Church Leadership: Effectual Strategic Planning towards the Congregational Growth and Maturation of Go and Teach Christian Ministries

Submitted to Dr. Jeffrey Dowdy

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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This thesis action research project is comprised of the effectual strategic planning toward the congregational growth and maturation of Go and Teach Christian Ministries. The project was embarked upon to address what had seemed to be a problem within the church’s leadership. The focus on church growth in membership numbers, rather than the membership, had seemed to creep into the leadership of GATCM. It seemed that the programs and events of the church were geared more toward attracting outsiders and adding new members to the church rather than creating an atmosphere of growth within the church attendees.

From a foundational point of view, this research project included a literature review that discussed what others have shared concerning the church’s leadership conviction, character, service/mission, and vision. The project also included the four theological foundations that undergirded this research: view of God, following God, church growth, and ministry outreach. Additionally included, as with the theological foundations, were theoretical foundations that furnished the project’s stimulus.

For the practical research of the project, the researcher chose to utilize a qualitative research method that started with a survey that gathered the general atmosphere of GATCM toward its congregational growth and maturity. The research also included a questionnaire that was verbally addressed during interviews of the selected personnel. After the completion of the interviews, using the data collected, there were two necessary focus groups convened with the GATCM leadership to conduct the strategic planning process. In the end, the project helped to formulate a new leadership strategy that will be reviewed periodically.

Keywords: strategy, strategic, planning, congregation, growth, maturation, leadership, service, mission, and vision.
Acknowledgements

As I reflect on this research project, my heart is immediately pointed to acknowledge those pivotal influences in my life that enabled its success. First, I Thank God for allowing me to participate in ministry service over the last 26+ years. He gave me life and has been my continued help and strength over the years. It is through His inspiration and revelation that this project derived and was completed. Truly, as John 15:5 reveals, I can do nothing without Him.

In addition, I would like to thank the man that God used to help me understand how to follow God in all things. That man is the late Bishop/Apostle Nathaniel Holcomb. He and His wife, Pastor Valerie Holcomb, not only taught me how to truly walk with God through their messages, but they also modeled a life exemplary of their message (a life Pastor Val still lives and leads by). Due to the lessons gleaned from their leadership, it was easy to follow God throughout His will for this research project.

I thank my family and friends, along with the GATCM family; their prayers, support, and participation were instrumental in the continual efforts toward this project’s success. I especially thank my wife, Stephanie: she put up with books and papers throughout the house, neglected events and quality time, complaints, etc. No words can express my gratitude toward her for her patience, prayers and support exercised and expressed throughout the completion of this project.

I also thank Liberty University for offering the opportunity to pursue the Doctor of Ministry degree - a degree with direct benefit to the body of Christ and I thank the instructors and staff for their support. Finally, I thank Dr. Jeffrey Dowdy. His mentorship was incomparable in keeping me focused on explicating this project for use throughout the Body of Christ; he was instrumental in keeping the author Kingdom focused throughout the project’s completion.
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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

At the beginning of this action research project, it is good to reflect on a quote from the late Nate Holcomb, who served for nearly 40 years as the founder and senior pastor of the Christian House of Prayer and as the overseer of Covenant Connections International’s ministerial fellowship. He stated, “today’s church is encumbered with many things; mission trips, balancing budgets and remaining relative in the surrounding communities to name a few. Many of the challenges of church work leave us ineffective in performing the work of the church…”¹ This ineffectiveness in performing the work of the church may be seen as a result of a new age misunderstanding of the role of the church within the church’s leadership circles. According to Holcomb, church leaders can live their entire lives and never truly come to understand the purpose for their church’s existence.² This is true of numerous contemporary church leaders. Many of these leaders have come to interpret survival and relevance as their church’s mission. This ideology is not the intended purpose, nor should be the focus of the leaders of God’s church.

As stated within Ephesians 4:12, Christ has given leadership to the church “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”³ Church leadership has been ordained by Christ for the primary purpose of church growth. However, many church leaders have seemed to view their purpose of church growth from the

¹ Nate Holcomb, Close the Gap: There’s Danger in the Distance (Copperas Cove: Him Publishing, 2016), 83.
³ All Scripture is from the King James Version of the Bible (Nashville: Cornerstone Bible Publishers, 1997), unless otherwise noted.
sole perspective of growing the membership numbers of the church. They seemed to lay aside their assignment to help the current and future congregation to grow spiritually in becoming committed followers of Christ. It is this spiritual growth that can be interpreted as the heartbeat of the Apostle Paul’s message to the Ephesian church. According to Paul, church leaders are to seek to bring their congregation into “unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” that they “may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:11-16).

