RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

The Black Church and the Current Generation:

A Program to Address the Decline of African American Church

Attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina

A Thesis Project Submitted to

the Faculty of the Rawlings School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

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April 2019

Rawlings School of Divinity

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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The Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project Abstract

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Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019
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This study concentrates on issues dealing with the decline of attendance in African American churches. Although long-standing statistics since the Civil Rights Era have always shown the African American Church keeping higher audience percentage than European American churches, the tide has changed, and now African American churches are uncharacteristically declining at a faster rate than usual. Unchurched young adults, particularly African American males, are disproportionately missing in the African American church. The fundamental purpose of this study is to focus specifically on evangelical denomination African American churches in Johnston County, North Carolina by employing quantitative and qualitative research. The survey collected recorded interviews with twenty pastors of African American or multicultural churches. The results of this study suggest several factors contribute to the decline of African American church attendance. Without a doubt, the African American Church has an epidemic attendance problem that has a backdrop of spiritual, social, and economic factors. This report makes recommendations for reversing the dwindling attendance problem.

Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks to my wife Deborah who spent many nights in bed without me throughout the production of this research paper, and yet remained my sturdiest critique and emotional support for which a husband could ask. I am forever indebted to her for being the primary breadwinner for nine consecutive years during my educational career.

I am also grateful for my mentor, Dr. Gregory Faulls, for his generous time in consultation and serving as my expert resource even as he pastored a huge church, taught seminary, and juggled his schedule throughout the many teleconferences, texts, and emails with me. His guidance, drive, and confidence in me invigorated me to finish strong.

Dr. Kevin King, my professor throughout much of my graduate studies, deserves an honorable mention for his tenacity in working with me and simultaneously supporting his son through his doctoral studies and research. Mr. Randy Miller, Graduate & Faculty Research and Instruction Librarian, guided me through the maze of research strategies and procedures, for which I am forever grateful.

Few people inspired me to love people and embark the journey to achieve this academic and pastoral status as the legendary evangelist, church planter, pastor, professor, and author, Dr. David Wheeler. To sit at his feet over the years from undergraduate to doctoral studies and have him sign off on my greatest accomplishment is an honor. To know him is to love him.

Lastly, I dare not fail to acknowledge the late Dr. Charlie Davidson. As my professor and director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, I venture to say the Holy Spirit gave him favor with me as he personally expedited my application package for acceptance into the DMin program before he laid eyes on me and before he closed his eyes.

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Preface

How can this church grow? The project researcher saw this project as an opportunity to satisfy the curiosity of a way to sustain growth in his parish. Since childhood, he witnessed the polarizing growth spurts of the church his father established and pastored; and since God called this author to preach at an early age, the possibility and probability that the church would someday be under his leadership motivated him to prepare. Sure enough on his father's deathbed, he received the directive to take the church and continue with it.

The charge of his father inspired him to investigate the plight of church attendance. This report intends to provide a program for reversing the decline of church growth, particularly in African American churches. The journey of drafting a thesis opened the researcher's eyes to the necessity of being passionate toward winning people to Christ in obedience to the Great Commission.

In his research, he is pursuing pastors to talk about the problem of attendance metamorphosed into a work of prayer, finesse, and rapport. While reading the report, keep in mind that it flows from stating a problem, researching the issue, reporting the results of the research, and concluding with a program for the solution. The research investigator's prayer is that this report will help those who are pastoring as well as those who are aspiring to pastor.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Give them a reason to come, and they will come.

—Dr. Charlie Davidson[1]

The project researcher developed a program to address the decline of African American church attendance as a footstep apropos to obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of the issues involved in church growth on the indigenous or local stratum. The aim is to serve as a pastor's library resource for leading the church toward growth in the categorical context of Johnston County in North Carolina. The program helps pastors appraise current behaviors, systems, stratagems, and use the tools collected through research while factoring in ethnographic experiences and perspectives of the congregation.

Practicing pastors regularly rely on models or mentors to foster their programs. They figure out the best procedures and practices by watching other ministries. The project researcher considered three major research models: Case Study, Action Research, and Program Development.[2] The Program Development Model emerged as the most appropriate to the local needs of Johnston County African American churches. Program development research determines an intervention, which in this case is church attendance, establishes a theological and theoretical basis for intervention, and designs a proposal to address the problem of attendance.

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[1] Lecture notes February 16, 2015. Charlie Davidson, *D.Min Thesis Project Handbook*, Blackboard, DMIN 880 Course. Lynchburg: Liberrty University School of Divinity.

[2] Three research models considered: (1) "Case Study Model" presents one case used to analyze factors and proposes pastoral action to resolve the issue; (2) "Action Research Model" is a group assembly with a leader and each person is a co-researcher assigned a specific task to solve a problem; (3) "Program Development Model" defines a problem, reviews literature, and designs a program or implementation. Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean, and Terry Dwain Robertson. *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 4, 63-34, 45.

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The data collected via this research process demonstrated substantial enough not only for a simple library tool but for a comprehensive program harnessed around pastoral leadership. The Case Study Model came under consideration, but the restriction of a single church study rendered its conclusions invalid for the entire church populace of the county. The Action Research Model constituted a collaborative group partnership; however, its rejection resulted from the researcher's goal to garner pertinent information that only a pastor shares and the liability risk of confidentiality among a local congregation. Furthermore, a team approach rendered as many opinions as participants.

<center>Ministry Context</center>

North Carolina is famous in many aspects. The University of North Carolina is the oldest state university in the country. The Wright Brothers flew the first successful airplane flight in North Carolina, and state museums and state symphonies originated in North Carolina. Nestled near the center of the state is Johnston County. Johnston is home to twenty-seven industries and eleven towns. It enjoys growth from its proximity to the capital city, Raleigh, and the Research Triangle Park. The abundance of family farm conversions to subdivisions and the construction of major thoroughfares contributed to the growth trend that boosted the population at a 40 percent growth rate for the decade between 1990 and 2000.[3] As recent as December 30, 2016, The Johnston County Report, a Smithfield, NC newspaper reported the county added thirty-four major subdivisions in the year 2016. The United Census Bureau considered towns with a population of 10,000 or more ranked Johnston County 83rd of the top 100 fastest growing

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[3] Johnston County Government, "Historical Census Data," 2018, accessed February 9, 2018, http://www.johnstonnc.com/mainpage.cfm?category_level_id=654.

counties in the nation.[4] In 2017 Johnston County became the fastest growing county in North

Carolina.[5]

      With this accelerated and steady populace growth, the manifestation of proportionate

growth in the local church loomed high as a foregone conclusion. The antithesis of that

hypothesis revealed that membership declined from 46 percent of the population in 1990 to 36

percent in 2010 during the same period of unprecedented general population growth.[6]

      An in-depth investigation of causation yields interesting results. Migration makes up the

greater portion of the impressive growth experience in Johnston County. Northerners, lured by a

warmer climate, find the area to be in moderation to the extreme winter temperatures of the

North and the extreme summer temperature of the Deep South. For baby boomers and aging

Generation Xers, the change in climate can be a health benefit. Other factors influence the

phenomenal growth experienced for the past two decades in Johnston County. The availability

of real estate earlier mentioned from the diversion of family farmlands develops into a

subdivision as the children of these inheritances sell and move into the surrounding technology-

enriched environment. Many people prefer suburb living to municipalities, coupled with the

excellent universities nearby such as NC State, Duke, and UNC, which makes Johnston County

attractive. An added convenience is the modern thoroughfare and branches of U.S. Highways I-

40, I-95, and I-70 that makes commute times very reasonable and worth the drive into suburban

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[4] United States Census Bureau, "American FactFinder," March 2017, accessed February 12, 2018, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk.

[5] Johnston County Government, "New Resident Information," June 9, 2017, accessed February 12, 2018, http://www.johnstonnc.com/content.cfm?id=69.

[6] Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, "U.S. Religion Census 1952 to 2010," 2018, accessed February 12, 2018, http://www.usreligioncensus.org/compare.php.

Johnston County. Yet, with all these positive features of Johnston County, the growth presents a

challenge for the church.

During a ten-year period from 2005 to 2015, Johnston County grew by 41,243 new

citizens that equated to a 29 percent increase.[7] The county, being in the Bible Belt, is true to

form and holds church in high esteem compared to the urbanites who are less adherent to church

culture. That means an influx of non-church goers drops the percentage rate of church

attendance. The clarion call to the church, more than ever, is to evangelize and execute outreach.

The Asian migration into the county experienced a 277 percent increase.[8] Hispanics population

rival the African American population. Likewise, a need for reaching targeted groups exists. The

new demographics of the county strikes at the core of the familial nature of the churches in that

they are a spiritual family, but also biologically connected and a close-knit fellowship exists

almost unaware to the exclusion of outsiders.

The prospect of fulfilling the Great Commission becomes dimmed by a lack of adaptation

to foster inclusion and assimilation into the church. Some churches preferred to maintain the

status quo, which led to stunted growth and sometimes decline. Obviously, when two cultures

meet, one of laid-back Southern born and bred, Bible-loving family and another of energetic,

movers and shakers, a meeting of the minds is in order; that is, recognizing societal changes and

reevaluating the purpose and values of the church body. However, statistics reflect that some

churches split over the issue of redefining its mission. As a corollary, dissidents started new

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[7] Triangle Council of Governments, "Welcome to Triange J Council of Governments and North Carolina's Region J," accessed February 12, 2018, http://www.tjcog.org.

[8] Johnston County Government, "Historical Census Data," 2018, accessed February 9, 2018, http://www.johnstonnc.com/mainpage.cfm?category_level_id=654.

churches that forsook the traditional fellowship-oriented church, which comprised mostly blood- or marriage-related members. Their new focus most often involved outreach.[9]

By way of ministry context for this project, the researcher fixated on addressing the decline of church attendance with the pastors of African American or multicultural congregations. The program becomes an opportunity to correlate church attendance with contemporary experiences of the pastor with his congregation. An explicit statement of the problem developed the framework clarity and added focus to the project.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned earlier, the numerous factors of changing demographics affected the attendance problem in Johnston County churches. Johnston County is a rural county, which by historical data has a lower attendance than municipalities. The African American church faces the same dilemma compounded with special issues of its own.

The critical problem for the African American church is the accelerated decline of church attendance. Congregants appear to be missing in general. Studies reveal 78 percent of the African American populace claim church membership but admit to attending church once in the last six months.[10] The African American church is still a worthwhile force in the community; however, its effect is diminishing. Nationwide, 32 percent of the African American community is reported unchurched. By European American church standards, this figure is exceptional

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[9] Kelton F. Hinton, *Developing a Pastor's Resource for Church Growth in the Johnston Baptist Association.* Dissertation (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2015), 7-8.

[10] Eric C. Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 382.

being that their statistics reflect 45 percent as unchurched.[11] For the black community, the

unchurched rate is staggering given its historical religious status in the African American sector

and is creating an unflattering snowball effect for the community. The Pew Research Center

reports with no equivocation that historically black Protestants account for a modest 12 percent

of North Carolina's church population. Of that figure, Baby Boomers comprise 37 percent,

Generation X consists of 27 percent, and Millennials include 15 percent. A sad commentary

decries the inability of the black church to attract other races. European Americans make up 5

percent of the African American Church and Asians less than 1 percent.[12] If the current trend

continues, the future of the historically black protestant churches appears ominous in North

Carolina.

The African American church is becoming the missing force for morals in its community.

In the past, it enjoyed the reputation of being a positive influence for good in the lives of African

Americans and Hispanics. Stereotyping is not the issue; it is a fact that church adherents are

more apt to marry before bringing children into the world and church members tend to enjoy

better relationships. Of course, many non-church goers enjoy wonderful relationships, and some

churchgoers have deplorable relationships. The African American church is not the remedy for

immoral behavior, but because of its strong presence as a center of conscience through the

pastor's preaching and teaching, and fellowship of its parishioners; the public "expect religion to

foster adherence to the code of decency among African Americans and Latinos in the United

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[11] Donald R. Barbera, *African American and Not Baptist* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2003), 27.

[12] Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study,* 2019. accessed January 23, 2019,
http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/north-carolina/.

States."[13] Johnston County black churches lack indigenous data because of insufficient

resources to track statistics within their denominations according to the US Census Bureau;

Chapter 3 illuminates the subject more.[14]

Upon closer observation, startling revelations take shape. One of the most significant

problems contributing to the decline of African American church attendance is the recent and

notable substantial decline in the number of men attending church. This trend happens to occur

in the general population of churches. Even, the nationally known men's ministry, Promise

Keepers that once crammed arenas can barely fill church sanctuaries and hotel conference rooms.

"Ethnic and overseas churches report gender gaps as high as 10 to 1."[15] This kind of epidemic is

right around the corner if the church ignores the warnings. Eric Lincoln writes: "Any casual

observer of a Sunday worship service in the typical black church is immediately struck by the

predominance of female members….Between 66 to 80 percent of its membership is usually

composed of women."[16] In fairness to North Carolina, the ratio of men to women in the church

is 4:6 (67 percent) or 4 men to every 6 women, which is better than national polls surveys of 1:3

ratios of men to women.[17] Reasons, some unappealing, develop later in this report for the

absence of men. On a more positive note, past and present trends show that black men with

talent and skills use the church as a platform for propelling themselves into the world of music

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[13] W. Bradford Wilcox and Nicholas H. Wolfing, *Soul Mates: Religion, Sex, Love, and Marriage among African Americans and Latinos* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), Preface.

[14] *U.S. Religion Census 2010: Summary Findings.* May 1, 2012. http://www.usreligioncensus.org/press_release/ACP%2020120501.pdf.

[15] David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), xi-xii.

[16] Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 304.

[17] Pew Research, "Religious Landscape"

and entertainment. However, relinquishing the church, for any augmentation is never a clever idea considering the priority of obedience to Scripture and the problems engendered by scanty church attendance.

Another fundamental problem affecting the decline of church growth is income. Limited income produces a diminishing effect on the edifice and quality of leadership. Churches without proper building maintenance will eventually deteriorate. In today's culture, churches on the forefront find it necessary to not only maintain but to remodel and upgrade. The average rural church income of 619 churches examined was between $10,000 and $15,000 annually.[18] With this kind of revenue, churches can barely compensate the minister who generally is mandated to be bi-vocational, which gives him less time to prepare appealing, substantial sermons. Such a church usually cannot afford a college-educated pastor. Lack of finances limits the church's ability to be the beneficiary of optimal shepherding. Obviously, an unattractive structure and uninspired worship services can affect member attendance and retention. As income affects attendance, other complications can do the same.

Spiritual weakness in the church, precipitated by many factors including the performance of ministers as stated earlier is another cause of declining church attendance. Spiritual weakness may seem to be an abstract term, but it means proclaiming a concept while missing in practice. For instance, "CNN Gallop poll found that 30 percent of American adults, including blacks, classified themselves as spiritual, but were not interested in attending church."[19] Some affluent

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[18] Ibid., 103.

[19] Barbera, *African American,* 27-28.

African Americans tend to renege on the Christian ethics lesson of 1 Corinthians on love and turn their backs on disadvantaged people of the community, and many cease attending church. Enough said on this subject for now, due to the urgency of the next issue.

Culture change is slow and often unrecognizable until it is too late. Failure to recognize and adjust is a major dilemma of declining churches. Culture change modifies concepts and behavior of society. Some are good, and some are bad for Christians. In relation to the African American church, most denominations limited the roles of women to singing in the choir and ushering, cooking, and serving in the missionary society. "As some white male ministers began to retreat in the face of the emerging power of the women's movement in the seminary and church, black clergymen laughed at white men's inability to keep women in their place."[20] Today African American churches are relaxing their stance, and more women are entering the clergy. It can ill-afford to lose women who in the general population "now make up 60 percent of the church population and that the highest attendance rate comes from the population 50 and older."[21] The next problem presents a quandary.

The length of worship service is an area that warrants more study. Millennials and Generation Xers demonstrates short attention span as the new norm. If outreach is to occur for this sector, the church's acceptance of their preferences for shorter services is in order. The dilemma comes from the observation of statistics that show Pentecostals are experiencing robust growth despite long services. Barbera suggests that part of the reason is due to the African American tradition of loving music, fellowship, and style. However, the average age of the

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[20] James H. Cone, *For My People: African American Theology and the African American Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 132.

[21] Barbera, *African American*, 32.

congregation is forty, which may account for the acceptance of lengthy service.[22] Still, other

factors contribute to the decline of church attendance.

The missing African American male presents a pending crisis; the missing father crosses

the problematic threshold for the family and the church. It is one thing to disenfranchise oneself,

but to disenfranchise two individuals (one being a child) is unfair and selfish. The implication of

a missing father is an abandoned child that lacks a role model for spiritual and moral guidance.

Such is the case when a father abandons his child in the church or the home. The mother is

overwhelmed as a single parent and forced to execute the roles of a mother and a father to the

best of her ability. Though countless children grow up to tell their survival story, the cost is high

for the mother and the child. The situation for such a predicament occurs in four scenarios:

infidelity in the home, substance abuse, unemployment, and criminal behavior. In all of these

cases, the male spouse is more likely to terminate the marital relationship and abandon the

family. Try as mothers might, they cannot replace the image of a male figure in the eyes of

children that observes their Dad worshipping in church. The image brands an indelible mark in

their eyes of the importance of the church. The missing father starts a domino effect.

The missing father generates the next critical crisis for the church, the missing youth. As

mothers faithfully take their children to church to instill moral and Christian values, the effort

dissipates before their eyes at a certain point. Particularly, when the boys reach adolescence and

compulsion to go to church fails. The influence of their environment outside the home is too

great, and they ultimately abandon the church resulting in the possibility of an entire generation

missing from the African American church. The same results occur when the mother drops out

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[22] Ibid., 32.

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of the picture due to substance abuse and collaborating with indecent society. [23] These

conditions with the youth can lead to yet another problem in the African American church.

Homophobia is the last critical problem in this study that impacts the decline of

attendance in black churches. Once again, the discussion is at the center of African American

men who, in addition to the previously mentioned conditions, often identify as gay. The

response from the church is either a sermonic rebuke from the pulpit or complete oversight of

their presence. Boyd recalled a worship service that the pastor challenged "real men, not faggots

or sissies" to confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Instead of pronouncing healing words, he

uttered inflammatory words that drive away gay men. The Gospel compels respect of persons as

part of Christian comportment regardless of the sin. Boyd argues "rather than helping, this type

of language enlarges the gulf, making it impossible for homosexuals and heterosexuals to hear

and see each other across their ideological divides."[24] Collins defined homophobia as

"unreasonable fear or antipathy toward homosexuals."[25] Homophobia is the "elephant in the

room," and yet the average church would deny such an accusation because of being unconscious

of the church's disposition. Respectfully, few pastors blatantly preach against the lifestyle of gay

people, which this report refers to as lesbians, gay people, bisexuals, and transsexuals (LGBT),

but their deafening silence speaks volumes about the church's unwillingness to provide tools and

support for gays. Its community not only needs spiritual support but physical support as well.

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[23] Alford A. Young, Jr., *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Changes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeston University Press, 2004), 79.

[24] Stacy C. Boyd, *Black Men Worshipping: Intersecting Anxieties of Race, Gender, and Christian Embodiment* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan), 94.

[25] Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition, "homophobia," accessed February 15, 2018, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/homophobia?s=t.

Unfortunately, HIV is ravaging black families since the majority of HIV infections are located in the African American community. "The rate of new HIV infections for black men was six times as high as that of white men, nearly three times that of Hispanic/Latino men, and twice that of black women."[26] The church cannot afford to be silent on the issue of same-sex activity. To be clear, the issue is not to oblige as if the LGBT community were handicapped and deserved special accommodations of positions in the church. It means a ministry of the Gospel in a confrontive, though caring fashion. A ministry where the Gospel is preached and the calling for repentance of sin but all with compassion and respect for the individual. All this should be done with helpful counsel and human support. Acts of kindness such as providing transportation and visits to those who are ill. The LGBT community affect church decline more than one realizes. If the African American men are either gay, in prison, or on drugs as many purport, then the LGBT community claims quite a number of them. They already bear an unfair share of prejudice from society, but if the church further marginalizes them, they negate the opportunity even to engage gay people. This is, unfortunately, the case with regular church attendance of African American men, particularly in the South, where sexual prejudgment is a deeply set part of the church culture. As such, the recent move of same-sex activists coming out of the closet and the immediate backlash or exclusion logically discourages church attendance. Moving forward, the identification of the above issues warranted a purpose for the project.

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[26] Anthony Stanford, "Homophobia in the Black Church: How Faith Politics, and Fear Divide the Black Community," (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013), 92.

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Statement of the Purpose

The overall principle of this project is that the church as the body of Christ is a living organism and as such is innately a creation of growth.[27] With this concern, the researcher intends to investigate the growth regression of churches and, in particular, the Black Church. This project examines the African American church to determine if the same accelerated decline of church attendance is true despite the prolific population growth in Johnston County. The project researcher's interest stems from his experience with a pastor of declining health in a Johnston County church that he founded. On his deathbed, the aged warrior bequeathed the edifice to the researcher. The independent church flourished during the first twenty years of the founding pastor and plateaued for the next ten years. The last ten years encompassed a steady decline until his demise. In retrospect, the founder and pastor of the church laid a textbook foundation via a five-year church plant in his home. The success of the slow but steady growth during the founder's young adult life and middle age plateaued at a membership of 150 on the roll with 75 regular attendees. After his heavenly transition, a few years ago, the church split along the generational line. The millennials left to plant another church, and the baby boomers remained. Mainly through age attrition, the attendance is subsequently down to less than 50. Although disunion exacerbated the degeneration of his church, the researcher is on a mission to investigate the drastic decline of black church attendance and discover avenues for revitalization.

The project researcher's objective is to interview twenty pastors in Johnston County to ascertain if they have experienced trends in growth, plateau or decline in attendance. To obtain

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[27] Ephesians 4:11-16. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version Bible.

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this kind of information, the researcher will interview pastors with five years of experience. Pastors with aggregates of five-year experience are acceptable since they are prime sources for sharing their experiences from one church to another. Their opinion of the factors that precipitated the trend of growth, plateau, or decline will be asked. What measures to increase attendance have they used will be asked. These questions are important for the researcher as well as the pastor as it gives the researcher the sought-after information and causes the pastor to ruminate on his career and performance at the church.

Another purpose of the research is to address the missing men and youth in the church. The church once stood as a force for advocating morals in the community. With the influx of newcomers from all levels of society including immigrants, undocumented immigrants and their children, known as "dreamers," the church is needed more than ever. The interview will cover the topic of the African American church's past role as being the community center in the past and seek to understand why it is no longer true or appears to be fading. In 2014, 32 percent of black Protestant millennials and Generation Xers both in the age bracket of 30-49 attended church compared to 40 percent in 2007 in North Carolina. Of that same period, late Generation Xers and baby boomers both in the age bracket of 50-64, 35 percent attended in 2007 compared to 30 percent in 2014.[28] Simply stated, the overall generational composition of black churches is changing because of the decreasing number of young families. The gender composition indicates 60 percent black women and 40 percent black men attend historically black Protestant churches in North Carolina.[29]

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[28] Pew Research, *Religious Landscape*.

[29] Ibid.

The purposes and objectives parallel the problem, obviously. The interview focuses on a positive note when the conversation mentions the five-fold ministry of the church—fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry to the needs, and evangelism. The objective is to focus on the impoverished for outreach and the black men who are disappearing from the church scene. The pastors are asked their strongest suit and their weakest, which is a good lead-in for candor. Another excellent question relates to the pastor's opinion of what the average unchurched African American would describe the pastor's ministry at the church and whether he is well known or unknown in the community. Pastors realize that the church assumes the role of beacon in a community and hopefully a fire of zeal will encourage the pastor to consider reaching out to the public arena prayerfully.

To address the problem of spiritual weakness in the church, the objective of the researcher's interview as intervention is to query the pastors regarding their members. As mentioned earlier, sometimes members appear to be Christian in name, but not in practice, which can be a reflection on the pastor. The interview enlists the pastors for their thoughts on the member's thoughts toward them. If pastors cannot answer the question well, it is a sign of a strained or unfamiliar relationship between them.

Relative to the problem of a change in culture, the interview fixates on the pastors' inclination to invite visitors into the membership. Pastors are asked the percentage of people who come as visitors, regular attendees, or members and what steps they take to offer them to be part of the church family. The objective is to gather the statistics for research and intervene in the affairs of the church by directing attention to pastors' responsibility of not only serving the flock but seeking for the lost. One of the questions queries the pastors' sensitivity to the assimilation of Generation X and youth visitors. It was significant to know if they were

welcoming churches for assimilation or would the prospect encounter cliques in the church. This segment of the interview questions aimed at the inclusion of not only all age groups but genders and non-genders. Concerning the critical need for church growth, the project researcher recalls simple truths of his uneducated, spiritually charged predecessor, "You cannot clean a fish until you catch him."

The final objective of the research project solicited the contribution of over one hundred years of accumulated experience among the targeted pastors. Listening and garnering information and advice from them equated to tapping into a reservoir of knowledge and experience, rich with practical and engaging conversation unique to each of their settings. The joint intervention with them culminated in a positive statement of the purpose of the project, which amounted to connecting the dots of the problems of church decline to answers for the cause, prevention, and cure. Aside from understanding the purpose of the investigative report, the revelation of another preliminary requires due diligence from the researcher to the reader.

Basic Assumptions

A basic understanding that undergirds the thinking of the project researcher affects vitally the writings, which he expresses as his framework, assumptions, presuppositions, or worldview. That means the researcher's basic assumptions affect the context of the report. However, the investigation is objective of discovering the solution to the problem of church decline. As stated earlier, it is a collaboration and intervention with those in the field who perform the task of shepherding God's people day in and day out. The researcher avoids ideas to the problem and seeks a precise answer to the problem from authoritative sources. To be objective, the researcher must be knowledgeable of the issue, and from there add more facts, not conjecture. The beginning of the researcher's investigative report reflects facts, data, and information. At that

point, parts of this report may appear to be a collection of facts, but the work is just beginning. The goal is not to fight other positions, or become polemical, but to qualify the research by interpreting the answers from the field, drawing upon skills of observation and analysis. The researcher's conclusions is not a sermon but are the decisive results of the study; that is, the extent of this investigative report is moving the academic research from the classroom to the field.[30] The following basic assumptions require no justification and assume general acceptance of the theological discipline.

The project researcher from a personal standpoint assumed a devotion of extended hours in the field. He knew voluminous hours had to be spent on the ground, collecting wide-ranging data, and laboring over field issues of trying to gain access, rapport, and an "insider" perspective. He presumed he had to participate in the multifaceted, laborious procedure of data analysis. The colossal chore of categorization through massive amounts of information and distilling them to a few themes were expected. The researcher assumed a solitary, inaccessible time of stress and contemplative data study. He expected a thought-provoking task, especially because the records consisted of intricate texts, graphs, and images. Since the plight of African Americans involves so many factors, he assumed participation in the form of social and human science research was inevitable and that negative judgment from others might be perceived when the study is completed.[31]

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[30] Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 2-7.

[31] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches,* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2013), 49.

Another basic assumption of the researcher is that the readers are engaged in or have an interest in ministerial leadership. They possess a progressive understanding of the nature and purposes of ministry to the point that they refuse complacency as a position in doing ministry for God. They desire to enhance their proficiencies in pastoral and ministerial skills, and to convert the dimensions of those proficiencies into the theologically reflective or insightful practice of ministry, as well as to recognize there is a price for ministry if they are to maintain continued growth and spiritual maturity. The researcher assumes the reader approves of a doctoral-level project that investigates and reports anonymously the nature and the practice of ministry in the field and that the reader is confident that the project has been undergirded by sound theological foundations that his academic peers will safeguard; the reader will find the practice of ministry in the research judged by professional standards and has the good potential for application.[32]

Bear in mind that the project researcher's place of beginning is within the scope of his pastorate at his church as the inspiration for the project. The assumption is that the reader needs no credential verification and is comfortable with the claim of being a pastoral peer who empathizes and interconnects to the plight of other pastors. The researcher will not set out to prove his church connects the dots and holds the prize for navigating through the maze and achieving the healthiest church trophy. Rather, the assumption is that the researcher in his ministry identifies with the problems set out to investigate and is an active learning curve participant. He assumes that "problems do not exist in isolation but are part of a complex network."[33] The condition under which this study occurs in the researcher's setting prevails

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[32] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), xvii.

