

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THE IMPACT OF SUNDAY SCHOOL PARTICIPATION ON SPIRITUAL
FORMATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES
IN NORTH CAROLINA

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Christopher Eugene Harris

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2020

THE IMPACT OF SUNDAY SCHOOL PARTICIPATION ON SPIRITUAL
FORMATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES
IN NORTH CAROLINA

by Christopher Eugene Harris

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

October 15, 2020

APPROVED BY:

Brian Pinzer, Ph. D. , Dissertation Supervisor

Joseph Butler, Ed. D. , Second Reader

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this correlational quantitative study was to determine a relationship between Sunday School participation and spiritual formation upon participating congregations of the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (GBSCNC). The process of spiritual formation comes through the spiritual disciplines being practiced. The spiritual disciplines were measured through the study sample of GBSCNC churches in this study using four spiritual development modes from the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile: growing through a relationship with God, growing through the Word, growing through critical reflection, and growing through relationships with others (Thayer, 1996). The research findings were based on a sample of 289 GBSCNC congregants attending Sunday school. Nagelkerke r correlation, logistic regression analysis, Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit test, and independent t-tests were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. Several relationships between the variables were observed, especially a high correlation between Sunday school participation and the disciplines of fellowship and evangelism. Other strong correlations included reading the Bible and mediation, service and fellowship, service and evangelism, critical reflection and repentance, and repentance and prayer. From these results, the researcher recommended further study of other African American denominations that are affiliated with an ethnicity other than their own. The findings were used to propose a model to local church Christian education leaders to promote and measure congregational spiritual formation.

Keywords: Sunday School, Christian Education, Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Growth, African American, Baptist Church, General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina

Copyright © 2020. Christopher E. Harris. All rights reserved.

Liberty University has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the University, including, without limitation, preservation, or instruction.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the Glory of God, the Son of Man, and the Presence of God's Spirit. He who saved, justified, called, is sanctifying, and will glorify me both now and in His Kingdom to come! Thank you, Lord! To my wife Jade, who loves me despite my faults, encourages me, and supports me in all endeavors. God has blessed me with her. To our children, Justin, Caitlin, and Cristin, I enjoy being your father! You have allowed time for me to work on countless projects throughout your lives, and you have always been patient in sharing your father with other stuff. To family, near and far known and unknown. To my mother, Margaret Long Johnson, my birth father, Andrew Harris, and my dad, Samuel L. Johnson, Sr. Thank you for the life lessons. To those that were an impact on my life and not here to see the finish of this task: Granddaddy Eugene Long, Grandma Eva Long, Grandmother Elizabeth Harris, Grandfather Logee Harris, Grandmother Jewel Johnson, and Grandfather Randolph Johnson.

Acknowledgments

I give special thanks to Dr. Brian Pinzer for your guidance and encouragement throughout the process of this work, Dr. Joseph Butler for serving as Second Reader and providing critique for the work, Dr. Tyrone McDonald for your grammatical eye, and Dr. Allison Nichols for your technical review, encouragement, and support throughout this process. Thanks to Kevin Campbell, Dr. Leonard Momeny, James Chaisson, Dr. Don Bosch, Dr. Joan Appleton, Derwin Lewis, Kim Auten and the rest of the cohort of the initial class of Liberty University's Rawlings School of Divinity Doctor of Education degree. Your encouragement, prayers, willingness to collaborate, and demonstrated love of the Kingdom of God can never be matched. Special acknowledgement of my external coaching team. Ileana Ramirez, for taking my rough musings and creating a coherent, scholarly paper that offers expertise to the field. Your enthusiasm, spiritual insight, analytical expertise, and attention to detail made you the ideal editor for this dissertation. Dr. Jennifer Bryant-Rounds, for just talking me through those moments when I was seeking understanding, with your calm demeanor, and for being very honest with me in our conversations. You were the absolute best at getting my mind directed to finish the course. Craig Marroquin, for your expert tutoring in statistical processing. After a thirty-five-year hiatus since my last statistics class, you were the right person to provide resources to explain the stuff that I could not.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
Copyright	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments	6
List of Tables	13
List of Abbreviations	14
CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN	15
Introduction	15
Background to the Problem	16
Statement of the Problem	18
The Relationship between Sunday School Participation and Spiritual Formation	19
The Spiritual Formation of a Believer	20
Practical Application of Theology	21
Purpose Statement	23
Research Questions and Hypotheses	25
Research Questions	25
Research Hypotheses	25
Assumptions and Delimitations	26
Research Assumptions	26
Research Delimitations	26
Definition of Terms	26
Significance of the Study	27

Summary of the Design	29
Chapter Summary	30
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	31
Overview.....	31
Theological Framework for the Study	32
Theological Literature.....	33
Spiritual Formation	33
Defining Spiritual Formation.....	34
Spiritual Formation as Depicted in Scripture.....	35
Sunday School Model of Christian Education.....	40
Application of the Theology	44
Summary of the Theological Framework for the Study	45
Theoretical Framework for the Study	46
Spiritual Formation	48
The Process of Spiritual Formation	49
Sunday School	52
Teaching Spiritual Formation in the Church	58
Related Literature.....	59
African American Culture in Sunday School and Spiritual Formation	59
Informed and Engaged Laity	60
Cultural Awareness and Integration.....	61
African American Culture.....	62
Spiritual Disciplines Identified	63

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature	63
Gap in the Literature	64
Profile of the Current Study	66
Chapter Summary	67
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	68
Research Design Synopsis	68
The Problem.....	68
Purpose Statement.....	69
Research Questions and Hypotheses	69
Research Design and Methodology	70
Population	71
Sampling Procedures	71
Limits of Generalization	73
Ethical Considerations	74
Instrumentation	74
Validity	75
Reliability.....	76
Research Procedures	76
Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures.....	78
Data Analysis	78
Statistical Procedures	79
Chapter Summary	80
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS.....	81

	10
Overview.....	81
Research Questions.....	81
Null Hypotheses.....	82
Compilation Protocol and Measures.....	82
Precedent Literature Review.....	82
Final Instrumentation Design.....	83
Demographic and Sample Data	84
Revised Sample Size.....	85
Demographic Data	86
Instrument Internal Consistency	87
Data Analysis and Findings	88
Preliminary Analysis.....	88
Research Question One.....	90
Research Question Two	91
Research Question Three	91
Research Question Four.....	92
Auxiliary Analyses.....	93
Evaluation of the Research Design.....	94
Strengths of the Research Design	94
Weakness of the Research Design	95
Chapter Summary	96
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS	98
Overview.....	98

	11
Research Purpose	98
Research Questions	99
Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications	99
Research Conclusions	101
Research Implications	103
Applications of the Research	104
Research Limitations	108
Further Research	109
Summary	110
REFERENCES	112
APPENDICES	119
APPENDIX A - The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile.....	120
APPENDIX B - CSPP Survey Use Request	121
APPENDIX C - CSPP Survey Use Permission	122
APPENDIX D - GBSCNC President Request.....	123
APPENDIX E - GBSCNC President Permission	124
APPENDIX F - Church Email Notification from GBSCNC.....	125
APPENDIX G - Pastor Email Requesting Congregational Participation.....	126
APPENDIX H - Pastor Confirmation Email with Instructions	127
APPENDIX I - Pastor Letter to Congregation.....	128
APPENDIX J - Participant Letter	129
APPENDIX K - IRB Participant Consent Form.....	130
APPENDIX L - Participant’s Instructions	132

APPENDIX M - Participant Demographic Survey	133
APPENDIX N - IRB Approval Letter	134

List of Tables

<i>Table 1.</i> Demographic Frequencies.....	87
<i>Table 2.</i> Internal Consistency Properties and Descriptive Statistics for Survey Subscales.....	88
<i>Table 3.</i> Correlation Matrix for the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile Subscales.....	89
<i>Table 4.</i> Logistic Regression for RQ1.....	90
<i>Table 5.</i> Logistic Regression for RQ2.....	91
<i>Table 6.</i> Logistic Regression for RQ3.....	92
<i>Table 7.</i> Logistic Regression for RQ4.....	93
<i>Table 8.</i> Independent Samples T-Test for Survey Subscales.....	94

List of Abbreviations

Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP)

General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (GBSCNC)

General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated (GBSC of NC, Inc.)

Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Null Hypothesis (H_0)

Research Question (RQ)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

What is spiritual formation? How does it happen? What are the indicators for successful spiritual formation? How does the Sunday school model of Christian education create spiritual formation? What is the impact of Sunday school participation upon the spiritual formation in the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (GBSCNC) church attenders? Pettit (2008) states:

First, spiritual formation is the holistic work of God in a believer's life whereby systematic change renders the individual continually closer to the image and actions of Jesus Christ. And second, the change or transformation that occurs in the believer's life happens best in the context of authentic, Christian community and is oriented as service toward God and others. (p. 19)

Spiritual formation, for the purpose of this study, is defined according to Wilhoit (2008), who states, "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit" (p. 23). Sunday school is defined, for the purpose of this study, as "the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship" (Taylor & Hanks, 1999, p. 11). The objective of spiritual disciplines—prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship (Thayer, 2004)—is to serve as "a catalyst for spiritual formation but not the cause of it" (Davis, 2011, p. 21). These practices are the lifeblood of both the individual Christian and the overall body of believers. Spiritual formation and Christian education are essential keys to fulfilling the Great Commission. They draw congregants closer to God and into better relationships with mankind.

Background to the Problem

There has been a decline in attendance at mainline Christian churches, documented in recent years, leading to a loss of spiritual formation and the potential effectiveness of the Sunday school model utilized for Christian education. Roehlkepartain (1993) remarked, “Since the 1950s, mainline churches have been facing declining memberships, increased illiteracy about the Bible and the faith, and a fear that faith was being reduced to a superficial, peripheral part of life for many professing Christians” (pp. 17-18). In the South, low attendance also appears to impact believers’ connection to their Bibles. Barna (2011) writes about southern churches, stating:

The only belief that sustained significant change was the 10-percentage point decline in adults who strongly agreed that the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches. That dropped the figure to half of southerners who hold this point of view.

The key impediment to the African American church specifically is alarmingly low church attendance. Studies reveal 78% of the African American populace who claim church membership admit to attending church only once in the last six months (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The influence of the church is losing its relevance in the community. Nationwide, 32% of the African American community is reported unchurched. By European American church standards, this is exceptional being that their statistics reflect 45% as unchurched (Barbera, 2003). These trends have contributed to a growing sense of urgency of church leaders to reform Christian education as we know it. Truss (2018) revealed in a study that “church attendance declined in many Baptist churches across America by 61 percent” (iv).

One of the reasons for the decline of the African American church is the lack of addressing the perceived needs of her parishioners. The church, particularly the African American church, must turn its spiritual formation toward the issues that have foundationally led to decline in attendance, namely the perception of depravity of the African American community through economic opportunity and treatment of the race in general. The African American

church must adopt a theological stance that embraces the prophetic ministry of identifying and speaking to the conditions that cause depraved conditions to get ahead in today's world.

Babatunde Adedibu (2013) of the Britain's Black Majority Churches reports that the church creates a "community of people with high self-esteem, belief, and pride in overcoming social injustices or alienation" (p. 103).

The followers of Christ must ask the probing questions that lead to lasting results of growth around spiritual formation. What is the connection of the Sunday school method of Christian education to spiritual formation of the attendees of the church? How real are the connections of the Sunday School participation and spiritual formation? The understanding of the church must be that the new generation is less loyal to traditions of the church and are in search of spiritual formation that they term as "real" or authentic. This issue is not only localized in individual church settings, but rather, it is systemic as well. The African American church that intends to create multigenerational spiritual formation must embrace the assertions of editor Emmett Price (2012) from Texas churches of Afro-European tradition experience in their ability to compromise. Mashego, cited by Price (2012), states once the leaders die from advancing age, the church dies.

This research focused on African American Baptist churches worship service attendees, addressing spiritual formation through Sunday school participation within the GBSCNC. This research explored the issue of Sunday school participation, to observe if a relationship exists between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of GBSCNC congregations.

This research assessed the effectiveness of the Sunday school model and if the information within said model enables the process of spiritual formation. "If Christian education does indeed have unparalleled power to nurture faith, how well are churches using that

potential?" (Roehlkepartain, 1993, p. 35). This study sought to determine a relationship between Sunday school participation and the growth of spiritual formation within the African American Baptist churches of the GBSCNC. This research's findings examined the effectiveness of the Sunday school Christian education delivery model to promote and measure congregational spiritual formation within the local African American Baptist churches in the GBSCNC. This study will continue to be used as a catalyst for local church pastors and Christian Education leadership to create a much-needed shift in the Sunday school model's purpose. The results of this study illustrate how the individual believer, the congregation, the committed membership, leadership, and the entire world through belief in Christ can possibly reach spiritual maturity through the process of spiritual formation.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to determine the relationship between Sunday school participation and the development of spiritual formation practices within the African American Baptist church attendees of the GBSCNC, using a spiritual service practice participation inventory instrument. The development of spiritual formation practices within the individual believer, which leads to spiritually mature attendees, is the fulfillment of the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus as found in Matthew 28:18-20. As Kgotie (2018) writes, "Matthew's Gospel ends with the expectation of continued mission and teaching." It is the goal of the Sunday school to grow Christians to maturity through the systematic study of the Word of God. Anne Boylan (1988) stated that the Sunday school served as "the primary tool of Protestant religious education in the nineteenth century" (p. 133). Cassidy-Moffatt asserts, through a dissertation:

The documented decline in biblical literacy and adult Sunday School attendance reflects a spiritual complacency that needs attention and intervention. Many churches have declined to the point of closure. The once-full and vibrant congregations with active

Sunday School programs have become merely fond memories for our older congregation members. (2016, p. 9)

The danger of the future church not having mature Christians can be avoided with resources available through the Sunday school curriculum to all developing and future spiritual formation seekers among the congregations studied in this work.

The Relationship between Sunday School Participation and Spiritual Formation

Understanding the relationship between participation in Sunday school and spiritual formation leads to the success of the local church attendee in secular and Christian ministry environments. Bennis (2009) states the following four lessons about self-knowledge:

1. You are your own best teacher.
2. Accept responsibility. Blame no one.
3. You can learn anything you want to learn.
4. True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience. (pp. 52-57)

Bennis may have been guided by the words of Christ in his description of personal growth, defining it as that state, “in which one is less concerned with specific skills than with self-understanding and the ‘transformation of values and attitudes’” (2009, p. 53). This harkens to Christ’s message to deny oneself and follow Him, leading one to conduct self-assessment (Matthew 16:24). The conclusion of this principle is seeking proper alignment, for spiritual formation to be the plan of God for one’s life. The practice of self-actualization points to the need for the Holy Spirit's work of spiritual formation in the life of the believer.

The process of self-assessment and self-actualization demands that one acknowledge that he/she is not in total control of his/her spiritual formation. A person accomplishes meaningful development by understanding that he/she is limited and needs assistance healing. Blackaby and Blackaby (2001) introduce the limitation of spiritual formation and development, saying:

One of the greatest limitations for today’s spiritual leaders is their inability to understand and acknowledge how their past cripples their current effectiveness. They are blind to their emotional and spiritual need, so they do not seek the healing that is available to

them in Christ. . . Failure is a powerful force in the making of a leader. The failure itself is not the issue; it's what failure leads to that is so determinative in leadership development. For true leaders, failure will not destroy them but will, instead, further develop their character. (p. 38)

Here the author suggests that external forces not only have the potential to impact spiritual formation but also have the power to overcome the limitations of growth achievable by individuals in a vacuum. In the same way, one can argue that the external impact of Sunday school participation can transform and enrich the spiritual formation of the believer, resulting in a more mature follower of Christ.

The Spiritual Formation of a Believer

The spiritual formation of a believer comes with Christian education, which develops the faith, conduct, and future of all Christian believers. Mature spiritual believers live by the words of Murray (2013) when he states:

The work of God's free grace in us enables us to die to sin and live to righteousness. In contrast to justification, which is accomplished for us with no reference to what we've done or not done, sanctification involves our not doing certain things and doing certain things, all by God's enabling grace. (p. 244)

It is this type of conviction that enables the Christian to obtain the success needed from a Biblical worldview. We have nothing save the grace of God, and we cannot be successful without Him.

Nancy Pearcey (2004) underscores the need for a continual process of spiritual formation of the Christian when speaking of Romans 8:17, observing, "Western Christians like to jump ahead to the second half of the verse, to the assurance that we will share in His glory. But spiritual growth doesn't work that way. Genuine sanctification begins with suffering and dying with Christ" (p. 354). It is indeed imperative that the Christian seeks true spiritual formation to embrace fully the liberating power of Christianity.

To begin the work of this study, the following chapter will summarize previous theological discussions of the following relevant topics:

1. The spiritual formation motif
2. The Sunday school Christian education model
3. Correlational relationship of the two theories.

The aim of this study is to determine if a correlation exists between religious education in the form of Sunday school and spiritual formation and to draw lessons that enable churches to better serve the spiritual needs of their congregants. In executing the Sunday school Christian education model, local churches must work intently in the employ of God to follow the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, teaching participants to love selflessly and be propitiatory examples of Christ. There must be a rigorous process of making disciples that are entirely bound to the example of Jesus in spiritual formation.

Practical Application of Theology

The practical application of the theological and biblical understanding of the spiritual formation motif is deeply rooted in our ability to understand who oversees our abilities and talents. Informed Christians must first have it settled in their minds and hearts that the flock, task, and principles they are called to follow do not belong to them. A proper relationship with God is fostered through the acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ alone. "The Bible is a book that tells it like it is. The God of perfection who planned, supervises, and will one day consummate the plan of redemption employs flawed human vessels to accomplish his purposes" (Howell, 2003, p. 296).

Theologically speaking, God has shown the model of leading His people through a systematic method contained within the Bible of delivering protection, provision, and guidance.

This model allows for theological understanding to find tangible and actionable steps that can be further replicated throughout Scripture, to enable those in the service of God and His people to view the pattern of God. One such example is found in the account of Moses unique call to his ministry found in Old Testament theology.

This pattern first demonstrates itself when the believer receives the calling from God to learn of Him. Arguably, the most pressing example of this calling is Moses's burning bush, in which the Lord calls him to free the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt (Exod. 3:1-10)¹. God then gives protection to the believer through a personal relationship with Him:

Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." (Exod. 3:11-12)

Here, God proclaims that his protection is evidenced by worship of His people. God's protection safeguards Moses when he confronts Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1-12), stays death's hand from the firstborn sons of Israel (Exod. 11:4-7), and ultimately parts the Red Sea so that the Jews may escape from Pharaoh to freedom (Exod. 14:13-31).

Next, God makes provision to enable the believer to reach spiritual maturity. For Moses, provision takes the form of physical sustenance in the desert, in which God proclaims, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God" (Exod. 16: 12). Jesus reminds the disciples of this moment to explain the spiritual provision that faith in Him offers:

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." Jesus said to them, "I am the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced are in *New American Standard Bible*.

bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” (John 6:32-35)

Finally, God gives guidance to compel believers to follow Him. For Moses, God delivers guidance in the form of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-26). God’s plan for believers demands that they have this holy text, given externally, studied in community, and adhered to faithfully, to build communion with Him and follow His guidance to the promised land.

A breakdown of this protection, provision, guidance model is vital to understanding how a believer becomes reliant upon God and his provision alone. In the applying of the theology and biblical foundations essential to believers, a balance of protection, provision, and guidance is necessary to connect to follow God’s plan. When everyone understands and fully embraces their role, God is indeed glorified from the relationship.

When attempting to understand the theological and biblical patterns of God, spiritual practice enriches a faith that is vibrant with the presence of the living God. Spiritual practice connects believers to His presence, which brings clarity to their involvement in the ministry of and to the Lord. The process of spiritual practice leading to spiritual formation necessitates the Sunday school Christian education model. The local church and Christian education leaders fulfill the scriptural mandate of Ephesians 4:11 by "equipping the saints for the work of ministry." However, the efficacy of the current model, given the low rate of attendance and connection to Scripture at African American churches, is uncertain.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to discover if there is a relationship between the Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of African American Baptist Church attendees within the research population of the GBSCNC. Spiritual formation, for the purpose of this study, is defined according to Wilhoit (2008) as “the intentional communal

process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 23). Sunday school is defined, for the purpose of this study, as “the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship” (Taylor & Hanks, 1999, p. 11).