The focus on church growth in membership numbers, rather than the membership, has crept into the leadership of Go and Teach Christian Ministries (GATCM). It seems that the programs and events of the church have been geared more toward attracting outsiders and adding new members to the church rather than creating an atmosphere of growth within their attendees. A contributing factor to this issue is the leadership of GATCM seems to lack an effectual strategic plan to create an atmosphere conducive to the growth and spiritual maturation of the church’s current and future congregation. With this in mind, it is time for the GATCM leadership to start over; as Holcomb stated, “The inventor often needs to go back to the drawing board before completing a project.”4 The current mode of operation is not working in GATCM; therefore, it is time for its leadership to go back to the drawing board and establish a new one.

**Ministry Context**

Go and Teach Christian Ministries is a non-denominational church, located in Augusta, Georgia. Its founding, mission, and visionary scripture is Matthew 28:19-20, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am

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4 Holcomb, *Close the Gap*, 133.
with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” GATCM began in 2007 with the belief that “the principles depicted for Christian leadership in the book of Acts are unsurpassed.”

Leadership in Acts included church leaders who were not fixed on programs and events but on the hearts of those they were called to lead. They showed how to develop Christ-exalting, Christ-loving, Christ-following people. GATCM looked to do the same. Therefore, GATCM adopted the motto of being a place “Where Your Life Become His Message.”

Go and Teach Christian Ministries has become a predominately African American teaching ministry that is open to all races and ethnicities. It is a small and growing ministry that embodies a balanced mixture of age and gender. The membership of GATCM consists of children of all ages to adults that are 70+ years old. Women comprise 80% of its members over 50 years; however, the membership ratio within the ages of 50 years old and below is more closely comprised of male and female – 44% are males and 56% are females. Though there are married couples within the church, 81% of the GATCM membership is comprised of singles. Therefore, most of the children are dwelling in single parent homes. The economic makeup of the GATCM membership can be categorized with 97% of its members found within the low-income classification of the city and the remaining 3% of its members found within the middle to high class of the city. In addition, 95% of the adult membership are high school graduates; however, only a few have attended any level of collegiate study.

Over the years, GATCM has provided, and continues to provide, weekly Sunday morning worship services, Wednesday evening Bible studies, and Saturday morning intercessory prayer services. In addition, the leadership has incorporated a men’s ministry - that meets, at a

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minimum, once a month - to serve as an outreach to encourage and strengthen the men of the church in dealing with the various challenges and issues that males encounter. Likewise, the church has a women’s ministry - that meets, at a minimum, once a month - to serve as an outreach to encourage and strengthen the women of the church in dealing with the various challenges and issues that females encounter. Though a dedicated youth ministry has not been established within GATCM, various periodic activities are conducted to keep the youth active and engaged in the church. The leadership has also established a bi-annual marriage maintenance seminar to help maintain the strength of the strong marital relationships and to help strengthen those that may have been weakened: desiring singles are invited as well, so that they may learn what to expect within their future marital relationships. The church also has an established a ministry outreach to provide food and clothing to those in need, as well as providing support to those experiencing mental and/or physical health challenges. In addition, the leadership of GATCM conducts a quarterly water baptism service and provides an opportunity for the congregation to participate in Holy Communion at least once a month. Finally, the leadership of GATCM has established four orientation classes to acquaint new members with the beliefs and doctrinal teachings of the church. These classes are held weekly on a recurrent rotating basis.

Go and Teach Christian Ministries is located near the downtown area of Augusta, Georgia. Augusta is a medical/military community that was once considered by many as more of a retirement community. However, with the current advent of the Army Cyber Command and various other emerging organizations, a new workforce of young and vibrant personnel is increasing within the city’s community composition. The city’s racial makeup is largely White (54%), with Black/African American (35%) making up the next largest group. Its economic median can be found within the household income of $55,143, with 13.3% of its population
below the poverty line. Augusta is located within the nation’s “Bible Belt,” with 81 of its 300 churches found within the Southern Baptist/Southern Missionary Baptist denomination.