[33] Ibid., 16.

upon him to assume that other pastors besides himself are thinking critically about the dilemma of church attendance. He contends that the parishioners deserve to be part of a church that they feel proud to be associated with and feel comfortable inviting their co-workers, school peers, and neighbors to attend their church. A hush is not the anticipated response when the pastor inquires who invited a friend to be their special guest to the service. Despite being called into the ministry as an adolescent and receiving seminary training, the researcher's philosophy of excelling in achievements prompted him to return to school once his pastoral appointment to the church became effective. Although the Master of Divinity degree is under the researcher's belt, he calls upon himself to undertake the quest to investigate by every means at his disposal the hindrances contributing to the prevention of growth of the church. And he calls upon the reader to assume not the finality of his findings, for the problem of church attendance is systemic and requires more research.

Beyond the scope of the researcher's ministry context, the study's presupposition embraces the notion that colleagues in leadership ministries will react favorably to the prospect of church growth. It presupposes the response might not be of high importance to some communities depending upon cultural frames. Within their framework, certain rituals and traditions maintain high esteem and new ventures, even growth, might be perceived as a threat. For example, some communities regard the sacredness of the church family network as preeminent and will resist all attempts to penetrate the zone. The study warrants a chance for evaluation regardless of its priority rank. At some point even on a low- scale priority, reality sets in of the unmistakable truth of attrition and the resourcefulness of this project will welcome the subsequent assessment of the researcher's study.

Definition of Terms

ACP - Annual Church Profile

Applied Research - A methodology of research appropriated to procure a solution to a specific problem of an individual or group. In this case a response to church attendance decline.

BSCNC - Baptist State Convention of North Carolina

Declining church - a church that decreased in worship attendance during a pastor's tenure

Delimitations - refers to narrowing the scope of the project to focus only on selected aspects, subjects, and level of sophistication.

Growing church - a church that averaged an annual increase in worship attendance by 2 percent or more during the pastor's tenure.

Intervention - the collaboration of the researcher and pastor to bring change in the church

Investigator/project researcher/researcher – terms used interchangeably to denote the author of the research study

JBA - Johnston Baptist Association

JDMBA – Johnston District Missionary Baptist Association

Limitations - potential weaknesses in the research project beyond the control of the researcher.

Plateaued church - a church that remained constant in attendance with a two percent plus or minus variation during the pastor's tenure.

Qualitative research - a study of things to understand why and how a problem exists in their natural settings (i.e., church).

Quantitative research - a study that quantifies the extent of a problem by data or statistics.

Revitalized church - a church that moved from a history of at last three consecutive years of decline in worship attendance to a phase of growth.

SBC - Southern Baptist Convention

Unchurched - a term used to describe persons who are not active participants in any local religious body.

Delimitations

The project researcher elected to set boundaries to the research. Boundaries were set to intercept expansive overreach of the topic that could circumvent a proper investigation of the purpose of the project. For example, instead of a general investigation on the churches of America, the ultimate narrow focus comprises the churches of Johnston County, North Carolina. Another example is the subject of dwindling church attendance that is prevalent in the church body across America, yet the researcher concentrated the efforts on people of color, which is a term used interchangeably for African Americans, blacks, and multi-cultures. The researcher identifies with this group and shares a deep passion for the thriving of the Gospel in that community since the latest statistics show that black church attendance is plummeting faster than any other group.

Another area of "delimitation" concerns areas of the applied research in the community.[34] The intervention process, conducted via the interviews with pastors, excluded participation from the congregation due to the objective of that phase of the project being to gather profiles of the church from administrative heads, which the pastors represented. An investigation among church attendees would thwart the focus resulting in data collection as varied as the number of

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[34] "Delimitation" refers to narrowing the scope of the project to focus only on selected aspects, subjects, and level of sophistication.

subjects/participants. The quantitative research was limited to research gathered from books, journals, and the internet; these sources offered correlation, but not causation.

Limitations

While the researcher places high confidence in the validity and truthfulness of the facts presented in the research project, he acknowledges certain limitations. First, qualitative studies rely heavily on the veracity of subjects/participants. That said, experienced investigators discovered that participants are more optimistic and might embellish their statements. This determination includes statistics on attendance, accomplishments, or failures. This breakdown to be completely open means the possibility of skewed data by 5 to 10 percentage points in favor of the interviewee. The leadership has an interest in presenting their worshipers or their distinctiveness from a positive perspective.[35]

In addition to the limitation of the degree of veracity of the subject interviews, limited data exist on the precise size of black congregations in Johnston County. The researcher's level of authority from the Internal Review Board of Liberty University did not include obtaining permission to gain access to denominational records. The project investigator relied upon data published by public information sources on the Internet and websites. As a result of many denominations being segregated still, much of the church data available exclude African American churches. In reference to research data, the researcher limits the reliability to that of the original source.

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[35] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 21.

Detailed Outline of Project

Chapter 1: Introduction

"The Black Church and the Current Generation: A Program to Address the Decline of African American Church Attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina," describes the ministry context of the researcher initially. After that, the project researcher presents the problem of attendance that generates the purpose of the investigation. He extends disclaimers to the scope of unfamiliarity and negations in the form of basic assumptions, definitions, delimitations, and limitations.

Chapter 2: Review of Precedent Literature

The researcher constructs a theological and theoretical framework for the basis of the project intervention. The theological framework supports God's design for the establishment and growth of the church. The theoretical framework outlines the importance of the African American Church and renders systemic factors contributing to its decline and gives solutions. Finally, the two constructs, theology and theory integrate for a solid foundation for justification of exploring the decline and response to the African American church attendance dilemma.

Chapter 3: Project Methodology

The researcher introduces the chapter and proceeds into the format of the project intervention, the description of the participants, description of the project sessions, and discusses the evaluation method to be used. The chapter further details protocol for pastoral sessions, the process for choosing participants, and presents the objectives of the project intervention. The evaluation method discloses the procedure for collecting and interpreting data.

Chapter 4: Project Results and Analysis

The researcher presents the results, proffers an analysis by category, and evaluates the conclusions. The analysis speaks to church attendance trends, healthy church traits and much more. His analysis unfolds from three perspectives: Pastor Data, Researcher Data, and Outside Expert Data. Following the analysis, a parallel discussion of each of the above perspectives forms the basis of the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The researcher addresses his hypothesis for the project and offers interpretations of the entire project. He refers to the trustworthiness, significance, and implications of the study. In this concluding chapter, the author presents his recommendations as a response to the Black Church attendance problem. As a parting thought, he shares the significance of the study on a personal level and suggests areas of further study.

Summary

One must note that as the first leg of this journey began, the researcher apprised the reader of the context of the research that is born from personal aspirations and concerns. He made a case for the problem of church attendance and the qualification for its research. Furthermore, he established the legitimacy of his purpose, disclosed his basic assumptions, delimitations, limitations and the directions of the reach project for readers consideration.

Chapter 2

Review of Precedent Literature

The researcher questions the cause and effect of dwindling church attendance in black churches. The legitimate interest stems from his role as pastor and a desire to search for answers. As a result, church ministry, especially pastoral leadership becomes the beneficiary of the research project. Ministry used the Bible as its foundation; therefore, the foundation of this research project is the Bible and theology. This research commences with a problem that generates a question. The "why" of the issue develops into a theory for the researcher to investigate. Because the subject matter is about human aspects, the study delves into the social sciences that branch into anthropology, sociology, history, economics, psychology, geography, and education. Research protocol requires a theory before engagement; therefore, the project researcher hypothesizes that the fundamental reason for the diminishing attendance in African American churches in Johnston County relates to leadership. Substantiating such postulation requires theoretical research of relevant literature. However, as stated earlier, the project is theological and precipitates biblical authority before proceeding into the academic facets.

Theological Foundation

The project researcher intends to construct a church model from the theology of the Trinity in which God manifests himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[36] In basic terms, God is

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[36] Theological outline inspired from Bert Reynolds, "Deep Calls to Deep: Equipping Teachers for Facilitating Classes on Spiritual Disciplines in the Chenal Valley Church of Christ." *TREN Dissertations.* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, January 2006). Tim Sensing, Qualitative Research, 25.

one in divine nature, yet triune with three unique and equal "persons."[37] A more profound, often

overlooked revelation is the operation of the Trinity in the history of humanity. Saucy said it

best, "The transcendent God acts personally in history to redeem and share himself with his

creatures."[38] In other words, the Trinity demonstrated intervention into civilization since its

inception according to biblical Old Testament (OT) history records. The plural form of God,

Elohim reveals the conversation of the Godhead in the statement, "Let us make man in our image

. . ."[39] and "Come let Us go down and there confuse their language . . ."[40] This biblical

foundation attests to the communal nature of the Trinity in creation, which, moreover affirms the

co-op nature predicated to the church.

Lest a rebuttal due to the absence of evidence of action from God the Son or God the

Holy Spirit in the OT, God's dialogue with Job during his afflictions in Job 38-41 substantiates

intervention of the Trinity. Such occurrences in biblical history are known as theophanies

defined as deity appearing to humans. Some scholars venture as far as to identify such

phenomena as belonging to the Son; however, no explicit evidence exists, but John makes the

case that the role of the Son, though equal in essence, was to do the will of the Father and operate

as his mouthpiece.[41] Theophanies are a distinct appearance from that of angel visits as in the

account of the birth of Christ in the book of Matthew. The Bible uses specific terms as "God,"

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[37] Persons in this context refers to the triune relationship between the Godhead described in abstract terms as love and unity without the limitations of humans. R. L Saucy, "God, Doctrine Of." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology,* ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Academic, 2001), 502.

[38] Ibid., 503.

[39] Genesis 1:26

[40] Genesis 11:7.

[41] John 1:1-2, 5:30.

or the "Angel of the Lord," which denotes the appearance of a member of the Trinity rather than "angels." Hebrew text in the OT consistently used *Yahweh*, and some manuscripts use *Eloah* to point out God's intervention in human history, particularly in Job for instance.[42] Despite varying viewpoints, the finding of God's advent in history holds true in the Psalms of David where during his anguish in battle David has the presence of mind to witness God's appearance that caused a glowing fire, and the earth to tremble as God destroys the enemy and rescues David.[43] Finally, several other unquestionable theophanies in Exodus goes on record as Moses' encounter with the burning bush and the Angel of the Lord, the pillar of cloud and of fire that led the children of Israel in the wilderness, and Moses' meeting with God on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments.[44] The point is the cooperation of the Trinity advanced creation and biblical/salvific history for the purpose of worship - the ultimate will of God.

With the establishment of the Trinity as a model for the church, the project researcher presents a framework for the church that encapsulates a concept that leads to church growth. The very conception of the Trinity implies the communal relationship of the Godhead, which can be a challenge to explain by analogy. If theologians compare the Trinity to a three-leaf clover, the imagery fails because the leaves can separate; however, the Trinity separates not. If the three forms of water (ice, liquid, and vapor) attempts to characterize the Trinity, it too falls short since only one state exists at the time, whereas the presence of the Trinity is continuous. The triangle portrays well the Trinity because of its three sides. The closest analogy to the Trinity comes

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[42] John H. Walton, *Job: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 2012), 398.

[43] Psalms 18:8-16.

[44] Exodus 3:2-6; Exodus 13:21-22; 19:16-25.

from Willmington who espouses the dimensional example of a book because it has height, width, and length. These components are inseparable and distinct.[45]

The researcher argues for the church to model the Trinity and maintains the future of the church hangs in the balance. Whether the church survives or proliferates depends upon the degree of commitment to the practical, existential principles revealed by the Trinity. Either one (survival or proliferation) requires "*Spiritual Formation Synergy*." This term, coined by the researcher, advocates the interaction of the pastor, church leaders, and members with the Holy Spirit that introduces life and light to the community and produces a total effect that is greater than the sum of the pastor, church leaders, and members. A simple illustration is that of a fire, which requires three ingredients: oxygen, fuel, and heat. Removal of any three components extinguishes the fire. Another analogy is that of the human circulation system. The blood is the vehicle transporting oxygen and nutrients to the body. Similarly, elimination of any three ingredients induces the demise of the body. The point is that the Trinity is a model for how a pastor, church leaders, and the Holy Spirit are to relate. For a church to grow and thrive is to partake in the abundant life of the Trinity that requires spiritual identity with the Trinity on the individual and corporate realms with an understanding of the role of grace and the application of spiritual training. The first aspect is "spiritual synergy."

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[45] Harold Willmington, *Preaching and Teaching the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Lynchburg: Liberty University, 2015), 12.

Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity

Salvation: The Entrance to Synergy with the Trinity

Every devoted member of the church is a professing Christian and a member of the body

of Christ, who is God the Son in the Trinity. The Son cannot entertain a reciprocal effect of

sharing the" life" of the Trinity if an individual is missing the opportunity to connect to the "life"

of Christ by salvation. Thus, Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity commences with the miraculous

work of God that brings salvation and a "new nature" to the unbeliever by the Holy Spirit.[46]

Paul utilized the analogy of the body to describe the relationship of the church to the

Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the lifeline of the body of Christ as blood is the lifeline of the human

body. Regardless of how much Nicodemus admired and mulled over the ministry of Jesus, the

explicit message from Jesus, indifferent to Nicodemus' status was "You must be born again."[47]

Attending church is a great start, but the goal is to admonish to partake of the life of the Trinity

for synergy and fellowship with the Trinity for every person in the church.

Human beings can be detrimental to God's plans, and experienced pastors understand the

cause is from fallen humanity. Korah, "beguiled by Satan," twisted God's people in opposition

to their heavenly appointed, spiritual leader, Moses. Naturally, jealousy, selfishness and the

desire for power played a part in Korah's rebellion since these are traits of the seared nature of

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[46] "New nature" refers to being "born again" in John 3:3-8. Both terms refer to the theological term, regeneration, which is ascribed to the work of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel in removal of the sinful nature and "the imparting of a new nature that is responsive to God," Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms,* 35, 81.

[47] John 3:7.

humanity under "the fall."[48] Additionally, the incident with Korah illustrates the biblical

definition of fully executed, and self-induced temptation manifested when persons are drawn

away by their desires and enticed.[49]

Consequently, temptation is a combination of succumbing to Satan's deception and

selfish desires. God created the human body to experience pleasure and feeling. These

sensations derive from regions of the brain called thalamus and hypothalamus to serve the body.

The problem lies with the fallen nature of humans dictating that the glory of God will not dictate

the actions of the body, but whatever stimulates the thalamus and hypothalamus regions of the

brain.[50] Thus, the need is for the church to be comprised of only born-again persons that are less

likely to hinder God's program, and apt to make sacrifices for the sake of God's will being done.

Jesus: The Model for Synergy with the Trinity

Although America is a melting pot of many immigrants, there was a time that America

retained her heritage of uniformity in Christian nature. The population of the United States in

1900 comprised 96 percent Christians and by the year 2005 that figured dropped to 85 percent.

Ten thousand Muslims occupied the nation in 1900, and by 2005 that figured mushroomed to

five million. The Buddhists and Hindus gained great strides also during that period.[51] The

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[48] "Beguiled by Satan" is a reference to the direct initiation of temptation of Satan to Eve (Gen 3:1-3) and in the passages of Jesus being tempted of the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). "The fall" denotes Adam and Eve's disobedience and commission of sin that brought tragic spiritual, and social deprivation to the entire human race." B. Demarest, "Fall of the Human Race," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology,* ed. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001) 434-435.

[49] James 1:14.

[50] Charles Detwiler, Kimberly Mitchell, and Norman Reichenbach, *Life by Design* (Mason, OH: Carnage Learning, 2012), 269.

[51] Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day.* 2. Vol. II. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 492.

nation is now heterogeneous, and leadership in every category finds itself having to be politically correct, meaning employing language and actions that refrain from offending particular interest including religion. The diversity in America at this hour presents a unique challenge to church leaders to attract members; perhaps Jesus gave the key. Jesus demonstrated proper leadership in his role of synergy with the Trinity by focusing on the Father and then the people. "At age twelve he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people." [52] He invested time with the Father to know his will and lost no time strategizing how to choose the disciples. Instead, he expended his time in prayer all night with the Father the previous night before selecting them.[53]

Jesus operated from the premise that his mission was to do the will of the Father. Blackaby identified two other characteristics of a spiritual leader: that he functions with all people, not exclusively with church people, and he guides from God's program.[54] Jesus took time to minister to an outcast man with leprosy, and he ministered to large crowds inside and outside of the synagogue such as the biblical account of the Sermon on the Mount (not the church), and he healed a Roman centurion's domestic worker.

A pastor and his spiritual team operating in synergy with the Trinity will lead from God's agenda. Conventional wisdom would have precluded Judas from becoming a part of Jesus' team, but the protracted time with the Father might have caused him to get a glimpse of Judas' role in the plan of the Father. He admitted that sometimes the Father's agenda was off-limits for

[52] Luke 2:52.

[53] Luke 6:12-13.

[54] Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda.* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 49.

him confessing that he was not privy to know his second coming.[55] Matthew recorded in the

fifth chapter of his book, verse thirty, that Jesus acknowledges his role was to do the Father's

bidding. That leads to the question of how contemporary leaders today accomplish the task of

ministering to all people while being without a personal agenda. Inquiring and searching minds

of spiritual leaders want to know the secret for a desire to hear and work from God's program.

They want to know the mystery of focusing on and working with all people with contentment.

Transformation: Christ's Image for Synergy with the Trinity

Blackaby asserts that leadership is a people business and some people lack the skill and

personality to interact with individuals successfully. For instance, leaders with an introvert

personality prefer to be alone and consequently face a challenge in interacting with people.

Richard Nixon noted of the presidency, "This would be an easy job if you didn't have to deal

with people."[56] Regardless of personality type, a transformation is possible through synergy

with the Trinity. The pastor assumes the image of the Son's role to the Father, that is, to please

the Father.[57] Christ indicates his purposeful intention of exemplifying the image of God through

humanity. As born-again believers, pastors strive to imitate the image of Christ who is the

personification of God, and the completion of the original Adam referred to as "the last Adam."

Surrendering to become God's best version of oneself is the personal goal. John Ortberg notes,

"Jesus does not come to arrange the outside of our life the way we want. He comes to arrange

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[55] Matthew 24:36.

[56] Craig E Johnson, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light or Shadow* (Los Angeles, CA:Sage Publications, 2009), 316.

[57] The Son's role to the Father does not mean that God the Son divested himself of his attributes of God such as omnipresence and omnipotence. He continued but limited his role during his incarnation. See Matthew 18:20 for examples of his omnipresence and omniscience see Mark 2:8 and Matthew 12:25.

the inside of our life the way God wants."[58] The Holy Spirit gives the pastor and his

accompanying spiritual leader's access to the Trinity. They are to allow the Holy Spirit to

transform them from the First Adam to the Second Adam. The First Adam was natural and from

the earth and reflected an image of humans from dust. The Second Adam is spiritual and from

heaven and reflects the image of the Trinity.[59]

Synergy with the image of Christ is necessary if the church is to reverse its decline in

attendance. Having a form of religion will not generate the kind of power to change the

trajectory of the church radically. Maturity into the image of Christ is the key. Putman and

Harrington highlight frightening statistics regarding the church. Lifestyle and morality between

Christians and non-Christians show little dissimilarity.[60] Because Christians are considered to be

more than twice as likely to have racist attitudes as the unchurched, attendance will continue to

lag. If drug abuse, alcohol addiction, and domestic violence are as prevalent among Christians as

non-Christians, the church influence in America will decrease. Only 6 percent of evangelicals

tithe consistently. Evangelicals consist of 25 percent of unmarried domestic partners. Finally,

during their twenties, 80 percent of young adults will leave the church.[61] Therefore,

transformation to the image of Christ becomes paramount if leadership is to obtain synergy with

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[58] John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 63.

[59] 1 Corinthians 15:46-49.

[60] Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleshift, Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 20.

[61] The most complete summary is Ronald Slider's book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). George Barna looks at the broader context in many of his books including his recent book *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World* (BarnaBooks, 2011). David Olson depicts the crisis of the church in his book *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

the Trinity. A Christian accomplishes this with the aid of the Holy Spirit and as leaders being

Christian first, they ought to lead the way. After spiritual leadership begins pursuing the image

of Christ, it can start in the subsequent phase.

Corporate Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity

Spiritual Synergy allows participation in the life of the Trinity. However, the relationship

is not without conditions. Because sin alienates fellowship from God the Father, God the Son

becomes the advocate of those who are born-again or saved.[62] That is why transformation into

the image of the Son is so important. His expressed purpose for incarnation was to identify with

humanity for the sake of empathy and to exemplify the God-centered life.[63] "Spiritual

transformation is not only a means to a salvific end but a part of the desired end."[64] In other

words, the miracle of salvation is not wrapped up in a blanket of security for the Rapture to

escape the damnation of hell to the exclusion of anything else. It encapsulates within the salvific

or redemption process the intent of Scripture to transform lives here on earth to testify to the

holiness and saving grace of God. The catenation of the new birth, studying the life of Christ,

and transformation into his image assimilates into Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity. A

discussion of the nature and necessity of corporate Spiritual Synergy follows.

Corporate Nature of the Trinity

The very nature of God is relational. John declared in John 10:17 that the Father loves

the Son. This fact suggests that God loves himself since Jesus emanated from the Father. For

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[62] Romans 8:34.

[63] Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:21.

[64] Reynolds, "Deep Calls*",* 11.

God to only love the persons of the Trinity connotes the capacity for narcissism, which violates the character of God. Thankfully, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, in his infinite and perceptive wisdom, led John to reveal at the outset God's loving relationship to the world caused him to commission the Son to pay the ultimate sacrifice for the redemption of humanity.[65] Specifically, the corporate nature of God in three persons, the Godhead, took upon himself to satisfy the claims of justice and reconciliation between God and humankind. As implied in the term "reconciliation," a breach in the relationship between God and the world existed that Christ restored by bearing the cost of the hostility and enmity that emerged between God and humankind.[66] That demonstration of the corporate nature and infinite love transfers to the finite capacity of human-to-human relationships. Conversely, from the descendent base level of humanity, Scripture gives the perfect example of what corporate nature is not.

When God asked Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" and Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" little did Cain know the depravity of his answer and the significance of God's inquiry.[67] Cain spoke from the viewpoint of a person's right to be selfish, and he became the first murderer to preach it. The teaching of Jesus was less about rights and more about endeavoring to discipline the spirit of the disciples to love and a sense of duty. Archbishop Thompson asserted the rights of humankind to the Christian's love and consideration rest upon

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[65] John 3:16.

[66] 2 Corinthians 5:19.

[67] Genesis 4:9.

an act of divine love, for "God loved them and sent His Son to be the propitiation [reconciliation] for their sins, and the Savior set to it His seal and signed it with his blood."[68]

The corporate nature of the Trinity compels those who would participate in a life of love, that without the synergy that derives from collaborating with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; humanity falls short in extending love to all people. The foundation of the Ten Commandments is the relationship among people and with God. The Son condescended to fulfill the OT law, not to abolish it. His association as a representative of the Trinity ushered in a synergy of love that produced the eleventh commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."[69] The efficiency of the Trinity's intervention in the world summarized the issue of monotheism, idolatry, dishonoring God's name, Sabbath rest, honoring parents, murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting into one commandment, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."[70] Christ consolidated eleven commandments into two, and those two signified the universal language of love as the driving force to win souls.

Necessity of Connection

Reynolds wrote, "True participation in the life of God, who by his nature is communal, necessitates communion with God, with his church, and with the rest of his creation."[71] That

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[68] Archbishop Thomson's reference to "propitiation," found in 1 John 4:10 alludes to the atoning sacrifice that appeases the wrath of God directed against sin. Tillotson, Geoffrey, Paul Fussell, and Marshall Waingrow, *Eighteenth-Century English Literature.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969). Archbishop Thompson, *"Life in the Light of God's Word", 301.(path: Wordsearch>SermonBible>Gen 4:9>WorldCat).*

[69] Matthew 22:39.

[70] Matthew 22:37.

[71] Reynolds, "Deep Calls*", 11.*

profound statement epitomizes the concept of this section. The notion that the Christian life in isolation is pleasing to God is erroneous. It is a deceitful tactic of Satan to thwart the spreading of the Gospel. If God approved seclusion, there would have been no need for the incarnation of Christ. The Trinity is complete within itself; however, the all-encompassing characteristic of love demands outreach and the duty of outreach requires maturity by spiritual formation. Spiritual formation develops from training initiated by the pastor to the leaders. The spiritual leaders of the church metamorphose into an extension of the pastor to train the laity for outreach. The overall objective is obedience to the Great Commission. God the Father commissioned God the Son. The Son sequentially commissioned his church, and the Holy Spirit empowers his church to achieve the mission.[72]

Grace and Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity

Achieving the responsibility of mission requires the continued application of grace in a different realm. The initial work of grace is the work of redemption through God the Son that accomplishes salvation for humanity and is an attribute of the Trinity that expresses goodness to those deserving condemnation, thus the expression, "God's unmerited favor." Too often the children of God take the grace of God for granted in that the knowledge of eternal security causes laxation of godly living. The work of grace does not have to end at salvation. As a child, grace accompanied Jesus as he grew "and he became strong in spirit and filled with wisdom."[73] The next section purports the work of grace to resemble Jesus and grace for spiritual formation that is required to attain Spiritual Synergy.

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[72] Acts 1:8.

[73] Luke 2:40.

Grace to Resemble Jesus

As if from very poor to very rich, sinners that accept Christ as their Savior become saints of God miraculously. They lived "in the flesh," and now they are "in Christ."[74] They walked as the "old man," and now they are a "new creation."[75] With that kind of elevation via regeneration to sanctification, *hagias* (Greek for set apart), comes the new responsibility to not only exist in a state of holiness positionally but to develop into the similitude of Jesus Christ holistically. In other words, once partaking of the new life in Jesus, the mark is to look identical to Jesus in behavior and purity of the heart. He is the image of God, *Imago Dei*, (Latin) in person and becomes the object for the Christian to imitate.[76] Hughes proffers that for this tall order, God provides "special grace" or "sufficient grace" once new life in Christ begins.[77] He describes it as "grace that is adequate for the saving of the believer here and now and hereafter to all eternity."[78] Specifically, in the presence of trials and tribulation, "sufficient grace" is on the scene as promised in 2 Cor 12:9 to achieve spiritual formation toward the image of Christ. Apostle Paul renders insight on the significance of resembling Jesus.

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[74] 2 Corinthians 5:17.

[75] "Old man" and "new man" are terms used by Paul to express the contrast between life without Christ and life in union with him (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10)." S. Motyer, "Man, Old and New," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001) 728.

[76] 2 Corinthians 4:4.

[77] P. E. Hughes "Grace," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 519-520. According to Hughes *grace* comprises two types, *common* and *special.* "Common grace is so called because it is common to all humankind…without discrimination." The order of creation reflects the mind and the care of the Creator, who sustains what he has made (John 1:1-4; Hebrews 1:2-3). Special Grace is the grace by which God redeems, sanctifies, and glorifies. Unlike common grace, special grace is bestowed only through faith in his Son.

[78] Ibid.

Paul uses the term adoption to describe the new relationship with the Trinity. To adopt children who were slaves to sin, dismiss their inherent depraved nature and background, and grant to them unmerited favor is a glorious act of God's love. His love engrafted the sinners, pulled off their filthy garment, put a ring on their finger, and sat them at the Father's table. Paul states that it was God's plan all along to clean up humankind and adopt sons and daughters of God to be co-heir with God the Son.[79]

From this imagery, the chances of adopted children resembling their adopted father in appearance are zero since they are not of the same bloodline. Nevertheless, they can call him father. Likewise, given the position of adoption with no prior spiritual connection to God, adopted children require the "sufficient grace" more than ever to train the new saints, the new children, in the ways of the Lord to match the clothing of righteousness given them. After all, once a part of the Trinity, the Great Commission awaits. New Christians can ill-afford to accept salvation and continue to allow the strongholds of sin to plague them. Such situations prove that they linger in the infancy stage and are ill-equipped to help others. If they refuse to utilize the resources provided by God's sufficient grace to mature into disciples of Christ, they become an obstacle to the unsaved who needs to see the lights of a city on their pathway to Christ.[80] Spiritual Synergy depends on the pastor and the leaders of the church to teach the sufficiency of grace for spiritual maturity that imitates Jesus before they can experience real Spiritual Synergy in carrying out the Great Commission.