This study also sought to discover trends across adult Sunday school participants for each of the ten individual spiritual practices measured in the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP): prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship (Thayer, 1996). These trends provided empirical data regarding the correlation of adult Sunday school participation and spiritual formation practices measured in this study amongst African American Baptist participants in the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated (GBSC of NC, Inc.).

This researcher considered other potential benefits that might arise from this study for the GBSC of NC, Inc. By analyzing spiritual formation and spiritual practices, empirical data might provide guidance to religious leaders on more effective education that best contributes to spiritual formation. More immediately, this study also stimulated conversation between the leadership of the GBSC of NC, Inc., and local church leaders in the area about Sunday school participation and the process of Spiritual Formation among African American Baptist church attendees.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

The research questions (RQ) were designed to determine relationships between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation, as informed by the CSPP's four spiritual development modes (Appendix A). The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with God” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ2. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with others” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ3. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through the Word” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ4. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation and “critical reflection” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

Research Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with God for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀2: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with others for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀3: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with Word for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀4: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and critical reflection for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

Assumptions are defined as, “what you take for granted relative to your study” (Roberts, 2010, p. 139). The assumptions of the study included the following:

1. The report of the GBSCNC was accurate in identifying churches that had an active worship service attendance.
2. The congregations willing to participate had a Sunday school model of Christian education within the congregation.
3. The CSPP accurately reflected the participation in spiritual formation practices of Sunday school learners.

Research Delimitations

Delimitations are “the way to indicate to the reader how you narrowed your study’s scope” (Roberts, 2010, p. 138). This study was delimited in the following ways:

1. The study was delimited to African American Baptist congregations that hold membership in the GBSCNC.
2. The study was delimited to participation by congregations strictly on a volunteer basis. Therefore, the results were drawn from those willing to participate.
3. The study used electronic data collection. This included the possibility of potential participant errors when completing the survey.
4. The study did not seek a preferred model of Sunday school that best fosters the spiritual formation of the local church.
5. The study was delimited to only the perceivable aspects of spiritual formation in the local church attendees.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this research:

1. *Christian Education*: Programs and events intentionally offered by a congregation to teach faith to children, teenagers, and adults. These may include Sunday school, church school, Bible studies, confirmation, discipleship training, camping, retreats, workshops, youth ministry, children’s and adult choirs, men’s and women’s auxiliaries, prayer groups, drama groups, vacation Bible (or church) school, new member classes, and intergenerational or family events (Roehlkepartain, 1993).

2. *Spiritual Development Modes*: "Learning modes by which one engages with God and others through the spiritual disciplines for the purpose of being open to transformation by the Holy Spirit" (Thayer, 2004, p. 196). The four spiritual development modes identified by the study were growing through a relationship with God, growing through the Word, growing through critical reflection, and growing through relationships with others.
3. *Spiritual Disciplines*: "Activities of the mind and body purposefully undertaken to place oneself before God for the purpose of being transformed into Christlikeness" (Thayer, 2004, p. 12). The spiritual disciplines discussed in this study include prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship.
4. *Spiritual Formation*: The intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (Wilhoit, 2008).
5. *Spiritual Formation Practices*: The ten spiritual disciplines and four spiritual development modes, as measured by the CSPP (Thayer, 2004).
6. *Sunday School*: The foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship (Taylor & Hanks, 1999).

Significance of the Study

This researcher intended the study to be significant in the following ways. First, the conducting of this research added previously undiscovered information to the body of research concerning spiritual formation in the GBSCNC, primarily in relation to the connection to Sunday school participation. Prior to this study, there was no documented empirical research specific to the relationship of Sunday school participation and spiritual formation practices of the GBSC of NC, Inc. The Barna Group (2011), in a research study on religious changes in the southern region of the United States between 1991 and 2011, claims that, "adult Sunday school attendance dropped in the South by 10 percentage points, to 21%." This statement creates a sense of urgency in the GBSC of NC, Inc., toward its fulfillment of the Great Commission of Christ, to quantify the attendance problem in its churches and seek solutions.

Second, this research sought to provide empirical data as to the relationship between spiritual formation disciplines and the Sunday school participation in local African American Baptist churches within the GBSCNC. The discoveries of this work brought valid research data to leadership, to promote discussion around spiritual formation and spiritual practices in Christian education. This discussion will lead to action plans to remove inertia and fully engage leadership and participants in the process of solution-based dialogue.

Third, the discoveries of this study addressed the inadequate discussion of spiritual formation in quantitative research. This study gives the GBSC of NC, Inc. and local churches quantitative data comparing Sunday school participation and spiritual formation as a tool to improve both individual and collective spiritual formation. According to Barna's research, 51% of churchgoers have never heard of the Great Commission (Barna Group, 2017).

Fourth, the study identified components of spiritual growth and, by doing so, served as a tool for accomplishing the overall mission of the Christian church in the southern region, namely GBSC of NC, Inc. member churches. Spiritual formation was better quantified because of this study and its observed relationships between its independent and dependent variables.

Last, this study addressed a large research gap concerning the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in African American Baptist churches in the GBSCNC. This gap is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. This study contributed previously undiscovered empirical data on spiritual formation for the GBSC of NC, Inc., discussed the correlational relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in the GBSC of NC, Inc, and the implications therein, focused on the inadequate frame of Great Commission fulfillment among local churches, and generated data to enhance the potential for spiritual growth in GBSC of NC, Inc. member churches.

Summary of the Design

This study conducted a quantitative survey of voluntary respondents, solicited by the researcher, within the GBSCNC. The researcher solicited a cross-section of African American pastors with congregations in the GBSCNC who volunteered their congregations for the survey. The instrument selected to evaluate the Sunday school model of Christian education and spiritual formation within the local church was the CSPP by O. Jane Thayer (1996). The CSPP instrument has been previously used and validated in previous, similar research studies.

The congregations that were selected to participate in this research were defined as churches with worship service attendees and an active Sunday school model of Christian education in the GBSCNC. The survey was available to respondents online through Qualtrics, the Liberty University approved electronic survey vehicle. Data analysis methods are discussed in Chapter Four of the dissertation. Data analysis used statistics to analyze the received data and to test the null hypotheses at the .05 level of significance. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for analysis of variables across various demographic factors (age, gender, church membership, and attendance in Sunday school). T-tests were used to determine whether there were any statistical differences among respondent groups in their depth of participation in each of the four spiritual modes being measured. Nagelkerke's r was used to determine if a relationship existed between Sunday school attendance and the depth of participation in each spiritual development mode. Finally, linear regression analysis was employed to investigate a predictor of participation in each spiritual discipline for all Sunday school participants answering positively on the demographic question concerning participation in the survey.

Chapter Summary

Spiritual formation is a process defined by the application of spiritual disciplines by the individual believer. Sunday school is one of the prominent choices of African American Baptist churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. to deliver spiritual formation to its attendees and membership. The introduction of the chapter set the stage in defining Sunday school and Spiritual formation as well as setting the background of the problem.

The background of the problem defines the current state of loss of spiritual formation and the potential effectiveness of Sunday school usage. The desire of Christian leaders to ask questions of results in spiritual formation in the GBSC of NC, Inc. churches. There is no previous study that answers the question, “Is there a possible connection between spiritual formation and Sunday school participation?” The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 calls for the church leaders and laity to join into relationship to actively fulfill the words of Jesus. The chapter introduces the relationship between Sunday school participation and Spiritual formation through the process of speaking to the spiritual formation of the believer. The practical application of theology follows, to discuss theological context for spiritual formation.

The chapter summarized the basic components of the study: research purpose statement, research questions and hypotheses, assumptions and delimitations, definition of terms, significance of the study and summary of the design. The researcher used the CSPP to measure the spiritual formation of Sunday school participants (Thayer, 2004) in order to generate empirical data and context for the discussions between leaders of the GBSC of NC, Inc. and local churches concerning spiritual formation and the direct connection to fulfillment of the Great Commission of Jesus.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review presents a foundation for the study, based on the prior research that has been gathered through books, dissertations, journal articles and other sources related to spiritual formation and Sunday school ministry participation. Section one discusses the theological framework of the study. Section two discusses the theoretical framework for the study. Section three reviews related literature for the study. Section four follows with the rationale and gap in literature. Section five will conclude with a profile of the current study.

The local church's challenge to make disciples, via the Great Commission, must guide the development of curricula that create a guided path that enables believers to reach maturity and full spiritual formation. The objective of spiritual formation is to engage individual believers and collective communities in "activities of the mind and body purposefully undertaken to place oneself before God for the purpose of being transformed into Christlikeness" (Thayer, 2004, p. 12). The spiritual disciplines in this study included prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship, selected from the CSPP by Thayer (1996). These practices are the lifeblood of an individual Christian and the overall body of believers. Spiritual formation and Christian education are essential keys to fulfilling the Great Commission. As Bernstine (1995) writes, "Christian Education must move to first place in our churches' lives, or we assist in making meaningless The Faith in backward lives of powerless parishioners" (p. 3). If thus appropriately prioritized, the Sunday school model of Christian education can deliver to African American Baptist congregations of the GBSCNC a vehicle for drawing congregants closer to God and into better relationships with mankind. These essential keys of spiritual formation can lead to the

growth and expansion of the African American Baptist church in the areas measured within the research population. A further need for this study comes from a research suggestion by Davis (2011), who stated about his own research the following:

Despite this study not producing significant results, it would be beneficial to duplicate this study within another association or another denomination other than Southern Baptist. Another study would confirm the same findings or open up further study if significant results were found. (p. 100)

To this point, literature concerning the African American Baptist church is limited from the perspective of spiritual formation, although there are works that transcend ethnicity and provide direction for analysis for this work. To that end, the attempt to deliver a detailed, simplistic, and engaging method of equipping congregations of the GBSCNC with the essentials of spiritual formation for the African American Baptist Church reveals a literature and research gap. Evaluating these gaps allows for the assessment of a relationship of Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of the African American Baptist congregations of the GBSCNC.

This evaluation refocuses on the essentials of necessary spiritual formation and its relationship to Sunday school participation. The review of literature will be conducted by examining a theological framework, theoretical framework, and related literature. The spiritual formation of the African American Christian leads to the wider Christian worldview in the fulfillment of the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To God be the Glory.

Theological Framework for the Study

The researcher's purpose was that Sunday school participation in the observed churches correlate to spiritual formation of individual Christians, thereby suggesting ministry effectiveness. The correlation of spiritual formation within individual Christians of the local church (African American Baptist Church of the GBSCNC) and Sunday school participation was

the purpose of the study. Connecting the purpose to the theological and biblical foundation to secure truth can be realized through a well-defined process.

This section contextualizes this study in theology, defines and discusses spiritual formation and its depiction in Scripture, reviews the theological context for Sunday school, and provides an application of Theology to these topics.

Theological Literature

An accurate depiction of Theology must include God as the subject matter. This is not new information, that without the proper belief in God, there are no other doctrinal beliefs that can be established. “It is imperative to believe that God is, and that the Bible is His Word, before we can approach its teaching on any other doctrine” (Lockyer, 1969, p. 12). God is the Supreme Creator of all, and all of creation must have responsibility to Him. For the purposes of this research, the process of spiritual maturity is called spiritual formation. “Because God is the redeemer-liberator of persons, groups, and societies, God is the source of righteousness, justice, and freedom; the one on whom persons must depend for fulfillment; and the initiator of a redemptive covenant” (Pazmino, 2008, p. 69). Believers must establish the fact that God is the originator of the entire creative and theological process to experience the growth in the area of spiritual formation and Sunday school participation that will fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

Spiritual Formation

For the purposes of this study, spiritual formation is equal to terms like sanctification and the spiritual life. A term that is gaining popularity in the postmodern era is “spirituality,” which reflects the fact that many people recognize the importance of spiritual experiences in their lives (Davis, 2007).

The results of proper spiritual formation are the disciplines of prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship, selected from the CSPP by Thayer (1996) and evidenced in the life of the individual believer. There are other disciplines that can be noted, but in this work those that are mentioned above will serve as results for growing spiritual formation. 1 John 3:2 clearly states the objective of spiritual formation is to look more like Christ, declaring, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

Defining Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation makes up the learning and applying of spiritual theology. The result of spiritual formation is the human soul’s transformation into the image of Christ. The process of formation stems from several points:

Christian spiritual formation: (1) is intentional; (2) is communal; (3) requires our engagement; (4) is accomplished by the Holy Spirit; (5) is for the glory of God and the service of others; and (6) has as its means and end the imitation of Christ. (Wilhoit, 2008, p. 23)

Spiritual formation comes from the understanding of God and the trust that His process is a recurring crossroads of growth and refinement of the individual believer’s spiritual enlightenment. Wilhoit exclaims, “Spiritual formation is certainly a multifactorial process that requires us to constantly ask God what we should be doing, rather than relying on our power and skill” (2008, p. 17). Spiritual formation is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Spiritual formation is the very lifeblood of the theological foundation of a believer and follower of Christ. The process of embracing the theological concept of the Trinity is as Averbeck (2010) writes:

Understood in this way, spiritual formation is first of all, above all, and throughout the shaping (i.e., forming) work of the divine Holy Spirit, carried out according to the will of God the Father, for the purpose of conforming us to the image of Christ. (p. 284)

This Trinitarian pattern is also clear in Romans 8:27-29:

. . . The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed (*summorphos*) to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Similarly, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, "[We] are being transformed (*metamorphoomai*) into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, the Spirit (see also Rom 12:2)" (Averbeck, 2008, p. 27). Otto and Harrington (2016), concerning the commitment of the believer in the definition of spiritual formation, state, "this definition limits the influence of a narrow group and focuses on the biblical foundations of spiritual formation that is a process begun by God, and requires a human response" (p. 253).

Spiritual Formation as Depicted in Scripture

A Biblical overview of spiritual formation starts in the book of Hebrews. Here, Scripture reminds all believers, in Chapter 10, that faith in Jesus Christ is the most profound work in which a Christian can engage, as the source of soul salvation. Schreiner (2015) notes, "Hebrews declare that any pathway to forgiveness outside the sacrifice of Jesus Christ doesn't avail. Only Jesus's death truly cleanses the heart of its sin and provides assurance of a right relationship with God" (p. 293). This chapter encourages Christian assembly, while shunning prioritizing other activities over assembling, as unbelievers do. The spiritual formation process requires a commitment to assembling as a means of transformation within the local church. Hebrews 12:5-11 depicts the preparation of Christians for discipline. This passage compares the discipline of God to the discipline of a child to his or her father. Attridge (1989) provided this insight on discipline:

Earthly parents acted as they deemed fit. The phrase is a good Greek expression for what one decides, but the verb basically means “seem” and Hebrews plays on this sense in contrasting the behavior of earthly fathers with that of God. God does not act on the basis of an arbitrary subjective judgment but with a view to what is objectively “beneficial” (p. 363).

The transliteration of scripture might convey punishment for leaving the spiritual formation path, but the more developed overall result is to see the path of spiritual formation as the intimate, developing guidance of God.

The book of Matthew has narrative history, lineage, and prophecies demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. In this Gospel, and likewise the process of spiritual formation, the purpose is to illuminate a Christlike path for believers. These passages instruct Christians to become disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). Reeves (2017) notes, “Even though we didn’t follow Jesus like the eleven, we believe we are able to make disciples, “teaching them to obey everything” as Jesus commanded (28:20), because Matthew wrote it all down for us” (p. 565). These passages remind believers of the two great commandments (Matt. 22:35-40). There has been a link made, between the two commandments, which enhances spiritual formation of individual believers. “Jesus’s response to the hostile Pharisee’s question (22:36) is to link two commandments, concerning obligations to God and neighbor respectively (Deut. 6:5; Lev 19:18)” (Boxall, 2018, p. 330). Other verses extol believers as salt of the earth and light of the world and speak to the commitment of serving God through his purposes (Matt. 5:13-14). To be a disciple means to be an outward-focused agent of the kingdom, inviting people to honor and glorify God (Matt. 5:16) (Pennington, 2017). These passages serve as reminders of the desired outcome of God to those in the process of spiritual formation.

The Apostle Paul is a New Testament example of servant leadership by way of shepherding. Jesus revealed this ideal in the New Testament; His life serves as a perfect Holy model of servant leadership. Paul, who presents a more imperfect human ideal, is a prime

example of the Lord God using human flesh to shepherd His people. Paul was born into a family of Pharisees of the tribe of Benjamin and initially named Saul. Nakai (2005) speaks indirectly to the process of Paul maturing, by quoting Robert Greenleaf, who states, “Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity” (p. 213).

Saul was trained as a lawyer and acted as a judge and executioner of the early church. He was one highly educated in the ways of Judaism. Upon hearing about the teachings of Christ and the spread of Christianity throughout the region, Saul became enraged and attempted to put every Christian in prison. He was on his way to Damascus to imprison further Christians. On his road to Damascus, Saul was caught up in a bright light from heaven which caused him to fall to the ground. He heard the words "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" He replied, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus answered directly and clearly, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:6²). From this moment on, Saul's life turned upside down. This moment was Saul's demonstration of the presence of God. His total yielding to the presence of God caused a name change as well as a heart change, however his relationship with God of Israel became an extension of his being. As Harrill (2012) asserts,

Attempts to heighten these paradoxes shape the most popular theme in Paul’s biography; as scholars tell his story, they often try to resolve these paradoxes by saying that the Jewish “Saul” converted to become the Christian “Paul” and also repudiated his past life in Judaism. A closer examination of the evidence, however, shows a cultural continuity between Saul’s early life in Judaism and Paul’s later Christian mission. Paul and Saul cannot be bifurcated or divorced. Instead of underscoring the paradoxes between Paul’s Jewish past and his later Gentile mission, I argue for continuity. (p. 23)

² *Christian Standard Bible.*

Thus, Saul became Paul and is credited with writing at least thirteen epistles of the New Testament. He personally mentored several pastors and believers in the early days of Christianity and continues to shepherd the church today through his New Testament epistles and teachings.

In the book of Romans, Paul tells believers how to serve God through building their faith. Paul provides the theological foundation for committing to the process of spiritual formation that leads to transformation of the actions of the believer. These actions, along with faith in Jesus Christ, produce the most important revelation of repairing the breach between God and man. He warns believers not to conform to the image of the world, but rather renew their minds for transformation (Rom. 12:2, 5:5). This is the desired goal of spiritual formation, to become a character slave for Christ. Keener (2011) provides further insight on Romans 5:5:

When one's hope proved false, one would be "ashamed"; the psalmist prayed that God would not let his hope in God cause him such shame (Ps. 119:116). The object of believers' hope, however (sharing God's glory, Rom. 5:2), would not put them to shame (5:5; cf. 1:16; 9:33; 10:11). The basis of Paul's confidence in the future was the divine sign of proven character already within believers, namely, the Spirit attesting God's love for them (5:5). (p. 71)

In its depiction of the Apostles' actions after being transformed by the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:32-33 and Acts 2:38 illustrates the benefit of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Becoming a follower of Christ is the first step in the process of spiritual formation. Without belief in Christ, spiritual formation and transformation are not possible.

Mark 16:15 sets the stage for believing in the miracle work of Jesus as evidence of His power as Savior. Here, Jesus also admonishes condemned nonbelievers. Mark, being the shortest of the Gospels, speaks of the twenty-seven miracles relating to the healing, teachings, and acts of compassion demonstrated by Jesus using parables. Moloney (2002) writes of Mark 16:15,

The command to go into the whole world and to preach the gospel to all creation is close to Matt 28:16-20, where the universal lordship of the risen Lord lies behind the mandate to go out and teach everyone what Jesus has taught them (v. 15) (p. 338).