Augusta, as well as most cities within the “Bible Belt,” is filled with people who are accustomed to religious practices. A lot of people go to church and most claim to be members of a church; however, few have seemed to communicate a lifestyle indicative of growing in a genuine relationship with Christ. Over the years, GATCM has not been exempt from these challenges and issues facing the Augusta church. Like many others, GATCM is surrounded by the ideology of church success being church growth in membership numbers. As a result, the leadership of GATCM has seemed to somewhat adopt the same mentality of those around them; negatively affecting the spiritual growth of its congregation. Programs and events have seemed to cater towards attracting new members to the church but have failed to foster an atmosphere of growth of those within the church. It is this perception that has prompted the senior pastor of GATCM to embark upon the strategic planning process to reexamine and redesign the church’s strategic plan; and, to teach and model that plan to and before the church’s leadership to create an atmosphere conducive to growth in the congregation’s relationship with Christ, each other, and the community they have been commissioned to serve.

**Problem Presented**

R.G. Clouse stated that the “Lord Jesus Christ is the sun about which the whole mission of the church revolves.” As the senior pastor of GATCM walked through the cycles of

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7 The numbers may not be absolute, but they are derived from the current Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) calculations and the number of churches recorded within the Augusta church and ministry directories.

examining the church leadership, Clouse’s statement resonated within him, underscoring the call for leaders to be servants of the Lord. As such, the leadership has been called/given to the body for the sake of maturing the saints – that they may grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:11-16). Therefore, every program, and function of the ministries within the operations of the GATCM, should be geared toward that end.

As a result of this initial examination, the pastor concluded that instead of the GATCM leadership having a sold-out focus on maturing the congregation, there seems to be more of an attitude towards church growth in membership numbers alone. Though the emphasis can be placed on the church’s discipleship of its members, the pastor’s concern is more toward the GATCM leadership’s growth and operation as servant-leaders of Christ’s church. The goal is for them to lead as followers of Christ, shepherding God’s people through lives flowing as examples of the very maturity in Christ they should desire to see in those they have been assigned to help shepherd.

The pastor views the lack of such a focus within the leadership as a problem within the church. The problem is the leadership of GATCM seems to lack a strategic plan to develop spiritual maturity within the congregation. Therefore, there has become a need to re-examine the church’s strategic plan; as well as a need to teach and model a strategic plan that can foster an attitude of spiritual growth within the leadership of GATCM toward the maturing of the congregation – in the end, following God’s lead towards ministries, programs, and events that aid in the establishment of a relationship with Christ and/or development of the attendees within their relationship with Christ.
Purpose Statement

In order for the congregation of GATCM to grow in Christian maturity, they must learn to be weaned from the world and to lean on the leading of the Lord Jesus Christ. They need to learn that no matter where they may find themselves in life or how far they may have fallen, they can start over again: they cannot change their yesteryear, but with Jesus, they can look toward tomorrow and bring about a new ending. This thought is the founding concept for the focus/purpose of this thesis project.

The purpose of this DMIN action research thesis is to teach and model a strategic plan within the GATCM leadership that can develop the spiritual maturity of the congregation. This research will provide the theological and theoretical foundation toward the development of such a plan, as well as the plan itself. This research will define servant-leadership in the form of shepherding God’s flock. It will also examine the process of developing such a strategic plan that will follow God’s leading towards ministries, programs, and events that aid in the establishment of a relationship with Christ and/or development of the attendees within their relationship with Christ.

The literature and action research of this work will provide the theological and theoretical foundation toward the development of such a plan to provide an understanding to the biblical character of the church’s leadership. The reader may come to understand concepts such as the leader’s conviction, character, mission/purpose, vision, as well as the leader’s expected disciplines. The literature research will also provide the need for consistency within the daily expression of such concepts.

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10 Ibid., 193.
Within the presentation of this research, the reader will also be presented with the concept of servant-leadership in the form of shepherding God’s flock. The presentation will clarify what it means to be a servant-leader within the Christian church. Additionally, the revelation of shepherding God’s flock will also be explored. As a result, the GATCM leadership will be enabled to lead and care for God’s people/flock, according to His leadership and plan. The goal is for following God to become the central theme and focus of each of the GATCM leader’s life.