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[79] Ephesians 1:3-5; Romans 8:15.

[80] Matthew 5:14

Grace for Spiritual Formation

The purpose of spiritual formation is to change one's behavior from "walking in the flesh" (past sins) to "walking by the Spirit. Scripture refers to the process as "sanctification."[81] Jesus has already sanctified the Christians positionally by setting them apart as a people belonging to God, a process bestowed upon the children of Israel as a foreshadow of Christ's work in redemption.[82] However, because Christ's work of redemption comprised redeeming the spirit of a person, the body is not a part of the full redemption process at Calvary.[83] "The legal declaration [of adoption] may have been made, and the Spirit may have been given as a down payment, but the consummation of the adoption awaits the future, for adoption includes the redemption of our bodies."[84] Thus at present is the need for a progressive work of sanctification through spiritual formation. It becomes incumbent upon Christians to bring their bodies under subjection to their spiritual formation.

Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity to fulfill the Great Commission commences within each and corporately with the church body to ensure its culture does not hinder God's plan of having the Gospel spread around the world before the Second Coming of Christ. "In this sense, the people of God intentionally collaborate with the grace of God to enable participation in his life and transformation into his image."[85] Apostle Paul instructed the church of Corinth on ways

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[81] 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

[82] Hebrews 13:12.

[83] Romans 8:24.

[84] P. H. Davids "Adoption," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 25-26.

[85] Reynolds, "Deep Calls," 11.

of applying the grace of God as a process. His message advocated relinquishing of material

desires and concentration on unity through the vehicle of love. Paul shunned abstract language

and veraciously expressed what constitutes spiritual formation through the application of God's

sufficient grace. In 1 Cor 10:13, he straightforwardly clarifies that the Holy Spirit, the third

person of the Trinity is present during temptation for an egress to escape. In the same chapter, he

admonishes to flee idolatry, which for the contemporary congregation is to refuse to accept any

preaching or teaching that minimizes the Godhead and promotes pantheism, atheism, or

pluralism.[86] Nothing must taint the purity of the Gospel. Bailey offers "the influence of the

Church as a central institution has diminished around the globe because the lean toward

secularization…has led to the ostracism of Christianity."[87] In other words, with today's multi-

culture population, now is the time for the church to be serious about spiritual formation and to

begin training disciples for Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity.

Training for Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity

Theology of Discipleship

Disciples are followers of the teaching of Christ. Those persons become a part of the

church created in the image of God in righteousness and holiness, making the church the "new

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[86] Pantheism holds the position that God and creation are identical as taught by Hinduism, which contradicts biblical theology of God as the creator of the universe (Gen 1:1; Heb. 2:2) therefore transcends the universe. Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason: Cengage Learning, 2008), 110. Atheism denies the existence of God which contradicts biblical theology. Pluralism suggests many paths of religion to God that leads to salvation. Biblical theology supports only Jesus Christ as the gate to salvation (Acts 4:12). Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, USA, 2011), 567.

[87] Anthony Wayne Bailey, "Spiritual Formation: A Model to Strengthen the Mission, Operation, and Commitment of African American Churches" (DMin diss., Liberty School of Divinity, 2014). 46.

human being," according to Bonhoeffer.[88] They are to put on the image of God, which is Christ and the church. An analogy corresponded to each believer clothed in a garment (of righteousness) and assimilated into the church community. The "new human being" exists through the church, which is the body of Christ.[89] S. Moyer explains new human beings are, "transferred from the old creation to the new. [Their] 'old man' - i.e., [their] membership in Adam - was crucified with Christ, and now [they] must seek to reflect in practice the 'image' of this new man ('put on'), and to scour out the remaining image of the old ('put off')," according to 1 Cor 15:45-49.[90] In the process, novice Christians mature into disciples.

Righteousness and holiness in disciples oblige them to advance the work of Christ in outreach. Bonhoeffer contends "merely personal sanctification which seeks to bypass…the church-community from the world confuses the pious desire of the religious flesh with the sanctification of the church-community."[91] That is, a false spirit from the desire of the flesh strives to be holy without the community of the church, which represents the treasure house of God's holiness and righteousness. As a prerequisite to successful training for Spiritual Synergy, Christ requires the intangible quality of love to manifest into a visible church. In other words, theological terms such as love, truth, doctrine, and Christianity are without a visible body. Consequently, the Trinity desires physical bodies to do their bidding and to simulate Christ.

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[88] Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Discipleship: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 219.

[89] "New human beings" referred to as "new man" in Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24. "Christ is the new (Son of) Man" of a new creation/kingdom/humanity established in contrast to that of Adam, who is the old man." L. L. Morris, "Adam," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology,* ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 73.

[90] S. Motyer, "Man, Old and New," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 728.

[91] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship,* 262.

Theology of Disciplines

One of the reasons for the three-plus years of Jesus' ministry on the earth was to prepare his disciples for his church. "Jesus taught them the insufficiency of physical food and the significance of the word of God as being the lifeline of the church in the fourth chapter of Matthew, verse four. It was imperative to build His church upon a solid foundation that was eternal and ensured its security against hell.[92]

Training is paramount in Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity. Even after conversion, spiritual formation is essential since the new birth of regeneration applies to the spirit of a person and not the body. To resolve this issue, Apostle Paul taught that the body is brought into submission by the "renewing of [the] mind."[93] The implication is that a process is involved that defies automatic transformation upon acceptance of Christ. At birth, whether spiritual or natural, a stage of infancy exists, and maturity can only manifest through growth. While the book of Romans is doctrinal mainly, Paul's last division of his letter advocates practical and ethical conduct, which agrees with the teaching of Peter that novel Christians, whether twelve years of age or seventy-five years of age, are newborns in Christ.[94] The growth process is imperative for through it God opens a channel in the life of the believer to implement His will; however, growth begins with sacrifice.

Whereas Israel's initiative for the forgiveness of God became animal sacrifices, the response today for forgiveness and salvation is sacrificing of one's self-body, and being willing

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[92] Matthew 5:18; 16:18.

[93] Romans 12:2.

[94] 1 Peter 2:2.

to do the will of the Trinity.[95] Thankfully, the mercy and grace of God cover sin despite the influence of the pre-Christian past that occasionally entices one to follow an old pattern of ungodly behavior. Rather than exhibiting past-conforming behavior, it is incumbent upon Christians to demonstrate spiritual-formational behavior to collaborate with the Trinity in executing the Great Commission that belies the church. This behavior includes every facet of life including health.

Case-in-point is the scenario of three anonymous persons from distinct parts of the United States. Blessed with the God-given pleasure center of the thalamus and hypothalamic regions in the brain, they obsess with an insatiable love of succulent food. While their ultimate purpose is to do the will of God, they cannot resist their nature, but they can resist the Holy Spirit. Because they have no power over pleasure, they could not control the source, the thalamus, which controlled the pleasure. They graduated from universities and developed skills in managing companies. At age sixty-five, God planned to use their skills in operating world-mission organizations for churches in the third world. Unfortunately, they became too heavy with obesity and died of a heart attack before reaching age sixty-five. God will now use someone else. These persons were in desperate need of training in Spiritual Synergy with the Trinity. [96]

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[95] Romans 12:1.

[96] Kyle James Harrs, "Life Is Internally Integrated," *Blackboard, BIOL 101 Course* (Lynchburg: Liberty University, April 9, 2009), 1-2.

Disciplines for Spiritual Synergy

"Works of the "flesh." [97] The term used in this research paper refers to the sinful nature

of humanity. Although the connotation appears unfavorable, a positive aspect dawns the

horizon. The unregenerate are "sinful flesh" per Rom 8:3, which causes them to live "after the

flesh" according to the ensuing verse 5. By living "after the flesh," they produce acts

characterized by lust, evil desires, or passions that enslaves their body and their minds.[98] The

good news is that the "Word became flesh" in keeping with John 1:14, in the person of Jesus

who "took on flesh in order that in and by his flesh he might loose [them] from the bondage of

the flesh."[99] Yes, those who have experienced regeneration remain "in the flesh," but they no

longer have to walk "after the flesh" as declared by Paul's letter to the Galatians, Chapter 2,

verse 20. To maintain such liberty requires disciplines through grace that is readily available to

substantiate the reality that one is no longer the "old human being," but the "new human being."

Characteristics of the "old human being," which is any sin, after practicing spiritual

formation disciplines, seem to be obscene in the presence of the "new human being" and the

accompanying Holy Spirit. The New Testament (NT) lists at least, but not limited to, fifteen

works of the flesh: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft,

hatred, wrath, strife, sedition, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and reveling.[100] For

instance, swearing or cursing whether from habit, anger or as an oath is futile before God

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[97] "Flesh" is used in three aspects of the New Testament Bible: (1) the whole-body including flesh and life (Gal. 2:20); Rom. 2:28), (2) humanity with its gifts and abilities (Rom. 1:3; Phil. 3:4), (3) sinful nature (Rom. 7:18). Unger, Merrill F. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago), 431.

[98] Romans 8:3-; Ephesians 2:3.

[99] J. A. Motyer, "Flesh." in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 456.

[100] Galatians 5:19-21, Matthew 5:21-22, 28; 2 Peter 2:10, 2 Timothy 4:3

because it gives validity to untruthfulness. That is why Jesus dismissed swearing as it calls upon God, the only omniscient one, to witness a statement; however, he will not be party to anything that gives credence to a lie. As for the Christian, everything a disciple utters should be truthfulness and verification is unnecessary.[101]

When considering the love manifested in the work of Christ, and the relationship he created with Christians as joint-heirs with him, Christians unwilling to nullify his accomplishment in their lives, will have no desire to lust for anything or anyone. For lust is a selfish imitator of love and contrary to the discipleship principle of self-denial. Love will not hurt another human nor the Trinity. The work of grace can overcome the works of the flesh.

Work of grace. The disciplines for obtaining spiritual formation are not "legalistic."[102] Instead, the reflection of special grace from God with his lavish and inundating love in action toward humankind lays the foundation for practicing the disciplines out of gratitude. Preaching and teaching by the church pastor and spiritual leaders are essential for spiritual formation. Just as Christ took the time to prepare his disciples to seek out the lost; the church exists to seek out the community as Christ did as he traveled the countryside with his disciples. This premise is logically and biblically based because the church is the body of Christ and thus represents the "Word" of the glorified Christ.[103] With the same Word comes the Holy Spirit to present gifts individually and collectively to the church to empower them for spiritual formation and

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[101] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship,* 129.

[102] Unger, *The New Unger Bible Dictionary*, 760. "Legalistic" is a term referring to the Law of Moses or the Old Testament. The legalistic way of honoring God by obedience to the Law took a back seat to the new and improved redemption through Grace that offers obedience to God's commandments because of love for the accomplished work of Christ; Galatians 3:19, John 14:15.

[103] Romans 12:5; John 1:14.

community outreach.[104] Once the church sows the seed of truth and models Christ, the Holy

Spirit as an agent of the Trinity bestows faith on the hearers that Christ loves, accepts, and

secures them.[105]

Upon pastors and spiritual leaders, God the Son confers the responsibility of teaching the

art of discipleship, particularly, humility and obedience, which became a signature doctrine of

Jesus.[106] Jesus taught humility and obedience as evidence of a disciple. Apostle Paul taught

according to Rom 13:1 that governing authorities on local, state, and national levels operate as

instruments of God. Douglas J. Moo states that submission "is to acknowledge that certain

institutions or people have been placed over us and have the right to our respect and

deference."[107] The significance of Christians recognizing governing authorities especially in the

workplace bolds well in facilitating harmony and teamwork and serves to exemplify Christian

behavior. The Holy Spirit facilitates acceptance of authority within and outside of the church

community.

Conclusion of Theological Foundations

The project researcher's investigation into the theological underpinnings for the

significance and methodology of church development reveals the objective of God to bring his

kingdom to earth. The will of God materialized with the obedience of Christ, the second person

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[104] 1 Corinthians 12:4, 9, 12.

[105] 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 1:13.

[106] Mark 10:42-45; Matthew 10:24-25; John 12:26.

[107] Douglas J. Moo, *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 429.

of the Trinity. The Son collaborated with the Father and the Holy Spirit in laying the foundation

of the church and commissioning his disciples to multiply throughout the world.

The church's success in concluding the assignment depends on *Spiritual Synergy* with the

Trinity to bring salvation to the masses through its participation individually and corporately by

maturing in spiritual formation. The process refrains from using saving grace as an excuse to

continue in sin but embarks upon discipline to emulate Christ and subsequently train new

disciples to reproduce new disciples.

Discipleship and discipline are the two principles of training for Spiritual Synergy with

the Trinity. The "theology of discipleship" includes the new birth (regeneration) followed by

teaching novice Christians obedience to the commandments of Jesus Christ, the Word. The

"theology of discipline" comprises a collaboration with the Trinity in the individual and

corporate practice of spiritual disciplines as in doing all things in love, reading, teaching, and

practicing the Word, operating in the gifts of the Spirit, bathing one's life in prayer, which is

modeling Christ. Armed with these theological underpinnings, the project researcher

investigates a theoretical framework for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher acknowledges that he is not attempting to waste time with the introduction

of the work of other scholars. However, the contribution of others acuminates the focus of the

project, helping the researcher better grasp the reasons for studying the problem of dwindling

church attendance. Furthermore, an understanding of the theoretical background of the question

assists the researcher in affirming the validity of considering the issue and the impending

ramifications of the findings. The following pages present the significance of the African

American Church in the community and the discovering of declining factors that generate

interest enough for the investigator to search and elaborate on ideas for revitalizing the Black Church.

African American Church Importance

Stability for the Family

Sylvan D. Ambrose researched the comparisons of religion and psychology and concluded that for many of her subjects the church family was as important as the biological family. She observed church members exemplified many of the emotive qualities of love, compassion, and empathy that blood relatives did. Even pastors possessed a fatherly influence on the fathers, and the women created a sisterhood. [108] Researcher Herbert Anderson and his colleagues assert in their book that the potential dynamics of church congregations serve as healing communities regarding the critical roles they play in supporting the mutuality or co-op of families.[109] In a period when so many fathers are missing in the home, these findings accentuate the strategic roles congregations play as an auxiliary to families. In a study of aggression, statistics showed that the black church plays a significant role in the lives of African American adolescent boys in low-income neighborhoods. The boys who attended church at least twice a month landed in the nonaggressive group.[110]

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[108] Sylvan D. Ambrose, *Religion and Psychology: New Research*, (New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2006), 290.

[109] Herbert Anderson, Edward Foley, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, and Robert Schreiter, *Mutuality Matters: Family, Faith, and Just Love* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 7.

[110] Sherle L. Boone, *Meanings Beneath the Skin: The Evolution of African Americans* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 259.

Spiritual Renewal Haven

Norma Burgess, the author of *African American Woman*, quotes Kelly Miller in stating

that the African American church among blacks is a social cosmos for the emotional outlet,

storms of life, inspiration, entertainment, and movements.[111] In 1991, researchers discovered

that 90 percent of the 2,107 African American men and women surveyed attended worship

services since the age of 18, and out of those, 70 percent attended church twice or more per

month. The same 90 percent considered church attendance essential and more than three-fourths

reported either reading religious material, watching, or viewing religious programming or

praying a few times or more each month.[112] African Americans rank God in their lives higher

than any other group. The 1988 Gallup Survey reported that 75 percent of African American

participants believed that religion is the answer to most problems, compared to only 57 percent

of the general population.[113] Nonetheless, the information below relating to recent years uncover

an alarming trend in attendance in the Black Church.

Church Decline

The trajectory of church attendance is tilting downward in recent years. Newport reports

"Gallup's latest yearly update from its daily tracking survey shows that in 2017, 38 percent of

adults said they attended religious services weekly or almost every week. When Gallup began

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[111] Burgess, Norma J., and Ernestine Brown, *African American Woman: An Ecological Perspective* (New York, NY: Falmer Press, 2000), 115.

[112] Taylor and Chatters, authors of National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA), 1991. Quoted by Norma J. Burgess and Ernestine Brown, *African American Woman: An Ecological Perspective* (New York, NY: Falmer Press, 2000), 116.

[113] Fredrick C. Harris, *Something Within: Religion in African American Political Activism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

asking this question in 2008, that figure was 42 percent."[114] The proliferation of immigrants

changed the demography and appeared to be a contributing factor. Accompanying the

demographic changes in the United States as the landscape becomes interspersed with various

religions, is the cultural change of giving equal status to all faiths. As such, the biblical mandate

to evangelize becomes uncomfortable proselytizing, and people prefer to keep their faith

personal. Thus, spirituality diminishes in institutional importance and surges in personal

significance. "Results compiled in USA Today—CNN Gallup poll found that 30 percent of

American adults, including blacks, classified themselves as spiritual, but were not interested in

attending church."[115] The remaining portion of this section discusses black church attendance.

African American men disappearance

Alford Young studied twenty-six poverty-stricken African American men. The common

factor was the church. The parents and guardians inculcated faith into their lives and throughout

childhood attended church regularly. However, after reaching adolescence, there was no

compulsion to continue attending church, and after experiencing vicissitude outside the home,

the church was no longer relevant.[116] From there, the path was downhill for those men. Brian

Harper defines the situation as a "perennial crisis in black masculinity," and T. D. Jakes notes in

his conventions that black men "die ten to fifteen years more quickly than [their] female

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[114] Frank Newport, "Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance," accessed March 24, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/242015/church-leaders-declining-religious-service-attendance.aspx.

[115] Religious Tolerance.Org, "Religious Beliefs in the United States, General Religious Beliefs," http://www.religioustolerance.org/ch_poll.htm, quoted in Donald R. Barbera, *Black and Not Baptist*, 28.

[116] Young, *The Minds of Marginalized BlackMen,* 79.

counterparts." He contends that men commit 80 percent of the suicides that occur in this country and that men in their forties and fifties are three times more likely to commit suicide?[117]

Aaron Smith who demarcates the current plight of African American men intertwines with jail, early death, and homosexuality as he repeats the infamous assessment by black women that "most Black men in America are dead, homosexual, or in jail."[118] Their absence in professional environments and complicity in becoming babies' daddies rather than husbands are frightening statistics. The character of African American men breaks down when analyzing how they can be in a relationship or marriage yet participate in secret same-sex attraction. As for their career track, college enrollment among African American men are substantially lower than African American women.[119] The complexity is in determining if this is a causality of being absent from the church or the church declining because of their absence or both. Regardless, these are actual problems distressing the African American family, religion, and community.

Faith, politics, and fear divide the African American community, argues Stanford. For instance, most African American Pentecostal churches refrain from overtly welcoming lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBT) and will restrict membership to a low-level capacity of pew occupancy void of filling positions or offices. Though this speaks of just the Pentecostal Church, most evangelical churches take this stance as a matter of principle following Scripture. Acceptance of membership into the church complies with the belief of receiving all into the

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[117] Phillip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African American Identity.* New York NY: Oxford UP, 1996, x. T. D. Jakes, *He Motions Hi-Lites at New Birth in Atlanta, GA,* rec. February 2004, DVD, T.D. Jakes Ministries, Callas, TX, 2004.

[118] Aaron Anwar Smith, *Is There Really a Shortage of Good Black Men? Empowering Relationships between African American Men and Women* (Durham, NC: Strategic Book Publishing, 2010), 90.

[119] Ibid., xi.

church who accept Christ's salvation and desire to overcome strongholds in one's life. The practice publicly amounts to a "don't ask-don't tell" policy and everyone continues to strive for perfection in Christ through His blood.[120] From the above perspective, the present predicament of the African American Church proves that it is in crisis mode manufactured by indecency and loss of well-being.

Decency and Well-being

Stacy Boyd observed that T. D. Jakes invests little time focusing on civil rights but spends much of his time focusing on well-being. "Jakes advise black churches to stop praising God long enough to recognize the death of black men as a serious threat. While responsibility for this crisis rests with the devil, black men and women become the victim of its entrenched ramifications," thus the need to recognize why Eric Lincoln estimates that slightly more than half of the membership roll attends church and females outnumber males by 3:1 ratio. [121]

Bradford Wilcox proposes missing dimensions of religion, sex, love, and marriage exist among African Americans and Latinos. According to researchers, factors of underemployment and unemployment make African American men unappealing as future husbands and contribute to lower marriage rates and more divorce.[122] Throughout history, religion and family shaped human behavior, and now "few Americans have been more affected by the so-called retreat from marriage than African Americans and Latinos."[123]

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[120] Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church,* 91.

[121] Boyd, *Black Men Worshipping,* 52. Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 102.

[122] W. Bradford Wilcox and Nicholas H. Wolfing, *Soul Mates: Religion, Sex, Love, and Marriage among African Americans and Latinos,* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 32.

[123] Ibid., i.

Gender Equality

At present, the occupancy of women in the black church is its redeeming quality. Apart from charismatic churches, women's role in the black church has been restricted and "reflected a damaging synergy between race and gender," according to Gilkes, and Pinn added, "fueled by the residue of the cult of domesticity, the need for male-centered leadership as the proper framing for spiritual development in line with the will of God…was voiced without apology."[124] In other words, respectively, the stay-at-home and absent fathers create a void in the church and in the home for spiritual modeling for African American boys. Rightfully stated by Rudolph, the "wonderful plan of salvation [that] has called and chosen men and women according to His divine will as laborers together with Him for the salvation of the world" paved the way for the sustaining of the church by the faithfulness of modern-day Esthers in keeping the church doors open.[125] Cone articulates the church cannot overlook the proliferation of female leaders in it. He criticizes black churches for advocating the subordination of women to men long after white churches shifted. Of course, his accusation needs qualifying since all Protestant churches regardless of race vary by denomination. That said, he noted that as some white ministers gave way to women ministers, black ministers insisted that women stand behind their men and be content to "sing in the choir, serve on the usher and stewardess boards, participate in missionary society, [and] cook in the kitchen."[126]

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[124] Gilkes, *The Politics of* Silence, 84-86. Quoted in Anthony B. Pinn, *Understanding and Transforming the Black Church.*(Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 95.

[125] Rudolph, *Antipathy to Women* Preacher, 127. Quoted in Pinn, *Understanding*, 97.

[126] Cone, *For My People*, 132.

Considering females' historically faithfulness to the church and biblical precedence of their leadership as well as servanthood, one should not find it a stretch for women to be in the pulpit. However, church bylaws, despite nuances in Scripture hermeneutics, often are barriers to granting women the opportunity to fulfill their calling into leadership positions. Encouraging female labor in the pews while reserving hierarchy to the males appear contradictory to NT grace and congruent with OT law, especially on topics that divide the church due to ambiguity in Scripture interpretation.

The question may be asked how this discussion of the roles of women in the church affects the decline of men in the church. With all the vitality and positive reinforcement that the women bring to the church, the anomaly to the situation is that a segment of men view the shouting, clapping, and swaying to be geared for women and uncomfortable for men. Some men hold male pastors responsible for not requiring women to hold their tongue and submit to their husbands, and the idea of them in the pulpit is reprehensible. Redmond wrote, "the whole concept of the church—Sunday worship, weekly activities, and membership—seems like one big women's society, with (in most cases) a man at the helm with a message to get women to follow what he says."[127] These men will stay home before entering an environment that is uncomfortable and the perceived emasculation. Next, addressing factors that induce the decline of black church attendance such as the plight of black men, well-being, and gender equality leads to the inquiry of revitalization.

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[127] Eric C. Redmond, *Where Are All the Brothers?: Straight Answers to Men's Questions about the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 32-33.

African American Church Revitalization

Judith Blau and her associates wanted to know if race separation contributed to the

growth or decline of church membership. History reveals that during Reconstruction, Southern

Baptists enjoyed heavy integration between the races, but after the election of President Hayes in

1877, the Jim Crow Era evolved, provoking the blacks to withdraw once they found their white

brethren on the wrong side of civil rights or silent on the issue.[128] Blau research tracked Baptists,

Catholics, and mainline denominations and concluded that liberal, integrated churches grew

slower than non-integrated churches.[129] A more recent study of the joint-venture of black

evangelicals and white institutions revealed the need for "understanding the dynamics of power-

sharing."[130] Therefore, they make the case that race relations are not the issue. The problem is

from within the African American community. The bugle calls for the Black Church to reclaim

the sacred institution, the church. Inherent in that reclaim is the need for parents to have a

healthy relationship with the Lord, and the church is to become village-minded in education and

socialization for the sake of the youth. Socialization includes innovative Bible study and

activities. This form of practical theology is incarnational and progresses to the next stage.

Serving well-being needs

The next stage advances from a personal, inward spiritual, and mental development to an

outward community flow. The church turns its focus on addressing the conditions that cause

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[128] Sid Smith, "Growth of Black Southern Baptist Churches in the Inner City," *Baptist History and Heritage* (July 3, 1981): 54-55.

[129] Judith R. Blau, Kent Redding, and Kenneth C. Land, "Ethnocultural Cleavages and the Growth of Church Membership in the United States, 1860-1930." *Sociological Forum* 8, no. 4 (December 1993): 609-637.

[130] Soong-Chan Rah, "Prophetic Voices and Evangelical Seminary Education." *Common Ground Journal* 8, no. 1 (September 2010): 32-48.

impoverishment and depravation. Robert Smith adopts an African American theology for the Twenty-first century. In addition to experiencing God, the African American church embraces a prophetic ministry of identifying and speaking to the conditions that cause depraved conditions to get ahead in today's world.[131] This theology is not to be confused with the "prosperity gospel."[132] The prosperity gospel is faithful to the themes of evangelicals, but expands to envelope "physical, emotional, material, social, and financial prosperity in this life."[133] Smith champions African American congregations collaborating with secular government and non-profit agencies. Though controversial in religious circles in America, the prosperity gospel is a popular worldview in the black church movement in England. Britain's Black Majority Churches (BMCs) creates a "community of people with high self-esteem, belief, and pride in overcoming social injustices or alienation" reports Babatunde Adedibu.[134] As the church addresses physical, humanitarian needs of the congregation, the focus consequently turns to cosmetics or physical appearance of the edifice.

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[131] Robert London Smith Jr., *From Strength to Strength: Shaping a Black Practical Theology to the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 158.

[132] "Prosperity Gospel" consist of three branches. (1) Old School includes cult leaders as Daddy Grace and Father Divine. (2) Hagin/Copeland School" consists of Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland who inherited the movement of E. W. Kenyon. Most well-known today are Creflo Dollar, T. D. Jakes, and Fred Price, all with television ministries. (3) New Age School and metaphysical teaching comprise that of Johnnie Coleman, Barbara King, and cult leader Reverend Ike. Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 72.

[133] Ibid., 71.

[134] Babatunde Adedibu, "Origin, Migration, Globalization and the Missionary Encounter of Britain's Black Majority Churches," *Studies in World Christianity* 19, no. 1 (2013), 103.

Physical appearance

Although superficial consideration as church beauty should not be the determinant for choosing a church, eye appeal is crucial to attracting attention to a church. Prospects entering the neighborhood establish some criteria for their families. Examination of bathroom facilities for their physically challenged loved ones and the care of their children becomes an issue. Day Care or merely a nursery during worship hours may be a concern. The security of the building, proximity to work, school, and home becomes part of the planning. Case in point, the average prospective family, traveling down a highway will bypass the church with rundown facilities and sparsely filled parking lots and target a church with well-manicured lawns with virtually filled parking lots. The same is true in the retail industry. The downward spiral of unimproved Kmart Stores compared to the prolific growth of new Walmart Stores is no accident. Given all factors being equal such as pricing, product, and merchandising, the prospective customer chooses the new and improved Walmart (even if the blue-light specials at Kmart are cheaper). The same eye-appeal goes for the church. Establishing a budget for maintenance and improvements is crucial. Because this may be an expensive long-term project, some immediate complimentary remedies can help.

An atmosphere of love and appreciation is priceless and "costless." Strategically, placing greeters in the parking lot, the church lobby and visible places throughout the sanctuary is significant. Appealing to the young adults by assigning "males" whose persona of dress, style, and speech represent the missing dimension in the black church makes a statement of hope and

aspirations of upward mobility. Physical appearance inspires.[135] The next stage of the

revitalization of the African American church is the worship experience.