Mark emphasizes the need to guard what grows on the inside of the believer in Mark 7:15, “There is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles him.”³ James 1:22 provides practical Christian insight as well, in which the text tells Christians to forgive and to live in salvation and the redemption from the spiritual death that is always planted within them. Colossians furthers the message that spiritual formation is about renouncing earthly attachment so that faith can bear fruit and grow (Col. 3:1, 5-8, 11). To offset nonbelievers, Paul teaches in 1 and 2 Corinthians to stand upon the foundation that you have learned of Christ. Especially in 2 Corinthians 6:1, he urges believers not to underestimate the grace of God. In their spiritual formation, believers are not to be receptive to words or acts that do not glorify God.

The book of Titus offers direction for leaders to engage their congregants toward spiritual formation. Titus, a Greek believer, received the directions from the Apostle Paul to assist in leading the church on the island of Crete. These lessons, though intended for leaders, are relevant to spiritual formation today in the GBSCNC churches. Paul tells Titus:

For the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God’s work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain. Instead he must hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self-controlled. (Titus 1:7-8)

The progress of spiritual formation is severely interrupted by destructive traits and behaviors such as arrogance, anger, violence, drunkenness, and greed. Leaders should practice the spiritual growth that is an example for congregants. Paul also instructed Timothy, while he was building the church in Ephesus, to devote himself totally to God (1 Tim. 4:7-8).

³ *Revised Standard Version Bible.*

Paul reminds suffering, disenfranchised, and persecuted Christians to find transformation through spiritual formation and that formation will be nurtured through personal salvation and holiness. In 1 Peter 1:17, the author reminds believers that the time spent on Earth is temporary, and they must view God as the Judge of their labor on Earth. In 2 Peter 1:4-7, he urges Christians to pursue knowledge, temperance, longsuffering, godly righteousness, and brotherly and unselfish love. All of these are goals of spiritual formation and a vital part of the ministry of Jesus. They provide the outline for believers to live a Christlike life.

The Apostle Paul shares optimism with believers to encourage them to pursue spiritual formation in Ephesians by accepting the office of God's calling designed for each believer. Some have gifts as prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers, and believers and should immerse themselves in those gifts to mature spiritually in Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). Spiritual formation requires a heart transplant to become a new creature that never existed. Ephesians 4:20-24 provides some guidance to avoid following a hardened heart and leave behind former ways of the world. The Word of God is full of information to pursue spiritual formation.

Sunday School Model of Christian Education

The objective of Sunday school is to develop effective Christians. There are some basic beliefs that support the development of effective Christians through the education ministry. Tidwell (1996) stated, concerning the necessity of Sunday school, "Sunday school is considered to be the most important structure with Christian education for Bible teaching and learning" (p. 82). These basic beliefs or foundations are shown to us through the ministry of Jesus, the Master Teacher. He showed His chosen men how to become a true and dedicated disciple of God. This dedication led to the continual fulfillment of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20. This is the foundation for the local church in pursuing a fulfillment of the plan of redemption.

A Definition Of Sunday School

Sunday school is defined by Lifeway as “the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship” (Davis, 2011, p. 30). Sunday school has been considered “one of the largest volunteer organizations in America” (Davis, 2011, pp. 26-27). This study’s definition of Sunday school is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship (Taylor & Hanks, 1999).

The Origin of Sunday School In America

Sunday school in America had beginnings rooted in England prior to the American Revolution. When the industrial age began in the late 1700s, people in England began the process of leaving their agrarian way of life and migrating to factories and mills (Anthony & Benson, 2003). Due to the high demand of factory-made materials, owners took advantage of low-wage workers, mainly children (Anthony & Benson, 2003). The work was so time-consuming that children had little time for education (Lawson, 2001). The factories were closed on Sunday, which gave children an opportunity to engage in crime. The cycle for many children was poverty, crime, and prison (Reed & Prevost, 1993).

In 1780, an English newspaper owner, Robert Raikes, concerned about poor children and their predicament, began a school that met on Sundays. The purpose of the school was to instruct children, teaching literacy, morals, and manners in addition to Christian education (Davis A. C., 2011). William Fox, a wealthy Baptist, took Raikes’s idea and adapted it for evangelism. Fox funded and organized private classes, with paid teachers and a Bible-based curriculum

(Workman, 2020). This Sunday school became the forerunner to the Sunday school movement in America.

Pre-Sunday School in America.

Reed and Prevost (1993) wrote that the first church schools in America held on Sundays occurred as early as 1737, in Savannah, Georgia, led by John Wesley. These Sunday church schools were developed prior to America gaining its independence from England. The arrival of the Sunday school movement in the United States came through the Sunday church school being established in other colonies (Reed & Prevost, 1993). In England, the learning targets were focused on literacy and Christian education of community-wide children. The opposite occurred in America. Towns asserted American Sunday schools focused on children already in church fellowship (Davis A. C., 2011).

Sunday School Movement in America.

The Sunday school movement spread to America in the 1790s (Boylan, 1988). American Sunday school focus began to change, from solely studying the Bible to two-pronged focus on conversion and outreach (Workman, 2020). The American church incorporated Raikes's and Fox's concepts to use as the model for Sunday school today. Workman (2020) asserts that American churches took Raikes's and Fox's ideas and adapted them to become a powerful evangelistic force. The growth of the Sunday school spurred the beginning of several volunteer-based organizations such as the First Day Society, Adult School Union, and the Sunday School Union (Davis, 2011). The American Sunday School Union, formed in 1824, expanded Sunday school throughout the western frontier, also known at the time as the Mississippi Valley (Garland, 2001). Those organizations, made up of several denominations, gave the Sunday school structure and strength while advocating enlargement efforts.

History suggests that unity of the various denominations subsided during the 19th century. Denominations later begin to utilize Sunday school as a way they could protect the doctrinal integrity of their organizations (Hemphill & Taylor, 2001). The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) voted to merge the Sunday School Board with the Home Mission Board in 1873, but, instead of merging, they established a new Sunday School Board in 1890, under the leadership of J. M. Frost (Kelley, 2018). In 1891, Frost proposed the formation of a Southern Baptist publishing house that could provide its own curriculum and meet the needs of Southern Baptists (Davis, 2011). The evidence of this incorporation of ideas is found in the modern-day work of the Southern Baptist Convention's growth and empirical information on Sunday school. From 1940-1960, the growth in SBC churches paralleled the growth in Sunday school ministry (Workman, 2020).

Arthur Flake is credited with the setting of the standard for modern Sunday school. Workman (2020) recounts how Flake worked as a traveling salesman and businessman in the early 1900s. Flake served as the Sunday school director of Winona Baptist Church in Mississippi. He moved to Nashville in 1920, where he led the Sunday school department of the Baptist Sunday School Board, now known as LifeWay Christian Resources. He is credited with the concept called "Flake's Formula" (Workman, 2020). Francis (2009) notes that Flake never explicitly stated, word for word, the five-step formula for which he is credited, but he used these five steps as an outline for speeches and revival meetings. Kelley (2018) writes, "'Flake's Formula' is simple and has proven to be effective for more than 50 years in a wide variety of churches" (p. 94).

In summary, Sunday school in America has reflected a continuous history of educating Christians and evangelizing the unconverted. History has revealed that Sunday school plays a

substantial part in the growth of churches of the SBC. There are several personalities that have given their expertise to the leadership of Sunday school in American denominations. The purpose of educating Christians and evangelizing the unconverted is the continued mission of Sunday school.

Application of the Theology

The practical application of the theological and biblical understanding of spiritual formation is deeply rooted in the believer's ability to understand Who oversees his/her abilities and talents. The informed Christian education leader must first have it settled in his/her mind and heart that the flock, task, and principles he/she is called to lead do not belong to him/her. God the Creator has demanded that our spiritual formation lead us to a proper relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God prepares those who are to be led and qualified by Him alone. "The Bible is a book that tells it like it is. The God of perfection who planned, supervises, and will one day consummate the plan of redemption employs flawed human vessels to accomplish his purposes." (Howell, 2003, p. 296).

When Christians theologically and biblically understand the pattern of God, they experience collective redemption that derives from a relationship that is vibrant with the presence of the living God. His appearance brings clarity to the believer and his/her involvement in the ministry of and to the Lord. This clarity illuminates the fact that spiritual formation is the same as the terminology found in Theology known as soteriology. "Sanctification, along with justification and glorification, deals with what we commonly think of as the work of salvation from beginning to end" (Moles, 2016, p. 32).

There are key components that help marry the concept of Spiritual formation to Sunday school. The purpose of Sunday school being to educate the Christian, it must enlist a Sunday

school director that understands the connection of Spiritual formation to both the process of studying the Bible and the evangelization emphasis of the Sunday school. Both connections are tenets that necessitated using the CSPP as a metric in this study. Workman (2020) states that one key component of the relationship between Spiritual formation and Sunday school is that the “quality of a Sunday school rises or falls on the teacher, his preparation, motivation, spirituality, and background” (p. 55). The teacher has to experience spiritual formation in a way that he/she is able “to teach, but also to apply the word of God to the age group he or she teaches. Sunday school teachers must teach biblical truths in age-appropriate ways” (Workman, 2020, p. 56).

This study measured the ten disciplines of the CSPP: prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship (Thayer, 2004). Sunday school, through systematic and deliberate recruitment of teachers, should look to fill classrooms with those who have Christian character and the resolve to following the teaching of God’s word. Hemphill (1996) added, “The teacher must embody the lesson. . . The teacher must have a clear testimony of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and be one who actively shares that faith” (p. 133). A Sunday school should provide to its students living examples of spiritual formation in the form of its director and teachers.

Summary of the Theological Framework for the Study

The knowledge of the Godhead in the development of congregations is exemplified by Jesus for the glory of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is what makes spiritual formation achievable within the local church. There are no successful strategies outside of those provided by God. Believers cannot use models in the arenas of education, politics, and other social sciences of the earth. Usually these seek to fulfill self-centered principles of leaders, principles

that undermine the desired plan of God. Directions given by the Godhead reveal the elements of being an example, nurturing, equipping, and becoming servants. These four elements create the proper environment for Christian education leadership development strategies.

The motive of the church is to provide disciples with examples of maturity, nurturing a relationship with God, equipping others in how to find a wholesome relationship with the Godhead, and ultimately becoming servants of the kingdom of God. The assignment of the body of Christ is to develop spiritually strong congregants that participate in the mission of Jesus Christ. The review of literature speaks to the level of humility required by Church leaders for their congregations to have purpose-centered Sunday school participation and spiritual formation.

The patterns set forth by Scripture in both Old and New Testaments provide a foundation for the theory of developing congregations with a Godly worldview. Congregants must cooperate in training, involving learning, to discern the work of God in the development of individuals and the overall local church. A formalized network of experiences and relationships are substantial foundation components in a believer's Christian development.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Understanding the correlation between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation leads to the success of the local church in secular and Christian ministry environments.

Warren Bennis (2009) highlights four concepts about self-knowledge:

1. You are your own best teacher.
2. Accept responsibility. Blame no one.
3. You can learn anything you want to learn.
4. True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience. (pp. 52-57)

Jesus's instructions to deny oneself and follow Him compels His followers to conduct self-assessment. Bennis (2009) similarly reflects on personal growth as a state "in which one is

less concerned with specific skills than with self-understanding and the ‘transformation of values and attitudes’” (p. 53). The process of spiritual formation therefore demands that churches provide a ministry of the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, and mature followers into the proper alignment with the plan of God for their lives.

The process of self-assessment and self-actualization inevitable leads to the understanding that humanity is finite and therefore unable to shape its own spiritual formation. Actual spiritual formation is accomplished when believers accept that they are limited and need assistance to reach spiritual maturity. Blackaby & Blackaby (2001) says, about the need to understand limitations on one’s spiritual formation:

One of the greatest limitations for today’s spiritual leaders is their inability to understand and acknowledge how their past cripples their current effectiveness. They are blind to their emotional and spiritual need, so they do not see the healing that is available to them in Christ. . . Failure is powerful force in the making of a leader. Failure itself is not the issue; it is what failure produces that is determinative in leadership development. Failure will not destroy true leaders but will further develop their character and leadership skills (p. 38)

Nancy Pearcey (2004) advocates the need for continual development of the individual Christian when speaking of Romans 8:17, “Western Christians like to jump ahead to the second half of the verse, to the assurance that we will share in His Glory. But spiritual growth doesn’t work that way. Genuine sanctification begins with suffering and dying with Christ” (p. 354). It is imperative that Christians seek spiritual formation, true sanctification, to fully embrace the liberating power of Christianity.

While Christian faith demands spiritual formation, the Gospel of Jesus provides a model for Christian education. Jesus knew that His mission would need continuation after His death and resurrection. For this reason, he made a purposeful investment of time in the teaching and testing of the twelve disciples. Jesus focused the strategy of building community instead of leadership

development and the concept of loving unconditionally. Jesus also focused more intensive training on Peter, James, and John. Blackaby and Blackaby (2001) write:

He [Jesus] knew that some people were more willing to receive his teaching and to act upon it than were others. Some were more prepared to understand deep truths than others did. By investing in small groups such as the twelve disciples, Jesus was preparing for the day when people like Peter would be powerful leaders themselves. (p. 219)

The theoretical framework for this study attempts to provide a contextual background for the following:

1. The spiritual formation theory
2. The Sunday school model
3. The integration of these two concepts.

The purpose of this section is to provide context that supports an integrated model for spiritual formation by way of Christian education. In effort to implement an effective Sunday school program, church leaders must work intently in the employment of God to follow the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20: love selflessly, follow the example of Christ, and willingly follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Leaders must engage themselves in the exacting process of making disciples that are fully bound to the completed example of Jesus in spiritual formation.

Spiritual Formation

The process of spiritual formation is one that must begin with a definition. “Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Wilhoit, 2008, p. 23). Foster (1998) characterized spiritual formation as:

1. Inward disciplines: meditation, prayer, fasting, and study
2. Outward disciplines: simplicity, solitude, submission, and service
3. Corporate disciplines: confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. (p. 41)

This study used the CSPP as its instrument to find the potential correlation between spiritual formation and Sunday school participation. The CSPP provides, in its interpreting documentation, spiritual growth components by reporting on the “frequency and depth of participation in ten basic Christian practices: Worship, Prayer, Repentance, Meditation, Prophetic Critiquing, Bible Study/Reading, Fellowship, Service, Evangelism and Stewardship” (Thayer, 2004).

The Process of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is a conclusion drawn from authors who have laid a classic foundation for the subject. Mulholland (1985) spoke to the need for patience in seeking spiritual formation, because it is not an “instantaneous experience,” but one rife with “aha moments” throughout the process, that requires maturation to take place (p. 27). Mulholland (1993) matured this thought in later work on spiritual formation, saying:

Everyone is in a process of spiritual formation! Every thought we hold, every decision we make, every action we take, every emotion we allow to shape our behavior, ... - all these things, little by little, are shaping us into some kind of being. (p. 23)

The process of spiritual formation provides the believer the benefit of a maturing walk with God, through the three discipline categories outlined by Richard J. Foster (1998): inward, outward, and corporate. The inward disciplines are meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The outward disciplines are simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. These disciplines serve as a means of “tutoring the human spirit” (Thurman, 1963, p. 9). It is this spiritual formation that this study sought to observe, with the hypothesis that Sunday school participation fosters it within the Christian believer. The process has recently been shared by Sironen (2020) as identifying with Christ; enduring suffering; experiencing the presence of God; receiving and applying the wisdom

of God; and imitating a Godly example. These steps interwoven with theoretical practices, lend to our understanding that “spiritual formation is a progressive lifetime process” (Sironen, 2020, p.49).

The process toward the lifetime spiritual formation should be clearly defined considering the variables being examined in this study. This examination should be conducted to provide foundation for the study to gain understanding the process of spiritual formation. A definition of each components of the CSPP allows a more detailed look at the identified subscales of this research. The use of literature review on each variable is appropriate to gain sufficient definition.

Worship can be defined as, “worship is being identified as a Christian activity among a particular denominational group” (Stevenson, 2020). Worship’s main objective is to demonstrate for the believer how to practice entering the presence of God “through fellowship, prayer, song and the preaching of the Word” (Sironen, 2020, p.53). Prayer is a foundational connection to God as attested by Merwe (2018) says that, “ ‘prayer is the life line of theology’ because it is the *en route* to knowing God” (p. 1). Prayer does the work of orientating “the pray-er to whom the invocation is made” (Flett, 2018, p. 251). Repentance involves the awareness of ungodly behavior and the seeking of renewing of the mind to become God’s temple. Hogan speaks about repentance this way, “it involves the shattering or breaking off of ungodly attributes and then attaining a higher level of understanding that equips one to be the dwelling place of God” (Hogan, 2017, p. 5). Meditation is the spiritual discipline that requires one to isolate themselves from any distractions and focus on God. Willis (2020) defines this spiritual discipline “meditation is strictly an inner spiritual discipline that calls for the person to listen to God only and to be alone” (p. 105). Prophetic critique is a term that means “observing your culture (and your own life) and evaluating it by principles in the Bible - both naming problems and providing

hope” (Luman, 2005, p. 45). The commitment of Bible reading, similar to other spiritual disciplines remains “activity within our power ... that brings us to a point where we can do what we at present cannot do by direct effort” (Reed J. M., 2019, p. 16). Reading the Bible allows the believer to connect to God’s power that we cannot do on our own. Fellowship is a requirement of all believers to foster community while maintaining individual steps toward the process of spiritual formation. Wilson (2020) shares thoughts on fellowship’s importance when he says, “Intimate fellowship exists when God’s people join together to praise Him as one united group” (p. 11). Service is a part of the discipline of spiritual formation that demonstrates outwardly the process of inward movement toward God’s plan for the believer’s life. Epps (2020) expands the understanding of service in stating, “Human Service to God and to people who glorifies God’s name and make Him look supremely valuable in Himself” (p. 14). Evangelism is a commitment to sharing the good news of the plan of redemption to those who are not currently following Jesus Christ, to accept Him as lord and savior of their lives. Dever (2013) makes the assertion for understanding evangelism “is to declare on the authority of God what he has done to save sinners, to warn men of their lost condition, to direct them to repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (p. 136). Stewardship is coupled with evangelism in this study. Stewardship according to Boloje, B. & Groenewald (2014) is defined as “to take care of something entrusted to one, to manage another’s estate or property, the charge committed to one. We have been given stewardship over our time, energy, talents, values, feelings, behaviour, money and all other things” (p. 1).

The process of spiritual formation can have many more components that are listed in the steps. However, for the purpose of this study, worship, prayer, repentance, prophetic critique, Bible study and reading, fellowship, service, evangelism, and stewardship are measured in this study and are expounded upon for the edification of the reader. The literature review transitions to Sunday school, its development, and its theoretical framework.

Sunday School

Sunday school is the most important structure within Christian education for Bible teaching and learning (Davis, 2011). The development of the Sunday school model informs its purpose in this research, especially because Sunday school now seems an inextricable part of the Christian church. Tidwell (1996) stated that Sunday school “is the best known institution of Christian education among Evangelicals today. It is so much a part of Christian education that it seems almost normative” (p. 32). The acknowledgement of the Triune God’s involvement in Sunday school is necessary in establishing the understanding of this research.

Sunday School Development

The development of Sunday school hinges on the ministry of God the Father, God the Son, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers’ ability to follow the direction of the Triune God through the study of Scripture. The direction by God amounts to the elements of being an example of nurturing, equipping, and becoming lifelong disciples. These four elements create the environment for the process of Christian disciple development strategies. It is in this development process that the community develops a Sunday school to guide the equipping of those that are assembled. Henderson (2009) provides a perspective for consideration:

Today, as theologian Leonard Sweet points out, our Christian education must be EPIC. E stands for Experience. People want to experience God, not simply have a rational

understanding of God. P is for Participatory. People want to be really engaged in their own change. I is for Image-driven. Just as Jesus is the image of God, the best religious teachers use metaphors and images. C stands for Connected. Christians choose to be associated with a community. (p. 31)

There must be a shift toward the Ephesians 4 model of education, in which churches teach believers how to walk, with unity of faith, toward the truth of the Word of God. “In Disciple Shift, Putnam, and Harrington (2013) call for a leadership shift from informing to equipping people for ministry” (Lemke, 2017, p. 272).