Finally, this work will examine the process of developing a strategic plan that will enable and foster the GATCM leadership to follow God’s lead towards ministries, programs, and events that aid in the establishment of a relationship with Christ and/or development of the attendees within their relationship with Christ. This plan will be correspondingly developed and implemented to foster such spiritual growth and maturity within the congregation, through the lives and actions of the church’s leadership.

**Basic Assumptions**

This action research project is being undertaken with the assumption that the leadership of GATCM has become more concerned about church growth in numbers, rather than the membership’s spiritual growth. As the author facilitates the research, it is presumed that the leadership will be willing to participate in this project with the intent to refocus on the true mission and vision of the church. Therefore, it is also expected that the leadership will also be willingly involved in a good strategic planning process - resulting in an adequate strategic plan to be taught and modeled within the church. In addition, it is assumed that the leadership will be willing to implement, teach and model the newly developed GATCM strategic plan.
Apart from the leadership of GATCM, selected church members will also be involved in the research. It is also presumed that the selected membership of GATCM will be willing to participate in this action research project, and their participation is anticipated throughout the research process. It is also assumed that the membership will be willing to follow the newly developed GATCM strategic plan, as taught and modeled by the church’s leadership.

Throughout this action research project, GATCM will remain operational, and it is assumed that the ongoing research will be conducted transparently within the daily operations of the church, its ministries, programs, and events. It is also presumed that there will be no direct costs or personal gains associated with this research project.

**Definitions**

Within this project, there are a few key terms/phrases the author would like to clarify in an effort to bring a greater understanding within the scope of the research. Though there may be more, the following terms/phrases have been identified as such that will help present a more refined action research project.

**Action research** – Action research is defined as a systematic process of inquiry “based on the proposition that generalized solutions, plans, or programs may not fit all contexts or groups to whom they are applied and that the purpose of inquiry is to find an appropriate solution for the particular dynamics at work in a local situation.”

**Church Growth** – In addition to the quantifiable growth of the church, the definition of church growth used within this project is focused on the concept that church leaders are to be intentional toward the development of the spiritual giftedness of the church membership they

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have been assigned to care for. They are to seek the growth of the membership of the church more than growing the numbers in the church.

**Leadership Conviction** – Within this research, leadership conviction refers to Christian leadership beliefs that influence the leaders’ practice. Good leadership carries the conviction that “leadership is always a theological enterprise in the sense that [their] most important beliefs and convictions are about God.” According to Albert Mohler, if the leaders’ belief about God is warped, everything they know, as well as who they are, will be warped and contorted.

**Servant-Leadership** – Servant-leadership carries the connotation of Jesus’ words found in Matthew 20:28, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (NIV). Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg stated, “one of the paradoxes of Christian leadership is that the leader is not a boss but a servant—someone who follows in the footsteps of Him who washed His disciples’ feet.”

**Shepherd-Leadership** - According to K.T. Resane, shepherd-leaders lead through caring, courage, and guiding the church. Prime and Begg added to this concept by sharing that God has called church leaders to shepherd His flock and to care for their well-being - by showing them how to live their lives worthy of God their Savior.

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14 Ibid.


17 Prime and Begg, Understanding Our Calling, 18.
**Strategic Planning/Management** - According to Kenneth O. Gangel, church leaders must ensure that their church make and implement policies and procedures in the pursuit of fulfilling the mission and vision God has given the church.\(^\text{18}\) This is the significance of strategic planning within this research. In authoring these policies and procedures, Peter White and Benjamin O. Acheampong expressed that church leaders must join in with God and the Holy Spirit to clarify what He wants the church to accomplish in their ministry context as they plan their resources.\(^\text{19}\)

**Limitations**

Every research project will encounter various factors that may limit the natural liberty of the research process. This action research project is no different. The are several factors that may limit its natural process. Though others may occur as the research is implemented, five such limitations have been acknowledged.

First, this project will only include the members of GATCM. The size of the ministry will provide a limited sampling pool for the research. In addition, within this limited sampling pool, members, finances, ministry giftings/talents, etc. may not be readily available to grasp the desired breadth of the research. Therefore, this project is entered into with the understanding that the number of participants and resources is a variable that cannot be predetermined or controlled by the church or the facilitator.

Second, there is no compensation incentives for participating in this study, nor is there any contract that will bind members to participate in or complete the study. Therefore, the willingness of the participants to participate and follow through the entire research process is

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another factor that cannot be determined. It is an assumption that they will, but their willingness
to complete the research process is out of the control of the church or the facilitator.