Worship experience

A strategic shift in the structure of the worship service can prove to be beneficial,

especially for the youth and young adults. The traditional worship set forth from the inheritance

of the general Methodist church by black Methodist churches is not a fit for the millennials,

according to Jessica Barron. "Contemporary observers of the black Methodist church notice that

behaviors such as clapping, lifting up hands, affirming spiritual gifts, and dancing, previously

rejected by class-conscious black Methodists in northern urban settings, are now more widely

embraced by younger blacks."[136] The new generation is less loyal to tradition and is in search of

worship that they term as "for real." Historic African American churches are losing their young

adults to Holiness and Pentecostal bodies.[137] The problem is not local only; it is systemic.

Editor, Emmitt Price, asserts that many Texas churches of Afro-European tradition experience

the same problem in that their churches are emptying because children of the congregants go to

other venues due to traditional worship experiences, unlike their generation. Once the leaders

die from advancing age, the church dies.[138] All aspects of the above theoretical framework

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[135] Jessica M. Barron and Rhys H. Williams, *The Urban Church Imagined: Religion, Race, and Authenticity in the City* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017), 77.

[136] Jeffery L. Tribble Sr., *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 92.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Shana Mashego, "Influence of Hip Hop Culture on Afro-European Church," in *The Black Church and Hip Hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Divide,* ed. Emmett G. Price III, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), 101.

derived from the science of anthropology, sociology, economics, and other disciplines. There is a benefit to the union of science and theology.

<center>Integration of Theological and Theoretical Perspectives</center>

The worldview of pastors should include the acceptance of the Bible and science. Some would claim that the two entities are at war. However, many times science and the Bible confirm each other. When differences exist, often science re-evaluates its claim rather than the Bible. The unresolved dispute of evolution is quintessential. Evolutionists predicted the discovery of thousands of transitional forms to substantiate Darwinism. However, creationist advocates creation of the earth in seven days and its age is relatively young: thousands of years rather than millions of years. As predicted by creationists, gaps remain in the fossil record, and no viable corroboration of Darwin's macroevolution (i.e., a common ancestor of the fly and the chimpanzee) exists.[139] Similarly, the collaboration of the project researcher's theological and theoretical findings create a pathway to learning the causation of the effects of diminishing attendance in African American churches. The emphasis of collaboration evolves from the possibility that pastors might perceive the study of social statistics irrelevant or no interest to the pastor's mission. However, if the slightest concern of stymie church growth is present, the researcher recommends the acceptance of the application of these two perspectives of theology and theory.

With the arrangement of biblical and theoretical concepts, the design of the research includes a statistical analysis that formulates the quantitative research that proffers mathematical

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[139] Detwiler, Mitchell, and Reichenbach, *Life by Design,* 440.

concepts as "mean," "median," and "range." These terms make their way into the analysis of church data. Not only scientific concepts of math but taxonomy (i.e., the science of classification) corroborates theological principles. For example, this project constructs the research collaboration of theological and theoretical perspectives into three dominant categories: Church Importance, Church Decline, and Decency and Well-being. These categories contribute to the study of the decline of church attendance, particularly in the black community.

Perspectives of Church Importance

The importance of the church hinges first on the welfare of the Christians as the body of Christ. Christians need to be concerned about the spiritual health of others, and this happens best when congregating. Within that context, believers can inventively encourage and assist one another as described by Scripture.[140] As the cooperative spirit develops the wellbeing of the believer augments the importance of not avoiding worshipping together. The worship experience spurs one another to continue toward the day of the return of the Lord.[141] Notwithstanding, evidence points to a decline in church attendance.

Perspectives of Church Decline

The decline of churches is universal and predicated upon the life cycle of a church. Churches may experience growth and eventually plateau. The plateau effect usually manifests specific symptoms. A church may be enduring, but weak according to Rev 3:8. Its influence upon its environment is diminutive to nonexistent. Another church may be poor regarding its

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[140] 1 Corinthian 7:17; Hebrews 12:23.

[141] Hebrews 10:24-25.

persistent discomfort of persecution and calamitous poverty, and might be infiltrated with hypocrites as noted in Rev 2:9. Then, there is the church that is opulently rich, arrogant, and uncommitted to the Great Commission; John indicated in Rev 3:17-18. A church that is in plateau mode or stagnant is lukewarm according to the Bible, Rev 3:15-16. Decline or even demise is the destiny of this church if not remedied, which correspondingly, this paper seeks to address, particularly as it relates to the African American church in Johnston County of North Carolina situated amid challenging decency and well-being.

Perspectives of Decency and Well-being

As foreign missionaries operate with an ulterior motif of Christendom, they strategically address the welfare of the target alongside the Gospel. Similarly, in solving the problem of dwindling church attendance in African American churches in Johnston County, the Goliath in the room is poverty. Although the North Carolina Department of Commerce reported that Johnston County enjoys a modest unemployment rate of 3.2 percent (slightly lower than the national average), the below the poverty level stood at 15 percent of the general population of Johnston County, North Carolina.[142] The low unemployment rate combined with the high non-white population suggests that all races and ethnicities comprise a pro-workforce. Specifically, African Americans comprise 17 percent of the county's population and Hispanics, 14 percent for a total of 31 percent population of people of color.[143] However, because of their general proclivity to procure less-paying jobs, they bear the brunt of the poverty onus. The major

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[142] "County Profile-Johnson County NC-Jan 2019," Access NC, accessed February 14, 2019, http://www.johnstonnc.com/files/econdev/publications/JohnstonCountyGP.pdf.

[143] "Quick Facts – Johnson County, NC," US Census Bureau, accessed February 14, 2019, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/johnstoncountynorthcarolina#.

employers are the public school system, county government, retail stores, and a few private industries. Although poverty is not a direct cause of deteriorating church attendance among African Americans, it indirectly and disproportionately affects participation. An illustration is the proclivity of the impoverished family that attends a middle-class church being too embarrassed to continue participating due to the disparity in their appearance, mannerism, giving, education, and other social factors that preclude, or they perceive to preclude their receptivity. In the same vein, an affluent church is inconceivable. If the disadvantaged family attends a church of meager means, the church leadership often lacks the leadership skills to affirm and the resources to influence the retention of that family.

God's people do well to first reshape and renew their mindset toward the wellbeing of people. In other words, become committed to giving God reasonable service in agreement with Rom 12:1. Second, the church must resist the temptation that engrafts into the current culture at the cost of neglecting what is right and the will of God to the degree of becoming nonconformist to the insensitivity of the culture as alluded to in Rom 12:2. If a cue is taken from Christ, to accomplish God's will is to minister to the poor, the broken-hearted, those who are captive to the strongholds of sin, and blind to the reality of freedom in Christ as Luke recorded in Luke 4:18.

Summary

From the Introduction, the researcher established the purpose, ministry context, and parameters of the project. An outline guided the reader in the awareness of the scope of the project. Chapter 2 presented the theological and theoretical underpinnings of the research. The researcher, then, integrated these biblical and academic concepts. The forthcoming chapter elaborates on the methodology of the applied research.

Chapter 3

Project Methodology

This section of the research project discloses the predominant paradigm that the applied research utilized to study the problem of declining church attendance among black churches. The methodology flows from the theological assumption that the pastors as under-shepherds of Christ, the Shepherd, are the starting point for addressing the issue. The researcher makes this assumption from the implications of Acts 20:28, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

The methodology evolves from collaboration with pastors, and this section explains the format of the intervention. Next, the process defines the participants that shaped the body of the research. The research devolves into project sessions, which capture the accountability and authenticity of the research. The chapter finally consummates the discussion with evaluation methods for administering, collecting, and interpreting the research data.

Format of the Project Intervention

Project Description

The crucial point of the study involved investigating the local pastors of black churches on their perspectives of the numerical growth of their churches. The process required fulfillment of prerequisites prior to commencement. The Institutional Review Board of Liberty University (IRB) required the researcher to complete a ten-module, "CE" certified research training

program through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI).[144] Completion of the program fulfilled federal training requirements for the purpose of investigators involved in Social and Behavioral Research with human subjects.

Having completed the course, the researcher studied his options for the methodology of the project based on the curriculum and the determination of the design of the intervention. After careful and prayerful consideration, he applied to the Institutional Review Board at Liberty for authorization to conduct field research among local pastors to investigate and collaborate with them in studying the problem of dwindling church attendance in black churches. The IRB approved the researcher's application for the applied research in the format of recorded pastoral interviews in the late summer of 2017.[145] One survey instrument contained a list of interview questions.[146] The pastoral invitation letter became the second instrument of the package.[147] Finally, the Consent Form that gave the researcher official authorization by the participants to interview them completed the instrument package.[148] A recapitulation of the project up to this point is in order.

The first objective of the project sought to present a theological foundation for the study. The researcher documented biblical evidence of God's desire for church growth. The findings of this research developed Chapter 2 of this paper. The researcher surmised from his discoveries that an analogy could be drawn between the triune relationships of the Godhead. Just as the

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[144] "CE" stands for Continuing Education. CITI Program, *Home Page,* n.d, accessed February 10, 2017, .https://about.citiprogram.org/en/homepage/.

[145] See IRB Approval

[146] See Appendix A, Interview Questions

[147] See Appendix D, Recruitment Letter

[148] See Appendix E, Consent Form.

Trinity cooperates in the objective of bringing humanity into a relationship with God, the church participates in the process of a trinitarian approach of developing the church as the gatekeeper, developing the community as the first layer of outreach, and developing the world for a circumferential relationship with God. After the establishment of the spiritual dimension for the validity of the study, the researcher transitioned to the next objective.

The second objective sought theoretical underpinnings from the research of other academia including books, journals, and dissertations written relevant to church decline and church growth. The results provided information for causes of decline and elements of church growth in other regions. This research encompassed the latter half of Chapter 2 of this paper.

In accordance with the project investigator's overarching objective to study black church attendance of Johnston County in North Carolina, he needed to identify them. To accomplish this, he accessed his church software database consisting of a compilation of approximately thirty churches that his staff identified as affiliated with his church through engagements and bulk mailing. The researcher, then, filtered the list through an Excel spreadsheet to identify black churches in Johnston County. He achieved the desired number of survey sample churches by obtaining a directory of churches from a local black church district association.

Format of Pastoral Sessions

Armed with years of theological scholarship and pastoral training, the researcher realized his obligation to contribute to the sphere of influence that awaited his arrival. He knew to presume the answer to the dilemma of declining churches rested in academic research and study solely, constituted a crucial error in judgment. Nothing short of treading the trenches of the pastors could provide the fodder required to understand the problem better, observe the details of

tradition and culture, and garner insights of venues, demographics, and characteristics of technicalities as minuscule as geography.

Establishing rapport and winning their trust loomed at the foot of each interview. Participants received reassurance that the researcher endeavored to safeguard their interests, rights, and sensitive information. He communicated his research objectives concisely and with clarity and assured them of their privacy. The participants received assurance of anonymity and the researcher further provided them information to contact representatives of Liberty University. He presented these disclosures verbally by telephone, text, in-person, and always followed up with a written Consent Form prior to the pastoral session.

Mentally fortified for an exhaustive summer, the researcher allocated three months to hold sessions with local pastors of black churches in Johnston County, North Carolina. By divine government, the period occurred during the summer months, which challenged scheduling interviews. The investigator filled his calendar to interview two to three pastors each week. This process resulted mostly in successful meetings and a few times with rescheduling due to last minute changes by busy pastors. However, it paled in comparison to the task of initiating contact with the pastors. Many of the pastors listed their church phone numbers in the directory or on the Internet but supplied no answering device or person. Half of the churches with answering machines never returned the investigator's call. The researcher traveled to various towns in Johnston County and attained the names of many pastors from the church billboard, but this effort was futile because a few pastors were itinerate ministers that pastored more than one church and lived in another town. Most of the pastors that were not itinerant pastors lived outside of their church community as well. Fortunately, as providence dictated, Johnston District Missionary Baptist Association (JDMBA) provided a directory that contained their pastors'

contact information, which proved to be vital. The investigator is grateful for his personal

association of pastors that completed a modicum of pastors for a successful survey project.

The investigator advised the pastors that he desired to have a session with them at their

church office and requested a tour of the church afterward. If this was not possible, he met with

them at their home or in a restaurant. In cases that rendered him unable to tour the church, he

later traveled to the church and took a photo of the church's exterior and the grounds. The time

set for the meetings corresponded to the pleasure of the pastors. The sessions occurred after the

morning worship service, before Night Bible Study, during their work lunch break, after Day

Bible Study or by an exclusive appointment day or night. Nonetheless, the project intervention

of pastoral sessions wrapped up within the three-month-allocated period.

Description of the Participants

Protocol for How Many Pastors Needed

The task of selecting twenty pastors is no small feat. Their selection means that they

mirror the targeted population or in other words are samples. The utilization of survey sampling

carries advantages for the investigator. The first consideration is the speed of data collection. In

social sciences, which entails this project, examining a subset within a set is more expedient than

reconnoitering the complete set when considering time and benefit. The second consideration is

the cost. Processing a few that represents the whole eliminates redundancy, which in turn

reduces cost. The same applies to applied research in the pastoral field. For instance, the

researcher lacks the luxury of meeting with the entire population of churches in the area which

could number into the hundreds of churches countywide for the general churches. The excessive

time and cost could derail the entire research project. For those reasons, the researcher elected to select twenty pastors to represent the African American churches of Johnston County.

A major task of the investigator involved quantifying black churches in the County of Johnston, North Carolina. The United States Religion Census reported incomplete coverage of black Protestant churches in Johnston County due to "African American religious bodies have traditionally lacked resources to gather data."[149] However, that report reflected statistics on eleven African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) churches, which the researcher corroborated independently during a pastoral session of one of the A.M.E. pastors. Additionally, the researcher obtained a conference with the president of a church association, who identified thirty other churches in Johnston County. A broader perspective from the U.S. Census Bureau attributes 259 congregations to Johnston County at-large including the eleven AME churches. The corollary is that the majority of black churches from all the denominations lack representation in the official data; therefore the researcher developed a formula for its determination. The researcher adopted the 15% black population figure of Johnston County to project the approximate number of black churches and applied that formula to the general church population.[150] The researcher deduced that 259 general population churches less eleven AME churches leaves a difference of 248 white churches with a multiplication factor of 85% as the ratio of whites to blacks, which yielded an estimate of forty-four black churches in Johnston County (248 / 85% = 292 white and black churches totaled). An assumption can be made that

[149] "U.S. Religion Census 2010: Summary Findings, May 1, 2012," accessed February 16, 2019, http://www.usreligioncensus.org/press_release/ACP%2020120501.pdf.

[150] "United States Census Bureau, American FactFinder, March 2017," accessed February 16, 2019, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF.

the difference between the forty-four black churches by the above mathematical formula and the 41 churches by actual count is the unknown number of black churches for which the researcher sought. Thus, the investigator can reasonably estimate that Johnston County is comprised of 248 white churches (85%) and 44 black churches (15 percent) for a total of 292 churches given all aspects are equal. To accommodate this finding, the researcher noted that human research samplings could be as low as 5 percent when considering comparable fields as voter polling or Nielsen's TV ratings. For instance, Nielsen reports that "a single national rating point represents 1% of the total number" of television equipment homes.[151] Accordingly, twenty sample black churches that represented forty-four actual black churches rendered an excellent representation of 45 percent (20:44 ratio), or each sampling represented approximately two churches. With one protocol fulfilled, the next protocol lay ahead.

Protocol for How Pastors were Selected

The subject of the survey sampling, the pastor, needed to represent all facets of the target population to depict the components therein accurately. The investigator omitted random sampling that picked pastors by happenstance. Instead, a calculated criterion or a "sampling frame" dictated the survey methodology. The sampling frame is a list of all churches within a population; in this case, Johnston County, whose pastor can be sampled.

The first parameter set by the researcher restricted churches to Johnston County. He identified the churches of said county by a specific contact to a local church association for the

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[151] TAM Glossary, *Nielsen Television Audience Measurement,* 2019, accessed Feb 19, 2019, http://www.agbnielsen.com/glossary/glossaryQ.asp#alphaS. Rating (TV): "The average percentage of a given population group watching a TV channel/programme across a set time interval. The concept of rating is generally restricted to TV, but may also be used for other media. One rating point equals 1 percentage."

directory of all its churches in the county. As alluded to earlier, the Servant Keeper church

management software from his own church generated a list of all church affiliation, that is, from

mail distribution campaigns and fellowship services among churches. The researcher exported

this list to his Excel spreadsheet and filtered out all churches with addresses other than Johnston

County.

The second parameter established by the researcher limited the selection of churches to

African American and multicultural ones. This criterion precluded an efficient method for

extracting minority churches since the remainder of Johnston County churches in the

researcher's portfolio came from an online directory. Nothing short of placing phone calls to

these churches to include or exclude them sufficed.

The third parameter required all pastors/churches to be proportionately distributed across

the geography of Johnston County, North Carolina. This criterion increased the likelihood of

including rural and town churches dispersed across the County. To accomplish this, the Excel

spreadsheet of Johnstonian churches were sorted by zip code. Johnston County comprised

eleven towns and the assortment of churches revealed they represented zip codes of all eleven

town or the churches were so close to adjacent towns that they were given zip codes of the

neighboring towns. One last protocol is now in order.

Protocol for Pastor's Role

The initial telephone call commences the procedure for screening the subjects or pastors,

which may sometimes be referred to as participants. If the church is fortunate enough to hire

office staff, the process requires only a couple of steps: determine if the pastor qualifies and

establish a rapport with the pastor. If the church is unstaffed, the investigator leaves a request for

the pastor to return the phone call on the answering device. Peradventure, the call is

unanswered, the arduous task of locating the pastor begins.

Upon reaching the pastor, the researcher is cognizant that he must decide qualification as

politely as possible without wasting the pastor's time or that of the researcher. A brief

introduction followed by one to three questions depending upon the answers. First, "Is your

congregation predominantly white or black?" If the response is affirmative for a white

congregation, the conversation apologetically terminates. If the response is affirmative for a

black congregation, the second task is the determination of the five-year pastoral experience

criterion. Once this is settled, the researcher's qualification process is complete.

The third task is to schedule a session with the pastor. The researcher states from

memory or a prepared script that he is conducting research to identify why attendance is

declining in black churches of Johnston County in North Carolina. He proceeds to request

permission to record an interview with the pastor. The personal phone call rather than an email

or letter gives the human touch in initiating rapport, which increases the likelihood of a positive

outcome. He informs the pastor that he will email the interview questions to give him time to

prepare.

The investigator's fourth task is to inform the pastor of his joint-role with the investigator

in the project, which further solidifies rapport and sets the framework for honest feedback. After

all, the definitive goal is to collaborate with the pastor in discovering solutions or at least shed

light on the problem of blacks disengaging in church. For pastors to share intimate information,

first about himself, and second, about his congregation, requires a certain degree of trust.

Pastors, as with any leader, possess a proclivity to cast their congregation in the best light and

may glaze over important contributions to the project intervention unknowingly. To counter this,

the investigator shares some unflattering details about his own church that portrays transparency and trust. For instance, while on the conversation of emailing the questionnaire, the investigator might let them know that he should not feel embarrassed to answer any questions as he himself deals with attendance issues and sometimes as few as "x" number of members shows up on Bible Study night.

The function of the pastor is to provide quantitative statistics on church attendance as well as offer input on qualitative research questions that answers the queries of how, why, and what in areas of leadership, the congregants, and the community. Such questions range from the pastor's personal qualification to the eccentricities of church members.

To augment the veracity of the research, the researcher delivered the questionnaire instrument in advance of the session to allow the pastor to ruminate over his responses. Often, spontaneous replies to questions contribute to errors and generate superficial data that fail to probe the root of issues and reflect only symptoms. Case in point, the question, "What factors do you believe account for the decline of your church attendance?" A hasty response might be, "People just do not want to come to church on Sunday morning." This answer may be true, yet it may be symptomatic of a bigger dilemma that begs the question of why they do not want to come to church on Sunday mornings. While pondering the nature of the question the pastor not only has a responsibility of personal integrity, but as the gatekeeper of his parish, his role includes being knowledgeable of the congregation, boards, committees, ministries, and standard operating procedures. All these factors contribute to the quality of the investigator's research that becomes dependent upon accurate data and assessment. In essence, the pastor's role is an informant to the investigator in areas of congregational habits and preference assessments, environmental needs assessment, and his personal assessment.

Objectives for Pastoral Sessions

In order to achieve the goal of ascertaining solutions or at least peeling off blinders to the problem of blacks disengaging in church, a set of objectives for the pastoral sessions required addressing. Without such guidelines, the project could veer off course or delve extensively in one problem area and barely touch another. To prevent hampering the collaborative effort from the embarrassment of the local church pastor, who held all the information, the researcher shared only pertinent, need-to-know objectives with the pastor. The researcher assumed the pastor realized he indeed was the subject from the Consent Form's statement, "The researcher is hoping to deduce whether church attendance is associated with a particular style of pastoral leadership."

The researcher established knowledge of the pastors as the first half of his objectives. He observed if and how much their experience, education, personality, leadership style, and availability contributed to the success of the church. Second, the investigator sought to garner information on the churches as the second half of his objectives. Their locations, cultures, ministries, finances, and physical appearances played a significant role in determining the factors that affect church growth. These two components, the pastors and their congregation, embedded the keys to unlocking the mystery of cause-and-effect that brings about growth, plateau, or decline in the life of a church. At least from the researcher's perspective, a project of this caliber could become a resource for church growth in his home county as well as the extra benefit of new found relationships among his peers. The meat of the project planning enlisted another component.

Content of Pastoral Sessions

   The pastoral sessions consisted of interviews with the pastors. Instead of a group session, the investigator chose private meetings with each pastor. Building a strong intimate atmosphere yielded better and more accurate information. A group focus tends to shield pastors from one hundred percent participation and more importantly, eliminates the appearance of pastors competing, which often lead to embellished or overgeneralized responses. Consequently, because of this approach, the project propelled the researcher into twenty private sessions across the county and required a set of standardized questions for all participants.

   Each pastoral session contained two segments. The first segment of the interview comprised twenty-eight questions, eight of which were preliminary that related to demographics and pastoral experience. The remaining twenty questions either quantified or qualified the state of the church. The last segment included a tour of the church facilities where possible. Some pastors experienced limitations on this request due to their remote residence from the church.

   The preliminary section queried the pastor's full name, the name of the church, its address, and denomination while other questions related to the number of years of pastorship at the present church and the total number of years as a pastor. The final two questions asked for the average Sunday attendance and the ethnicity of the church makeup.

   After the preliminary section, the following emanated as the core of the interview questions along with the reason for the question as a backdrop:

1. What trends have you seen in your church attendance in the past five years? Have you seen growth, a plateau, or a decline in attendance? The question is a quantitative question to measure the trajectory of the church population. This question is the flagship for discovering the reason for whatever is the trajectory.

2.   What factors do you believe account for trends? The question is qualitative and requires the

pastor to ruminate the history of the church over the past five years. Perhaps a church split, age

attrition or a new pastor had affected the attendance.

3.   Have you taken any measures to try to increase your attendance? Please discuss. To omit

"please discuss" would render the investigator clueless with this closed-end question. However,

he must be tactful as the pastor could perceive the question to be a formal accusation on his

leadership abilities.

4.   Overall, attendance in the black church seems to be on the decline. Why do you believe that

is happening? The qualitative question imposes the opinion of the pastors to conjecture their

take on the black church at large and, depending on their response from the previous question,

gives them a chance to recover from their pride or anguish in their own local situation.

5.   In the past, the church was often considered to be the center of American black community

life. Do you think that is still true? If not, why not? If so, why is that? Again, this set of

questions is qualitative and draws attention to black history over several decades to gain an

appreciation for the severity of the problem.

6.   If someone were to ask you how to increase church attendance, what would you suggest?

The previous question 3 referred to the pastors' past performance in increasing their church

attendance. This particular question grants the pastors a chance to advise the investigator from

their perspective while simultaneously fortifying themselves for launching an offensive strategy

in their backyard.

7.   Someone has suggested that churches often tend to emphasize certain aspects. Here are five

factors of healthy churches: fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry to the needy, and

evangelism. Of those five, which aspect or aspects do you believe is the strongest in your

ministry? The researcher either informs or reminds pastors of the aspects of a healthy church from the statement that serves as a preface to the question.

8.   Of those five, which do you think is the weakest in your ministry? The pastors, from this quantitative question, can self-evaluate. The question seeks no justification, for it is a time of reflection.

9.   Would you say you have balanced these factors in your church or is one or more of them more predominant? Again, the researcher allows space for rumination.

10. If I were to ask an unchurched black person in your community to describe your church based on what they know, how would they describe your ministry? What is your reputation in the community? Do you think you are relatively well known or unknown in your surrounding area? The interview with this cluster of questions turns to community engagement for the church in conjunction with the pastors' personal influence.

11. If I were to ask your members what they like best about your church, what kind of responses would I get? Obviously, this question is meant to shift inward to gauge the culture of the church from the member's perspective. This can be enlightening even for the pastors.

12. If I were to ask them what they like least or what they would like to see improved, what might those things be? With the psychological skill of compliment before constructive critiquing, the researcher asks the pastors to tender complaints of the church through the lens of the parishioners. If the pastors have no clue, they now have a cue of what to do. For some, this might be an epiphany that can lead to investigating ministries, initiating building improvements and revisiting finances.

13. What are some factors that you believe encourage individuals to become regular attendees of the church? An understanding of why people attend their churches can assist pastors in

capitalizing on a building block for growth that is already in place. The antithesis of that is the opportunity to investigate why people attend but refuse to commit to membership.

14. Number wise, what percentage of people on a typical Sunday are visitors, regular attendees, or members? This quantitative question explores the makeup of the church population. Distinguishing these groups becomes a pool for training spiritual leaders as well as identifying who is own the church membership role.

15. Do you take any steps to encourage regular attendees to consider church membership? Explain. The researcher is now highlighting the easiest form of church growth.

16. On a typical Sunday, do you often see any unbelievers or seekers? The closed-end question is purposeful in that it serves as a pause to remind pastors that the absence or presence of unbelievers means work. If present, constant prayer, fervent worship, and clarity in preaching ought to prevail; if absent, outreach is calling.

17. Do you believe your church is welcoming to visitors? Would it be easy for a new person to assimilate or would they encounter cliques? This question addresses a major obstacle to church growth and pleads suggestively for a pastor to beware.

18. I am writing a project that I hope to be helpful to black pastors. What advice (on any topic) would you give to a pastor just starting in the ministry? On behalf of the researcher, this freelance question is for his benefit in garnering innovative ideas that can further his research.

19. What is your position on requiring church members to pay tithes? The purpose of this line of questioning is to compare tithing churches with non-tithing churches to determine if it is a factor in church growth or decline.

20. What is your highest level of education? Likewise, the researcher employs this question to determine if the level of education contributes to church growth or decline.

Evaluation Method

After completion of the intervention process, the researcher's next task entailed determining whether the undertaking attained success or not. The researcher yearned to know, and the very nature of the methodology demanded to know if the intervention achieved the purpose of the project and whether it responded to the problem at hand sufficiently. To assess the outcome of the project required a systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of the project, which Michael Patton refers to as evaluation research.[152]

This method is a comparison of collected data to the goals of the researcher. In other words, the evaluation focused on the research problem exclusively. The researcher rendered an accurate account of what took place in the progression of the intervention including what transpired appropriately and what backfired or presented challenges. Furthermore, the integrity of his research compelled him to not only explicate what he did but rationalize his actions. Before proceeding the report warrants an introduction to the types of evaluation considered in the evaluation process.

Types of Evaluation

The key to evaluating or interpreting data derives not from reporting information, but conversely from a cross-section of everyday life experiences. To achieve breadth and depth in analyzing the data, the researcher utilizes a technique called triangulation. This practice

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[152] Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987, 145.

considers the culture, politics, society, dialects, and ideology of the participants and audience as well as that of the researcher.[153]

Four basic types of triangulation exist to facilitate the researcher's ability to decipher fluctuating viewpoints on multifaceted issues and events. Methodological triangulation studies a single problem from the employment of multiple methods such as interview, observations, questions, and documents. This process is an overkill for this investigator since his only tools are interviews and questions. Investigator triangulation comprises a group of researchers or social scientists from varying fields examining the same dilemma. This method hardly applies to this project. The third, theory triangulation, utilizes manifold viewpoints to interpret a single set of data. For instance, if the study focused on missiology, probing the conclusions through the optics of different atonement theories will reveal more than restricting the study to one doctrine or religion. This theory is too broad for the researcher since his focus is on evangelical churches. The final approach, data triangulation compares and contrasts information from observation, questionnaire, and interviews. This straightforward method augmented the researcher's understanding of an issue and appeared analogous to the researcher's purpose.