The curriculum of Sunday school must therefore act as a catalyst of submission to the Will of God. The individual and community of believers submitting to the leading of the Holy Spirit creates the spiritual formation necessary to make Sunday school an effective education model (Matt. 8:22; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21; Mark 1:7; 2:14; 8:34; Luke 5:27; 9:23; John 1:43; 12:26). Sunday school has the responsibility of ensuring the environment of rearing spiritual infants into mature saints. Root (2012) states that C. S. Lewis “also knew that application of the Scriptures to one's life was essential for all Christians who sought truly to grow in Christ” (p. 15). The prerequisite to hearing God is to listen to God (Ackerman, 2001). This also involves the process of being an example while establishing disciplines that foster the development of mature saints toward full identity in Christ (Eph. 4:14; 1 Cor. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:2).

Once submission is established, Sunday school is tasked with teaching Christian beliefs. Jesus being the example of God in educating followers, it is necessary to understand how He taught His disciples. The scriptures provide a set of different styles of teaching that Jesus used to deliver information. Wilhoit & Dettoni (1998) observed:

Teachers who study the teaching methods of Jesus know that Jesus loved discussion groups. Of course, Jesus also lectured. And, there are biblical examples of Jesus using group work and individualized instruction. Jesus was like all good teachers. He used teaching methods based on circumstances and needs.” (p. 203)

Christian education has the luxury of using various kinds of delivery options for the learner. The most common methods of delivery are group discussion, lecturing, and mentoring. These methods find themselves rooted in the teaching style of Jesus, as depicted in scripture. There is also contemporary teaching method developmentalists that offer expanded explanation of methodology. Piaget, Kohlberg, Fowler, Erikson, Vygotsky, Perry and Belenky shared development processes that have impacted development of the Christian education model for the local community. The use of experiential learning theory as developed by Kolb (1984) is further explained in the following paragraphs to provide its connection to spiritual formation.

Experiential Learning Theory

Learning theories and spiritual formation are connected by homogeneous theoretical and theological issues. Learning theory deals with the questions of knowing and becoming. There is evidence to support the hypothesis that spiritual formation also handles the same questions of knowing and becoming: (John 17:3; Eph. 3:16-19). The connections between experiential learning theory and spiritual formation will be examined in this section. However, a deeper analysis of the spiritual dimension in experiential learning is entirely absent from existing literature (Veselsky et al., 2013).

Experiential learning has been with humanity since its existence. The theory of experiential learning was developed in the eighteenth century. Experiential learning applications have ebbed and flowed in educational circles since the theory was articulated. Experiential learning is defined as learning by doing, learning while doing, or practical learning. When seeking spiritual formation coupled with experiential learning strategies, “reflection is required after the experience; during the reflection process, new knowledge may be acquired” (Rustan, 2018, p. 1). Kolb’s theory of experiential learning for this study is defined as, learning that

“requires that the learner goes through a transformative experience to create new knowledge after going through four stages: observation, thinking, experience, and reflection” (Rustan, 2018, p. 1).

Experiential learning theory advocates involvement of the student in his/her own learning. Lisko and O’Dell (2010) assert, “to facilitate the process of grasping experience and transforming it into new ways of thinking and new behaviors, the theory presents four different learning styles or modes: accommodating, diverging, converging, and assimilating” (p. 106). The definitions of the four learning modes or stages are as follows:

Accommodating learners are those who learn through apprehension and active, hands-on experimentation. Diverging learners also learn by apprehension; however, they internalize by reflection. Converging learners learn by comprehension, considering abstract ideas separate from the actual experience. Assimilating learners are those who learn by comprehension, but internalize the learning. (Lisko & O’Dell, 2010, p. 106)

It is useful to examine Kolb theory’s four stages of learning when observing Sunday school methodology and its relationship to spiritual formation of its attendees. These learning styles ultimately create the product of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes can be critically influenced by the incorporation of learning styles into classroom and laboratory presentations (Lisko & O’Dell, 2010). The application of Kolb’s theory integrates the learning styles as its base with four-stage learning styles provide concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation as the result. Rose (2020) writes, concerning the integration of these concepts, “The cycle provides a framework for engaging students in meaningful learning that is connected to the world around them” (p. 22).

The Kolb theory has been successfully demonstrated in the fields of nursing and education in public schools, in the teaching and learning of new concepts. The research has not, however, translated to Sunday school, in the local church teaching and learning process, to measure the outcomes of experiential learning on spiritual formation.

The Father in Sunday School

Spiritual formation in the individual believer is a process of development under the direction of God the Father. Jesus constantly reminded His disciples that His ministry was to glorify the Father. The Bible provides several examples through the Gospel of John:

“I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge” (8:50⁴). “Jesus replied, If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God is the one who glorifies me” (8:54⁴). “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (11:4⁴). “And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father” (14:13⁴). “I have brought you glory on Earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (17:4⁴).

Jesus remained close to the understanding that He Chose to become human, instead of remaining in His glorious state, to live among human beings, and he died on the cross to give honor to God the Father. Jesus maintained that the desire to glorify the Father is the absolute best example for the Sunday school model of Christian education.

The opportunity arose for Jesus to abandon His mission and meet the expectations of those in need, but He did not ultimately fulfill wants of others. The Gospel of Mark shares a story demonstrating Jesus staying true to His mission despite the press of the masses of people giving Him popularity (1:36-39). This retelling provides an example to follow for His disciples and Christians seeking spiritual formation, namely that God the Father must set the agenda and direction of spiritual formation.

⁴ *New International Version*

The Son in Sunday School

Jesus is the example for all believers of the grace and love of God in flesh. As disciples of Christ, believers are called to follow the example of Jesus and emulate his earthly life as our own. The establishment of the church is to continue the work and ministry of Jesus's earthly journey. In Scripture, Jesus established the disciplines of spiritual formation. He taught the concept of servant leadership and how it should be developed among mature disciples.

Today, Jesus calls His disciples to follow His model of communicating God's love and grace to the entire world through the power of the Gospel message. Even in His final hours before the crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples of the intent of God as captured in the canon of scripture (John 13:15, 13:34, 15:10, 15: 12; Eph. 5:1-2).

The Holy Spirit in Sunday School

The Holy Spirit, being constant in the ministry of Jesus, provides followers of Jesus with a plan of development around congregations when closely observed. The Holy Spirit was present at Jesus's birth (Matt. 1:20) as well as directing Him to retreat into the wilderness during His process of temptation (Matt. 4:1). The Spirit of God, at Jesus's baptism, descended upon him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22). The Holy Spirit was leading Jesus while He was fulfilling his mission (Heb. 9:14), and followers of Jesus must have the same leadership from the Holy Spirit to continue the ministry of Jesus through Christian education. Dependence upon the Holy Spirit is a necessary submission for believers enduring the process of spiritual formation and church leaders developing Christian education models for their communities of believers. Leaders of Christian education must submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit as they develop their Sunday school practices within the local community of believers. Sanders (2001) shares this thought concerning spiritual leaders and the work of the Holy Spirit:

Spiritual leaders are not elected, appointed, or created by synods or churchly assemblies. God alone makes them. One does not become a spiritual leader by merely filling an office, taking coursework in the subject, or resolving in one's own will to do this task. A person must qualify to be a spiritual leader. (pp. 18-19)

The Holy Spirit gives leaders and followers gifts, as He wills, along with natural abilities. These gifts and abilities by themselves—absent an ongoing relationship with Christ—are not worthy of bringing glory to God. The Holy Spirit's role is to make a foundational relationship between Christ and His followers successful (John 14:26, 16:7-14). Leading God's church without the full reliance on the Holy Spirit in the development of the Sunday school model will result in the church missing the mission and example of Christ. It is in the spirit of reliance on the Holy Spirit that spiritual formation remains the work of the Holy Spirit. This development cannot succeed without His guidance and mentorship. Pettit (2008) speaks to ministry being a guide to the working of individual salvation's results through the Holy Spirit, saying,

Ministry is not merely activity for God. As we grow in our understanding of who we are, and as we mature with others in the context of Christian community, and as we shore up the areas of lack and weakness in our life, the natural outflow is dedicated service according to our divine design. (Pettit, 2008, p. 274)

Teaching Spiritual Formation in the Church

Teaching spiritual formation in the church is the main purpose of God for the church in this age and space. There are questions that must be answered to fully ascertain the foundational principals of teaching the important subject matter in the church: "Why does the church teach? . . . Why teach? . . . Why does the church exist?" (Parrett & Kang, 2009, p. 20). Teaching spiritual formation in the church begins with teaching the process of salvation as well as the disciplines that are being studied in this research.

Related Literature

The related literature of this study synthesizes journal articles, books, dissertations, and other sources related to the current of spiritual formation and the Sunday school ministry. This study has, however, uncovered some connection between African American theological scholars and spiritual formation that could lead to the development of a comprehensive Sunday school curriculum. This curriculum must be:

1. Theologically based on continuing the ministry of Jesus
2. Bring glory to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit
3. Simple and easy to implement
4. Effective in the increase of laity engaged in spiritual disciplines in the local church
5. Within the context of the local church's current spiritual formation mandate
6. Following the principles of Scripture in developing cultural awareness in African American Baptist congregations.

African American Culture in Sunday School and Spiritual Formation

Developing Sunday school and spiritual formation curricula is the challenge of the church, in direct obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus. Ensuring a proper perspective from the lens of diversity is always a factor to consider when preparing to effectively captivate and educate the African American Christian community. Inclusion of all of creation is the stance of synthesis embodied by Thomas Aquinas:

[Thomas Aquinas] represents a Christianity that has achieved or accepted full social responsibility for all great institutions. Thomas understood that Christ is far above culture, and never tried "to disguise the gulf that lies between them." Yet he manages to combine without confusing "philosophy and theology, state and church, civic and Christian virtues, natural and divine laws, Christ and culture." (Carson, 2008, p. 21)

Carson continues to use Thomas Aquinas as the lesson for how to contextualize culture within a Christ-like context:

We cannot say, “Either Christ or culture,” because we are dealing with God in both cases. We must not say, “Both Christ and culture,” as though there were no great distinction between them; but we say, “Both Christ and culture,” in full awareness of the dual nature of our law, our end, our situation. (p. 21)

The mindset of Sunday school and spiritual formation must be culturally inclusive yet seek to engage those followers of the process to maintain effectiveness.

A directed plan of Sunday school and spiritual formation leading toward Christian maturity will include many variables to measure the success of their effectiveness in the culture of African Americans. The primary variable discussed in this work will consist of development of the relationship of Sunday school and spiritual formation motifs alongside the fellowship ministry within the community of believers.

Informed and Engaged Laity

This study sought to determine if Sunday school curriculum is effective, that is, is theologically based on continuing the ministry of Jesus, brings glory to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit, is simple and easy to implement, is effective in the increase of laity in leadership in the local African American Baptist church, is within the context of the local church’s current lay leader development, and follows the principles of Scripture in developing leadership. This high criteria for Christian education place a significant burden on church leaders, who are ultimately responsible for the spiritual formation of their communities.

According to McNeal, spiritual leaders head toward an uncommon goal:

Genuinely great spiritual leaders do not do what they do for themselves or even as a way to become recognized as great leaders. The end game for spiritual leaders is about expanding the kingdom of God. They pursue greatness because they are passionate about God and about helping other people experience the life God intended for them to enjoy. In the end, great spiritual leaders are not interested in calling attention to themselves. They point people to a great God. This is the sort of greatness we are desperate for. (2006, p. 8)

Christians and non-Christians in their communities would look quite different if church leaders adopted this view of success. Leadership development for the glory of God focuses on abiding in the love of God. Blackaby and Blackaby (2001) state, “Leadership development comes through character development, because leadership is a character issue” (p. 53). They add, “People do not choose to become spiritual leaders. Spiritual leadership flows out of a person’s vibrant, intimate relationship with God” (p. 100). Servant leaders, who become engulfed by the love of God and seek to mature their calling to serve His people by sharing his love, enroll themselves in the proper leadership development strategy of God. In such a way, He alone receives all the glory.

Cultural Awareness and Integration

The local church must understand and operate within the current culture as it exists today:

Culture is the container and agent of a society’s beliefs and norms. It holds the experiences of a community in its rituals and customs. A society’s culture transmits its values and beliefs through its religious ethos, patterns of association, and relationships. . . . The same is true for Christian education. Culture influences the choices that determine what information will be included and excluded for teaching and learning. . . . The experience of African Americans in the United States illustrates how their cultural distinctives emerged. (Crockett, 1990, p. 57)

Christian education in the African American context teaches the importance of such stories in their historical and current contexts (McKinney, 2003). Another important element in a viable educational program, of particular interest to arising number of black people, is the history and role of black people in the development of the Scriptures (Stewart, 1994). There are customs that are necessary to ensure that the culture of the African American church is integrating its culture into the biblical history and culture. The process of development of the Christian education and spiritual formation of the African American Baptist church must include probing into the presence of the African people. The educational program of the prophetic black church

should inspire constructive, responsible inquiry into the role of African peoples in the development and dissemination of the Judeo-Christian traditions (Stewart, 1994).

Though the African American church can focus on the integration of culture, the goal of spiritual formation must not be neglected. The ultimate teaching goal is that all learners and all leaders integrate intimately into their minds and hearts the biblical truth that sets the course for living (Hemphill & Taylor, 2001).

African American Culture

God transcends all culture and plants His mandate of the Great Commission upon all mankind to fulfill it. The earnest desire of the church must be to remain focused on the community it serves and true to the mandate God has given the church. It is a balance that requires lay and professional leadership to interact with clear vision that the objective of the church is clearly forming faithful Christians that serve the community. Focus on building the faithful Christian, through Christian education and spiritual disciplines, is paramount to this objective. There also must be an emphasis on the culture from which the individual Christian has been called to minister.

What are the spiritual disciplines that require focus? What teaching methods will be employed to ensure that information is delivered in an impactful way? These questions and others are essential to the creation of effective Christian education models and spiritual formation in the African American Baptist church of GBSCNC. This literature review focused its research on embracing the understanding of Theology and theory of education, however the cultural relevance is not addressed with respect to the African American cultural experience. It is in this limitation of available literature focused on the African American church that a research gap was identified. This study sought to close said gap, to find the balance between spiritual

formation, Christian education, and culturally based yet balanced ministry to the African American Baptist churches in the state of North Carolina to address this need.

Spiritual Disciplines Identified

There are spiritual disciplines that are identified in the research as indicators of measurement for the research portion of the paper. The investigator wanted to identify those spiritual disciplines for the sake of clarity. Spiritual formation is the process of coming to grips with one's finite humanness and developing an understanding that one's sufficiency lies in the person of Christ. This definition represents the "transformed mind" that Paul describes in Romans 12. "The result of this type of transformation is an understanding that our position and sufficiency are wholly and completely dependent upon Christ and what he has completed for us in his death and resurrection" (Forrest, 2013). This project uses for its measurement the spiritual disciplines of prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship, measured through the broader topics of a relationship with God, others, the Word and critical reflection from the Christian Spiritual Participation Survey (Thayer, 2004).

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

The rationale for this study was the lack of knowledge for the GBSC of NC, Inc. leadership team and Christian education leaders of local member churches within the GBSC of NC, Inc., concerning the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation practices. The leadership teams of the GBSC of NC, Inc. and local churches struggle to reverse the decline of the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Christ through spiritual formation. The necessity of spiritual formation and its positive impact on the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Jesus is thus outlined:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Spiritual formation is a process that requires the follower of Christ to consistently ask God what we can do, instead of relying on our own talent and skill (Wilhoit, 2008). Spiritual formation is formed through communal practices within a local church.

All persons are formed spiritually. It may be in either a positive or negative direction. This formation may involve the cultivation of virtues that promote trust in God and foster social compassion or may leave persons wary, self-protective, and unable to promote the welfare of society. (Wilhoit, 2008, p. 17)

Sunday school participation is a communal gathering of individuals to practice the spiritual disciplines of studying and reading the Bible. Sunday school engages in the study and reading of the Bible, which creates spiritual formation in the believer. However, it is not the only discipline that creates spiritual formation. Paul, when speaking of his ministry in Colossians 1:28, states, “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.” The disciplines of spiritual formation are gaining more than intellectual knowledge. “Learning in the church allows for dialogue, modeling, hands-on practice, and other means of learning which must accompany and complement the academic side of discipleship” (Whitney, 1996, p. 181).

Gap in the Literature

The last few years have seen an increased interest in spiritual formation. Numerous studies in previous years have addressed Sunday school participation among SBC churches in North Carolina, yet the studies have not fully addressed the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation. There is little to no current empirical information available regarding the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in the GBSC of NC, Inc. to guide those currently in leadership. The need to assist local churches with

fulfillment of the Great Commission, the direct output of which is individual spiritual formation, demanded that this research begin to address this knowledge gap. Following are some instances of research studies that are associated with the study of the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation but neglect to address the correlational relationship in one or more areas.

One hopeful text by Habermas (2008) describes Christian education and spiritual formation as a combining of the two traditions. The author of this text asserts the combination of Christian education and spiritual formation concepts, saying, “God interrupts our lives is so that we will not assume that our schedule is our own to manage, but will allow it to be arranged by God (p. 20)” This statement implies the need for humility and teachability. Habermas also claims that these two traits are elements for Christian growth and fulfillment of the Great Commission referenced in Matthew 28:18-20. The text acknowledges God’s ultimate plan for all mankind and for each individual Christian, maintaining that Christian education and spiritual formation is a continual lifelong process. However, the text does not speak to the relational connection between Sunday school model and spiritual formation, which is the purpose of this study (Habermas, 2008).

An article written by Galindo (2001) assists in this study, by summarizing, “spiritual formation is a matter of holistic matter by discussing that it should encompass the application of modern psychologies, educational research, appropriate theological frameworks, and congruent methodologies” (p. 411). Galindo advocates for reformation of Christian education settings in the context of the church. His article describes the paradigm for reformation of the Christian education but does not address the connection of Sunday school and spiritual formation.

Jeffrey Greenman and George Kaltznis (2010) recognize the investment of the church community in spiritual disciplines but not in the how of spiritual formation or development.

They state:

This volume is not designed to instruct people in how to go about practicing spiritual disciplines. Instead, it focuses on fundamental biblical-theological questions about the purpose of spiritual formation, why we pursue it, where we should locate spiritual formation in doctrinal terms and what critical theological convictions must be made operative in order for spiritual formation to take place individually and corporately. (p. 11)

This text covers the subject of spiritual formation; however, it fails to address Sunday school participation. Each of these texts fails to consider the cultural and social implications of Sunday school participation in the African American Baptist church in North Carolina and its possible connection to spiritual formation.

Profile of the Current Study

This chapter offered a literature review relevant to the research problem of addressing the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ by enabling spiritual formation through the Sunday school model of Christian education. Spiritual formation is essential to the church because it is integral to the mission Christ gave her. Christ's Great Commission to churches was to "make disciples" (Matt 28:19-20) (Aniol, 2017). The information presented creates a foundation for the research findings articulated in the chapters to follow. The investigator addressed the Sunday school model of Christian education and the possible relationship of the model to spiritual formation in the areas identified in the research problem. These foundational categories included various Christian education models as identified in literature among African American churches: the disciplines of prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship (Thayer, 2004) and culturally centered practices that exist among African American religious culture. The

literature review demonstrated a potential relationship between the delivery of information and the focused response of believers on the mandate of the Great Commission of Christ. However, the literature review found no research specific to the development of Christian education models and spiritual formation among African American Baptist churches or churches in the GBSCNC. A research gap existed with no empirical connection between the above categories. The literature review led to the necessity for the research problem and consequent research purpose as stated in Chapter One. Chapter Three will present the method of design utilized to address the research problem.

