cause the discussion to last indefinitely. That is not part of the focus of this Thesis Project.

The universal church does still exist and will always exist. Jesus did say that hell itself would not prevail against it. Just because a particular local congregation ceases operation does not mean the kingdom has lost ground, it just means that the inevitability of change has displayed itself once again at the local level.

As long as a local congregation is being fruitful and making a positive impact for the gospel, it should certainly remain open for the business at hand. Once this positive impact has stopped, then the congregation has ceased to meet the definition of a Biblical Church. It would be best for the group of people who are not willing to curtail conflict to close their doors so that either others can come in and use the property to start a new church or so that the supposed church will no longer be seen as a blemish on the influence of the local church in that particular area.

This Thesis project pointed out three reasons why it is necessary for the contagiously conflicted church to close its doors. In the first chapter, the author introduced the concept of actually closing a local “church” if it was a contagiously conflicted church. There was a

definition explaining that a contagiously conflicted church was one that has experienced conflict for generations, stretching over decades that simply does not seem to ever end permanently.

Chapter two defined what church conflict is and how to better understand the issues that arise from this conflict in an effort to move towards resolution before it becomes contagious. It was pointed out that if conflict is handled correctly early on, it will never grow to the level of being contagious.

Chapters three and four are where the author pointed to three reasons for closing a contagiously conflicted church. In chapter three, he listed the first two of the reasons. While we know that the name of Christ is ultimate and that He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, conflict nevertheless casts a negative light on his name in the eyes of the unredeemed. Believers in Jesus Christ should do everything within their power, and even more through the power of the Holy Spirit, to make sure they do not cause anyone who is not yet a Christian to be opposed to knowing more about Jesus because of how they conduct themselves in a community.

In the second half of chapter four, the author listed the second reason for closing a contagiously conflicted church. It simply is because of the negative impression that is left on all local churches in an area of a single conflicted church. It was pointed out that when one church is conflicted at the contagious level, there is a negative light cast on other congregations in the same area and this leads people to stay away from them as well.

The fourth chapter is where the author shared a good deal of personal information regarding his own journey through contagious church conflict, as well as that of survey respondents. It is here that the author provided data that speaks to the negative impact church conflict can have on those who attempt to serve faithfully through vocational ministry. The

author provided responses of real people who represent individuals and families who are forever scarred as a result of church conflict. These responses all speak to the idea that contagiously conflicted church should be closed in order to prevent further harm to other servants of God.

In the fifth and final chapter, the author discussed what could be a solution, if any particular church wanted to put an end to the contagious conflict, in an effort to avoid closing their doors. The premise provided here is that there is not enough proper training of the leadership in local churches today, and that if this was more organized, then as a natural side effect, there would be more people who were aware of how to properly respond to conflict before it ever becomes a contagious issue.

It is the author's hope that this project will in some small way serve as a resource to better understand the impact of contagious church conflict and help to better resolve the issues that arise as a result of its influence.

It is also the author's hope that either he or someone else will take the information included in this project and use it as a launching pad into another dimension of the discussion. The next important question to be researched and answered is "at what point do we call game, set, and match?" At what point does the congregation need to make the decision to close their doors? Or, perhaps is it possible to put together a system or catalog of sorts that "red flags" contagiously conflicted churches so that unsuspecting ministers will know to either avoid them at all costs or to at least enter into the situation with expectation and as much preparation as possible.

Dr. David Wheeler, Professor of Evangelism at *Liberty Theological Seminary* puts it best when he stated in a phone interview with the author on April 24, 2014 "When a church has gone

to the place where normal activity does not included fulfilling or even seeking the Great Commission and the members are no longer able to unit for that goal they have ceased to be a New Testament and it is time to change their ways of close their doors.”

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Appendix A  
Recruitment Emails and Survey Questions

**Recruitment E-mail**

Hello Pastor,

My name is Michael Sanders and I am working on my thesis project at *Liberty University (Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary)* and am seeking help in compiling some research for the purposes of the completion of my project. Your name and e-mail address was provided to me by a mutual friend and colleague. Your participation is entirely voluntary and would prove to be beneficial for the project I am working on, as well as any who would utilize it as a resource in the future.

The title of the thesis project is “*The Case for Closing the Contagiously Conflicted Church: Three reasons why it is necessary*”. My hope for this project is that it will help create and even larger awareness of the potential harm to families as well as communities that conflicted churches stand to cause.

I would ask that you respond at your earliest convenience to this survey (which is attached to this e-mail as a word document) on the effects church conflict has had on your personal life as well as its effect on the community. If at all possible your response is appreciated within one week of receipt of this request. Your participation is appreciated and should you have any questions or comments there are more details available on the attached consent form. Please contact me with any questions prior to completing the survey.