Protocol for Administering Evaluation

The triangulation method breaks down into three components that constitute three angles of evaluating the intervention. "For qualitative research, three angles of vision are considered the saturation point to support the criteria of trustworthiness."[154] Besides, the panorama of a

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[153] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods.* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002, 41, 65.

[154] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 76.

research problem is too vast to capture all perspectives from one angle. The first angle of the data triangulation is data collection from the twenty pastors connected to the project. The nomenclature for them, "The Insiders," is appropriate since they possess firsthand information and maintain access to the church, community, and the accompanying issues. Their position on the ground permits them to interface the church and the community to fully appreciate and capture the dynamics of the church attendance problem. The Insiders' job description as pastors held them accountable to provide accurate and honest information as respondents to the twenty-plus questions that the interviewer presented. As collaborators in the research, certain parts of the interview required not only data but their expertise in evaluating the problem and solution of dwindling church attendance.

The next angle of the triangle consisted of "The Outsider," who conducted an independent analysis as an outside expert. After the collection of the data, the investigator delivered it to The Outsider, Dr. Gregory Faulls, for an oral or written evaluation. The rationale for his role evolved from the need to examine the responses of The Insiders (pastors) to determine if their input paralleled academic and experimental findings and to make recommendations. In other words, he reviewed the data provided by The Researcher and provided insights and critiques related to theological and theoretical strengths and weaknesses. His role as a second-opinion doctor, metaphorically, rendered his expert diagnosis, his recommended treatment, and presented his prognosis of the treatment.

The last angle of the triangulation is that of the "The Researcher." Being that he shared commonality with the Insiders as being a minister of the Gospel within his parish deemed him qualified to be an active participant and relatable to much of the intricacies encountered by pastors in identifying and evaluating the problem. On the other end of the spectrum, The

Researcher, to some degree, shared a scholarly footing with The Outsider. Because of the cohesion with both contemporaries, The Researcher operated under the umbrella of observation, interpretation, and filtration. Specifically, he made notes of his observation and audible communication. Such field notes and other tools enabled him to recapture the rationales, voice tones, dialogues, and visuals that prompted him at some point to make notations. His role demanded observation of moods, silence, personality, dress, and body language. Though seemingly minuscule, such nuances articulated virtues such as temperament and provided insights. Coupled with the content of the interviews, The Researcher, interlaced structured questions with improvised questions to weave in the unique fabrics of each local church that often-revealed underlying problems that generated symptoms. The observation sequence of the project included all communications, tours, photos, dinners, and in some cases attending worship services. The finality of The Researcher's expertise as pastor, researcher, and active participant catapults him to be the filter of all the data gleaned through the lens of The Insiders (pastors) and The Outsider (independent expert). Figure 1 below illustrates triangulation.
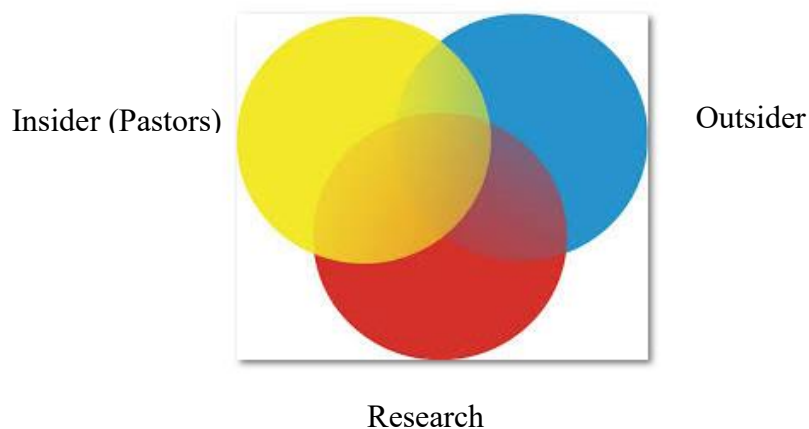

Insider (Pastors)   Outsider

Research

Figure 1. Data Triangulation from Distinct Perspectives[155]

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[155] Ibid., 185.

Protocol for Collecting Data

After determining the sample size of twenty pastors, the researcher created a tool for collecting the desired data, called a questionnaire, which contained approximately twenty structured questions and room for impromptu questions to elicit more information to fill in gaps and clarification. The previous subsection "Content of the Pastoral Sessions," covered the nature and justification for each question. The next procedure entailed a face-to-face interview with the source of the data, the pastor. The investigator arrived early always to begin the Observation Process that commenced while driving. The geography of the area provided data that informed him of population density and settings whether rural, subdivision, small town, middle income or low income. Economic and business development status emerged from the lack or presence of businesses and manicured lawns. Observation of the church surroundings provided a clue for the degree of need for ministry outreach, for instance, the presence of youth in the street or senior citizens on porches.

The first action upon arrival at the churches entailed shooting snapshots of the church grounds and the exterior of the church and adjoining buildings. The appearance of the church exterior in most instances presented the impression of an organized and progressive church. Anything to the contrary could only be determined by the narrative of the forthcoming meeting with the pastor. To ensure a full record of the interview, the pastor pre-approved the meeting to be audio recorded before the researcher arrived. Following the interview that could last from thirty minutes to almost two hours, the pastor granted a tour of the church and its facilities, which proved helpful in giving proper understanding and context to what was communicated in oral and written form. During the tour, the pastor allowed the investigator to take photos of the

pastor and the interior rooms of the church and facilities such as the fellowship hall, his study, the kitchen, Sunday school rooms, and the media centers.

Although the investigator's preference upon returning home was to review the recordings, on most occasions, he only had time to check for a valid recording and replenish his stock for the next meeting. The process lasted all of three months. The tools for collecting data consisted of the Consent Form, questionnaire, laptop, audio recording application, hand notes, and camera. Additional supplies included backup batteries, highlighters, ink pens, power supply, extra copies of the Consent Form, extra copies of the questionnaire, a vehicle, and a GPS navigation system for locating the churches. Extra cash and a credit card for emergencies while traveling completed the equipment package.

Protocol for Interpreting Data

Interpreting the findings of the intervention project required enough expounding to lay the groundwork for the results sufficiently. The results required a picture of the context to convey the meaning of the interpretation. In other words, the researcher during the evaluation process assessed each interview question intentionally from various aspects rather than from a threadlike straight narrative that delineates the findings. To do otherwise, served only to rob the reader of experiencing the views and circumstances represented in the conclusions. Therefore, the interpretive data included copious but not pedantic qualitative responses. The next consideration involved organizing the data collected and the evaluation responses.

Interview questions encompassed the analytical framework for the project. Since standardized questions dictated the format for the pastoral sessions, their responses followed the same format for interpreting the data. The researcher grouped together the responses of all

twenty churches to each question. Case in point, if an interpretation embraced a question on outreach ministries, the researcher grouped all the responses on outreach ministries.

Another feature for interpreting involved distillation of the twenty questions into two basic themes. First, the completed questionnaire precipitated twenty possible themes from which the participant's empirical responses reflected their worldview. The corollary caused a compilation of multi-layered and multi-dimensional responses that required refining. Van Manen lists four aspects by which people experience the world, namely, spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality.[156] Subsequently, when considering these aspects, the interpreting expanded initially with thick descriptions and then condensed methodically into four categories: the first being spatial, how the "environment" affects church decline; the second being corporeal, how the "person and possessions" affects church growth; the third being temporal, how "time" affects church growth; and the last category being relational, how "relationships" affect church growth. From these four aspects, emerged two basic theoretical themes: causes of church decline and recommendations for church growth.

Summary

The project description and the composition of the pastoral sessions constructed the format of the project intervention. The discussion proceeded to describe the protocol for the participants and the project sessions. Next, the discussion fixated on the evaluation types and the method chosen. The researcher closed the chapter with the protocols for evaluation and, with the project methodology established, the next chapter of the project lay ready to build upon.

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[156] Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experinces.* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 101.

Chapter 4

Project Results and Analysis

This chapter rejoins the obvious question, "What were the results of addressing the problem of the decline of African American church attendance in Johnston County." It details the results of the research project's intervention plan through two arteries: evaluation of the results and evaluation of the conclusion. The results proceeded from three viewpoints: the pastors, the researcher, and the outside expert. The following interview segment of the intervention comprised twenty questions that were divided into five categories: Attendance Trend included Questions 1-5; Healthy Church Traits, Questions 6-9; Church and Pastor Evaluation included Questions 10-12; Visitor/Attendee Outreach, Question 13-17; Recommendations to New Pastors, Question 18; Growth Barriers, Questions 19-20.

Evaluation of the Results

Analysis from the Pastor Data

Attendance trend

This set of questions intended to convey a cursory view of the current state of attendance decline of the Black Church and to seek confirmation at the local level.

Question 1: What trends have you seen in your church attendance in the past five years? Five of the twenty pastors stated a trend of growth, six reported a plateau, and nine conveyed a decline. See Figure 2.
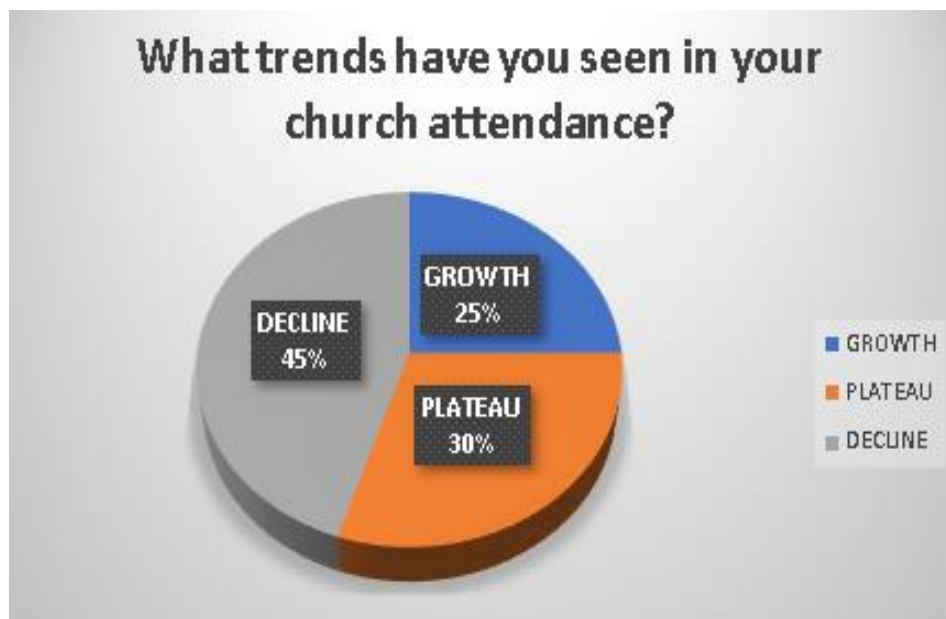
Figure 2. Five-year church attendance trends.

Question 2: What factors do you believe account for this trend? The following pastors shared their rationale for growth. Pastor 3 stated, "I gave them [members] a platform to express and facilitate their calling." Pastor 4 deferred to the many prayers that undergirded their Outreach Ministry. Pastor 5 credited growth to "relational ministry," stating, "We have taken in thirty new members since my coming to this church; one hundred percent through family relationships. No incentives, just by telling family and friends." Pastor 12 responded similarly, "Shepherds don't beget sheep. Sheep beget sheep. They can reach people that the pastors have no access to." Pastor 14 claimed a different scenario for growth. The retirement of a 38-year veteran pastor, the move from two services a month to four services, the return of members who earlier transferred, the influx of newcomers into the area, the change of preaching style and music, all contributed to the growth of his church.

Question 3: Have you taken any measures to try to increase your attendance? All of the pastors affirmed this question and cited several methods used. Ninety percent of the responses involved some form of outreach: door-to-door, letters, flyers, and unique events. For instance,

Pastor 1 operated a Back-Pack Buddies program that provided lunch meals to school kids. In addition, his church participated in the county's Meals-On-Wheels program for the elderly.

Question 4: Overall, attendance in the black church seems to be on the decline. Why do you believe that is happening? (See Figure 3 below for summary.) Each pastor tendered several factors for the decline in churches that translated into the following percentages of the responses. The rebellion from the Black Church tradition ranked as the number one factor of the Black Church attendance decline. This category amalgamates several problems. The churches regardless of denominations experienced millennials leaving the church because of not given a voice or their request denied by the power structures of the traditionalist. Other facets of rebellion consider the church nonessential to salvation, teaching, and fellowship. Peer pressure among the same group to follow the crowd to multicultural- and mega-churches becomes part of the osmosis to the rebellion. Other forms of rebellion include escape from perceived negative images of black churches from the television industry and mocking from peers.
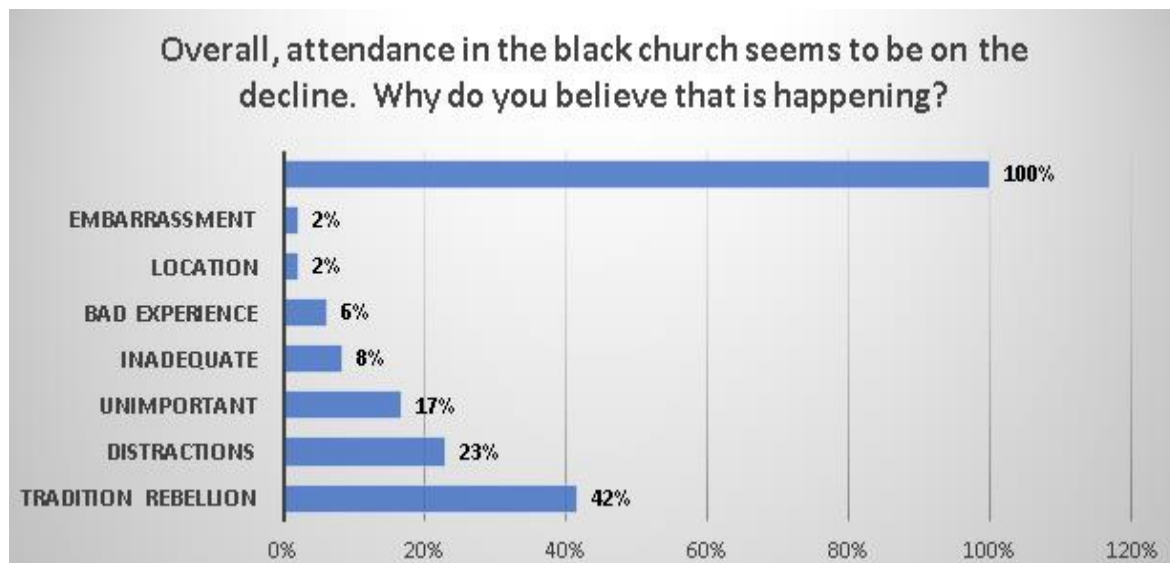

Figure 3. Reasons African Americans are leaving the Black Church

Sunday businesses and entertainment distractions ranked second for black church flight at 23 percent; multicultural church preference, 15 percent; church no longer important or Christian

faith abandonment, 17 percent; inadequacy of the Black Church to meet expectations, 8 percent; bad experiences, 6 percent; location issues, 2 percent; and personal embarrassment of clothing and offerings, 2 percent. When pressed on this last issue of clothes and offerings, Pastor 10 noted that the Sunday dress code for most black churches consist of at least semi-formal attire, which Millennials consider inconsiderate of the poor and the expectation of tithing humiliates the impoverished.

When asked to expound on rebellion of the Black Church tradition, Pastor 1 contended that the general church body that includes all races treats black churches as inferior and the black demographic does not want to be identified by race. "People of color notice that white ministers act as if they are called to the blacks. No white pastor has ever invited me to preach to his congregation, although we have had several white ministers to come to our church. It is only done if the non-white pastor is a celebrity like Tony Evans or T. D. Jakes. And even then, as celebrated as they are, only a small percentage of whites make up their audience, thus blacks become ashamed of their church." Pastor 9 explicated "rebellion of tradition" in his experience related to black millennials observed the unwillingness of black churches to adapt in worship style, which resulted in them leaving the church and thereby an entire generation vanished from the church. Pastor 12 noted that the current generation believes "it does not have to go to church to be saved or to hear the Word." Another factor for declining church attendance noted by Pastor 5 included negative images of black churches from the TV and entertainment industry that mock them.

Question 5: In the past, the church was often considered to be the center of American black community life. Do you think that is still true? Why is that? Ninety percent of the pastors replied in the negative with common and copious responses that factored into the

equation. The following is a partial recount: (1) church replaced by televangelists, (2) church considered a social club, (3) church imbued with recalcitrant leaders, (4) church lost in competing factors, no longer the only outlet, (4) church lost integrity from corrupt leadership, (5) church lost parental reinforcement or participation, (6) church positioned within a generation that denies the existence of God and knows little about God, (7) church experiencing youth flight, but return at senior age, and (8) church fell to seek and fellowship with the lost.

Healthy church traits

Question 6: If someone were to ask you how to increase church attendance, what would you suggest? Each pastor presented several suggestions; however, noteworthy is that 20 percent of the pastors admitted the question represented a quandary to them. A bell-shaped curve placed the following as the top suggestions for increasing church attendance: (1) think outside the box, 30 percent (their definition for this included tech savvy pastors changing their method but not their message, being creative, and becoming involved in civic matters that affect the church community); (2) build a strong youth department, 25 percent; (3) outreach, 25 percent; (4) teach discipleship and leadership to core group, 20 percent; and (5) make preaching interesting and applicable, 15 percent. Other suggestions on the edges of the bell curve included: checking church environment (structure and appearance), being consistent will all members, listening to people, increasing teaching, following-up with visitors, motivating members to build relationships with family and friends, promoting church relevancy to the new generation, surveying the community and church, acquiring younger leadership teams, and maintaining some form of public relations (marketing, advertising, social media, et cetera), and finally loving people genuinely.

Question 7: Someone has suggested that churches often tend to emphasize certain aspects. Here are five factors of healthy churches: fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry to the needy, and evangelism. Of those five, which aspect or aspects do you believe is the strongest in your ministry? Fellowship tied with worship, each at 30 percent, as the pastors' strongest aspects. Discipleship ranked next highest for 25 percent of the pastors. Ministry to the needy and evangelism deadlocked last at 15 percent each for the pastors. See Figure 4.
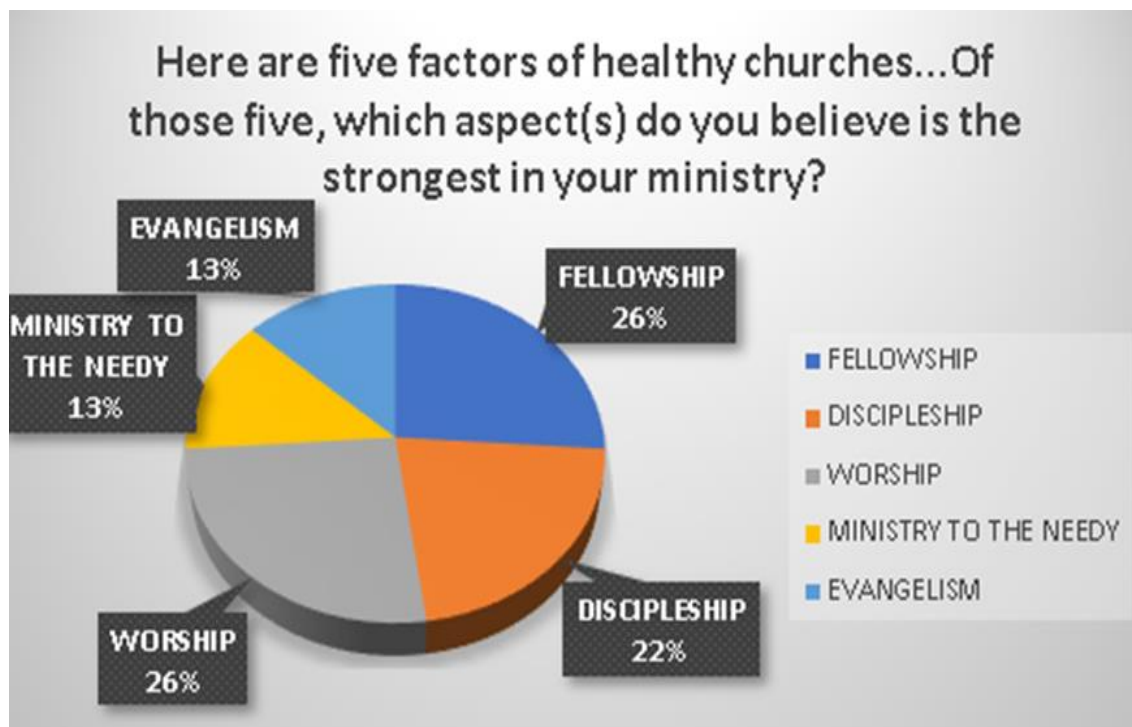
Figure 4. Ministries which are strongest.

Question 8: Of those five, which aspect or aspects do you believe is the weakest in your

ministry? Sixty percent of the pastors conceded evangelism ranked lowest in their churches.

Twenty-four percent of the pastors conceded discipleship ranked next lowest. Worship and

ministry to the needy fared better in that only 5 percent and 10 percent, respectively, of the

pastors claimed weakness in those areas. See Figure 5.
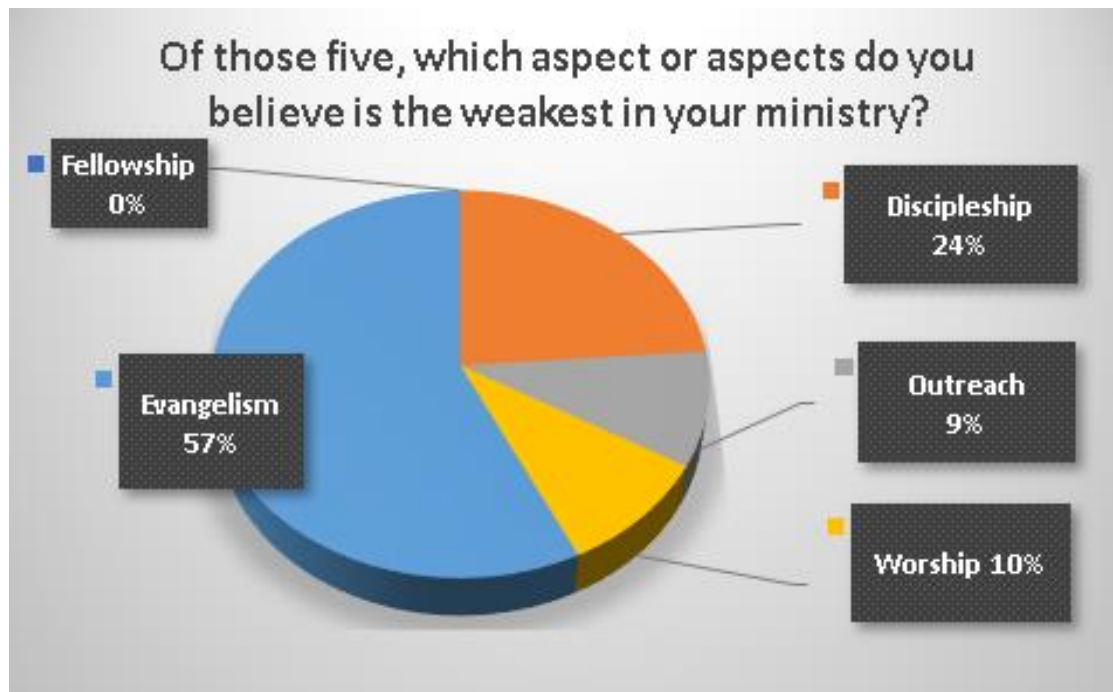
Figure 5. Ministries which are weakest

Question 9: Would you say you have balanced these factors in your church or is one or

more of them more predominant? Why? Sixty-five percent of the pastors responded in the

negative. Pastor 3 maintained that churches need not fulfill all the ministries, only what they feel

called to do and according to their resources. For him, evangelism by bus ministry incurred

higher-than-expected liability cost and door-to-door contact sparked an outcry of rejection by the

community. "We have no purposeful crusade to evangelize. We experience growth through

relationship and bringing friends. Textbook growth does not work. Door-to-door contact is not

safe and unwanted," he stated. Most believed their church should be balance in these areas and confessed that to be their goal.

Church and pastor evaluation

 Question 10: If I were to ask an unchurched black person in your community to describe your church based on what they know, how would they describe your ministry? What is your reputation in the community? Do you think you are relatively well known or unknown in your surrounding area? Eighty-five percent of the respondents stated that they and their churches were well known in the community. Pastor 3 perceived that unchurched blacks felt "safe" at his church. When asked to explain, he noted that his church was predominantly European American (although he described his church as multicultural), but the word permeated among the African Americans that his church was welcoming and safe to attend without backlash. Pastor 4 stated he had no clue due to him being fairly new to the area; however, his style he noted is slow and methodical, and he is in the process of implementing and defining his church goals. Pastor 5 revealed that his church is known for community events as selling chicken dinners and giving alms to the sick.

 Question 11: If I were to ask your members what they like best about your church, what kind of responses would I get? The question received an assortment of thirty-seven responses from the twenty pastors. They were narrowed down to four categories: fellowship and love within the church, 43 percent; preaching and pastor's style, 30 percent; worship music, 14 percent; and other, 14 percent. See Figure 6.
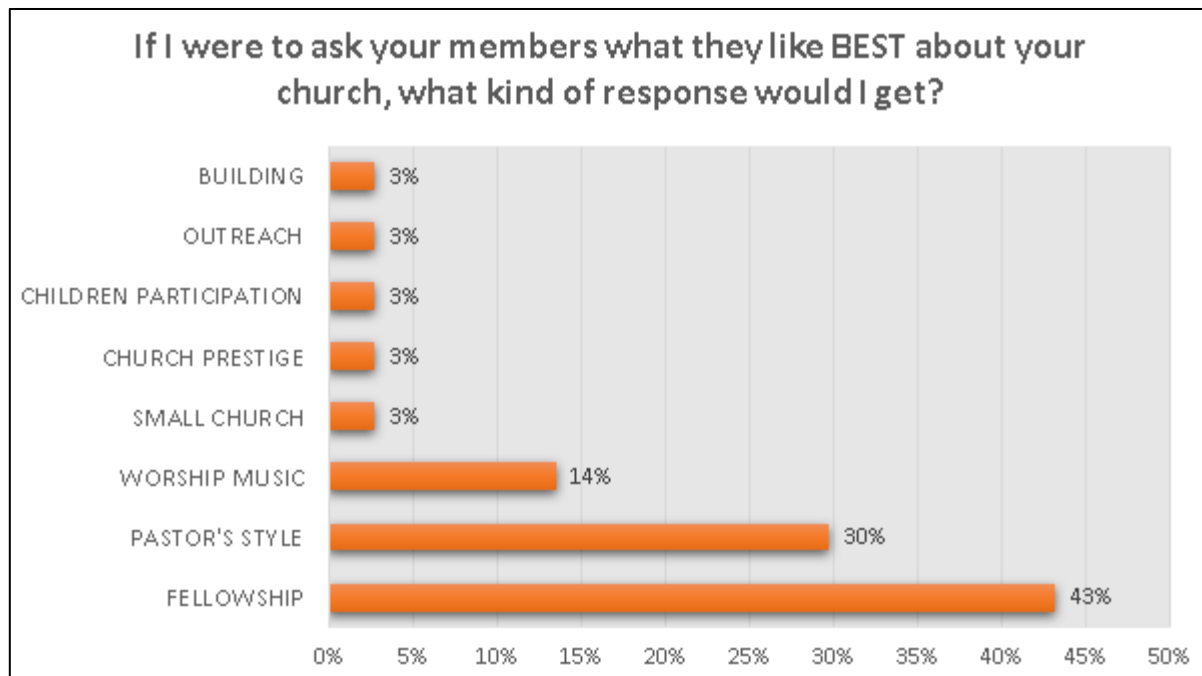
Figure 6. Pastors' response of what members like best about their church.