Chapter Summary

This literature review navigated the theological and theoretical frameworks for the study, the identification of spiritual formation, the review of Sunday school and its theological implications, followed by related literature. Spiritual disciplines for this study were identified, and the rationale for the study and the gap in the literature were articulated.

Spiritual formation in the local church setting focuses on individual growth toward the local church's challenge to make disciples through a guided curriculum. The objective of individual and collective communal spiritual formation is shaped in the disciplines of prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship (Thayer, 2004). These practices are essential to the success of the individual and the collective community of the African American Baptist member churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. Literature and research gaps existed that motivated this research.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In Chapter Two, a review of the literature revealed the gap in research-based observations of a relationship between Sunday school participation and Spiritual formation, and especially in the membership churches of GBSC of NC, Inc. The lack of empirical research and available literature examining the relationship between spiritual formation and Sunday school participation led to the relevance of this study. The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to discover if there is a relationship between the Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of African American Baptist Church attendees within the research population of the GBSCNC.

Chapter Three illustrates the research process conducted in this project. The first half of the chapter consists of the synopsis, statement of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, hypotheses, and research design and methodology. The remainder of the chapter describes the gathering of the population for the research, sampling procedures employed, limits of generalization, ethical considerations, proposed instrumentation, research procedures, data analysis, and statistical procedures.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

The decline in attendance at mainline denomination churches is directly or indirectly connected to the loss of spiritual formation and lack of interest in Sunday school within the African American Baptist Church. Since the 1950s, mainline churches have faced declining membership, increased illiteracy about the Bible and the faith, and the threat of faith being reduced to a superficial, peripheral part of life for many professing Christians (Roehlkepartain, 1993). There is a potential need to revitalize and implement an effective delivery system of Christian education models that promote spiritual formation among African American Baptist

Churches. The process of spiritual formation leads to the fulfillment of the mandate of Christ to the Church. The Church is trending older, among clergy and membership alike; younger generations of the church exiting has moved the African American Baptist church in the growth cycle position of decline. “Studies reveal 78 percent of the African American populace claim church membership but admit to attending church once in the last six months” (O’Neal, 2019, p. 4). This exodus necessitates focus on factors that could reengage younger generations to return to spiritual formation practices that yield solutions beneficial to the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to discover if there is a relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of African American Baptist Church attendees within the research population of the GBSCNC. Spiritual formation, for the purpose of this study, is defined according to Pettit (2008) as, “the holistic work of God in a believer’s life whereby systematic changes renders the individual continually closer to the image and actions of Jesus Christ” (p. 19). Sunday school is defined, for the purpose of this study as, “the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship” (Taylor & Hanks, 1999, p. 11).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

RQ1. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with God” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ2. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with others” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ3. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through the Word” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ4. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation and “critical reflection” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

Research Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with God for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀2: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with others for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀3: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with Word for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀4: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and critical reflection for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

Research Design and Methodology

The definition of research design is deceptively simple: it is a plan that provides the underlying structure to integrate all elements of a quantitative study so that the results are credible, free from bias, and maximally generalizable (Hancock et al., 2019). The research design used in the study was a quantitative nonexperimental correlation design. This design was chosen to provide a more naturalistic study “to describe the current variables of interest” (p. 402).

The methodology for this study utilized the CSPP (Appendix A) by Jane Thayer (1996). This tool defined ten different spiritual disciplines, the participation in which was observed and measured across study participants by way of a survey (Appendix B). The disciplines were then measured against the four modes of spiritual development as defined by Thayer (2004): growing

through a relationship with God, growing through a relationship with others, growing through the Word, and growing through critical reflection. This correlational design then examined the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in African American GBSCNC churches to determine if Sunday school participation was a reliable predictor of spiritual formation. Demographical information was analyzed through usage of SPSS 19 software program to conduct analysis.

Population

The research population for this study was made up of participating congregations of GBSCNC churches with worship services and an active Sunday school. Participation in Sunday school was not a requirement of church membership. The sample population met the following criteria:

1. The host church was a recognized member of the GBSCNC.
2. The church reported an active Sunday school model of Christian education.
3. The church responded to the researcher with a willingness to participate in the research.

Sampling Procedures

The GBSCNC is a vital Baptist denomination with an estimated membership of 500,000 individual African American Baptists across the state of North Carolina (GBSCNC, 2013). The researcher requested permission from the GBSNC President using an email (Appendix E). Once permission was received (Appendix F), the Executive Secretary-Treasurer served as the point of contact between the member churches and the researcher. The Executive Secretary-Treasurer created a graphic invitation that was placed in the electronic communication of virtual Convention activities, instructing all Convention attendees to contact the researcher if interested

in assisting in the study. He then sent an advertisement to the Pastors (Appendix G) introducing the researcher and endorsing the study. The researcher's email information was provided to the pastors willing to participate, and the researcher sent a request for permission to conduct the survey within the congregation (Appendix H). Pastors were then emailed the participant survey information (Appendix I) complete with instructions to conduct the research, a letter from the pastor to the congregation (Appendix J), a participant letter (Appendix K), a participant consent document embedded within the survey (Appendix L), participant instruction sheet embedded in the survey (Appendix M), and the demographic and CSPP surveys (Appendices N and B). The email distribution list of qualifying churches was used by the Executive Secretary-Treasurer to solicit the senior pastors' assistance, by making them aware of the research being conducted and share the criteria to qualify churches for participation in the study.

After determining the churches that matched the criteria for the study, the study's design intended to use a random sample method to select a sample size from participating GBSCNC congregations. As per the convention's website, there were 500,000 individual members across 56 churches in North Carolina (GBSCNC, 2013). The use of random sampling would allow for any of the participating worship service attendees of the population to be chosen for the study. This approach is called simple random sampling and is utilized when "each and every sampling unit in a population receives equal chance of being included in a sample" (Roy et al., 2016, p. 14).

However, due to communication problems with GBSCNC, their method of informing churches about the survey, and unforeseen issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, each sampling unit in the population did not receive an equal opportunity to participate in the survey. Random sampling was no longer an appropriate methodology, and the actual sample size

decreased significantly. Therefore, convenience sampling was utilized instead, so that all participants who fully completed the survey were included. This sampling methodology and its impact on the total sample size is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Limits of Generalization

This study was limited to the following:

1. African American Baptist churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. with worship service attendees; therefore, it was not directly applicable to churches that were not affiliated with the GBSC of NC, Inc.
2. African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. with a Senior Pastor or a recognized Minister/Director of Christian Education and operating a Sunday school with educational opportunities during the week in the parameters explained; therefore application of findings to churches outside of these stated parameters, to other denominations, ethnicities, churches without a Senior Pastor or recognized Minister/Director of Christian Education might not yield similar results.
3. The general concerns of participant bias. Individuals participating in the study might have responded to the instrument items in ways that they thought the researcher intended for them to respond; therefore, participant bias must always be considered when evaluating the results.
4. Data collection through electronic means within the participating congregations; therefore, it was not directly applicable to pen and paper results. Consideration must be given to the possibility of participant errors when completing the survey and possible coding errors by the researcher when scoring the results.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this study were necessitated using human subjects, as discussed in preceding sections of this chapter. Concerns were addressed through Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process. The study operated under total participant anonymity and voluntary participation, which enabled honesty and confidentiality in the conducting of the research. When anonymous, responses have been found to have less bias in many contexts (Hancock et al., 2019). There were no names attached to the surveys completed by any participant in the research. Any participant could choose to end his/her participation in the survey if he/she were not comfortable with the questions. Upon completion, the surveys were sent electronically to the researcher through an electronic survey instrument, so the participants were not able to see the answers of other participants. The approval of the IRB was requested and obtained, which covered all these ethical considerations (Appendix O).

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect the data was a previously used survey entitled CSPP by Jane Thayer (1996) (Appendix A). The CSPP measures the intensity of a person's involvement in a process that leads to desirable change. It does not purport to assign a level of achievement or maturity (Thayer, 2004). The CSPP's conceptual framework is built upon Kolb's experiential learning theory (Davis, 2011). Thayer states that a correlation exists amongst developing and maturation in rational and emotional domains alongside growing and maturing in the spiritual aspect. The CSPP measures the development and maturation of the rational, emotional, and spiritual aspects. The CSPP does this by measuring activity in ten spiritual disciplines and categorizing them into four spiritual development modes (Thayer, 2004).

The CSPP is made up of two segments. The first segment measures the rate of recurrence of a participant's involvement in the ten selected spiritual practices: prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship. The second segment of the CSPP assesses how appropriately a participant is employing the four spiritual development scales. The four scales are:

1. Growing through a relationship with God (also called the Transcendent Scale). This scale consists of sixteen items in the survey. This scale assesses a person's participation in a relationship with God.
2. Growing through the Word (also called the Vision Scale). This scale consists of twelve items in the survey. This scale assesses one's participation with the Word of God.
3. Growing through critical reflection (also called the Reflection Scale). This scale consists of ten items in the survey. This scale assesses a person's participation in critical reflection of culture and one's own life.
4. Growing through relationships with others (also called the New Life Scale). This scale consists of twelve items in the survey. This scale assesses one's participation in relationships with others. (Thayer, 2004, p. 200)

The instrument consisted of 50 questions and used a six-point Likert scale that was expressed as: Very Frequently=5, Frequently=4, Occasionally=3, Rarely=2, Very Rarely=1, and Never=0 (Appendix B). The survey responses were grouped into categories and averaged for an overall score in participation. The highest possible score was 5 and the lowest possible score was 0, as assigned by Thayer. The researcher retained this scale for the questions. Operationally, the researcher defined periodicity answers in the following manner: Very Frequently=daily, Frequently=four or more times a week, Occasionally=one or more times a week, Rarely=three or more times a month, Very Rarely=one or more times a month and Never=never in a month.

Validity

Thayer (2004) has provided validity for the CSPP from three sources:

1. Content related evidence was obtained through the procedures used in selecting the disciplines, constructing the items, and evaluating the items by theologians and religious educators.
2. Construct related evidence was acquired by testing the four spiritual development modes by using factor analysis. The factor analysis produced four factors all having eigenvalues over one that correspond with the four predicted scales of Kolb's learning theory.
3. Criterion related evidence was supported by comparing the CSPP to other related sales from other validated instruments. (pp. 201-202)

Reliability

The CSPP has a high reliability in terms of the coefficients of internal consistency. The coefficient alphas for the four development scales vary in range from .84 to .92 (Davis, 2011, p. 48). The Transcendent Scale has a coefficient α of .92. The Vision Scale has a coefficient α of .89. The Reflection Scale has a coefficient α of .84. The New Life Scale has a coefficient α of .90 (Thayer, 2004).

Research Procedures

Data collection began after the following steps were implemented to provide support to the data collection process:

1. Dr. Jane Thayer was contacted via email to obtain permission to use the instrument (Appendix C). Permission was granted (Appendix D).
2. The GBSCNC was contacted to receive permission to conduct the research within the denomination (Appendix E). Permission was granted (Appendix F).
3. An advertisement was sent from the GBSCNC to the church pastors (Appendix G) to introduce the researcher and the study.
4. The researcher contacted, via email, each pastor explaining the nature of the study, asking for his/her help to distribute the survey by providing the survey link to willing participants (Appendix H).

5. Each affirmation to distribute the survey was cataloged.
6. Once the participant sample had been identified, the pastor was sent an introductory email (Appendix I) and a standardized email to forward to all congregants willing to participate in the study (Appendix J).
7. Follow-up was conducted with the pastor via email as a reminder to conduct the research within the prescribed time frame.

The researcher first obtained permission from the IRB to conduct this study (Appendix O). Permission was requested and obtained from Jane Thayer for use of the CSPP (Appendices C and D). The consent of the President of the GBSC of NC, Inc. was solicited and granted (Appendices E and F). The President of the GBSCNC contacted the pastors of each church and initiated contact between the researcher and the appropriate point of contact within each church (Appendix G). The initial contact of the researcher to the pastors occurred via email (Appendix H). Upon agreement to participate, the researcher emailed a confirmation along with instructions on how to communicate with congregants about the survey (Appendices I and J).

Before the distribution of the surveys among the participants, all worship service attendees were made aware of the research study and that participation was voluntary. An email was sent to each attendee with all necessary tools to complete the survey (Appendices K, L, and M) by the researcher. The participants did not receive any incentive to complete the survey.

The surveys were not numbered and had no way of tracking the origin of their source locations, for the purpose maintaining participant confidentiality. Participants began the survey after electronically consenting to participate. The participant also gave permission for the data to be collected and used in the research study. The rest of the survey was submitted to the

researcher electronically. The participant received a copy of the informed consent page electronically, only if he/she requested it via an email to the researcher.

Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

The data collected was compiled and analyzed for each GBSCNC worship service attendee who participated in the demographic survey and the CSPP. This study analyzed the relationship between participant scores on spiritual formation practices and active Sunday school participation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the SPSS 19 software program. One database was created. The first part of the database contained demographic survey information. This included age group, race, gender, professing Christian or not, length of time being a Christian, and participation status in Sunday school. The database was populated with participating church worship service attendees, as identified in the sampling procedures.

The second part of the database contained information collected from the CSPP for each participating congregation. This database aggregated scores for each of the spiritual disciplines included in the survey (prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service and stewardship) and spiritual development modes (growing through a relationship with God, growing through the Word, growing through critical reflection, and growing through relationships with others).

The researcher screened the data for completion and consistency of responses. Any surveys not completed at a rate of greater than 10% were deemed unusable. If any respondents designated that they were not Christian during the demographic portion of the survey, their

responses were eliminated from the study. A total of the surveys omitted is reported in Chapter Four.

The data analysis of this research included calculating statistics such as percentage and mean to describe the data. Additionally, this study included a Nagelkerke correlation matrix. Any assumptions for Nagelkerke's correlation were noted prior to running the correlation coefficient. The researcher also performed a check for outliers in the data and eliminated them. The anticipated significance level was set at .05 ($\alpha = .05$) for the study. The anticipated guidelines for interpreting significant positive and negative correlations to be used in the study were as follows:

- $\pm .70$ or higher = very strong relationship
- $\pm .40$ -.69 = strong relationship
- $\pm .30$ -.39 = moderate relationship
- $\pm .20$ -.29 = weak relationship
- $\pm .01$ -.19 = negligible relationship (Davis, 2011, p. 54).

The use of Nagelkerke r correlation, logistic regression analysis, Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit test and independent t-tests were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The test of the hypothesis for all research questions was multiple regression.

Statistical Procedures

The researcher used descriptive statistical methods to “measure the central tendency (means, medians, modes), calculate the dispersion of the scores (variances, standard deviations), and identify outliers in the distribution of the scores. These procedures are called descriptive statistics because they are aimed primarily at describing the data” (Ho, 2013, p. 1). The CSPP established the creation of statistical data in the form of the use mean.

All data analysis for this research was documented in tables and an informational summary of the findings was presented in Chapter Four. Table 1 provides a frequency distribution of the demographic information of the survey participants. Table 2 displays the internal consistency properties and descriptive statistics for survey subscales for the instrumentation. Table 3 presents the correlation analysis of the CSPP subscales. This analysis was performed to detect the strength of the relationship between the subscales. Table 4 provides a display of logistic regression for Research Question 1. Table 5 displays the logistic regression for Research Question 2. Table 6 demonstrates the logistic regression for Research Question 3. Table 7 depicts the logistic regression for Research Question 4. Table 8 provides t-test results used to assess the differences between those who did and didn't participate in Sunday school on the ten subscales measured in the instrument.

Chapter Summary

The work presented in this chapter provided clarity for the reader of the research process and gave a road map for replication of the study. This chapter reviewed the research design and provided a synopsis, shared information collected concerning the population of the research, delineated the sampling procedures, and sought to provide clear limitations of generalizations, ethical considerations, the chosen instrumentation, research procedures, data analysis, and statistical procedures of the study. The analysis of the data and report of findings will be provided in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The findings in this chapter were presented and analyzed in accordance with the purpose of this study. This quantitative correlational study sought to discover the relationship between Sunday school participation and engagement in spiritual formation practices of African American Baptist Church attendees within the research population of the GBSCNC. Spiritual formation for the purpose of this study was defined according to Pettit (2008) as “the holistic work of God in a believer’s life whereby systematic changes render the individual continually closer to the image and actions of Jesus Christ” (p. 19). Sunday school is defined for the purpose of this study as “the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship” (Taylor & Hanks, 1999, p. 11).

What follows in this chapter is the report and statistical assessment of the gathered data and an appraisal of the total research design. This chapter restates the research questions and null hypotheses, then describes the compilation protocols and measures, demographic data and sample data observed, data analysis and findings, and a critique of the research design. The statistical analysis of collected survey data is displayed in the section on data analysis and findings and organized via the guiding structure of the survey design.

Research Questions

The data was compiled and analyzed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with God” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ2. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with others” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ3. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through the Word” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ4. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation and “critical reflection” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

Null Hypotheses

The data was compiled and analyzed to attempt to disprove the null hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and “growing through a relationship with God” for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀₂: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and “growing through a relationship with others” for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀₃: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and “growing through a relationship with Word” for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

H₀₄: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and “growing through critical reflection” for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

This section is comprised of the following elements: precedent literature and final instrumentation design. This section seeks to describe these elements in detail.

Precedent Literature Review

The precedent literature review for this study focused on the theological and theoretical frameworks for defining and codifying both the process of spiritual formation and the Sunday school model as a method of Christian education. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) state that the literature review’s function, “is to review—“look again” at (re + view)—what others have done

in areas that are similar, although not necessarily identical to, one's own topic of investigation" (p. 58). The literature review identified a gap in the literature around spiritual formation and Sunday school as experienced by African Americans and especially with respect to African American Baptist churches in the GBSCNC. This gap lacked evidence of any empirical connection between the above categories. This gap necessitated this study and its findings, which are described later in this chapter.

Final Instrumentation Design

The instrumentation used for data collection, the CSPP, was developed, validated, and tested for reliability by Jane Thayer (1996). This profile measures the intensity of a person's involvement in a process that leads to desirable change (Thayer, 2004). Thayer stated that a correlation exists amongst developing and maturation in relational and emotional domains alongside growing and maturing in the spiritual aspect. The CSPP measures the development and maturation of the rational, emotional, and spiritual aspects. This is accomplished through measuring activity in ten spiritual disciplines and then categorizing them into four spiritual development modes (Thayer, 2004).

The CSPP has two segments. The first segment of the CSPP measures the rate of recurrence of a participant's involvement in the ten selected spiritual practices: prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of critical reflection, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship. The second segment of the CSPP assesses how appropriately a participant employs the four spiritual development scales. The four scales are:

1. "Growing through a relationship with God" (also called the Transcendent Scale). This scale consists of sixteen items in the survey. This scale assesses a person's participation in a relationship with God.
2. "Growing through the Word" (also called the Vision Scale). This scale consists of twelve items in the survey. This scale assesses one's participation with the Word of God.

3. “Growing through critical reflection” (also called the Reflection Scale). This scale consists of ten items in the survey. This scale assesses a person's participation in critical reflection of culture and one's own life.
4. “Growing through relationships with others” (also called the New Life Scale). This scale consists of twelve items in the survey. This scale assesses one's participation in relationships with others. (Thayer, 2004, p. 200).

The instrument consisted of 50 questions and used a six-point Likert scale that range from Very Frequently=5, Frequently=4, Occasionally=3, Rarely=2, Very Rarely=1, and Never=0. The survey responses were grouped into categories and averaged for an overall score in participation. The highest possible score was 5 and the lowest possible score was 0, as assigned by Thayer. The researcher retained this scale for the questions. Operationally the researcher defined the answers in the following manner: Very Frequently=daily, Frequently=four or more times a week, Occasionally=one or more times a week, Rarely=three or more times a month, Very Rarely=one or more times a month, and Never=never in a month.

The survey questions were derived directly from the paper instrument (Appendix B) per written permission of Dr. Thayer (Appendix D), and the participant demographic survey (Appendix N) was submitted to the IRB for approval. The instrument and demographic survey were approved by the IRB (Appendix O) and entered the Qualtrics survey platform.