For the kingdom,

Michael P. Sanders

### **Survey Questions**

Survey questions for research project titled “*The Case for Closing the Contagiously Conflicted Church: Three Reasons why it is necessary*”

- 1.) How long have you been in the ministry?
- 2.) How long have you been at your current church?
- 3.) What is your highest level of education?
- 4.) What, if any denomination do you identify with?
- 5.) How many churches have you served in? What were the positions and length of service, size of the memberships, etc.?
- 6.) What is your marital status? Do you have any children?
- 7.) How has your marriage been affected within the churches you have served? How have your children been affected?
- 8.) Have you experienced any serious church conflict during your tenure in ministry?
- 9.) If so, how has the conflict affected your family?
- 10.) If so, how was the church affected?
- 11.) If so, how did it affect your personal health? (physical, emotional, or spiritual)
- 12.) If so, how was the community affected and what was their reaction?
- 13.) If so, how was the general membership affected? (individual impact)
- 14.) What was the organizational structure of the church? (i.e. Pastor-led, Deacon-led, congregation-led, family chapel, etc.)
- 15.) What was the source or sources or perhaps the cause of the conflict?

- 16.) Have you ever left vocational ministry for a period of time as a result of church conflict whether by your own choice or not?
- 17.) Do you have any friends, genuine confidants, or support groups who you talk with on a regular basis? (other pastors, fellowship groups, etc.)
- 18.) Do you have a regular time spent focused on your spiritual health? (prayer time, Bible study, journaling, etc.)
- 19.) Is there anything that could have done to prevent the conflict?
- 20.) In your opinion can the church that experienced conflict be restored to a point of usefulness where they are planted?
- 21.) How many others churches are there in the area where the conflicted church is located?
- 22.) What, if any, background in spiritual formation do you have?
- 23.) How supportive do you feel your denomination was during the times of conflict?  
What, if anything did they do specifically to help you?
- 24.) If you had it to do over again what, if anything would you do differently in handling the conflict or conflicts that you faced?
- 25.) What process did you use to investigate the churches where you served before accepting the position?
- 26.) What advice would you give anyone looking to go into vocational ministry?

## **MICHAEL P. SANDERS**

*Curriculum Vitae – Updated April 8, 2014*

### **EDUCATION**

#### **High School**

Lighthouse Christian Academy, Montgomery, AL graduated 1992

#### **Undergraduate**

*Bachelor of Arts* 2000 Southeastern Bible College,  
Birmingham, AL - Majors in Bible and Pre-Seminary

#### **Postgraduate**

*Doctor of Ministry (ABD)*, in Pastoral Leadership and Management (3.95 GPA)

Liberty Theological Seminary of Liberty University 2014

*Master of Divinity*, in Evangelism and Church Growth (3.00 GPA)

Liberty Theological Seminary of Liberty University 2010

*Master of Arts*, in Evangelism and Church Growth (3.00 GPA)

Liberty Theological Seminary of Liberty University 2009

### **EXPERIENCE**

**October 2013 – Member of Faculty Pool – Liberty University** Lynchburg, VA

- Online Instructor of Undergraduate level Bible courses on a contractual basis as the need arises

**November 2012 – Member of Faculty Pool - Mid-Continent University** Mayfield, KY

- Online Instructor of Undergraduate level Bible courses on a contractual basis as the need arises
- Provide classroom/cohort instruction at satellite locations on an as needed basis

**October 2011 Senior Pastor – Immanuel Baptist Church** Pikeville, KY

- Prepare, Preach and teach relevant, Bible based messages three times a week
- Manage the overall organization known as Immanuel Baptist Church (Staff, Budget, Facilities, etc.)
- Pastoral care (Counseling, Hospital Visitation, Conduct weddings and funerals, etc.)

**August 2009 – September 2011 Pastor New Elkahatchee Baptist Church** Alex City, AL

- Prepare, Preach and teach relevant, Bible based messages three times a week
- Manage the overall organization known as New Elkahatchee Baptist Church (Staff, Budget, Facilities, etc.)
- Pastoral care (Counseling, Hospital Visitation, Conduct weddings and funerals, etc.)

**August 2008 – August 2009 Pastor Old Providence Baptist Church** Hackneyville, AL

- Prepare, Preach and teach relevant, Bible based messages three times a week
- Manage the overall organization known as Old Providence Baptist Church (Staff, Budget, Facilities, etc.)
- Pastoral care (Counseling, Hospital Visitation, Conduct weddings and funerals, etc.)

**March 2002 – July 2008 Pastor Clay First Baptist Church** Clay, AL

- Prepare, Preach and teach relevant, Bible based messages three times a week
- Manage the overall organization known as Clay First Baptist Church (Staff, Budget, Facilities, etc.)
- Pastoral care (Counseling, Hospital Visitation, Conduct weddings and funerals, etc.)

### **OTHER EXPERIENCE**

**January 2013 – Chief Chaplain Pike County Sheriff's Office** Pikeville, KY

- Providing counseling support for the officers and support staff of the Sheriff's Department

***August 1992 – March 2007 Operations and Claims Manager*** Saia, Inc. Birmingham, AL

- Manage the operations of a break bulk freight terminal (HR, Logistics, Timely delivery, etc.)
- Manage facilities, equipment, staff, technology, customer service, and profit/loss viability

**PERSONAL**

Born June 17 1974 in Montgomery, AL

Married June 8, 1996 to the former Christy Parsons. We have three children, all of whom are homeschooled. They are Keegan (12), Briley (8), and Aubrey (3)



The Graduate School at Liberty University

April 19, 2013

Michael P. Sanders

IRB Exemption 1583.041913: The Case for Closing the Contagiously Conflicted Church: Four Reasons Why it is Necessary

Dear Michael,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
  - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
  - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
Professor, IRB Chair  
Counseling

(434) 592-4054



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