Question 12: If I were to ask them what they like least or what they would like to see

improved, what might those things be? Again the findings demonstrate a hodge-podge of

responses that filtered down to seven types of responses. Leadership issues infiltrated church

member dislikes at a rate of 33 percent. A breakdown of the responses detailed issues such as

the pastor refusing to submit to the deacons, which instigated a ripple-effect on the attendance.

Another instance encountered is the pastor and the leadership might disagree on the direction of

the church or the deacons might oppose the pastor in his requirement for more accountability.

Generational infighting within the church between founding descendants of the church and new

leadership members resulted in an exodus in the church. Often times, members leave because of

infighting and the refusal of the retirement of long-term leaders to hand leadership to the next

generation. Certain persons or families in the church wielded more power than the pastor. For

the millennials, transferring to another church or abandoning the church altogether became their

decision. This and the balance of the data for this question defined not the current status of the

churches but amounted mostly to the pastors' assessment based on their tenure and knowledge of

the history of the churches. In other words, they were problems of the past. An ongoing

problem with most of the pastors involved insufficient financial and human resources for

activities and outreach. Because of lack in these areas, causal effects occurred in shortages of

activities and outreach programs. As a result, 23 percent of the congregation assessed weakness

in activities and outreach ministry and 20 percent claimed they were overworked. Minor

concerns were communication and worship experience issues, each at 3 percent. Seven percent

of responses from the pastors amounted to confessions that they needed to execute a field survey

for the membership since they were clueless of how the members felt about their church. See

Figure 7.
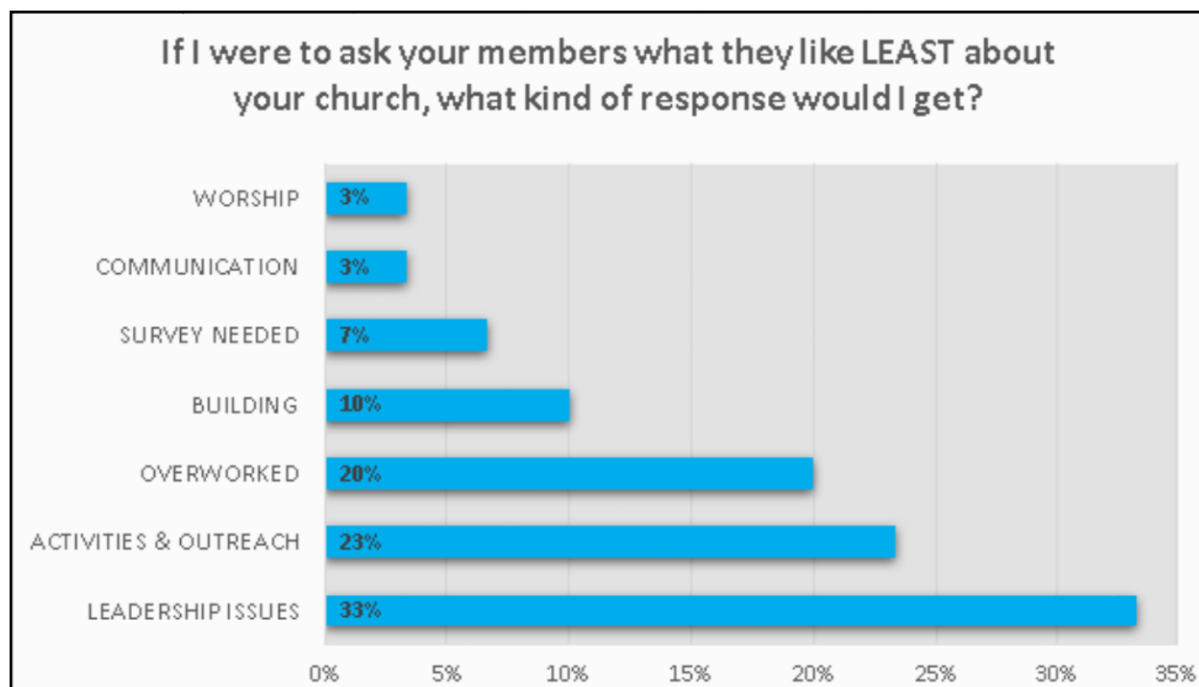
Figure 7. Pastors' response of what members like least about their church.

Visitor/attendee outreach

Question 13: What are some factors that you believe encourage individuals to become regular attendees of the church? This question yielded a mean of two propositions per pastor: forty-two responses that ranged from church stability to a desire to only attend to save face while avoiding responsibilities. Most pastors used the terms attendance and membership interchangeably until the next question followed.

Question 14: What percentage of people on a typical Sunday are visitors, regular attendees, or members? The mean for visitors landed at 7 percent, while the mean for regular attendees settled at twice that amount, and membership debarked at 79 percent. See Figure 8.
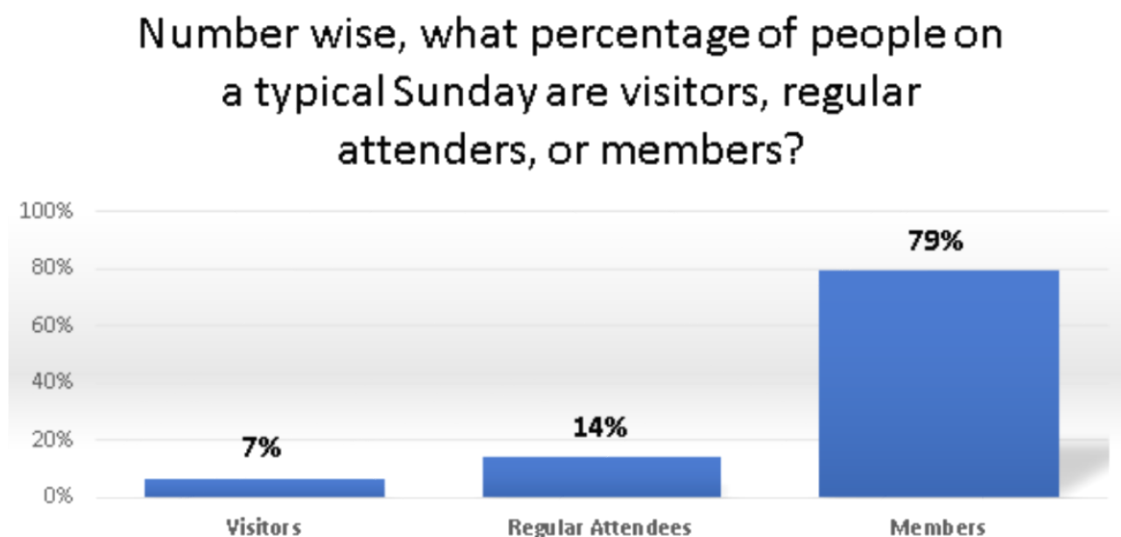
Figure 8. Breakdown of worship service congregation.

Question 15: Do you take any steps to encourage regular attendees to consider church membership? Pastors 1, 4, and 14 provided new disciple classes or orientation classes for visitors, regular attendees and new church members that desired to attend. They mandated all persons seeking membership to attend these classes. The majority of the pastors extended an invitation to become a Christian and a member of the church simultaneously after each sermon

during worship service. Pastor 3 discovered outreach ministry to be the door to increasing

membership. Their millennials enjoyed "getting their hands dirty and doing something

meaningful." For them, Habitat for Humanities" and building handicap ramps constituted their

outreach ministries. For Pastor 3, the objective of increasing membership came through

promoting gifts and talents via participation in projects prior to becoming members. Other

pastors used direct approaches as making a good first impression with door greeters, visitor

cards, follow-up calls and letters, personal visitor interviews after worship service, and meet-

and-greet periods during worship service. Pastor 15 stressed the key to converting regular

attendees into members involved establishing relationships. When he noticed regular attendees,

he immediately followed up and attempted to build a profile on them by establishing an ongoing

relationship, inviting them to outings, and participation in projects such as HIV patient packets.

Question 16: On a typical Sunday, do you often see any unbelievers or seekers?   The

question became difficult to answer because of its subjective nature in the inability to know the

heart of a person. Although given this negative, many pastors either knew their attendees

personally or through their confessions. The study reflected that 40 percent of the respondents

observed unbelievers in their midst during a typical worship service. On the other hand, Figure 9

on the next page also depicts the 40 percent of the pastors never saw unbelievers or seekers on a

typical Sunday.
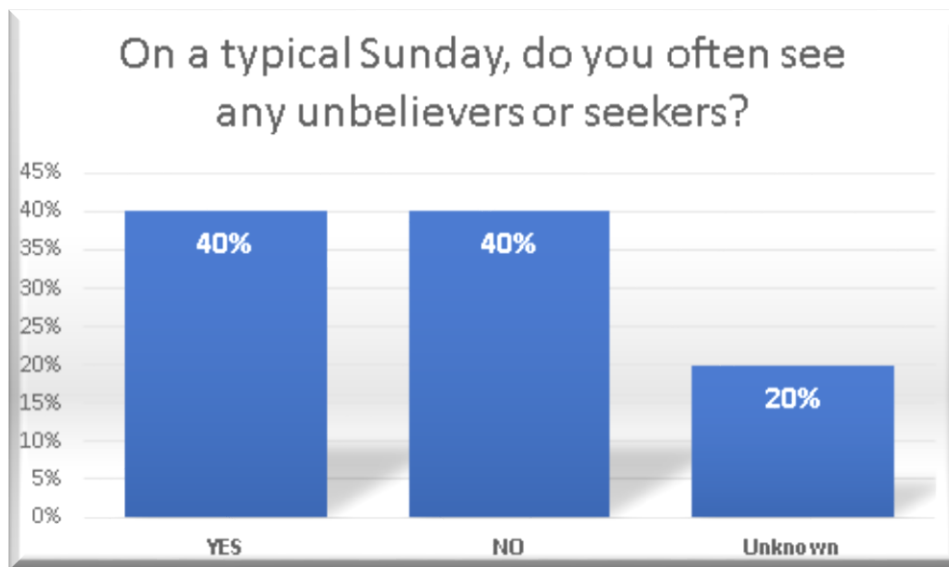
Figure 9. Observation of unbelievers or seekers attending a worship service.

Question 17: Do you believe your church is welcoming to visitors? Would it be easy for a new person to assimilate or would they encounter cliques? Strangely, 95 and 90 percent of the respondents believed their churches were welcoming and assimilating, respectively; although 70 percent of them acknowledged cliques within the church. The pastors defended their paradoxical statements in their assertion that they taught in a nurturing manner the importance of assimilation. When asked to elucidate the discrepancy in being assimilating and cliquish, the majority of the pastors stated cliques were inherent due to the familial nature of their church members. They note that family members sought out each other after service, thus the counterbalance of teaching them to make visitors their priority. Conversely, Pastor 4 vehemently and openly disallows cliques even though his church also is familial. He states the practice is detrimental to visitors and his authority in the church. Additionally, his objective is to prevent would-be-cliques from luring him to take sides, and the process bodes well for newcomers. Other pastors assert families innately gravitate to each other, but the pastors teach their congregations how to be hospitable to newcomers by first seeking them out before conversing

among themselves. Pastor 3 and congregation implemented a policy to encourage their youth to take their guest out to lunch, and the church would reimburse them for the expense. He also refrains from announcing guests in the church. He stated, "the attention is embarrassing, and visitors do not want a spotlight on them when in most cases they are just checking out several churches before making a decision." Figure 10 below illustrates the pastors' responses.
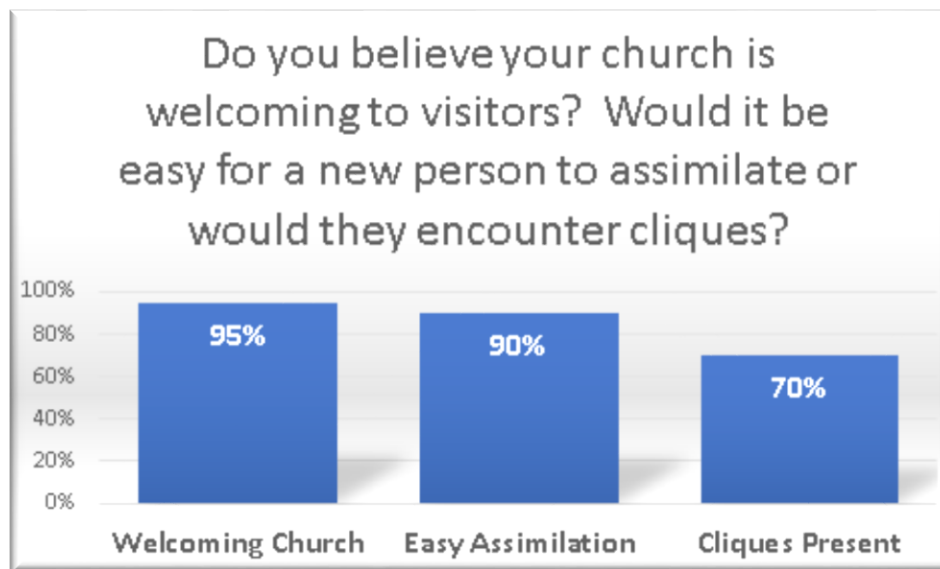
Figure 10. Newcomers encounter with churches according to pastors.

Recommendations to new pastors

Question 18: I am writing a project that I hope to be helpful to black pastors. What advice on any topic would you give to a pastor just starting in the ministry? A volley of advice followed:

> Be multiracial, think outside the box, don't get discouraged, grow with people, don't imitate other pastors, do your homework, love your people, build a leadership team of your vision, pray hard, don't give up, be a servant, seek God for guidance, be a model, go slow, don't use your influence before you earn it, build bridges not walls, preach the

Gospel, no meddling, treat everybody equal, teach the word, don't isolate yourself, fellowship with other churches and cultures, do pastoral care, and be patient.[157]

Question 19: What is your position on requiring church members to tithe? The majority of the pastors required their membership to pay tithes, but there were no repercussions for non-compliance. Unanimously, they agreed the tithing system relied upon an honor code. If that is the case, then their stance is actually "strongly encouraging" their members to tithe since they lack direct accountability or consequences. However, Pastor 3 referred to the church bylaws that require regular attendee status until such persons commit to the mandate of tithing whereupon they became legal members of the church body for business purposes. Seventy-two percent of the pastors stated that they require tithing, while 21 percent request tithing, and the remaining 7 percent require freewill offering only. See Figure 11 below.
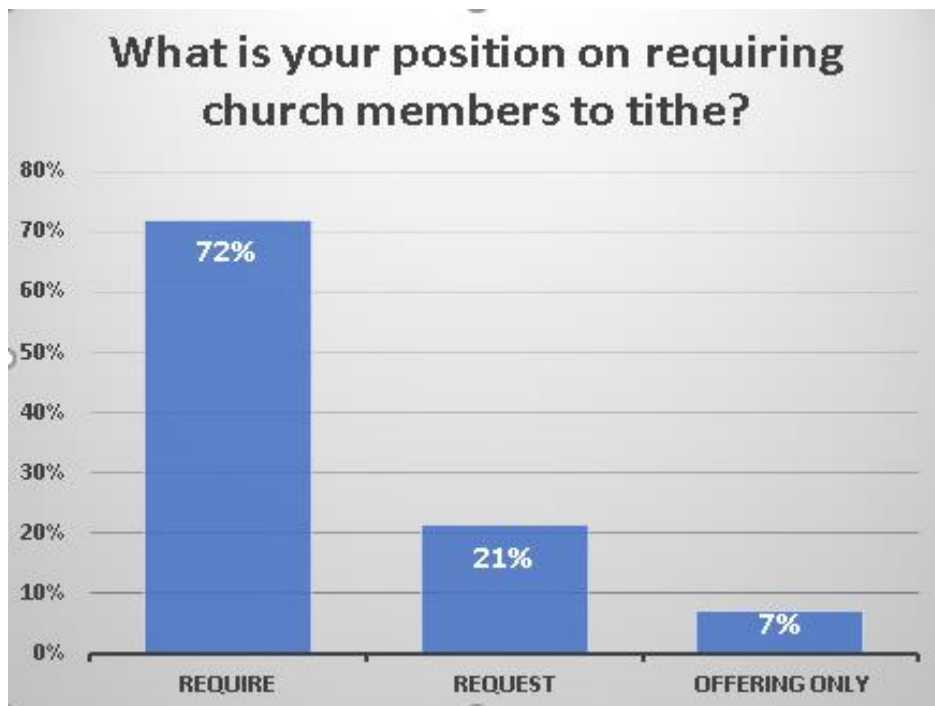
Figure 11. Pastors' position on tithing.

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[157] See Appendix B, "Advice to New Pastors," Excerpts from audio recordings of the interviews during applied research intervention of the researcher/investigator.

Question 20: What is your highest level of education achieved? The mean educational

level of 45 percent revealed the majority of the pastors earned a master's degree. One-fourth of

the pastors obtained a bachelor's degree. One of the pastors received a GED and advanced to

college. The two smallest segments tied at 15 percent of the pastors attained a high school

diploma and 15 percent earned a doctorate. Figure 12 below analyzes the educational success of

the pastors.
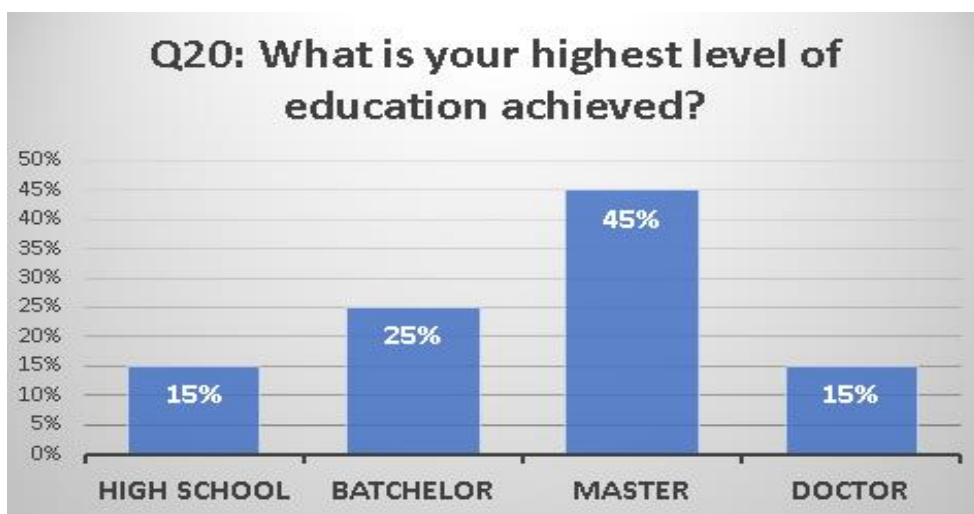
Figure 12. Education of pastors.

Analysis from the Researcher Data

A literal reading of the interview data can skew its interpretation. The researcher took

into consideration the pastors' point of view that was subjective to their worldview. His analysis

contains at least four multidimensional aspects of worldview discussed in Chapter 3 that shaped

the responses of the pastors. He derived such assessments during his interview with them, which

he used to refine the data submitted. The first dimension recognized the environmental impact

upon the response of the pastors to Questions 1 through 5. Specifically, they shared their

firsthand field knowledge of the causation of church decline from each of their unique

neighborhoods and surrounding—past and present. The puzzlement, and in some cases anguish

portrayed on many of their countenances, revealed dismay from their own personal dilemma of agonizing over the first five questions pertaining to the general decline of the black church. The corollary extended to their own church that corroborated the truth of the state of decline in the Black Church. The researcher's documentation of photos and interviews interpreted why the hesitation and often silence: the average Johnstonian church operated at only 31 percent of their capacity.[158] Many vacillated, and their initial response replicated the question back to the researcher as the six million dollar question for which they were seeking solutions as well. Case in point, the competitive, secular environmental influences such as sports, shopping malls, and technology that the pastors assessed as negative factors for church growth revealed their frustration and overall worldview of the church that left them unfulfilled and sometimes acquiescent to accept their fate of mere survival, much less thriving. One pastor confessed contemplating resignation until the intervention of the researcher. Sunday secular activities threaten church attendance on a broad scale. Steve McMullin conducted a survey of sixteen declining churches in American and Canada and reached similar conclusions. He determined secular competition as the explanation for the decline of the targeted churches. In his article, he wrote, "The repeal of 'blue laws' that kept stores closed on Sundays has resulted in many more people working or shopping on Sundays, and children's athletic activities are often scheduled on Sunday mornings at the very time when many churches traditionally have provided religious education."[159]

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[158] See Appendix C: Demographic Survey Sampling Results of Johnston County Black Churches by Denomination.

[159] SteveMcMullin, "The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches." *Acadia Divinity College*, 2012: p. 43.

Questions 6 through 12 concentrated on an internal investigation from the membership standpoint on church decline and the antidote for growth. Whereas the first five questions evoked a spatial dilemma with the environmental influences, the next set of questions elicited two more levels of a worldview that affected their responses. The first being corporeal or personal impact weighed heavily on the pastors. The researcher sprinkled flattering dialogue judiciously at certain moments. Examining the health of the church from the pastor's perception of the congregants implied an investigation upon the pastors' knowledge of their flock and cast a spotlight on their ability to lead their church through tough times. Fortified with patience the researcher heard the entire rationale for the pastors' predicaments and entrenched with determination, the researcher prodded for more information for those pastors that skimmed the subject. The second aspect of worldview, temporal or time impact, challenged the pastors when answering Questions 6 through 12. When the pastors deliberated the questions pertaining to principles of growth via healthy church ministries that should be operating, it became clear that the demographics of the pastors (most of whom were bi-vocational or retired) coincided with their predicament of not having the human resources in their churches nor the personal time for additional investment into the development of the church. The researcher's intuition delayed the question of educational status until the end of the interview sessions.[160]

Questions 13 to 19 pursued the pastors' feedback on how they would counter church plateau or decline. This line of questioning circumscribed to the final worldview of relationship impact. Executing change to determine a different outcome in church attendance invoked an

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[160] The author gathered the demographics of the church and pastor at the commencement of the interview with the exception of Question 20 that related to educational level. The postponement of the question until the end of the interview, in the author's mind, circumvented emotional distractions to bonding a rapport with the respondents.

outward focus beyond the walls of the church from the mouths of the pastors. By the implications of the interview, the majority of the pastors conceded of their own volition that the popular embrace of fellowship paled in comparison to the much-needed ministry of outreach/evangelism. This self-revelation informed the researcher that nothing less than a recommendation of intentional and overt gospel-centered outreach/evangelism addresses the decline of church attendance. The intervention, unlike subconscious and unspoken awareness, brought the crisis to the surface to the realization that the focus of relationship through the inward fellowship of the "church brethren and sisters" warranted shifting outward toward relationships outside the church body. To a degree, Pastor 17 admitted that it was plausible that his introvert personality could be a contributing factor to his anonymity in the community. The researcher noticed that one pastor exemplified type "D" personality that denotes strong, dominant and driven leadership, yet less social.[161] These qualities are complementary and not a deterrent for a pastor but an opportunity to adapt to be the best pastor they can be.

The above process constituted determining results through reflexivity; that is, the researcher confessed his empathy and assumptions while explaining the context of the project's findings. To complete the triangular evaluation of church attendance by insider, researcher, and outsider (pastors, researcher, and expert, respectively) as discussed in Chapter 3, the researcher turned to Dr. Gregory Faulls for his expertise on the subject matter. Dr. Faulls earned his undergraduate degree from Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky; and his Master of Divinity, as well as his Ph.D., from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in

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[161] "D" personality type represents one of four based on the theory of psychologist William Marston identified by the acronym, DiSC. A behavior assessment tool. William M. Marston, *Emotions of Normal People* (K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1928), 405.

Fort Worth, Texas. His pastorate includes three churches over his lifetime, and he currently

serves as the senior pastor of a thriving church in Owensboro, Kentucky, Bellevue Baptist

Church. Additionally, Dr. Faulls is an Assistant Professor of Practical Studies at Liberty

University Rawlings School of Divinity. The researcher proudly touts that Dr. Faulls is his

Academic Mentor for this dissertation and, as a student, the researcher will refer to him with his

title, which takes precedent in this segment over academic protocol on scholarly writing that

eliminates titles since all contributors are deemed doctoral credentialed.

Analysis from the Expert Data

As earlier mentioned, to establish the credibility of the research findings, the project

employed a triangular analysis method. The process involved the perspectives of the *insiders*

(the pastors), the *researcher* (the author) and the *outsider* (the expert). He enlisted the services of

Dr. Gregory Faulls as the outside expert. Prior to the meeting, the researcher forwarded to him a

spreadsheet of the results of the intervention and accompanying slides. To capitalize on the one-

hour session with Dr. Faulls, the researcher narrowed the interview to questions related to church

growth.

Concentrating on the pastors that experienced growth, Dr. Faulls commended Pastor 3

who signified his growth stemmed from giving his members a platform to express and facilitate

their calling. He agreed to the merits of the idea in that it bestows ownership in the mission of

the church:

> I would agree that a principle of church growth or just even good leadership is to raise up
> good people and help them discover their gifts, and talents, and be able to give them a
> measure of freedom to be able to make judgments, within parameters, to explore the

ministry themselves to maximize their potential and their opportunities to reach more people for Christ and serve people in better ways.[162]

He qualified his statement in noting that the hazard to this initiative is the danger of running amuck with unorthodox doctrine, particularly, if parameters are not in place. Without training, theological clarity, financial limits, adherence to layers of authority, and knowledge of the church's mode of operation, a platform for members can be dangerous, he warned. Paraphrasing, Dr. Faulls noted that with explicit guidelines undergirded with one's authority base that includes interacting with the hierarchy and other leaders, members should be trained to become spiritual leaders to use their best judgment and exercise as much freedom as the pastor can transfer to execute their calling. These safeguards are tantamount to "that train that you want to go as fast as it can as far as it will, but you don't want it to careen in every direction because that would create great damage."[163] Case in point, a pastor should never become so enamored with growth that he permits himself or his members to fall into the trappings of using a,

> prosperity gospel to bring people and their money in for the purpose of bigger crowds, bigger buildings, and bigger money. In other words, the same platform for extraordinary growth initiatives can be healthy with parameters but detrimental if allowed to go rogue. The validity of growth at the expense of compromising saving faith theology is counterproductive.[164]

While on the subject of church growth the researcher queried Faulls on his views on utilizing a strong prayer ministry alone for church expansion, as Pastor 4 cited prayer as his principle factor for growth and his only semblance of an outreach ministry consisted of women undertaking follow-up house calls. Since this apparent style of ministry landed this pastor in the

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[162] Gregory Faulls, interview by Robert O'Neal Jr. *Evaluation of the Black Church Research Intervention Results* (November 12, 2018).

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

growth category, Dr. Faulls lauded the pastor for his accomplishment and for recognizing the

significance of prayer but cautioned to not depend upon prayer alone. Faulls supported his

statement with the biblical incident in Acts 6:1-7 that dealt with the disparity in the welfare of

the Greek and Hebrew widows. Apostle Paul noted the ensuing hindrance of prayer and

preaching and resolved the issue with the appointment of the church's first official deacons.

Faulls continues his discourse to the effect that from this episode evolves at least three required

dimensions of the church: the ministry of prayer, the ministry of the Word, and the management

of needs. The power of prayer cannot be underestimated nor exploited as an excuse for not

ignoring other key ministries. "Solidarity in prayer and fellowship alone can give the mirage of

a close-knit, exclusive social club, which the early church very timely avoided."[165]

The researcher queried Faulls on the importance of evangelism, fellowship, ministry to

the needy, worship, and discipleship in the growth of the church. "I think you need to have them

in balance," he replied and stated that some church activities fulfill the needs of several

ministries congruently. He presented an illustration of a church satisfying three ministries at

once at one function. The men of his church sponsored a "fellowship eat" and invited a guest

speaker. The men invited their neighbors, which afforded them the opportunity to befriend and

minister to them. The overall hospitality and chatter among the men during the dinner facilitated

comradery and fellowship, and the guest speaker concluded with an invitation to accept Christ.

When structured to that outcome, one event can satisfy aspects of fellowship, evangelism, and

minister to needs simultaneously.