The data analysis of this research included calculating statistics such as percentage and mean to describe the data. The use of Nagelkerke r correlation, logistic regression analysis, Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit tests, and independent t-tests were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The test of the hypothesis for all research questions was multiple regression.

Demographic and Sample Data

With final approval of the IRB (Appendix O), the instrumentation was presented to the GBSC of NC, Inc. President for survey distribution. The decision of the GBSCNC President to

best handle survey distribution was to provide a recruitment message during the GBSCNC Annual Virtual Convention, requesting that pastors and participants email the researcher directly to participate in the study. This method for participant recruitment still was within convenience sampling of the member churches willing to participate in the study. The challenge of this sampling method was there was no exact number of potential participants that could have seen the survey recruitment messaging, compared to those that decided to participate in the study. This shift in recruitment messaging impacted sampling and required a recalculation and realignment of the minimum sample size.

Revised Sample Size

Convenience sampling has many potential pitfalls, one of which was encountered during survey distribution, which was performed by a third party, the GBSC of NC, Inc. Because of the third-party survey distribution, the researcher had to assume that distribution may not have been as effective, due to complications associated with the delivery method of GBSCNC leadership. Due to confusion regarding distribution, likely an unforeseen communication problem due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher elected to adjust the parameters, resulting in a new assumption of regression analysis.

The initial target sample size of 384 was based on a previously published recommendation of an inaccurate calculation derived from the sample size calculator website. The realignment of the minimum sample size for the study required the researcher to utilize all the collected data that was both valid and complete. The use of regression analysis for correlation via Green's (1991) rule of thumb was used to realign the sample size for the study. Green (1991) stated the equation, " $N \geq 104 + m$ for the partial correlation." (p. 499). The application of the Green rule allowed for the lowering of the research's sample size to 118 participants because of

the conduction of final regression analysis on the data collected from the completed participant surveys.

Demographic Data

Overall, there were 332 participants who started the survey, with 20 participants who did not attempt to answer any survey items. An additional 23 participants had completion rates ranging from 30% to 80%, as calculated by Qualtrics, and were missing at least ten items (20% of the survey) or more. The final sample consisted of 289 participants who had a 100% survey completion rate, which was 87% of all participants. The rationale for using responses with a 100% completion rate was that those who had an 80% completion rate, as calculated by Qualtrics, were missing at least ten items or more, which would significantly impact the results calculations. As a result, the number of excluded participants was 42. An overwhelming majority (43.3%) of the participants were in the 56+ age category, and 68.5% were female. Most (95.2%) had been Christians for ten years or more, while 75.6% of the participants attended Sunday services, and 31.8% of those who did attend Sunday Services attended at least once a week. Table 1 depicts the demographic frequencies of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Frequencies

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-24	4	1.4	1.4	1.4
25-35	36	12.5	12.5	13.8
36-45	44	15.2	15.2	29.1
46-55	80	27.7	27.7	56.7
56+	125	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	289	100.0	100.0	
Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	91	31.5	31.5	31.5
Female	198	68.5	68.5	100.0
Total	289	100.0	100.0	
Christianity Length of Time	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-2 Years	1	0.3	0.3	0.3
3-4 Years	1	0.3	0.3	0.7
5-10 Years	12	4.2	4.2	4.8
10+ Years	275	95.2	95.2	100.0
Total	289	100.0	100.0	
Sunday School Participation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	204	70.6	70.6	70.6
No	85	29.4	29.4	100.0
Total	289	100.0	100.0	
Sunday School Participation Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always (Every Week)	92	31.8	45.1	45.1
Most of the Time (>2x/month)	56	19.4	27.5	72.5
About Half the Time (2x/month)	25	8.7	12.3	84.8
Sometimes (1x/month or less)	30	10.4	14.7	99.5
Never	1	0.3	0.5	100.0
Non-Sunday School Participant	85	29.4		
Total	289	100.0	100.0	

Instrument Internal Consistency

The CSPP (Thayer, 1996) is a 50-item survey measuring four constructs and ten subscales. Due to the subscales being the primary interest in the analyses, internal consistency

analyses were performed on the subscales, and mean scores were computed for the subscales. The worship, prayer, and repentance subscales comprised the “growing through a relationship with God” construct and had internal consistency properties of $\alpha = 0.41$, $\alpha = 0.82$, and $\alpha = 0.84$, respectively. The subscales for “growing through the Word” construct included bible reading/study and meditation, and the internal consistency properties were $\alpha = 0.88$ and $\alpha = 0.59$, respectively. The subscales for “growing through a relationship with others” included evangelism ($\alpha = 0.75$), fellowship ($\alpha = 0.80$), service ($\alpha = 0.63$), and stewardship ($\alpha = 0.63$). Finally, the last subscale, “examination of critical reflection,” which is also the prophetic critiquing scale, had an internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.83$. Overall, five subscales had an internal consistency that was less than acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003). The internal consistency results, along with the descriptive statistics for the subscales, are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Internal Consistency Properties and Descriptive Statistics for Survey Subscales

Sub-Scale	# of Items	α	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Prayer	6	0.82	5.62	0.67	1	6
Repentance	4	0.84	5.31	0.98	1.5	6
Worship	4	0.41	4.88	0.82	1	6
Meditation	4	0.59	4.15	1	1.5	6
Conscience	8	0.83	5.21	0.88	2	6
Reading	7	0.88	4.13	1.26	1	6
Evangelism	4	0.75	3.32	1.3	1	6
Fellowship	5	0.8	3.39	1.27	1	6
Service	4	0.63	3.53	1.06	1.5	6

Data Analysis and Findings

Preliminary Analysis

Correlation analyses were performed to detect the strength of the relationship between subscales. There were a total of 45 $p < .01$, two-tailed, significant correlations. The highest correlations were evangelism and fellowship $r(287) = .75$, $p < .01$, fellowship and service $r(287)$

= .73, $p < .01$, and meditation and reading $r(287) = .73, p < .01$. The lowest correlation was between service and prayer $r(287) = .33, p < .01$. The correlation matrix is in Table 3.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix for the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile Subscales

Correlations	Prayer	Repentance	Worship	Meditation	Conscience	Reading	Evangelism	Fellowship	Service
Repentance	0.662								
Worship	0.524	0.592							
Meditation	0.437	0.469	0.477						
Conscience	0.595	0.663	0.547	0.568					
Reading	0.438	0.514	0.494	0.728	0.623				
Evangelism	0.391	0.484	0.516	0.601	0.519	0.618			
Fellowship	0.350	0.379	0.425	0.586	0.476	0.591	0.749		
Service	0.333	0.361	0.396	0.547	0.426	0.535	0.678	0.728	
Stewardship	0.375	0.407	0.394	0.550	0.459	0.557	0.582	0.591	0.576

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Research Question One

RQ1. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with God” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

H₀1: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with God for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

Due to Sunday school participation being binary (yes/no), a logistic regression was used to determine if worship, prayer, and repentance subscales, which comprised the “growing through a relationship with God” construct, predicted Sunday school participation. Linearity of the continuous variables examined by using the Box-Tidwell (1962) procedure. None of the interaction terms for the natural log of the continuous variables were significant.

Next, the Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that the data fits the specified model. The Goodness-of-Fit test is an assumption test used in logistic regression to make sure that the analysis of the data should not be conducted, or at least the results should be interpreted with extreme caution. The idea of the test is to partition

the observations into groups and construct a chi-squared statistic that summarizes the discrepancy between the number of observed and expected events within all combinations of group and outcome state (Nattino et al., 2020). The results of the Goodness-of-Fit test were not statistically significant $\chi^2(7) = 9.35$ $p = .228$. A non-significant result indicated that the data did fit the specified model.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 17.53$, $p < .001$. The three independent variables explained 8.4% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for Sunday school participation and correctly classified 70.6% of the cases. The only statistically significant variable was worship, where for every standard deviation unit of one increase in worship, the odds of attending Sunday school increased worship from the respondent by 1.74 (95% CI: 0.47-1.36). Due to worship being a significant predictor of Sunday school participation, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Logistic Regression for RQ1 Worked with OR, 95% CI, Wald, and p values ($N = 289$)

Variables	B	OR	95% CI		Wald	p
			Lower	Upper		
Constant	-1.84	0.16			2.60	0.11
Prayer	-0.22	0.80	0.47	1.36	0.68	0.41
Repentance	0.24	1.28	0.89	1.83	1.75	0.19
Worship	0.56	1.74	1.16	2.63	7.10	0.01

Research Question Two

RQ2. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with others” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

H₀2: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through a relationship with others for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

A logistic regression was used to determine if evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship, which comprised the “growing through a relationship with others” construct,

predicted Sunday school participation. As evidenced by the non-significant results of the interaction terms for the natural log of the continuous variables, there was linearity of the continuous variables with the dichotomous dependent variable. The Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit test was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(8) = 10.28, p = .245$, indicating that the data did indeed fit the specified model.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 27.83, p < .001$. The four independent variables explained 13.1% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for Sunday school participation and correctly classified 73.7% of the cases. The only statistically significant variable was evangelism. For every standard deviation unit of one increase in evangelism, the odds of attending Sunday school increased by 1.44 (95% *CI*: 0.50-0.91). Due to evangelism being a significant predictor of Sunday school participation, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. The results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Logistic Regression for RQ2 Worked with OR, 95% CI, Wald, and *p* values ($N = 289$)

Variables	B	OR	95% CI		Wald	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper		
Constant	-0.87	0.42			2.51	0.11
Evangelism	0.36	1.44	1.03	2.01	4.55	0.03
Fellowship	0.36	1.44	1.00	2.06	3.84	0.05
Service	-0.18	0.84	0.56	1.24	0.78	0.38
Stewardship	0.01	1.01	0.75	1.38	0.01	0.93

Research Question Three

RQ3. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through the Word” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

H₀₃: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and growing through the Word for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

A logistic regression was used to determine if reading/studying and meditation, which comprised the “growing through the Word” construct, predicted Sunday school participation. According to the non-significant results of the interaction terms for the natural log of the continuous variables, there was linearity of the continuous variables with the dichotomous dependent variable. The Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit test was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(8) = 6.19, p = .626$, indicating that the data did indeed fit the specified model.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2) = 42.06, p < .001$. The four independent variables explained 13.5% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for Sunday school participation and correctly classified 74.7% of the cases. The only statistically significant variable was reading/studying the bible. For every standard deviation unit of one increase in reading/studying the bible, the odds of attending Sunday school increased by 1.87 (95% CI: 1.36-2.56). Due to reading/studying being a significant predictor of Sunday school participation, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Logistic Regression for RQ3 Worked with OR, 95% CI, Wald, and p values ($N = 289$)

Variables	B	OR	95% CI		Wald	p
			Lower	Upper		
Constant	-2.09	0.12			15.06	0.00
Reading	0.63	1.87	1.36	2.56	0.38	0.54
Meditation	0.13	1.13	0.76	1.69	12.20	0.00

Research Question Four

RQ4. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation and “growing through critical reflection” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

H₀₄: There is no statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and critical reflection for an individual attendee in the African American Baptist church of North Carolina.

A logistic regression was used to determine if critical reflection predicted Sunday school participation. According to the non-significant results of the interaction terms for the natural log

of the continuous variable, there was linearity of critical reflection participation. The Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit test was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(8) = 11.12, p = .195$, indicating that the data did indeed fit the specified model.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 10.72, p < .001$. Conscience explained 5.2% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance for Sunday school participation and correctly classified 70.2% of the cases and was statistically significant at the 0.001 level. For every standard deviation unit of one increase in conscience, the odds of attending Sunday school increased by 1.59 (95% *CI*: 1.20-2.11). As a result, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. The results are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Logistic Regression for RQ4 with OR, 95% CI, Wald, and *p* values ($N = 289$)

Variables	B	OR	95% CI		Wald	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper		
Constant	-1.52	0.22			4.185	0.001
Conscience	0.47	1.59	1.20	2.11	10.55	0.041

Auxiliary Analyses

Independent samples t-tests were used to assess whether significant differences existed between those who participated in Sunday school ($n = 204$) and those who did not ($n = 85$) for the ten subscales. For all ten subscales, those who attended Sunday school had significantly higher mean scores than those who did not attend Sunday school. The most notable difference was the mean score for the “reading/studying” subscale. The mean of “reading/studying” of those who attended Sunday school was 4.43, compared to a mean score of 3.39 for those who did not attend Sunday school. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Independent Samples T-Test for Survey Subscales

Subscale	No		Yes		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>			
Prayer	5.50	0.79	5.67	0.61	-2.05	287	0.041
Repentance	5.01	1.14	5.43	0.88	-3.33	287	0.001
Worship	4.59	0.99	5.01	0.70	-4.11	287	0.000
Meditation	3.69	0.94	4.34	0.97	-5.21	287	0.000
Conscience	4.94	1.01	5.32	0.79	-3.42	287	0.001
Reading	3.39	1.33	4.43	1.10	-6.90	287	0.000
Evangelism	2.76	1.25	3.55	1.25	-4.89	287	0.000
Fellowship	2.86	1.18	3.62	1.24	-4.81	287	0.000
Service	3.23	1.03	3.66	1.05	-3.14	287	0.002
Stewardship	3.41	1.05	3.84	1.13	-2.97	287	0.003

Evaluation of the Research Design

The research design employed within this study featured various advantages and disadvantages. This study has provided empirical data that is pertinent to adult Sunday school participation and Spiritual formation in African American Baptist Churches in North Carolina. The sample size collected served to provide significant information to satisfy the research questions and hypotheses that were proposed in this study. The data also ensured that the instrumentation was correctly selected to evaluate these relationships and should be considered valid for future research. The data collected was able to provide empirical research to the leaders of the GBSC of NC, Inc. and local African American Baptist churches for the purpose of testing the relationship “among variables of a population, by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147).

Strengths of the Research Design

The quantitative descriptive methodology utilized in this research was a clear strength of the design. This method yielded the necessary data points that previously did not exist to analyze spiritual formation and Sunday school participation in the GBSCNC, and African American

Baptist churches affiliated with the Convention. Another benefit of this method was the inability to interject researcher bias, both due to the independent survey methodology and the use of a stringent confidence interval. A confidence interval is a range of values that describes a level of uncertainty around an estimated observed score (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 158). The effect size recognized the potency of inferences regarding “the relationships among variables in quantitative studies” (p. 158) which was another credit to the design. The design also followed a standard form to identify and communicate with participants of the study, conduct the overall testing procedure, and measure results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A final benefit of the study was using the quantitative method to devise a survey design that answers “questions about the relationships between variables” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147) to better understand spiritual growth measures were correlated to Sunday school participation and spiritual formation.

Weakness of the Research Design

A weakness of the research design was the use of a survey that was not consistent with some of the suggested guidelines for a quantitative analysis questionnaire. Though the CSPP is an effective tool used in previous research on spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines, the length of the instrument (50 questions) was cumbersome for the participants. Leedy and Ormrod (2016) advocate for shortness of any questionnaire, saying “Your questionnaire should be as short as possible and solicit only information that is essential to your research effort” (p. 161). The survey was further encumbered by the Likert scale’s total of six responses for the participant to choose for each of the questions. This combined effect resulted in the survey not being fully completed by 42 participants, or 12.7% of all participants who began a survey. This significantly reduced the sample size.

The initial method utilized to identify a minimum sample size was another weakness of the research design. The researcher used preliminary estimates of the population of data that were available and assumed that the number of active members of the GBSCNC was accurate. A suggestion for potential further researchers would be to have the Convention perform a census of its membership every 10 years like the census performed in the United States. This recommended step would increase the accuracy of determining active members of the Convention.

The GBSCNC's requirement of having potential participants email the researcher, which required an unexpected additional procedural step, had the potential to decrease the research's sample size. A further assumption was made in the school of thought that "beyond a certain point (about $N = 5,000$), the population size is irrelevant, and a sample size of 400 will be adequate" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 179). Research should have been conducted to gather a viable estimate of members of the GBSC of NC, Inc. in active membership, as deemed by the organization at the time of the research being conducted. This process would have allowed for a more accurate reporting of the membership roster of GBSC of NC, Inc., and that would have expanded exactness and confidence to apply interpretations toward a greater population.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four restated the research questions and null hypotheses, detailed the compilation protocol and measures, displayed the demographic data and sample of participants, presented the data analysis and research findings, and offered an evaluation of the research design. The literature review in Chapter Two identified a gap in available information on the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation among African American Baptist Church members in North Carolina that necessitated the study.

The CSPP was selected as the primary instrument for this research because it measures spiritual growth in ten spiritual disciplines and categorizes them into four spiritual development modes (Thayer, 2004). Internal consistency analysis revealed five of the subscales to have less than acceptable consistency levels. However, the sampling methodology was changed due to survey delivery, so that convenience sampling rather than random sampling was utilized. The target sample size was 118 participants. The actual sample size for data analysis was 287.

The use of Nagelkerke r correlation, logistic regression analysis, Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit tests, and independent t-tests were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The test of the hypothesis for all research questions was multiple regression. Preliminary correlation analysis revealed strong correlations between evangelism and fellowship, fellowship and service, and meditation and reading.

For RQ1, data showed a significant correlational relationship between Sunday school participation and the “growing through a relationship with God” subscale of worship, so the null hypothesis was rejected. For RQ2, data showed a statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and the “growing through a relationship with others” subscale of evangelism, so the null hypothesis was rejected. For RQ3, data showed a statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and the “growing through the Word” subscale of reading/studying the bible, so the null hypothesis was rejected. For RQ4, data showed a statistical correlation between Sunday school participation and the “critical reflection” subscale of conscience, so the null hypothesis was rejected.

Chapter Five discusses the conclusions and implications that can be drawn from this research, theorizes potential applications of the research, discloses limitations of the study, and makes suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This chapter presents a synopsis of the research and important inferences derived from the data produced in Chapter Four. It presents an examination of the implications and applications and proposes areas for further research. This chapter begins with a review of the research purpose, research questions, and research hypotheses. The chapter then discusses the conclusions. Next, the implications of the research will be discussed, considering the literature review in Chapter Two, followed by the applications of the findings and how they can be implemented to further Sunday school participation and spiritual formation. Lastly, limitations faced by this study will be reviewed, followed by further research recommendations.

The quantitative study was performed to observe the potential relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in African American Baptist churches that were members of the GBSC of NC, Inc. The study initially sought to replicate a previous study's suggestion "to duplicate this study within another association or another denomination other than Southern Baptist" (Davis, 2011, p. 100). However, the resulting emphasis of this research was to derive a correlation between adult Sunday school participation and spiritual formation, using the CSPP by Thayer (2004) as the instrument to observe the dependent variables of the ten spiritual disciplines with the independent variable of Sunday school participation.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to discover if there was a relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of African American Baptist Church attendees within the research population of the GBSCNC. Spiritual formation, for the purpose of this study, was defined according to Wilhoit (2008) as, "the intentional communal

process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (p. 23).” Sunday school was defined, for the purpose of this study, as “the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great commission Christians through Bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship” (Taylor & Hanks, 1999, p. 11).

Research Questions

Research Questions. The research questions were gathered from the CSPP’s four spiritual development modes (Appendix A) The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with God” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ2. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through a relationship with others” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ3. What relationship, if any, exists between Sunday school participation, and “growing through the Word” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

RQ4. What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation and “critical reflection” subfactors among African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Chapter Two’s literature review provided a review of recent publications that focused on spiritual formation and Christian education (Habermas, 2008; Galindo, 2001; Greenman & Kalantzis, 2010). The relationship between Christian education and spiritual formation has been described in this writing, however there is little research conducted that demonstrates the correlation between spiritual formation and Sunday school. Considering this underrepresentation, this study focused on the correlational relationship between adult Sunday school participation in African American Baptist churches in North Carolina, more specifically of the GSBCNC.

The relationship between adult Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in African American Baptist Churches in North Carolina was a never-before empirical research effort. This research was conducted during a unique time in history (during the once in one-hundred-year pandemic of COVID-19), which threatened to impact participation by an adequate sample group. The resolve of pastors, Christian education leaders, and the researcher to collect the data have resulted in this study, which serves as a critical data point for continued leadership discussions on the effectiveness of the current delivery Sunday school model upon adult participants' spiritual formation.