Third, the presuppositions of the participants could extend the length of, or even hinder
the research, as the facilitator will have to work through any erroneous suppositions to set a good
base for the strategic planning process. As with any endeavor, to achieve success, a harmonizing
of differences must occur, and a common ground/goal must be established. The presuppositions
that may arise during the study are difficult to identify prior to the implementation of this
research project.

Fourth, the author is a bi-vocational pastor. Therefore, there will be an uncontrolled
limitation to the amount of time that can be dedicated to the research. As a bi-vocational pastor,
the author is responsible of working five days a week, eight hours a day, during his secular
employment, as well as managing his time between, family, ministry, and school. Therefore, his
activities throughout this research project will have to be strategically planned and remain
flexible to address any impediments that may arise.

Finally, the research time is also limited to the extent of the course project requirements.
There are course requirement milestones allocated for each portion of this DMIN action research
project. Therefore, time will have to be managed in a manner that will allow for the completion
of each milestone within the DMIN program’s allotted timeframe. This includes all research and
the preparation of all written reports.

**Delimitations**

The author is the senior pastor of GATCM and exercises the right and the freedom to
count the research within the church. He will set and select the research participants (target
audience) without any hindrance from any outside influences or authorities. The target pool will
include the entire leadership of GATCM and a select group of members - varying in age, race, and gender. In addition, as the senior pastor, the author will ensure that the research will be done within the church without closing the doors of the church or shutting down any of its programs and services. Ongoing education and training are important to the research process and building church structure. Furthermore, as the senior pastor, the author will ensure that participation in this study remains voluntary (except for focus groups) and a member’s decision whether to participate or not will not affect his or her current or future relations with GATCM. Finally, as the senior pastor, the author will allocate the church’s resources to conduct the research, if needed.

The author will also be the facilitator. He will keep the research participants’ participation anonymous – creating an atmosphere of transparency and confidence within the research process. Participant survey responses will be anonymous, participant interview responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes, and interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. The author will collect and compile the research data, and with the help of the leadership, finalize and implement the church’s strategic plan. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. The author will ensure that all collected data will be properly safeguarded. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interview recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. If a member chooses to withdraw from the study, his or her collected data will be destroyed and not included in the study.
Thesis Statement

According to Dr. Jesse Giddens, “Everyone who truly desires to go through the process of transformation in their life [and/or ministry] must acknowledge the fact that real change begins with right thinking…When we have the wrong mentality then we will always have the wrong reality.” The leadership of GATCM seems to lack the understanding of what it means to be a leader according to biblical standards, which, has led to erroneous thinking towards the church’s purpose. If they are going to be the effectual catalyst to true change within the congregational growth of the church, they must come to understand they cannot fix the problem it faces, but God can – starting with the genuine display of biblical character within their circles.

If the biblical character of the church is understood and displayed within the GATCM leadership, and the leader’s conviction, character, mission/purpose, vision, as well as his or her expected disciplines are expressed daily within the leadership, the GATCM leadership will be enabled to be an example to the congregation in modeling true maturity in Christ – inspiring and stimulating its spiritual growth. Good leadership draws and promotes the same spirit within those following, positively influencing the follower’s actions and conduct. As the congregation grows spiritually, each member will be enabled to properly fulfill his or her divine assignment within Jesus’ Great Commission.

The leadership of GATCM seems to lack the biblical understanding of servant-leadership and the concept of shepherding of God’s flock. If servant-leadership in the form of shepherding God’s flock is clearly defined and understood and the revelation of shepherding God’s flock

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20 Jesse Giddens, Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life: The Master Key to Unlocking Total Victory (Kearney: Morris Publishing, 2018), 63.

21 Holcomb, Christian Maturity, 195.
explored, the GATCM leadership will be enabled to lead and care for God’s people/flock, according to His leadership and plan. They will be encouraged and propelled to allow God to become the central theme and focus of each of their lives. Ultimately, their leadership will be enabled to become a visual extension of Jesus’ leadership – carrying on the work that He began and commissioned the leaders of the church to continue.