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[165] Ibid.

Faull's next question from the researcher related to his opinion of door-to-door knocking since some pastors in the intervention process disparaged the practice for safety reasons, even denying its effectiveness and noting undesirability among residents. He responded,

> In general, I believe that is the case. I think the best thing to do is to do evangelism through network. You get a core people, build relationships with neighbors, do tasks together that gets you into the flow of where people are and start building bridges. After a while, that expands and grows [toward the church], and you duplicate the process congruent with experience and authenticity."

The conclusion of the interview with Dr. Faulls occurs under the next section of this research paper. In that section, the author presents his evaluation of the pastor data that he collected; following that, he presents the conclusion of his own research data and concludes with remarks from the interview with Dr. Faulls regarding his perspective on church growth.

Evaluation of the Conclusion

Conclusions from the Pastor Data

The analysis of the data collected from intervention with the pastors validated the theory that the Black Church in Johnston County is experiencing a decline in attendance. Only 25 percent of the churches experienced growth while 75 percent of the churches are plateaued or declining in attendance. Contentment, not by design, but by circumstances appear to pervade the leadership of the Black Church. Covey's "circle of influence" speaks to the black pastors' frame of reference.[166] They concentrate their efforts and focus their energies where they can affect

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[166] "Circle of Influence" one of two phrases coined by Steve Covey encompasses all the things we have the power to affect. "Circle of Concern" includes the things we care about but are beyond our control. Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989).

change in attendance. Pastors during the intervention recognized issues under their direct control. Creating a climate of acceptance, facilitating an atmosphere of meaningful worship, delivering sermons with clarity and relevance, and accommodating youth needs registered as aspects under their direct control in worship. Logistically, for growth, they observed the aesthetics and comfort of the edifice and its surroundings, the security of the facilities, the accommodations for people with disabilities and nursery requirements as items that could affect change in attendance. The presentation of the intervention made them cognizant and mostly reminded them of the importance of the church and the pastor's reputation and presence in the community. It allowed them to do outreach ministry and market themselves in new ways as via social media and the world-wide-web to augment attendance. Yet this circle of influence could not break an overarching "circle of concern" that locked them into a state of settling for complacency.[167]

The circle of concern by definition identified the following issues beyond the influence of the pastors, all because of the location of the churches. Poverty-stricken communities consisting of Section 8 Federal Government Housing, retired persons on a fixed income, low paying jobs and the constrained number of industries in the county contribute to the lack of growth of the majority of the African American churches. These conditions contribute to limited building and church grounds improvement and hamper financing of outreach endeavors in the community. Furthermore, limited financial resources affect hiring the most qualified pastors and limit services available from part-time or bi-vocational pastors. Another aspect of location is low population. Sparsely populated rural areas, unaffordable subdivisions, and the absence created

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[167] Ibid.

by retired persons transitioning to assisted living and nursing homes affects church attendance and the human pool of church leaders negatively. Lastly, most towns that house black churches experience minimum growth. Only a couple of thriving towns on major corridors to Raleigh, North Carolina contributes to the growth of the Black Church. As problematic as these issues are, the pastors could ill-afford to let them consume them, thus a settling of complacency.

Here are supplementary factors for the decline according to the applied research with pastors. First, most of the pastors over time traveled unsuccessfully the road of pursuing various avenues to grow their churches and settled for the status quo. Their experience is that growth attempts through outreach is nonproductive financially and overworks the faithful few. The intervention data reflected the average church seated 150 persons; the mean attendance surveyed at 49 persons (982 attendees divided by 20 churches). However, a more accurate picture is the median of 40 persons (the midpoint of the attendance range of 20 churches with attendance from 15 to 250). Furthermore, the best measurement of church attendance in Johnson County is the mode, which gives the most common number of attendances within a group. Of a sampling of 20 churches, 11 reflected attendance from 1-40 persons, 6 managed attendance from 41-80, and 3 churches squeezed attendance from 81-125. The researcher could safely say that 55 percent of the sampling reflected church attendance below 40 persons, and 34 percent of the total sampling attendance came from the 3 largest sampling churches.[168]

The vacancy rate of empty pews emerged at 70 percent and supporting data corroborated this fact revealing that over half of the churches in the county experience median attendance of

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[168] See Appendix C: Demographic Survey Sampling Results of Johnston County Black Churches by Denomination.

twenty-five to thirty persons. When the researcher factored in the Pareto Principle, the pastor's

core disciples registered at approximately five to ten persons.[169] The Pareto Principle

conceptualized by Vilfredo Pareto, also known as the 80-20 Rule, states that 80 percent of the

work generates from 20 percent of the people. Most pastors agree with the theory in practice.

These five to ten faithful disciples become the workhorses of the church with insurmountable

responsibilities. The financial burden taxes them to their limits to just maintain the operation of

the church and the pastor's stipend, notwithstanding setting aside funds for contingencies and

repairs. Further expansion into outreach ministries, which amounts to an investment in

benevolence, exceeds human and financial resources. The pastors, for the sake of their loyal

followers, forfeit the brilliant but costly ideas of growth and regretfully yield to contentment and

operation as usual.

Second, the worldview of most of the pastors reflects a dim prognosis for black churches

in the face of competing factors of televangelism, Sunday sports, shopping malls, and smart

gadgets. Coupled with the human pursuit of self-gratification and the pervading culture of

ostracizing the church and disbelief in God, the pastors resign to contentment in leading the few

"pure-in-hearts" to heaven. The view dims further with the unspoken thoughts of many blacks

are ostracizing the Black Church as a vestige of segregation, much like historical black

universities that are perceived to be inferior. The researcher recalls his professor at NC State

University during his undergraduate studies in a private counseling session encouraging him of

his career advantages even at being mediocre at that institution as opposed to finishing top of the

class at a historical black university. The comments were not to disparage the researcher from

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[169] Ibid.

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excelling but to assure him that if all his arduous work yielded mediocrely, that was good in light

of the predisposition of the job market in its selection of college-graduate applicants. People of

color believe that mindset still prevails, and the millennials and generation Xers seek an all-

inclusive church for all cultures to escape the black church stigma of what they describe as

unintelligible hooping preachers and chaotic worship. In essence, the future of the Black Church

might be salvaged by a merger of all black churches in communities, according to one pastor.

These pastoral conclusions precipitated from questions deviating off the script. As mentioned

earlier, some facetious and some exasperated pastors quipped when asked how to increase

membership, "I don't have a clue," and "I've tried everything." However, a brighter outlook

emerged from the 25 percent of pastors experiencing growth, although nominal.

The pastor data revealed that the growth churches possessed a common trend of

empowering young adults with a platform to work and express their ideas within the church

setting and through outreach projects. Another common denominator converged on an

impressive attendance. These churches enjoyed membership in the midrange of 40 persons or

higher during worship services. Although not robust, that number made the difference in

possessing the ability to expand ministry and finances as well as moving the pastor closer to full-

time status. Often the correlation of the pastor's financial stability goes hand in hand with

growth stability of the church. To substantiate the point, the researcher's intervention revealed

that churches of larger congregation retained full-time pastors or retired pastors that dedicated

more time to the church because of secondary income from pensions, particularly those with previous employment from the government, education, and military backgrounds.[170]

Another interesting finding is the perception of a less-than-half-empty church as opposed to a less-than-full church. For instance, Pastor 6, when asked about attracting visitors, theorized that people regard their choice of church similar to their choice of a restaurant. If it is packed, they presume good service and succulent food await them. If it is empty, the opposite is occurring. Another growth factor involved membership taking ownership of developing familial and coworker relationships that drew people to their church. The final common factor of growth involved retiring pastors of attrition and procuring young energetic and innovative pastors possessing the temperament to stay the course and earn respect as pastor and shepherd of the church. The researcher observed the venue of growth churches placed them near thoroughfares and middle-income neighborhoods. The churches on main roads gained the advantage of thousands of commuters passing their churches daily, which this kind of public exposure increased the likelihood of prospects visiting their churches. Also noteworthy is that the researcher's observation data reflected that growing churches located themselves in working and middle-class neighborhoods, thus implying a higher tendency to attend and support the church than plateauing and declining churches.

Conclusions from the Researcher Data

While the intervention plan did not support the researcher's hypothesis that leadership style determines church growth entirely, the design and implementation of the researcher's

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[170] Although the interview questions omitted the financial status of pastors, they shared background employment information when asked if they were full-time or part-time pastors, thus enabling the researcher to make the correlation.

intervention plan led to insightful findings and conclusions. The researcher's intervention of

studying church decline elected to analyze the skills, experience, education, and personality of

the pastor to determine if any of these components played a factor in the success or failure of

church growth. These ingredients comprised the pastor's leadership style, and the researcher's

theory ascribed it as the bedrock of the church, which warranted scrutiny.

However, the intervention concluded that education factored diminutively in the

equation. The education of the twenty pastors ranged from High School to Doctorate, and the

data revealed that each level of education experienced growth, plateau, and decline.

Furthermore, eighty-five percent of the pastors achieved Bachelor degrees or higher, which ruled

out inadequate education.

Although the personality types analysis was subjective, the researcher used the following

guidelines to gauge personality types: D = Dominant and Direct, I = Inspiring and Interactive, C

= Cautious and Careful, S = Supportive and Steady.[171] He concluded from dialogue with the

subjects that while personality types are important, the subjects with years of experience

possessed the ability to modify their personality types to accomplish their pastoral objectives.

Case in point, one "D" personality pastor under pressure, tended to become bossy and when

confronted with laziness and weakness in others became irritated. To control the situation, and

become "the me I want to be," he learned to back off, relax and think before reacting. According

to each pastor, the relationship between pastor and congregants was harmonious. Therefore, the

researcher concluded that behavior was a non-issue for church attendance decline. Another

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[171] Center for Internal Change, *Overview of the Everythng DiSC Model,* 2018, accessed November 20, 2018, https://www.onlinediscprofile.com/what-is-the-disc-profile/.

unexpected result discovered that the experience of the pastors did not play a noticeable role in the decline of the Black Church attendance: for the average tenure of the pastors was 16 years.

The pastors' skill set claimed the last component of the pastors' leadership style analysis by the researcher. To rule out incompetence among the pastors, the researcher listened for skills in preaching and visited some of their churches during worship service. The oratory of the sermon revealed organization and clarity, although the method varied from expository to topical, and each pastor adhered to his own unique style. From the outset, the researcher noticed the labor skill set of many of the pastors who were electricians, carpenters, and technicians, which rendered an extra value to the church. All the pastors appeared to have a good command of people skills (communicating friendly with people) from the researcher's interaction with them. Listening to the pastors' testimony of conflict resolution with leaders and the church members assured the researcher that the pastors as a whole possessed interpersonal skills. However, the researcher observed from the intervention process the need for the pastors to acquire a better grasp on the area of problem-solving skills. The reference relates specifically to the question of how to improve church attendance. Frankly, the researcher noticed this question presented a common dilemma among the pastors. Yet, the findings of the lack of this particular skill set support the researcher's expectation to bring recommendations to the pastoral field from his extensive study of the problem.

For the most part, the intervention plan as designed ruled out the above factors and identified dwindling rural population and low income as the core problematic origins of church decline. Causation of the divergence between the researcher's hypothesis and reality became obvious when academic and philosophical concepts were superimposed by the fieldwork, which in this case, supplied unique perspectives to Johnston County. Some churches in said county are

not growing because (a) community demographics may require unavailable human resources and funds, (b) the real estate term, "location, location, location," really determines the prospect of growth, (c) bi-vocational pastors lack the time and finances to properly invest in the church, and (d) the 80-20 rule depletes and exhaust minuscule memberships.

Of all the propositions for the growth or decline of church growth, only two were validated as core causes (not symptomatic) by the intervention and yielded expected results. The researcher noted a correlation between church growth and the employment status of pastors: 67 percent of the growing churches employed fulltime pastors. Another correlation mentioned earlier surfaced between growth churches and location: 100 percent of growing churches were located in middle-income neighborhoods or along thoroughfares.

In the spirit of research triangulation, the researcher presented conclusion from the pastor data that confirmed the decline of attendance in the Black Church with the exception of pockets of growth in certain economies, which alone is not enough to stem the tide of the current trajectory of the Black Church. Researcher data ruled out pastor qualification as the culprit for the decline. To his encouragement, he observed that insightful pastors to the church-climate change responded accordingly in skillful management of their resources. For instance, prevention of workhorse-member fatigue scored first place on their list of concerns. Also, several pastors worked alongside church members on repair and renovation projects. During visits to some of the pastors in their worship service, he observed the gradual shift to expository preaching to reach the millennials on an intellectual level for purpose of developing Christian foundations for them. The remaining triangulation evaluation from the Outside Expert, Dr. Gregory Faulls, concluded the summation.

Conclusions from the Outside Expert Data

Having discovered that despite a pastor's best efforts, circumstances within the circle of concerns but outside the pastor's control can prohibit church growth, the researcher turned back to Dr. Gregory Faulls, Outside Expert, to give safeguards to at least salvage the progress of growing churches and perhaps rekindle plateauing or declining churches.

The researcher diagnosed from the applied research intervention that the declining churches lacked presence in their communities. They sat in the middle of an isolated or populated setting as a religious memorial. That the church body sought solace among each other within the confines of the four walls, beckons the question of why. The research answered the question with the response of too few members and pastors willing to go outside. It is inactivity in the community that cast a picturesque silhouette undisturbed, inanimate, and a reminder of what once was and what now is. Beyond that, no dots connected the church to the community.

Growth requires a presence that speaks to the community in ways that ensure connectivity, consciousness, and concern. That necessitates developing a reputation within the neighborhood via activities of the church or interactions from the pastor. The absent, commuting, bi-vocational pastor accomplishes this best by a church that becomes his extension and builds a robust standing in the locality. When asked if the reputation of the church or the pastor was more important for growth, Dr. Faulls weighed in, "I don't want to hold to a personality. If I get sick or die, I want the church to thrive and go on. At the same time, there are some cultures where the leader, the man of God is important. People want to see somebody that they aspire to for spiritual success and they want to identify with that man's ministry. There

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are dangers in it, but if that is their culture, it has merit."[172] His antithetical point being that such ministries might topple from impropriety and require careful planning for succession.

The idea of a church survey solicited comments from Faulls. He valued the concept for it was within this context that a wealth of information regarding the current status of African American churches in Johnston County was bequeathed to the researcher. The same principle fortifies the pastor with knowledge and direction on the emerging culture of the current generation through surveys on preferences. The surveys should have no bearing on nonnegotiable tenets as church doctrine. The researcher indicated that some congregations if polled might prefer expository sermons for teaching Scripture rather than inspirational hooping sermons. Faulls warns that he implements surveys sparingly because it can open up complex issues. "If you ask members what they like best and least about the church and what they want, make sure you want to know. Once you open that 'can of worms' you have to address it. I would want to make sure it's something that I could lead them into…I would want to make sure that it is not divisive and does not convey things that are not biblical or theological," To illustrate his point, he disclosed that for him attempting to satisfy the congregation on the type of worship music among a diverse congregation proved to be a daunting project.

When asked about encouraging regular attendees to become members, Faulls recommended it. Unchurched attendees come and go as they please with little commitment. Membership affords benefits as immediate counseling, pastoral care, fellowship, and often hardship assistance when necessary. Other benefits generally include end-of-life benefits as

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[172] Gregory Faulls, interview by Robert O'Neal Jr. *Evaluation of the Black Church Research Intervention Results* (November 12, 2018).

funeral services, repast, and sometimes burial plots. However, with membership comes the responsibility of financial support of the church and pastor, volunteer work, and spiritual duties. Faulls recounts, "I remember the days in the early eighties where if you visited our church three times, we got you to join…Now it's more like six months or longer before people join. Faulls encourages weekly invitation after each sermon, "and the best thing you can do is the one-on-one dialogue. 'Hey, we would love for you to be a member?' 'What is the difference in just coming? They might ask.' 'Well there are certain things you can do. It's a spiritual thing. I can count on you. We can count on each other.' From there, build a relationship and a bridge to the church life."[173]

Tithing plays a significant part in the growth of the church, which the intervention likewise addressed. The church needs adequate finances for normal operations as well as for expansion of ministries. Dr. Faulls would not go as far as to require tithing since enforcement is impossible, but he highly recommended the teaching, preaching, and expectation of tithing. He encourages pastors to "make public the practice of their household in tithing, giving general and special offerings, and to challenge the members to follow them. Pastors should not handle the money alone. They should have open books within reason, spend less than they receive and be good stewards of the money to maintain the confidence of the membership."[174]

From a backdrop of decades of pastoring, Dr. Faulls' passion against micro-management reflected in a cautious tale of the Bonsai tree referred to in Ken Hemphill's book, *Bonsai Theory of Church Growth.*[175] He illustrates the theory of dwarf church growth with an analogy of the

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ken Hemphill, *Bonsai Theory of Church Growth* (Tigerville, SC: AuxanoPress, 2014), 35.

stunted Bonsai tree that is constantly uprooted, roots clipped, and re-potted. His point being that pastors can be overbearing with checkpoints that prohibit members from taking ownership and developing in leadership roles. Another example is purging membership rolls too closely. Once deleted from the system, that action blots them out of view and eliminates all forms of communication by letter or telephone that could allow them to be recycled from inactivity to activity. "Sometimes, your mission field is on your church roll," quipped Faulls.[176] A second scenario is strict requirements. "To only have people in leadership if they have attended church faithfully for 24 months can discourage people if they have to sit two years in the pew before doing anything," not to mention, it can cripple much-needed services in the church.

Another barrier to church growth is settings. By that Faulls means that a pastor should know the geography and demographics of his church community. The door-to-door issue is contingent upon location and should not be ruled out arbitrarily. Studying and researching the neighborhood aids the pastor in determining what ministries to employ. If two evangelistic teams are door knocking in two different areas, they probably will get different results even if all factors are equal, that is, they get the prospects, do the job well and are friendly. The dynamics affecting the results could be age, income, education, and race. Another church in the area could resonate more with the people. Pastors should be open-minded to trying things. What might not work in one place, might work well in another.[177] False perception can cloud a church's view. "There are many people that think their church is the friendliest church in the world, but it is not

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[176] Gregory Faulls, interview by Robert O'Neal Jr. *Evaluation of the Black Church Research Intervention Results* (November 12, 2018).

[177] Ibid.

friendly to outsiders. It's friendly to them because they've been there for fifteen years and see the ten people that they know so well and love so much," declares Faulls.[178]

The big takeaway for the struggling churches of Johnston County, being a predominantly agriculture county, is that historically and geographically rural churches are small inherently. Dr. Faulls pastored a rural church for nearly four years, "averaged 28 people per Sunday, seventeen on a low Sunday, fourteen if it snowed, a megachurch [facetiously] of thirty-eight on Easter, and baptized only three persons during his tenure."[179] The point is that some churches do not grow because their base is not growing. Early in this report, the investigator established that despite the growth in the Hispanic and European American population, the African American population is decreasing as they migrate to neighboring Wake County for better job opportunities.

For the growing church, Dr. Faulls encourages them to stay grounded, and be resourceful. Establishing a visitation program, a bus ministry, or getting on the Internet does not guarantee growth or sustained growth. Growth dynamics constantly change. One of the most potent ingredients for prolific growth is novelty. Faulls shared the success story of his church in urban metaphorical dialect:

When we were growing like crazy twenty years ago, we were doing contemporary stuff—new things—and nobody else was except for one other church. We were 'blowing and going.' And everybody else was stunted and they couldn't grow, and they were shrinking. Now everybody is doing cool things that we started twenty years ago. Now it is not special anymore. I found that my wave of prospects began to trickle. Now we couldn't just go to the low hanging fruit. We're having to go work on the hard people. We're working on internationals. So we're still reaching people, but it's different and it's slow. Well the dynamics around me changed.[180]

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[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid.

Dr. Greg Faulls' final advice as an Outside Expert is for every pastor to surround

themselves with godly and successful mentors. "Yes, I could present an enumerated list,

however," he gave a swirling motion with his hands and continued, " all the counseling I could

give you spirals [emanates] from spending time with mentors." Paraphrasing, he advises pastors

to find someone who is doing what the pastors aspire to do and ask humbly for their advice and

be grateful when received. Ask for an hour a week or an hour a month with a pastor of 500

people. Ask for a thirty-minute or forty-minute audience with a pastor of 5000 persons. The

pastors should ask to take them to lunch and speak into their lives about some things. Most

mentors will be flattered and want their lives to be multiplied in the lives of others.[181] This

researcher gratefully appreciates Dr. Faulls sharing his words of wisdom with him from an

Outside Expert's perspective.

Summary

To recapitulate the results, the Pastor Data posited the African American churches of

Johnston County had experienced limited growth, some plateauing and excessive decline in

church attendance. For every church that grew in attendance, three either plateaued or declined

in attendance. The Researcher Data confirmed mitigating factors as demographics affected

church growth. The Expert Data surmised a deficit in evangelism/outreach contributed heavily

to the problem of church decline.

Armed with the above results and analysis, the author recalls his hypothesis that

leadership style determines the success or failure of a church. In reality, the study validates the

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[181] Ibid.

complexity of the issue and concludes that irrespective of leadership style, leadership itself

determines the fate of the church entrusted into its hands. When returning to the theological

foundation of this research, the final authority rest with the Bible that holds the pastor as the

divinely ordained overseer of the church, (Acts 20:28). The final chapter provides implications

for the growth success for the African American Church and the Church at large.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Although the research did not support the investigator's hypothesis that the pastor's leadership style determines the growth or decline of the church, the study yielded pragmatic results. Going forward the intent is to focus on the revitalization of the churches that are plateaued or declining. The reason for the inclusion of the plateaued church is that it is only a step away from declining. If the church is not growing, it is stagnant, which leads to a slow or swift death. The implications of the research suggested that a combination of factors contribute to the growth of the African American Church. These factors, though prevalent in the Black Church, remain common and corroborate the external validity or generalizability of the study. In other words, the findings in this research apply universally to other settings and under a myriad of conditions. Therefore, the investigator used the understanding of the experiences studied for three objectives: (1) to make recommendations for church growth, (2) share the significance of the study and (3) offer final considerations.

Recommendations

To ensure the dependability and credibility of this project in its recommendations, the researcher tapped into the findings of other scholars and published material for corroboration. The researcher from the compilation of all the data identified three strong factors of growing churches: preaching, evangelism/outreach, and prayer. First, the congregants appreciated a place to worship with good preaching and music. Second, the common trait among all flourishing churches supported some form of interaction with the community. Finally, prosperous churches contributed their overall success to much prayer. Limited space inhibits all the testimonies of the biblical patriarchs, and that of the academia that credit prayer for the

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intervention of the Holy Spirit in reviving and thriving churches. To prevent over-simplification of the implications of this project endeavor, the researcher recapitulates its findings and submit five specific recommendations for the development and revitalization of the African American Church in Johnston County, North Carolina.

Leadership

Stetzer and Dodson surveyed 324 churches that made a comeback after experiencing a pattern of plateau or decline. The results rated leadership as the most crucial factor in revitalizing a church and valued leadership as having the highest impact in turning a church around. Leadership beckons the call to advancement and influences a following. Churches that are in a holding pattern of plateau or a gradual slope of decline need strong leaders who will signal the way to renewal and growth. If there is to be revitalization, it will occur through strong, effective leadership. Components of leadership encompass the ability to develop an attitude of growth among the congregants. The leadership will be intentional and proactive, that is, a stated unobstructed vision and a planned strategy that activates the vision in a shared environment. The process implies the ownership of the ministry by the members, and the leadership mobilizing the troops. Stetzer states "Comeback leaders are not willing to settle for a slow or no-growth mentality; maintaining a small-church mindset is not an option. They are willing to identify and make necessary changes and set growth goals." That means to avoid being trapped in bygone days, whether in traditions or accomplishments. "Too many churches choose their past over their future, their heritage over their growth, and their traditions over their

children."[182] Harney warns "When a church is not growing or is merely maintaining, or even declining, how can the leaders say they are not into the numbers? The numbers could indicate a spiritual issue. I think God is concerned about numbers because numbers represent souls."[183] Casting the vision and creating a mindset of spiritual and numerical growth belongs to the pastor and the leadership team.

Another component of leadership is strategy. Strategy consists of setting goals or objectives as the vehicle to accomplish the vision and mission of the church. One strategy for the Black Church is to reform preaching. A case can be made at this time in history for biblical expository preaching to appease the curiosity of the young and restless seeking to find themselves through the truths of Scripture. This group is not impressed with the style of preaching as much as they are with the content of preaching. They want to know what God has to say to them through the Word that can actually affect change in their lives. Topical preaching tends to use Scripture to support an idea on a subject matter and is excellent for special occasions as Mother's Day and seminars. However, expository preaching needs no support. It is God's truth—the mind of God that brings life, and the young thirst to be taught its relevance for them. Expository preaching answers the basic question every listener wants to know, "What is God saying to me today through the seemingly archaic writings of Scripture?" The time is ripe for inculcating the mindset of change with and for the millennials. For the church that maintains a base of traditional members, the leadership will employ a strategy of fulfilling the needs of both groups with a blend of both. A plan of salvaging the aging bedrock of the church traditionalist

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[182] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches,* 213.

[183] Harney and Bouwer, *The U-Turn Church: Direction for Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 30.

warrants financial success of the church, and the integration of millennial innovations warrants the spiritual and numerical growth of the church.

Rightfully so, author, Thabiti Anyabwile asserts revitalization by the Word calls for re-centering the Bible; that entails being true to the Gospel. The Gospel in substance is evangelical. The Liberation Gospel espoused by many black churches preaches that Jesus arrived in human existence for the sole purpose of breaking chains of slavery, vindicating the poor and the needy, and now extending to political, racial, and gender oppression. Another category is the Prosperity Gospel that accepts the Evangelical Gospel but expands to include physical and financial prosperity. However, the crux of the Gospel is eternal life, and there is no risk of misguidance when adhering to the Message of salvation. People have lost their lives when refusing medical care while holding out for healing. Families have lost their homes while supporting prosperity preachers. These occurrences of distorted teaching ultimately work against the mission of the church in reaching the world due to negative publicity.[184] Leadership throttles the revival of the church. Leadership sets the tone and mindset of the membership to embrace change, and the change starts with the strategical change beginning in the pulpit. From the pulpit, a call is made to discipleship.

Discipleship

Discipleship is the second recommendation for the development and revitalization of the African American Church. Vibrant faith that metamorphoses into the incarnation of Christ (i.e., a dedicated disciple of Christ), is paramount. To do so engenders a renewed belief in Jesus

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[184] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 69-71.

Christ, the mission of the church, in servanthood, and strategic prayer. "Creating a renewed focus and emphasis on Jesus is vital to making a comeback. Believers need to experience the reality of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives. The "message and mission of the church is to help people live a new, resurrected life in Christ, through the filling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This is called spiritual formation. Spiritual formation happens through teaching, Bible study, the spiritual disciplines [personal prayer time, devotional and walk with God] and mentoring."[185] Then, in order to create an atmosphere of renewed belief, comeback leaders will want to find ways to translate that belief into practical activity."[186] The Great Commission demands the numerical growth of the church. This awesome task requires spiritual synergy with the Holy Spirit and the church body. With the salvation of 3,000 new believers through the collaboration of the Holy Spirit, the first-generation Church possessed the numbers to commence the execution of the demands of the Great Commission.[187] McIntosh believes "The Great Commission is a corporate commission and can be fulfilled only as God's people, his church, work together to carry it out."[188] The researcher submits this scenario as a solid model for strategic discipleship.

When Rev. Harrison accepted the pastorate at Christopher Temple, only 400 members on the roll attended in a building that seated over 1,000 persons. Prospects shopping for new churches bypassed traditional Methodist churches and joined proliferating Pentecostal churches,

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[185] David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 214.

[186] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches,* 211.

[187] Acts 2:41

[188] McIntosh, Gary L., ed. *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2004), 76.

nondenominational megachurches and the Nation of Islam. For the first five years at his church, Rev. Harrison curtailed community involvement and denominational duties to concentrate on equipping and discipling leaders within his local church base. By the time of his Fifteenth Pastoral Anniversary, the tally of new members stood at 3,958 not counting those lost by attrition.[189]

In summary, appropriately within the strategic plans for revitalizing a church, the leadership takes the initiative in recommitment of itself to the principles of discipleship and from there set its priorities to training disciples to multiply disciples. God never intended for the pastor to carry out the Commission alone. He commissioned the church body and appropriately provided the tools.[190] Once the infrastructure of spiritual maturity is in place, the next phase awaits.