The significance of this study—as the beginning of continuing inquiry into the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of adult congregation attendees of African American Baptist Churches in the GBSC of NC, Inc.—is impacted positively and negatively by this historical significance. The worldwide outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has resulted in the unprecedented isolation of the entire world to relieve the suffering and death of large populations of humankind. During this time of isolation, many churches' Sunday school models were rendered inactive. The inactivity of Sunday school proved to be a certain impairment to this research. Sismondo (2020) offers this perspective in speaking to the widespread COVID-19 outbreak: “We know to pay attention to the complex matter of counting. It's clear that numbers from one jurisdiction to another aren't comparable” (p. 173).

However, in some cases the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 have demonstrated the resilience of the African American Baptist Church leaders in the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated to continue the spiritual formation of church attendees through enabling new Sunday school participation modes. Some Christian leaders have used their technological knowledge to maintain connection to their church members by

immediately hosting online Sunday school classes. There are yet other leaders who did not or could not prepare for such a delivery method of Sunday school classes. “As a result, there was a sense of panic among some, as it was perceived Christian leaders were losing their ability to lead and create a meaningful leadership influence field due to changing environmental variables” (Memony, 2020).

Research Conclusions

This study examined the correlation between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation of adult African American Baptist Church attendees within the membership of the GBSC of NC, Inc. as measured by ten spiritual disciplines and four spiritual development modes. The correlational study employed a previously used survey, its purpose being to measure spiritual formation of the participant. All research conclusions were drawn from the hypotheses of the study. The data revealed stronger participant mean scores among those participating in Sunday school in all ten of the spiritual disciplines when compared against non-participants in Sunday school. Data analysis revealed strong relationships between Sunday school attendance and spiritual formation in the areas of worship, evangelism, reading/studying the Bible, and conscience.

The analyses performed on Sunday school participants revealed that the involvement of fellowship coupled with evangelism had the highest correlations. In other words, when fellowship was coupled with the activity of evangelism with the Sunday school participants, these activities fostered spiritual formation. These activities, as revealed in the study, were strongly connected to spiritual formation. The literature reviewed in the study speaks to the necessity of the local church’s challenge to make disciples as brought forth by the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) through the development of curricula that creates a guided path

for believers to reach maturity and full spiritual formation (Thayer, 2004; Berstine, 1995; Davis, 2011). Reaching full spiritual formation alongside Sunday school participation and the data in the correlation matrix (Table 3) was .749. The observation that Sunday school provides fellowship among its participants, as well as the evangelism opportunities and spiritual formation, is a well-developed correlational relationship.

The second highest correlation observed were the activities of reading/studying the Bible connected to meditation and the activities of fellowship connected to service. When these activities were performed in conjunction with each other, they fostered spiritual formation. The literature speaks to the importance of reading and studying the Bible as both a way to gain spiritual formation and a central practice of Sunday school (Tidwell, 1996; Taylor & Hanks, 1999; Davis, 2011; Workman, 2020). The data in the correlation matrix (Table 3) was .728. The literature and correlation matrix suggests that there is relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual discipline of reading and studying the Bible.

The lowest correlation on the matrix (Table 3) were the activities of prayer and service. When these activities were performed together, they tended to lead to the least amount of spiritual formation in the Sunday school participant. The data scored in the correlation matrix (Table 3) was .333. The literature and correlation matrix suggests that the inward discipline of prayer and the outward discipline of service (Foster, 1998), which serve as a means of “tutoring the human spirit” (Thurman, 1963, p. 9) that shapes us “into some kind of being” (Mulholland, 1993, p. 23).

The data revealed strong intentional participation scores among the adult Sunday school participants in African American Baptist Churches in the GBSCNC. The data revealed a correlational relationship between Sunday school participation and RQ1 the “growing through a

relationship with God” subscale in the spiritual discipline of worship, rejecting the null hypothesis. The data showed a correlation between Sunday school participation and RQ2 “growing through a relationship with others” subscale in the spiritual discipline evangelism, which rejected the null hypothesis. The research showed a correlation between Sunday school participation and RQ3 “growing through the Word” subscale in the spiritual discipline of Bible reading and studying, which in turn rejected the null hypothesis. The research data revealed a correlation between Sunday school participation and RQ4 “growing through critical reflection” subscale in the spiritual discipline of conscience which rejected the null hypothesis. These findings suggest that there is a correlation between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in the African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc.

Research Implications

This study uncovered a direct correlational relationship between spiritual formation and Sunday school participation in African American Baptist churches in the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Inc. through the use of Nagelkerke r correlation, logistic regression analysis, Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit tests, and independent t-tests were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The total of the 289 participants in this study, divided between those who attended (204 or 70.58%) and those who didn't attend (85 or 29.41%) Sunday school. The mean score of study participants were significantly different in all ten subscales measured if they attended Sunday school versus the non-attende (see Table 8 in Chapter 4).

The results of the correlational analysis performed between the CSPP and logistic regression analysis support Sunday school attendance has a positive relationship with spiritual

formation within the attendee of African-American Baptist congregations in North Carolina, the findings must be mitigated through the process of further research.

The implications of the research performed start the closing of the existing gap between the study of Sunday school attendance and spiritual formation in participating congregations of the GBSCNC. The impact that Sunday school attendance has on spiritual formation in congregations has revealed to be convincing (Bernstine, 1995; Wilhoit, 2008; Davis, 2011; Reeves, 2017). The scarce amount of literature regarding the correlation of the two variables in this study leads the necessity of more research. This study will not serve as the only proof of the relationship existing between Sunday school and spiritual formation. This current study serves as a catalyst for additional consideration.

The challenge of obtaining a conclusive statement from this research is grounded in the actuality that only one variable (Sunday school attendance) has been evaluated in relationship to congregational spiritual formation in African American Baptist Churches in North Carolina. The impact of other variables, whether direct or indirect, can possibly positively or negatively affect congregational spiritual formation. The correlational relationship, though there is a meniscal amount of literature on these variables, in this research has recognized the existence of positive affiliation. It is, therefore, recommended that Sunday school participation as an effective catalyst of biblical improvement of congregations as they seek to obtain spiritual maturity.

Applications of the Research

This study demonstrated that Sunday school participation has a correlational relationship to spiritual formation in African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. The Sunday school's purpose is to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ as found in Matthew 28:18-20. This suggests that those who participate in Sunday school may have a positive impact on the

spiritual formation in the participating African American Baptist Churches of the GBSCNC, Inc. Spiritual formation has been embodied through the process of personal internal disciplines; personal external disciplines; along with corporate driven disciplines. The spiritual formation of congregations are formed through personal and corporate expressions that lead to the conforming to the image of Christ. These expressions are formed through meditation, prayer, repentance, study, worship, prophetic critique, fellowship, service, evangelism and stewardship or more directly disciplines (Thurman, 1963; Mulholland, 1985; Mulholland, 1993; Foster, 1998; Thayer, 2004; Wilhoit, 2008). The process is enhanced when congregants cooperate with the Holy Spirit and He performs spiritual formation positively within the congregation.

The research of this unexplored study presented an untouched environment of assets that were not available prior to this research study. From this research, several applications can be made regarding individual congregational participation in Sunday school and its relationship with spiritual formation in the African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. The application of this study begins to close the divide that exists between the research of spiritual formation and Sunday school participation within the research group. It is to be noted that one study cannot provide all of the information answer every question, this study seems to suggest a relationship between the variables researched and therefore, provides energy for supplementary consideration of the correlation data contained in this study. These findings suggest changes to the theological framework; theoretical framework; related literature; and ministry praxis for the African American Baptist churches of the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated.

There are no theological framework implications for the local church. The study and findings provide no new insight into how the theological foundation can be strengthened to the

enhancement to the relationship between spiritual formation and Sunday school participation for the individual attendee within the study group. As stated in chapter two's literature review, the theological foundation must include God as the subject matter which is not new information. This theological position reaffirms the assertion that spiritual formation originates with awareness of God's redemptive plan for humankind (Lockyer, 1969; Pazmino, 2008). The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 produces the clarion call to the central foundation of the theology of spiritual formation and Sunday school correlation, which is God is the foundation of the theological framework for this relationship.

Considering the theological framework's foundation, the theoretical framework of the Sunday school model must be evaluated in the African American Baptist Churches of the GBSCNC, when considering this study. The literature review connected the origin of Sunday school in America is "for Southern Baptists, Sunday school is often viewed as the growth agent of the church" (Davis, 2011, p. 92). Sunday school's intent is to grow the church numerically with the creation of new classes full of new believers. The philosophy of numerical growth is further extended by Francis (2009) when this writer claims, "Ideas abound about how a Sunday school, a church ... grows. All of those theories can be reduced to this most basic principle: start new units" (p. 40). The philosophy is to continually start new classes to evangelize for Christ.

Additionally, the study's data showed lower participation in the areas of prayer, repentance, service, stewardship, and mediation among active participants of Sunday school in the African American Baptist Churches of the GBSCNC. For the Christian seeking spiritual formation growth in the ten subsets of the used instrument, this information begs the question: Is it possible for Sunday school to provide quality biblical teaching to create higher participation in the areas of prayer, repentance, service, stewardship, and mediation among its participants? The

trends necessitate reevaluation of the philosophy driving Sunday school participation, including developing these deficit spiritual disciplines to strengthen the needs of its students. Overall, the data suggests a correlation exists between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation.

The second application is that the quality of Christian education delivered within the African American Baptist Churches of the GBSCNC must be evaluated, concerning its effectiveness fostering spiritual formation of its students. Spiritual formation that leads to Christlikeness is the goal of Christian education, as given by the Great Commission. The goal of reaching for anything other than the goal of Christlikeness by Christian education is not aligned with the Great Commission of Christ, as found in Matthew 28:18-20 and referenced in Mark 16:15-18. Christ was able to instruct and lead in application of the instruction being taught. This study demonstrated that weakness of the participants in key areas of spiritual formation. This raises the question of what is being taught and applied or not being taught nor being applied that is allowing for lapses in the disciplines of prayer, repentance, service, stewardship, and mediation among those who participate in the Sunday school.

Christian education in the context of Sunday school was defined by Lifeway as “the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through bible study groups that engage in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and worship” (Taylor & Hanks, 1999, p. 11). This definition must be the guiding principle of Christian education within the African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. and all churches seeking to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ. Is this a matter of a lack of application of information being delivered? The data revealed that areas of discipleship (stewardship, meditation, prayer and repentance) and ministry (service) scored at the bottom of activity for the participants, yet they were identified as the “foundational

strategy in the local church for leading people to faith” (Taylor & Hanks, 1999, p. 11). The data seemingly conflicts itself, in that an overwhelming percentage of the sample size identified with the 56+ age group with 10+ years of being a Christian and attendance at Sunday school every week, and yet these participants were not compelled to participate in these critical spiritual formation activities. If the Sunday school curriculum is contributing to the low participation scores in spiritual formation practices measured in the survey, then leaders must address the shortcomings of the curriculum.

The application of this research suggest that the leadership of the African American Baptist Member Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. should formulate a study commission, to adequately address, reevaluate the philosophy of Sunday school, the quality of Christian education, and to encourage the development of spiritual formation practices within the African American Baptist member churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc.

Research Limitations

The research limitations were impacted by the threat of a worldwide pandemic. However, the ability of the researcher and several dedicated pastors and Christian leaders to better understand the topics of this research engendered participation despite this limitation. Another limitation was the CSPP instrument, which proved to be somewhat lengthy and contributed to participant fatigue. This fatigue led to 42 respondents failing to complete the entire survey, which limited the total number of completed surveys. While the fatigue in respondents was measurable in the 13% of participants who started but failed to complete the survey, it was a potential deterrent to participating in the study at all, and this limitation by its definition could not be qualified. Another limitation in the research was the amount of churches that had limited

to no Sunday school during the COVID-19 pandemic. The GBSCNC's publicity also limited the participation rate of the research.

Further Research

This study attempted to provide empirical research to fill a major gap in knowledge of the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in African American Baptist churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. The research revealed a significant difference between participants and non-participants of Sunday school in discipline practices that contribute to spiritual formation. The data illustrated strong correlations between fellowship and evangelism, Bible reading/studying and meditation, and between fellowship and service. The correlation between prayer and service was the lowest correlation. The spiritual discipline of prayer was scored statistically in the lowest four of the ten correlation relationships analyzed. The research conducted was a worthwhile effort, but there were gaps that would benefit from further research.

A study using a qualitative research method with a focus on the causation of the relationship between spiritual formation and Sunday school participation would be appropriate. The study could focus on the interviewing of the Christian education leaders (Sunday school superintendent and/or Minister of Christian education) and pastoral leadership of the African American church as to their thoughts considering the causation of the positive correlations and what they imply for the study group.

A study that measures the spiritual discipline of prayer more deeply would be appropriate, considering its weak correlation scores. The study could focus on the instrument's questions about prayer and measure how much time respondents spend in prayer, other variables that might increase the likelihood of prayer (i.e. church service attendance), and how prayer's impacts are beneficial to spiritual formation.

A study that details further spiritual formation is needed. The study could focus on the examination of Christian education leaders' understanding of the spiritual disciplines that are needed to development spiritual formation. This study is strongly recommended, due to the lower participation score on five of the ten spiritual disciplines, which might point to a lack of knowledge or prioritization of these areas by church leaders.

A study within other African American denominations, African Americans congregations affiliated with a race other than their own ethnicity, or other African American state conventions would be beneficial to confirm the findings in this study. Such research could also begin further study into the correlation between spiritual formation and Sunday school participation, and whether trends observed here are specific to ethnicity, denomination, or region.

A study within African American Baptist churches that uses small group Christian education would be an interesting further study into the correlation between spiritual formation and this delivery method.

Chapter Summary

This study was conducted to test the relationship between Sunday school participation and spiritual formation in African American churches that hold membership in the GBSC of NC, Inc. Spiritual formation is essential to the overall Body of Christ's fulfillment of the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20. The Great Commission set forth the requirement for disciples to teach the ways of Christ to every person who is baptized into relationship with Christ. Sunday school is the singular vehicle, by and large, within the GBSC that it uses to deliver scriptural truth to its congregations.

Findings from this study suggest that Sunday school participation has a positive impact on individual spiritual formation of participants. This study presented the African American

Baptist churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. with empirical research for aiding in the spiritual formation of Sunday school participants and assist in their spiritual maturity. The sample size of this research, considered adequate to conduct the findings herein, confirms the research of a significant correlational relationship existing among Sunday school participation and spiritual formation. The research confirms this researcher's hypothesis that a significant relationship exists between Sunday school participation and congregational spiritual formation.

The findings of this study begin to bridge the gap between Sunday school and spiritual formation among African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. This is significant due to no prior literature existing, nor study performed, concerning the relationship between these variables. These findings add to the body of knowledge of Sunday school participation and spiritual formation, with the overall goal of expanding the kingdom of God through the Great Commission of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).

The findings of this study emphasize the prominence of the progression of Sunday school participation. African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc. can use this understanding to broaden behaviors correlated with Sunday school participation, which may possibly lead to expanded congregational spiritual formation. Further research could lead to improvements in Sunday school and all components associated with the strategy of spiritual formation in African American Baptist Churches of the GBSC of NC, Inc.

REFERENCES

- Abernethy, A., Rice, B. E., Rold, L., Kurian, K., Grannum, G., & Jones, H. (2015). Corporate worship and spiritual formation: Insights from worship leaders. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 34*(3), 266-279.
- Ackerman, J. (2001). *Listening to God: Spiritual formation in congregations*. The Alban Institute.
- Adedibu, B. (2014). Migration, identity, and marginalization: The case of Britain's black majority churches. *Journal of Africana Religions, 2*(1), 110-117.
- Aniol, S. (2017). Practice makes perfect: Corporate worship and the formation of spirit. *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, 10*(1), 93-104.
- Anthony, M., & Benson, W. (2003). *Principles for the 21st century: Exploring the history and philosophy of Christian education*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Attridge, H. (1989). *Hebrews: A commentary on the epistle of Hebrews*. (Koester, H., Ed.). 1517 Media.
- Averbeck, R. E. (2008). Spirit, community, and mission: A biblical theology for spiritual formation. *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, 1*(1), 27-53.
- Averbeck, R. E. (2010). *The kingdom of life: A practical theology of discipleship and spiritual formation*. (Andrews, A., Ed.). The Navigators.
- Barbera, D. (2003). *African American and not Baptist*. iUniverse, Inc.
- Barna. (2011, August 3). *Regional shift in religious belief and behavior since 1991*. Barna. <http://barna.org/research/regional-shifts-in-religious-beliefs-and-behavior-since-1991-revealed-in-new-barna-report/>
- Barna Group. (2017). *Barna trends 2018: What's new and what's next at the intersection of faith and culture*. Baker Books.
- Barton, R., Chandler, D., Tan, S., TenElshof, J., & Wilhoit, J. (2014). Spiritual formation of the church. *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, 7*(2), 292+.
- Benner, D. (2002). *Sacred companions: The gift of spiritual friendship and direction*. InterVarsity Press.
- Bennett, C. (2008). *An investigation of the factors associated with spiritual maturity of Southern Baptist African American adults*. (Doctoral Dissertation).
- Bennis, W. (2009). *On becoming a leader: The leadership classic*. Basic Books.

- Bernstine, A. C. (1995). *How to develop a department of Christian education within the local Baptist church: A congregational enablement model*. Townsend Press.
- Blackaby, H., & Blackaby, R. (2001). *Spiritual leadership: Moving God's people on to God's agenda*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Bologe, B. O. & Groenewald, A. (2014). Hypocrisy in stewardship: An ethical reading of Malachi 3:6-12 in the context of Christian stewardship. *HTE Teologiese/Theological Studies*, 70(1), 1-11.
- Boxall, I. (2018). *Matthew through the centuries*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Box, G. E. P., & Tidwell, P. W. (1962). Transformation of the independent variables. *Technometrics*, 4, 531-550.
- Boylan, A. (1988). *Sunday school: The formation of an American institution 1790-1880*. Yale University Press.
- Carson, D. A. (2008). *Christ and culture revisited*. Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Cassidy-Moffatt, L. (2016). *Spiritual formation as more than cognitive belief: An ethnographic study of adult Sunday school in Baptist churches in Massachusetts*. (Dissertation). Bethel University.
- Clark, J. (2001). *The role of Christian religious education in transforming the African American Apostolic Pentecostal church's world view and mission*. Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.
- Creswell, J., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Crockett, J. (1990). *Teaching scripture from an African American perspective*. Discipleship Resources.
- Davis, A. C. (2011). *A study to determine the relationship of scores of adults Sunday school teachers to scores of adult Sunday school learners on a spiritual formation practice participation inventory* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Davis, D. C. (2007). Dialogue of the soul: The phenomenon of interpersonal peace and the adult experience of protestant religious education. *Religious Education*, 102(4), 387-402.
- Dever, M. (2013). *Nine marks of a healthy church*. Crossway.
- Epps, V. L. (2020). *Equipping ministry leaders for service at Mount Calvary Baptist Church*. (Doctoral Dissertation).
- Flett, J. G. (2018). Prayer and missionary movement beyond the self. *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 18(2), 246-259.

- Forrest, B. K. (2013). Modeling spiritual formation from a distance: Paul's formation transactions with the Roman Christians. *Christian Education Journal*, 10(1), 110-124.
- Foster, R. (1998). *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth*. HarperCollins.
- Francis, D. (2009). *Great expectations: Planting seeds for Sunday school growth*. Lifeway Press.
- Galindo, I. (2001). Methods of Christian education toward Christian spiritual formation. *Review & Expositor*, 98(3), 411.
- Garland, K. (2001). *Evangelical dictionary of Christian education*. Baker Academic.
- GBSCNC. (2013). General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated. GBSCNC. <https://www.gbsconline.org/history.html>
- George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference. 11.0 update* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Green, S. B. (1991). How many subjects does it take to do a regression analysis? *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 26(3), 499-510.
- Greenleaf, R. (2007). *Corporate ethics and corporate governance*. (Zimmerli, W. C., Holzinger, M., & Richter, K., Eds). Heidelberg.
- Greenman, J., & Kalantzis, G. (2010). *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual formation in theological perspective*. InterVarsity.
- Habermas, R. (2008). *Introduction to Christian education and formation: A lifelong plan for Christ-centered restoration*. Zondervan.
- Hancock, G., Stapletin, L., & Mueller, R. (2019). *The reviewer's guide to quantitative methods in social sciences*. Routledge.
- Harrill, J. A. (2012). *Paul the apostle: His life and legacy in the Roman context*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hemphill, K. (1996). *Revitalizing the Sunday morning dinosaur: A Sunday school growth strategy for the 21st century*. B&H Publishing Group.
- Hemphill, K., & Taylor, B. (2001). *Ten best practices: To make your Sunday school work*. LifeWay Press.
- Henderson, D. (2009). The whole church teaches: Reflections on educational ministry today. *Presbyterian Record*, 31.
- Ho, R. (2013). *Understanding statistics for the social sciences with IBM SPSS*. Chapman and Hall.

- Howell, D. N. (2003). *Servants of the servant: A biblical theology of leadership*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Keener, C. S. (2011). *Romans: A new covenant commentary*. Cascade Books.
- Kelley, C. S. (2018) *Fuel the fire: Lessons from the history of Southern Baptist evangelism*. B&H Academic.
- Kgatie, M. S. (2018). Globalisation of missions: An exegesis on the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). *In die Skriflig*, 52(1). 1018-6441.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Prentice Hall.
- Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading change*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Lawson, K. (2001). *Christian education: Foundations for the twenty-first century* (Anthony, M. J., Ed.). Baker Academic.
- Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. E. (2016). *Practical research: Planning and design*. Pearson.
- Lemke, D. L. (2017). A philosophy of disciple-centered leadership. *Christian Education Journal*, 14(2), 270-284.
- Lincoln, C. E., & Mamiya, L. H. (1990). *The black church in the African American experience*. Duke University Press.
- Lisko, S., & O'Dell, V. (2010). Integration of theory and practice: Experiential learning theory and nursing education. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 31(2), 106-108.
- Lockyer, H. (1969). *All the doctrines of the bible: A study and analysis of major bible doctrines*. Zondervan Publishing House.
- Luman, R. R. (2005). *An investigation into factors associated with membership in small discipleship groups and spiritual maturity as measured by the Christian Service Participation Profile*. (Doctoral Dissertation).
- McKinney, L. E. (2003). *Christian education in the African American church: A guide for teaching truth*. Judson Press.
- McNeal, R. (2006). *Practicing greatness: Seven disciplines of extraordinary leaders*. Jossey-Bass.
- Memony, L. (2020). *A field theory guided quantitative study into environmental forces impacting Christian leadership and instrument development* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Merwe, D. G. (2018). Prayer, the encounter and participation, the experience: A Pauline exhortation towards a spirituality of prayer. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 39(1), 1-9.

- Moles, D. (2016). *Introduction to spiritual formation: An expositional and disciplined approach*. ProQuest, LLC.
- Moloney, F. (2002). *The gospel of Mark: A commentary*. Baker Academic.
- Mulholland, M. R. (1985). *Shaped by the Word: The power of scripture in spiritual formation*. Upper Rooms Books.
- Mulholland, M. R. (1993). *Invitation to a journey: A road map for spiritual formation*. IVP Books.
- Murray, D. (2013). Does Jesus + nothing = everything? *Puritan Reformed Journal*, 5(1), 243-255.
- Nakai, P. (2005). The crucial role of coaching in servant-leader development. *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*, 1(1), 213-228.
- Nattino, G., Pennell, M., & Lemeshow, S. (2020). Assessing the goodness of fit of logistic regression models in large samples: A modification of the Hosmer-Lemeshow test. *Biometrics: Journal of the International Biometric Society*, 76(2), 549-560.
- O'Neal, R. A. (2019). *The black church and current generation: A program to address the decline of African American church attendance in Johnston County in North Carolina*. (Doctoral Dissertation).
- Otto, P., & Harrington, M. (2016). Spiritual formation within Christian higher education. *Christian Higher Education*, 15(5), 252-262.
- Parrett, G., & Kang, S. S. (2009). *Teaching the faith, forming the faithful: A biblical vision for education in the church*. InterVarsity Press.
- Pazmino, R. (2008). *Foundational issues in Christian education: An introduction in evangelical perspective*. Baker Academic.
- Pearcey, N. (2004). *Total truth: Liberating Christianity from its cultural captivity*. Crossway Books.
- Pennington, J. (2017). *The sermon on the mount and human flourishing: A theological commentary*. Baker Academic.
- Pettit, P. (2008). *Foundations of spiritual formation: A community approach to becoming like Christ*. Kregel Publications, Inc.
- Price, E. (2012). *The black church and hip-hop culture: Toward bridging the generational divide*. Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Reed, J. E., & Prevost, R. (1993). *A history of Christian education*. B&H Publishing Group.

- Reed, J. M. (2019). *Reading behavior and Bible reading frequency among evangelical emerging adults*. (Doctoral Dissertation).
- Reeves, R. (2017). *Matthew*. HarperCollins Christian Publishing.
- Roberts, C. M. (2010). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation*. Corwin.
- Roehlkepartain, E. (1993). *The teaching church: Moving Christian education to center stage*. Abingdon Press.
- Root, J. (2012). C. S. Lewis. scripture and spiritual formation. *Christian Education Journal*, 9(1), S-157.
- Rose, B. (2020). *Service learning and experiential learning cycle in elementary school* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest.
- Roy, T., Acharya, R., & Roy, A. (2016). *Statistical survey design and evaluating impact*. Cambridge University Press. DOI:10.1017/CB09781316550892
- Rustan, K. (2018). *Exploring licensed practical nursing graduates/ perceptions of activities based on Kolb's experiential learning theory*. (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest.
- Sanders, J. O. (2001). *Spiritual leadership: Principles of excellence for every believer*. Moody Publishers.
- Schreiner, T. R. (2015). *Commentary on Hebrews*. Holman Reference.
- Sironen, R. J. (2020). *The relationship between pastoral servant leadership and congregational spiritual formation in U.S. churches* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Sismondo, S. (2020). Covid-19. *Social Studies of Science*, 50(2), 173-174.
- Stevenson, A. (2020). Worship is... . Qualitative research among rural Methodist congregations. *Rural Theology*, 20-26.
- Stewart, C. F. (1994). *African American church growth: 12 principles of prophetic ministry*. Abingdon Press.
- Taylor, B., & Hanks, L. (1999). *Sunday school for a new century*. Lifeway.
- Thayer, O. J. (1996). *Assessing participation in the spiritual development modes: Construction and testing of the Christian spiritual participation profile* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Thayer, O. J. (2004). Constructing a spirituality measure based on learning theory: The Christian spiritual participation profile. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 23(3), 195-207.
- Thurman, H. (1963). *Disciplines of the spirit*. Friends United Press.

- Tidwell, C. (1996). *The educational ministry of the church: A comprehensive model for students and ministers*. Broadman and Holman Publishers.
- Truss, E. Q. (2018). *The decline of church attendance in black America: A Biblical mandate for black males to Godly leadership* (Doctoral Dissertation). Liberty University.
- Veselsky, P., Poslt, J., Majewska, P., & Bolckova, M. (2013). Addressing spirituality in experiential learning. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, (106), 328-337.
- Whitney, D. S. (1996). *Spiritual disciplines within the church: Participating fully in the body of Christ*. Moody Publishers.
- Wilhoit, J. C. (2008). *Spiritual formation as if the church mattered: Growing in Christ through community*. Baker Academic.
- Wilhoit, J., & Dettoni, J. (1998). *Nurture that is Christian: Developmental perspectives on Christian education*. BridgePoint Books.
- Willis, S. L. (2020). *Spiritual disciplines for men in a medium-sized church*. (Doctoral Dissertation).
- Wilson, J. R. (2020). *Developing reciprocal community in Jackson Baptist Church*. (Doctoral Dissertation).
- Workman, J. C. (2020). *Developing a strategy to increase Sunday school attendance at Harrison Avenue Baptist Church, Harrison, Ohio*. (Doctoral Dissertation).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile

Information removed to comply with copyright

Detailed information about the development of the *Christian Spiritual Participation Profile*, its reliability, and its validity can be found in the following article:

Thayer, O. Jane. (2004). Constructing a spirituality measure based on learning theory: The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 23 (3): 195-207.

APPENDIX B - CSPP Survey Use Request

Subject: Permission to use CSPP

Dr. Thayer, I am an Ed. D. student in the Rawlings School of Religion at Liberty University of Lynchburg, VA. Currently, I am working on a proposal for my dissertation. I am interested in using your Christian Spiritual Participation Profile to examine the relationship of participation in Sunday School and spiritual formation practices among African American Baptist Churches with worship service attendees in the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated. I have received approval of my research prospectus on December 10, 2019 and the reason for this email is to secure your permission to use your instrument for my dissertation.

Thank you for your help and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Christopher Harris

APPENDIX C - CSPP Survey Use Permission

Andrews  University

February 24, 2020

Dr. O. Jane Thayer

Dear Christopher Harris:

After learning of your research proposal entitled *The Impact of Sunday School Participation on Spiritual Formation in African American Baptist Churches in South Carolina*, I have decided to grant you permission to use the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile as your research data gathering survey.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

I will provide you with the CSPP in paper form

I will provide you with the CSPP in electronic form (You may change the demographic questions.)

Sincerely,

Dr. O. Jane Thayer
Associate Professor of Religious Education
Andrews University

APPENDIX D- GBSCNC President Request**LETTER TO THE GENERAL BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION OF NORTH CAROLINA,
INCORPORATED CONVENTION OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESIDENT REQUESTING
PERMISSION TO CONDUCT SURVEY OF THE CHURCHES**

Dear President Lynch,

Greetings in the name of our Christ!

I am Christopher Harris, Senior Pastor of Flint Hill Baptist Church of Rock Hill, and a Doctor of Education in Christian and Ministry Leadership student at Liberty University Rawlings School of Religion. I am working on my dissertation and need your support.

I write to request permission to conduct a research study within the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated on the relationship between participation in Sunday School and spiritual formation with churches attendance of two hundred (200) or less for my dissertation and need your endorsement across the state to reach the sample size required to make this study a success. Based on the number of members in the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated (500,000) per the Convention's website, I would need approximately 400 participants from the congregations with average attendance of two hundred (200) or less to create a viable study. Here is where your assistance is requested:

- 1) Return via email permission to conduct the survey within the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated member churches with average attendance of two hundred (200) or less,
- 2) Send an email to the state's pastors requesting their participation to distribute to their churches in the state convention. I will provide you with a template to use if you desire (see attachment).

The excitement is building for this study and I am thankful to God to have the opportunity to be able to conduct within the state where I reside. I pray that you will lend your support to this work to get it conducted.

I look forward to hearing from as soon as convenient for your schedule.

Sincerely,

Christopher Harris
Senior Pastor, Flint Hill Baptist Church
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

APPENDIX E - GBSCNC President Permission



General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Inc.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

April 28, 2020

Rev. Christopher Harris. Pastor

Dear Rev. Harris,

Greetings in the matchless name of Jesus, in whom we live, move and have our being! I trust you and your family are staying safe in this season.

I offer my sincere congratulations as you pursue your Doctor of Education in Christian and Ministry Leadership degree through Liberty University Rawlings School of Religion. I received your request seeking research assistance from the churches of the General Baptist State Convention of NC, Inc. I have reviewed the information you sent and do offer the support of the GBSC as you prepare to begin your research and work.

Further, I will reach out to the Convention and ask if they will help by answering the questions you send in a timely manner, allowing you to gather the needed data.

Again, please know that I am praying for you for not only this, but all future endeavors. May our Heavenly Father keep you in His perfect peace.

Because of Calvarv.

President, GBSC of NC, Inc.

LEONZO D. LYNCH
President

RICKY L. BANKS, Vice President-at-Large ■ J. VINCENT TERRY, SR., First Vice President
O. D. SYKES, Second Vice President ■ PRINCE RANEY RIVERS, Third Vice President ■ REGINALD A. WELLS, Fourth Vice President
MATTHEW D. ROUSE, III, Recording Secretary ■ REGINALD A. BARNES, Assistant Recording Secretary
ROOSEVELT WHITEHEAD, JR., Historian ■ KELVIN L. BARNES, Statistician ■ ANTHONETTE WRIGHT, Parliamentarian

APPENDIX F - Church Email Notification from GBSCNC

Participation in Research Study



Rev. Christopher Harris is a resident of Charlotte, NC and currently pastors the Flint Hill Baptist Church. He is asking for your assistance as he is pursuing his doctoral degree, studying the impact of Sunday School

participation upon spiritual formation in African American Southern Baptist Churches. If you agree to help, you will be sent a list of questions to answer (helping him to formulate data for his research). If you are willing to assist in this 15-minute survey, please contact to Rev. Harris directly at [REDACTED] Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

Thank you for your support of missions through the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

APPENDIX G - Pastor Email Requesting Congregational Participation

5/30/2020

Dear Pastor,

I currently am a doctoral student at Liberty University, and I am studying the impact of Sunday School participation upon spiritual formation in African American Southern Baptist churches of the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated with active attendance and an active Sunday School.

I am writing to seek your approval to survey adult attendees who attend your church. I have attached a copy of the consent form and survey I am asking your adult (ages 18 and above) worship service attendees to complete. The survey is intended to increase our understanding of whether Sunday School participation impacts the extent to which adult worship service attendees participate in the disciplines that lead to spiritual formation.

The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete, and all participants will remain completely anonymous. The surveys will be coded for research purposes, and no specific information about any of the participants will be published. I would be willing to share the results of the research with you upon your request.

After receiving your permission to proceed, I will email you the link to the survey or the person you designate at your church, and we will establish a convenient timeline to engage your congregation in the survey. I understand that your time is valuable and would like to get as such participation as possible with that in mind, I have provided for you a complete set of template letters to use with your congregation for convenience sake.

I appreciate your willingness to assist me. Please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED], or [REDACTED] if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you in advance for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Christopher Harris
Liberty University Doctoral Student

APPENDIX H - Pastor Confirmation Email with Instructions

Dear Pastor,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study concerning the relationship of Sunday school participation on individual spiritual formation practices on participation inventory. Attached you will find four documents: The Participant's Instructions, the Demographic Survey, the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile survey, and the Human Subject Research Consent Form.

To ensure the best results possible, please follow these instructions:

1. Prior to (start date), begin informing your congregation about the research project. Let them know that your congregation was randomly selected to participate in this study. Explain to them that they will be asked to sign a consent form if they choose to participate, fill out a demographic survey, and complete a fifty (50) question survey. (See attached email Letter from Pastor to the Congregation)
2. On Monday morning, (start date), please send every member of the congregation in attendance a copy of the Participants Instructions, the Demographic Survey, CSPP survey, and the Human Subject Research Consent Form via email. (See attached email template labeled Participant Letter)
3. As the pastor, please remind the congregation on a weekly basis that the surveys need to be returned no later than Sunday, (finish date).

Thank you once again for your willingness to participate in this study. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me by email [REDACTED] or by phone [REDACTED]. May God bless you as you continue to serve the Lord.

Sincerely,

Christopher Harris
Liberty University Doctoral Student

APPENDIX I - Pastor Letter to Congregation

Dear Members of _____ Baptist Church,

I pray things are going well for you. The reason for this letter is to inform you of a study that involves our entire congregation. Christopher Harris, the Senior Pastor at Flint Hill Baptist Church of Rock Hill, and a doctoral student at the Rawlings School of Religion at Liberty University, is currently working on his dissertation and he needs our support.

Christopher will be studying the relationship between Sunday School participation and spiritual formation in African American Baptist Churches with two hundred (200) or less worship service attendance in the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated. His hope is that this study will demonstrate the importance of the spiritual life of worship service attendees of our congregation and participation in Sunday School. All that is required is completing a simple demographic survey and a 50-question survey (15 minutes) about spiritual formation habits.

In the next couple of weeks, you can expect an email from the church containing a request for permission from Christopher to conduct the study in our congregation. If you choose to help him, then an email with instructions for the survey will follow shortly. I ask that you help support him in this endeavor.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Love in Christ,

Pastor
Baptist Church
Email:
Phone:

APPENDIX J - Participant Letter

Dear Recipient:

As a graduate student at the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. Two weeks ago, an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is 6/20/2020.

If you choose to participate; you will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes for you to complete the procedure listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, go to this [Survey](#) link and complete the survey.

A consent document is provided as the first page you will see after clicking on the survey link. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research. Please click yes at the end of the consent information to indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Thank you for participating in this worthwhile study.

Sincerely,

Christopher Harris
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX K - IRB Participant Consent Form

THE IMPACT OF SUNDAY SCHOOL PARTICIPATION ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN NORTH CAROLINA

Christopher Eugene Harris
Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity

You are invited to participate in a research study on the spiritual formation (or spiritual growth) in African American Baptist Churches in North Carolina. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older, African American, you attend a church within the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated and your church has an active Sunday School. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Christopher Harris, a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to discover if there is a relationship between the Sunday School participation and spiritual formation (or spiritual growth) of African American Baptist Church attendees of the General Baptist Convention of North Carolina, Incorporated. The research question(s) are as follows:

What relationship, if any, exists between the Sunday school participation among attenders of African American Baptist Churches within the study group and growing through a relationship with God; growing through a relationship with others; growing through the Word; growing through thinking about behavior; and what is the overall effectiveness of the Sunday School Christian education model on Spiritual Formation among attenders of African American Baptist Churches within the study group?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I ask you to do the following things:

- Complete an anonymous, online survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include understanding the impact of Sunday School participation and participation in spiritual growth disciplines and its potential to lead to the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. This could lead to other Christian denominations conducting a similar study. This could lead to the development of curriculum that will engage more followers of Christ to pursue a deeper relationship with God and mankind; develop a love for

understanding the power of self-reflection and adjustment of religious practices; sincere and determined following of the Word of God as the guide for all individual life.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant survey responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision about whether 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 prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Christopher Harris. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Brian Pinzer at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

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 [REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED].

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

APPENDIX L - Participant's Instructions

Purpose of the Survey:

The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP) measures the intensity of your involvement in spiritual formation practices.

Instructions:

- In this digital version of the CSPP, you will find a list of 50 items with radio buttons under each statement. Read each item and select the appropriate response that indicates how often you practice the statement. Please answer according to what best represents what you do, not what you wish you did.

Thank you for your cooperation in participating in this study! Your time is greatly appreciated!

APPENDIX M - Participant Demographic Survey

1) Identify your age group:

- 18-24
- 25-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56+

2) Identify your Gender:

- Male
- Female

3) Are you a Christian?

- Yes
- No

3a) If you answered "Yes" in question 3, "Are you a Christian?" how long? (Skip Logic used)

- Less than One Year
- 1-2 Years
- 3-4 Years
- 5-10 Years
- 10+ Years

4) Do you participate in Sunday School?

- Yes
- No

4a) If Yes, in question 4, "Do you participate in Sunday School?" How often? (Skip Logic used)

- Always (Every Week)
- Most of the time (2 times a month or more)
- About half the time (At least 2 times a month)
- Sometimes (1 time a month or less)
- Never

APPENDIX N - IRB Approval Letter

Wed 5/20/2020 2:23 PM

To: Pinzer, Brian (School of Divinity Instruction); Harris, Christopher
May 20, 2020

Christopher Harris
Brian Pinzer

Re: IRB Approval - IRB -FY19-20-179 THE IMPACT OF SUNDAY SCHOOL
PARTICIPATION ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN BAPTIST
CHURCHES IN NORTH CAROLINA

Dear Christopher Harris, Brian Pinzer:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: May 20, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46. 110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

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
Research Ethics Office