Ministry

Once leadership commitment and strategy are in place, and the congregants embrace the vision through noticeable and incarnational discipleship, the next step is Ministry. "Laypeople becoming involved actively in ministry is a significant factor in church renewal. Creating an atmosphere of lay mobilization is very important in the revitalization process. Increased expectations, equipped people, and empowered people are key components of developing an atmosphere of lay ministry involvement."[191] In other words, the pastors unselfishly transfer

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[189] Jeffery L. Tribble Sr., *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 94-95.

[190] Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 4:11-12.

[191] Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Church,* 211.

ministry—they give it away. Pastors of turnaround churches stir up the gifts and talents of the people that God deposits within their circle.

A response to the disproportionate number of women to men ratio is to establish a ministry in the church that targets black young men. Lincoln and Mamiya argue that black teenage-and-young adult men who incorporate church attendance into their lives possess a better chance of escaping the ghetto. The observance of working adults, even if marginally employed, serves as role models that can influence positive youth who often encounter no one who works in their own families. Simultaneously, when reinforced with self-help and biblical preaching from the pulpit, the possibilities are enormous for improving the lives of young black men and the growth of the church.[192]

Outreach Ministries give exposure to the church as well as benefit the community. For instance, churches can take advantage of a program that the Department of Transportation sponsors in North Carolina, the Adopt-A-Highway Program. Committed members relish the idea of giving back to the community and the added notoriety of the church's name posted along the highway reinforces prospects of a viable church. A carefully organized Bus Ministry that ensures safety can canvass the neighborhood for transporting persons from nursing homes, homeless shelters, and local neighborhoods. A Clothing Closet and Food Pantry assure the community that the church is incarnational in its Christian witness. With the number of Hispanics in society, a church budget for bringing in a Hispanic pastor or interpreter might prove one of the best outreach-endeavors a church can make. Other traditional outreach areas are a

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[192] Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 334.

homeless ministry, a nursing home ministry, and a prison ministry. The researcher's advice is to

major in one or two ministries to establish a niche that becomes the brand of the church. A

conglomerate of ministries adapts well to megachurches but leads to a dearth of funds and

human resources for small and medium-size congregations.

Critical community outreach programs for trained church members include alcohol and

drug addiction ministries, pregnant teens ministries, and battered women ministries. Barnes

recommends the BCYC (Black Church Youth Culture). The design of this ministry prepares

churches for comprehensive socialization of the black community. It sponsors job readiness

programs, sports initiatives, and religious education. Its goal is to "intentionally and holistically

educate, equip, and empower youth."[193] The closing note on social issues is this:

> Salvation is not necessarily freedom from torture or social improvement. It begins with a
> life-changing experience with God. It includes becoming a devoted follower of Jesus
> Christ. It is nurtured by membership in a local fellowship of believers. "For these
> reasons, a purely social gospel falls short. But so does salvation that only includes a
> "decision" recorded on a card at an evangelistic crusade, or at the end of a church
> meeting.[194]

The progression of revitalizing a church flows from the leadership team to discipleship

and ministry. The track record depicts a church that develops from the inside and branches into

the community. Now that the church is healthy and meeting a specific need or various physical

needs of the community, phase three comes into view.

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[193] Sandra L. Barnes and Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise: Education and Socialization in the Village-minded Black Church* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 162.

[194] Ralph Moore, *How to Multiply Your Church,* (Venture, CA: Regal , 1996), 38.

Evangelism

The adage that recounts the difficulty in leading starving street persons to the Lord prior to feeding them holds true with evangelism. The previous phases of church revitalization to this point strategically developed and empowered the body of Christ to reach out and address human physical needs. However, the ultimate purpose of the church is the Great Commission that meets the spiritual needs through evangelism. The Gospel is a rescue mission initiated by God, carried out through His Son. Jesus emphasized this in the three parables in Chapter 15 of the book of Luke: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Jesus makes apparent that he arrived to seek and to save the lost.[195] In conjunction with and oftentimes subsequent to fulfilling physical needs, the church's ultimate goal is to focus on that which is spiritual. That is where the battle is being lost. "In reality, the church in America is not booming. It is in crisis. "On any given Sunday," according to Olson, "the vast majority of Americans are absent from church….As the American population continues to grow, the church falls further and further behind."[196] Logical assumption and biblical accountability as shown in Scripture above dictates that if the lost will not come to the church, the church ought to come to the lost.

According to Rainer, the simplest way to achieve this is through "response evangelism," that is, respond to a request for a visit due to some event in a person's life such as illness, counseling or death. The one-on-one dialogue allows the recipient to speak freely and confidentially and facilitates an opportunity to establish a relationship. The second way of bringing the church to the lost is through "event evangelism." This approach draws a crowd to a

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[195] Luke 19:10

[196] Olson, *American Church in Crisis*, 16.

public interest event that includes an evangelistic thrust. In other words, a different kind of

evangelism is required for millennials. First, time is their most precious commodity. Time is

money with them. An effective encounter with them will be brief. It will meet a need of theirs.

If they are to be part of the church and believers, they want to know they can touch lives and

make a difference. At the top of their needs are relationships, and this is where evangelism is

most productive.[197]

Finally, despite the perception that mass evangelism and mass media spread the Gospel

most infectiously, the reality is the network of relatives and friends of credible Christians,

particularly new Christians, proliferate the communication of the Gospel. Noteworthy is that

"the Gospel spreads more easily to persons and peoples who are in a 'receptive' season of their

lives… [and] groups, classes, choirs, congregations, churches, and ministries, and other 'new

units,' are most reproductive than old established units."[198] In other words, evangelism

flourishes with the new because of less baggage and greater excitement. Evangelism, the spread

of the Gospel, leads ultimately to the purpose of humanity, worship of the Creator.

Worship

Pastors and their worship staff bear the responsibility of birthing an atmosphere for

worship that is suitable for both believers and unbelievers. A seeker comprehensive church

service honors God through worship and preaching of God's Word and simultaneously provide

relevancy of the Scripture and creates an atmosphere in which unbelievers are challenged to

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[197] Thom S. Rainer, *Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), 216-222.

[198] McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*, 8-9.

accept Christ as their Savior. To accomplish this, the successful church effectuates a service that is understandable and sensitive to the unchurched, yet not changing the message.[199] An atmosphere of acceptance of all people including gay people fosters goodwill. Stetzer contends that "accepting people without approving of their lifestyles can be challenging….The church must allow unchurched persons who are living in sinful lifestyles to enter and hear."[200]

Several innovations can enhance the worship experience and meet spiritual needs. First, emphasize clarity in the lyrics of the songs. Music for some people can touch the heart in a way that preaching cannot. "Since music has an intense power in the formation of the human spirit," states Stetzer, "and in the transmission of truth, we must ensure that the worship songs are theologically sound."[201] Christian music, in a sense, does not exist. Christian lyrics do. The church adapts the unchanging Word of God to ever-changing music styles that accommodate the culture of the church. Invariably, the millennials music preference diverges from the traditionalist. The goal is to find common ground and/or employ a dual approach to satisfy both groups, particularly the group that moves the church into the future. Case in point, one minister in Texas recounted the demise of many neighboring traditional churches but credited the success of his church to the acceptance of Christian hip-hop music. The doors of the other churches closed due to age attrition of the church leaders. Symptomatic of that was the lack of alterations in the church service that prompted the youth to leave as soon as they became adults. [202]

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[199] Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That's Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 262-263.

[200] Ibid., 264.

[201] Ibid., 262

[202] Barnes and Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise*, 101.

A media center that includes overhead, video clips and PowerPoint presentations augments worship. Build a theme for each week with banners. Preach a series of sermons on a particular theme. These type sermons assist unbelievers and believers alike in developing a perpetual foundation for their faith. Use various approaches to deliver the greatest impact on the sermon and to deflect monotony.[203]

The researcher in summary tenders five aspects of church growth and revitalization. Short of guidance by the Holy Spirit to do otherwise, he recommends executing the steps in tandem since each preceding step serves as a foundation for the succeeding step. If there is to be growth and revitalization, it will ensue through robust, effective leadership. The second step is discipleship training for the leaders and then the lay members of the church. From there the leadership will lead the church into outreach ministry as the fourth step. Finally, through survey and culture of the new "comeback" church, an overhaul of the worship experience can be palatable and accommodating for a church built on love. The author shares some internalized thoughts of his research.

Significance of the Study

The author of this study qualifies significance by differentiating between "statistical significance" and "substantive significance." The statistical data supported the veracity of the proposition that the African American church is declining. The substantive significance produced solid evidence that the Black Church is in crisis mode. The author further examines significance in three scenarios: personal, ecclesial, and theological.

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[203] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 265-266.

Personal Significance

   The researcher found the project to be a pedagogical tool that sensitized him to the dialogical collaborative nature of pastors, that is, the project stimulated him to listen and share ideas pertaining to the pastorate. During the three to six months of shared experiences, the researcher developed an intense awareness and concern for the plight of the African American church. He reminded himself to stay focused on the completion of the project. His listening skills sharpened with each response from the interview questions, which afforded him new understanding, appreciation, and suggestions as the pastors responded from their various contexts. The seemingly endless and unique situations of each pastor to the same twenty questions expanded the researcher's comprehension and elicited empathy for the pastors in their struggle to retain the viability of their churches. The qualitative nature of the study facilitated the adaptation of the researcher's Type D direct, decisive temperament. Unequivocally, he believes the Holy Spirit employed the project for his personal self-development, specifically the activation of the fruits of patience and longsuffering.

   The project served as an elixir in building his confidence, developing dialogical tendencies to a person that would otherwise be profound at sermon delivery and challenged in interlocution. The dialogue field research moved him from a "this is me" perspective to "this is me becoming" perspective as he sat down with the learned doctors and officials that represented one of God's highest institutions, the church. The experience of conducting the research impacted his relationship with the pastors. The former paths of most of them never crossed the researcher's itinerary. However, because of the research, he now enjoys access to and comradery with many of the pastors. The researcher learned that he possesses the ability,

fortitude, discipline, and passion for accomplishing whatever task he chooses. The project

boosted confidence for his future endeavors.

Future plans consist of transforming the researcher's church into a prototype of the

implications and recommendations identified within this report. He intends to model his church

for other pastors desiring confirmation that the research is sustainable. He recognizes that the

outcomes or recommendations of this research will disrupt the long, institutionalized practices,

as well as impact "people's egos, dignity, power, status, and career opportunities. In almost all

situations, some people will resist changes of any sort unless he defines the processes carefully

and takes into account their interests."[204]

Ecclesial Significance

Exploring ecclesial significance takes shape in the form of the problem stated at the

outset of the research project: the decline of church attendance in the African American church.

The probe further considers the purpose stated at the inception of the project to address the health

of the Black Church. The churches in the study corroborate the criticalness for church growth,

and the study concluded that the pastors share a willingness to advance to the next level.

The researcher learned that the pastors involved in the study were competent and God-

fearing. Each possessed a good grasp of the Scripture and the capability of leading a healthy

church. All of the pastors served at aged, well-established churches except for four first-

generation church plants. The oldest of these churches experienced thriving attendance, which

inferred that all factors being equal the newer churches could uniformly expect improvement in

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[204] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 227.

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attendance. The pastors and their congregation, despite low attendance in general, remained

encouraged and the project left the pastors invigorated to motivate their people toward the Great

Commission. However, the study revealed that prior to the intervention of this project, the

mindset of most of the pastors proved indifferent to the plight of low attendance. Their past

efforts to reverse the trend proved unfruitful, and they grew complacent to enjoy the Christian

fellowship of each other, which heightened the researcher's interest regarding how the churches

perceived themselves.

The researcher swelled with curiosity to discover with what church metaphor the

congregation's research most identified, that is, a body (Rom 12:4-5), a bride (Rev 19:7-9), a

field (1 Cor 3:9), a holy temple (Eph 2:20-22), a family/members of a household (Gal 6:9-10), a

building/structure (Gal 3:9-10), or branches of the vine (John 15:5). The significance is that the

primary metaphor is indicative of the role the church sees itself. Most of the pastors during the

intervention process referenced their church as a family. Church members generally follow their

pastor's lead and mimic their tone. This led the author to contend that the majority of the

churches perceived themselves as a family. Likewise, the researcher concedes that he is inclined

to express the term "church family" in his own church in his normal dialogue.

Paradoxically, the author commentates that to employ "family" as a church metaphor can

initiate a disconnect. The term refers to the household of faith in the Greek is *oikeios,* which

means "belonging to the house."[205] The term, family, bodes well in fostering commitment and

fellowship within the church. However, to facilitate extending beyond the walls of the church

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[205] Goodrick, Edward W., and John R. Kohlenberger III. *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 1575.

and to preclude the semblance of isolation to outsiders, the author recommends for his church and others to utilize the term "vineyard." The Hebrew transliteration, *kerem,* and the Greek transliteration, *ampelon* is taken from several passages of Scripture.[206] The Scripture compares the church to a vineyard in Psalms 80:8 (i.e., Israel is a shadow of the church), John 15:1-8 (Jesus is the vine and the church is the branches of the vine), and Matthew 21:33 (Jesus symbolized the church as His vineyard in a parable). Vineyard implies work and fruit that identifies church members and denotes the spirit of growth as a vine branch runs through the field that is indicative of a church spreading throughout a community. The significance of the study is indeed ecclesial, but it also broadens to theological connotations.

Theological Significance

The construct of the author's theological foundation commenced in Chapter 2. In the segment, the author argued theologically for the communal nature of the Holy Trinity to serve as the model to guide the development and expansion of the church. In the same manner one God in three persons intervened the affairs of humanity to create a pathway back to God, correspondingly, the church's obligation requires action as a many-membered body to collaborate with the agency of the Holy Spirit in being instrumental in proclaiming the Gospel in tandem and continuity of the work began by Christ.

The author's theological reflections yield several observations from this study. Stone and Duke said, "To be Christian at all is to be a theologian. There are no exceptions."[207] Whether

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[206] Ibid., "kerem" 1426, "ampelon" 1527.

[207] Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 1.

Christians are movers and shakers of Christ's business or hide their heads in the sand, they are guided by some conviction of God, especially faith in God, which in itself is incumbent upon a believer to know God's purpose for their lives.

First, the author recognized the significance of every Christian being involved in ministry at the church. What emerged from the research study is a profound need for co-laborers with the pastors and a need to recruit leaders in various areas of the church that can attract followers. Acts 2:41-47 presents a snapshot of the church functioning in nine ministries: teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, prayer, meals, miracles, worship, liberal giving, and outreach. The author plans an intentional theological approach of teaching Scripture and modeling discipleship that empowers members and motivates members for servant leadership as Christ demonstrated to the disciples at the Last Supper.

Second, theological reflections from the study reveal that most pastors recognize church growth as the purpose of God, and if there is to be growth, evangelism and Christian presence is fundamental. Conversely, evangelism stood out as the least developed ministry in the churches. Old Testament Scripture passages prophetically envisioned the church and the New Testament commissioned the church.[208] Rainer asserts "He [God] has been calling out from the world a people for Himself, and sending His people into the world to be his servants and His witnesses, for the extension of His kingdom building up of Christ's body, and the glory of His name."

Last, the unwavering proclamation of the power and final authority of the Bible stood out throughout the course of the project. The dialogic tenor of the pastors instilled reassurance in the mind of the researcher that the Black Church in Johnston County, North Carolina persists in

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[208] Isaiah 40:28; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 1:11: Acts 14:14; John 17:6, 18.

good hands. The intervention with each pastor echoed a chorus that seemed to reverberate the words of Rainer:

> We…affirm the power of God's Word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all mankind. For God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it, the Holy Spirit still speaks today. We affirm that there is the only one Savior and only one gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches. Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and man.[209]

Final Considerations

Application of Results in other Settings

Sensing suggests that the applicability of a research project referred to as external validity or generalizability determines the extent findings from one context transfers to other contexts. "While the existence of local conditions in a particular context will not be duplicated in any other context, there are degrees of similarity between situations."[210] In other words, the research term begs the question of whether the results of the project applies to situations outside the project or other settings. If so, the project meets a general standard test that states the results are transferable.[211]

Inevitably, the question arises whether the results of this study apply to other settings or does Johnston County possess a uniqueness that relegates the project to dusty bookshelves. To the contrary, the findings are not tailor-made, although the research concentrated on a certain geography. The pastors and the researchers provided the purpose, place, and people as subjects.

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[209] Rainer, *Theology of Church Growth*, 76-77.

[210] Sensing, *Quality Research,* 215.

[211] Ibid.

The issues of dwindling church attendance share broad commonality across America as documented from the beginning. The project utilized a sampling in Johnston County, North Carolina to take a behind-the-scenes snapshot of the factors associated with the problem and recommended a course of action.

The data flowed from the researcher's laboratory of analysis to that of the Outside Expert and back to the researcher and expert again for final conclusions. The project evaluation process still continued as the research pursued the corroboration and recommendations of academics, theologians, and practicing professionals in pastoral studies. This project supported an abstract inductive theory by providing the concrete evidence of that theory via a deductive local research study.

In essence, attendance issues in the Church run rampant in every sector of America among all races and all denominations. The factors may differ in degrees, but the symptoms are universal, and the fundamental solution derives from one source, the Bible. Myriad strategies and objectives may characterize the pathway to the solution, but all emanates from the infallible Word of God where truth exists.

Merits of Future Research

The quest to understand and remedy church attendance continues. Basic biblical principles of leadership, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship drive the recommendations herein. Nevertheless, questions remain unanswered. For the community that consists of sparse population, attendance remains a dilemma. For the neighborhood downtown or in rural areas that run rampant with illegal drugs and low income, financial resources to sustain a church continues to be a conundrum—much less grow a church. This project cleared

some underbrush allowing the visualization, conceptualization, and where feasible, the undertaking of crucial ministry. Knowledge needs wisdom to now prevail.

Another dilemma that the intervention barely scratched is being gay in and around the church. The researcher observed in recent years that some pastors preach against the lifestyle from the pulpit in concert with other sins, but no probe or invite for counseling of those struggling with the issue occurred. During the project intervention, no overt homophobic signs surfaced, but a prevailing unspoken rule of evasion on the topic filled the air during private dialogue. The "don't-ask-don't tell" tone of the pastors dissuaded the researcher from delving into the topic. The author felt comfortable conversing with only one middle-aged millenial, doctoral pastor regarding the subject. His theological reflections mirrored the progression of church theology on slavery, women in ministry, and divorce. To him, explicitly, and perhaps to some of the other subject pastors, implicitly, the sin is no different from a systemic unfaithful deacon to his spouse and chronic spousal battery. In his estimation, those who refuse gay people into membership and positions need to first take a hard look inside their own congregation and ensure against double standards. The author recommends further research on (1) how and to what extent the avoidance of the LGBT community affect church attendance and (2) if and how should they be brought into the church theologically.

More research investigating the overwhelming number of black men turning to Islam is worth undertaking, especially since Kunjufu observes in his book on black male absenteeism, mosques have a male membership of 75 percent while black churches are reversed at 75 percent

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female.[212] The most influential leader of the Nation of Islam in Louis Farrakhan who has a

following of 20,000. The Nation of Islam or the Black Muslim appeal to the masculinity of men

taking ownership of their plight. The teaching is effective in that the "New York Times has

estimated that about 1 million of the 6 million Muslims in the United States are African

Americans, and close to 90 percent of new converts are black."[213] In the midst of this surge of

self-help mentality, the church must meet the challenge with the relevance of the Gospel in

transforming lives from the inside out and through the bonds of grace and love, which the Nation

of Islam sees as weakness and effeminate.[214]

In closing, Jeremiah the prophet asked, "Is there no balm in Gilead. Is there no physician

there?"[215] The answer is a resounding yes. There is medicine and a Physician for the ailing

churches. This study exposes the health status of the church but does not stop there. A

comeback is not only needed but possible. For those willing to make the journey, the pastor's

leadership is essential. A polite religion that lacks power and authority will not accomplish the

turnaround of a declining church. The journey begins with a fresh spiritual experience with

Christ the Physician that refocuses the vision of the pastors and leaders. The medicine

prescribed is in God's Word for implementing strategic plans. That means being willing to make

changes. The proverb holds true that a person cannot expect different results when doing the

same thing. The Trinity and God's Word will not change; on the other hand, fresh methods of

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[212] Jawanza Kunjufu,. *Adam! Where Are You?: Why Most Black Men Don't Go to Church.* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 1994), 29.

[213] Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 390.

[214] Boyd, *Black Men Worshipping*, 59.

[215] Jeremiah 8:22

reaching the communities, fresh ideas of doing ministry and fresh approaches to worship will

always need revisiting.

Appendix A

Questionnaire for Pastors

Dissertation Title: A Program to Address the Decline of Black Church

Attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina

Demographics

Name of church (Code) _____

Name of pastor (Code) _____

Denomination _____

Are you a bi-vocational pastor?_____

Years at this church _____

Years as a pastor _____

Average Sunday attendance _____

Predominantly black or multi-cultural (yes/no) _____

Research Questions

1)   What trends have you seen in your church attendance in the past five years? Have you seen

growth, a plateau, or decline in attendance?

2)   What factors do you believe account for trends?

3)   Have you taken any measures to try to increase your attendance? Please discuss.

4)   Overall, attendance in the black church seems to be on the decline. Why do you believe

that is happening?

5)   In the past, the church was often considered to be the center of American black community

life. Do you think that is still true? If not, why not? If so, why is that?

6)   If someone were to ask you how to increase church attendance, what would you suggest?

7) Someone has suggested that churches often tend to emphasize certain aspects. Here are five factors of healthy churches – fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry to the needy, and evangelism. Of those five, which aspect or aspects do you believe is the strongest in your ministry?

8) Of those five, which do you think is the weakest in your ministry?

9) Would you say you have balanced these factors in your church or is one or more of them more predominant?

10) If I were to ask an unchurched black person in your community to describe your church based on what they know, how would they describe your ministry? What is your reputation in the community? Do you think you are relatively well known or unknown in your surrounding area?

11) If I were to ask your members what they like best about your church, what kind of responses would I get?

12) If I were to ask them what they like least or what they would like to see improved, what might those things be?

13) What are some factors that you believe encourage individuals to become regular attendees of the church?

14) Number wise, what percentage of people on a typical Sunday are visitors, regular attendees, or members?

15) Do you take any steps to encourage regular attendees to consider church membership?

16) On a typical Sunday, do you often see any unbelievers or seekers?

17) Do you believe your church is welcoming to visitors? Would it be easy for a new person to assimilate or would they encounter cliques?

18) I am writing a project that I hope to be helpful to black pastors. What advice (on any topic) would you give to a pastor just starting in the ministry?

19) What is your position on requiring church members to pay tithes?

20) What is your highest level of education?

Appendix B

Advice for New Pastors Questionnaire Results

Question 18: I am writing a project that I hope to be helpful to black pastors. Advice (on any topic) would you give to a pastor just starting in the ministry?

PASTOR RESPONSES	Number of Pastors	PERCENT
be multi-racial	2	4%
think outside the box	2	4%
don't get discouraged	1	2%
grow with the people	3	6%
don't imitate other pastors	1	2%
do your homework	3	6%
love your people	6	12%
build a leadership team of your vision	1	2%
pray hard	1	2%
don't give up	3	6%
learn to be a servant	3	6%
Seek God for Guidance	1	2%
Be A Model	0	0%
go slow, don't use your influence before you get it	3	6%
build bridges, not walls	2	4%
learn to preach the gospel (no meddling)	2	4%
treat everybody the same	2	4%
learn to teach the word	1	2%
don't isolate yourself	2	4%
fellowship with churches (denominations, cultures)	1	2%
do pastoral care	1	2%
patience	1	2%
OTHER	8	16%
TOTALS	**50**	**100%**

Appendix C

Demographic Survey Sampling Results

	Demographic Survey Sampling Results of Johnston County Black Churches by Denomination									
PASTOR	DENOMINATION	EMPLOY STATUS	YEARS AT CHURCH	YEARS PASTORING	ATTENDANCE	CAPACITY	CULTURE	CORE DISCIPLES Pareto Rule	OPERATING PERCENT OF CAPACITY	EMPTY PEWS PERCENT
17	AME	Bivocational	10	19	35	150	Black	7	23%	77%
5	AME	Fulltime	4	9	65	200	Black	13	33%	68%
11	Baptist	Fulltime	10	11	2	50	Black	0.4	4%	96%
3	Free Will Baptist	Fulltime	13	26	38	150	Multi-cultural	7.6	25%	75%
4	Free Will Baptist	Fulltime	3	29	70	150	White	14	47%	53%
12	Missionary Bpt	Bivocational	3	3	60	250	Black	12	24%	76%
16	Missionary Bpt	Bivocational	7.00	15	55	150	Black	11	37%	63%
19	Missionary Bpt	Bivocational	8.00	8	55	250	Black	11	22%	78%
13	Missionary Bpt	Fulltime	10.00	10	40	250	Multi-cultural	8	16%	84%
15	Missionary Bpt	Fulltime	6.00	6	90	250	Black	18	36%	64%
18	Missionary Bpt	Fulltime	6.00	30	30	150	Black	6	20%	80%
20	Missionary Bpt	Fulltime	10.00	10	30	125	Black	6	24%	76%
14	Missionary Bpt	Retired	12.00	17	55	125	Black	11	44%	56%
2	Missionary Bpt	Retired	10.00	10	25	200	Black	5	13%	88%
7	Missionary Bpt	Bivocational	10.00	21	25	75	Black	5	33%	67%
10	Missionary Bpt	Bivocational	18.00	21	40	100	Black	8	40%	60%
6	Missionary Bpt	Fulltime	10.00	16	12	100	Black	2.4	12%	88%
8	Missionary Bpt	Retired	13.00	13	15	75	Black	3	20%	80%
9	Missionary Bpt	Retired	21.00	26	115	300	Black	23	38%	62%
1	Non-denom	Bivocational	17.00	17	125	125	Black	25	100%	0%
AVERAGES			10	16	49	161		0	10	31%	69%

Recruitment Letter

February 1, 2018

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]

Dear Pastor [Recipient]:

As a student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a D. Min degree. The purpose of my research is to determine why attendance is declining in black churches of Johnston County in North Carolina.

I am writing to request your permission to record an interview with you—preferably at your church, but if not convenient, then at a quiet, privileged location of your choice. The interview should take no more than 20 minutes; and a tour of your church, if the meeting takes place there, should take only 10 minutes.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to roneal@liberty.edu indicating that you have given me permission to contact you to setup a time for the interview.

Sincerely,

Robert O'Neal Jr
DMin Candidate

Appendix E

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

**A Program to Address the Decline of Black Church
Attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina**
Robert A. O'Neal, Jr.
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study of the decline of black church attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina. You were selected as a participant because you have pastored a church with 25 members for five years or more. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Robert O'Neal, a D. Min. candidate in Liberty University's School of Divinity.

Background Information
Black church attendance has dropped substantially in the past two decades. Attendance is vital to the survival of the black church; therefore, the researcher is hoping that the findings of this research may serve to reverse the current declining trajectory of church attendance. The researcher is hoping to deduce whether church attendance is associated with a particular style of pastoral leadership.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1) Allow me to conduct a recorded interview at your church or wherever is quiet and convenient for you. The interview should take no longer than 20 minutes.
2) Give me a tour of your church facility, if the meeting is held at your church.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study
The risks of participating in this study are minimal (no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life).

Participants will not receive any personal benefits. The researcher is hoping that the findings of this research may serve to facilitate an increase in black church attendance.

Compensation
Participants will not receive compensation for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home, and

only the researcher will have access to the records. The records will be retained for 3 years. After 3 years, the records will be deleted.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Robert A. O'Neal, Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 919-375-4275 or roneal@liberty.edu. Mr. O'Neal's faculty mentor is Dr. Adam McClendon. Dr. McClendon can be contacted at 417-399-2259 or pamcclendon2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall Suite 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 10, 2018

Robert Allen O'Neal, Jr.
IRB Approval 3111.011018: A Program to Address the Decline of Black Church Attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina

Dear Robert Allen O'Neal, Jr.,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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