The leadership of the church must be “apt to teach” (II Tim 2:4) what they have learned and are learning in Christ. The congregation grows spiritually from what the leaders teach through their words and actions. God has given His Word for all to have life in Him and He has given His leaders to teach and display that Word to and before others. Following the example of Jesus is the best way to Teach God’s Word. According to Holcomb, “As a great steward, the Lord Jesus Christ did not teach many different things; however, He taught a few things many different ways.” If the Word of God is taught and displayed within the GATCM leadership, the congregation can experience a life of spiritual growth and vitality that It provides.

As the GATCM leaders change their thinking and focus on their role in the purpose of God’s will for His church, they will begin to seek and follow His leading in developing an effectual strategic plan to accomplish His assigned mission and vision for GATCM. As a result, every program, event, class, service, sermon, etc. will be geared toward the focus of the accomplishment of God’s will for the church. Programs/Ministries/Events that are not conducive to the mission and vision of the church will be deleted and programs/ministries/events not yet added but determined needed will be developed and implemented within the strategic plan of GATCM.

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In summary, if a good strategic plan is taught and modeled within the leadership of GATCM, then the spiritual maturity of the congregation may be developed. This can be accomplished only as the leadership submits to follow God’s lead towards ministries, programs, and events that aid in the establishment of a relationship with Christ and/or development of the attendees within their relationship with Christ.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter covers the conceptual framework of the thesis action research to be conducted within Go and Teach Christian Ministries. It encompasses a literature review that discusses what others have shared concerning the church’s leadership conviction, character, service/mission, and vision. Also provided are three theological foundations that undergird the purpose of this research: following God, church growth, and ministry outreach. Finally, as with the theological foundations, theoretical foundations are provided that furnish the stimulus for this research project.

Literature Review

More than any other time in history, much of the world is exploding with fast, frightening change. It has affected businesses, government, schools, and ultimately, the church – nationally, corporately, and individually. However, throughout the world’s changes, there are some underpinnings of life that should not succumb to change. This literature review provides a discussion of one such arena that should not change – the conviction, character, service/mission, and vision of leaders within the Christian church.

Leadership Conviction

Within the Christian church, the worldview of its leadership matters. It will determine the stability and direction of the actions the leaders will take. This will also become the driving force and influence for the entire church body. What has hindered the progress of some churches is their leaders have had a hard time distinguishing between their culture (traditions and norms)

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and their Christian mandates. They fail to receive or maintain a conviction that theology trumps the traditions or norms.²⁵ Therefore, church leadership must come to understand and maintain the view that “leadership is always a theological enterprise in the sense that [their] most important beliefs and convictions are about God.”²⁶ According to Mohler, if the leaders’ belief about God is warped, everything they know, as well as who they are, will be warped and contorted.²⁷

The literature conversation of previous authors, as they addressed this subject, expresses that it is important for leaders to possess the conviction that God is the most important reality in the universe, as shared by Matthew Perman,²⁸ and it is God’s sovereignty that frames the leaders’ understanding of leadership, as expressed by Mohler.²⁹ In addition, according to Benjamin K. Forrest and Chet Roden, leaders are to see God as the sovereign ruler of all creation, with all authority belonging to Him and all human leadership flowing from Him.³⁰ God possesses the right of leadership over all creation and His rule and leadership is to be seen as absolute, with His directives a must to be followed.³¹ As the ultimate example for Christian leadership, Jesus established the need for ultimate obedience to the Father’s will. According to Henry and Richard


²⁶ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 133.

²⁷ Ibid.


²⁹ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 134.


³¹ Ibid., 30.
Blackaby, Jesus’ life expressed the concept that “good leaders are also good followers,” and God is the leader that Church leaders are to follow.\(^{32}\)

As the leaders’ conviction is established in the sovereignty of God, they must also possess the conviction of being called into His service, as an extension of His leadership within their realm of influence. Mohler shared that leaders are to see themselves as mere stewards over all that the Lord has entrusted to their care.\(^{33}\) Therefore, according to Aubrey Malphurs, they have become leaders inside and outside the church and Christian community. They have a sense of mandate to lead Christianly within any context.\(^{34}\) This perceived mandate was the conviction of the early church apostles; however, each apostle received a distinct call from Jesus to the ministry and was prepared for that call by Him.\(^{35}\) As Elmer Towns relays, Jesus was, and still is, seen as the final revelation and personification of the Old Testament writings and the expression, revelation, and communication of the God through the New Testament records.\(^{36}\) As a result, those called to lead are to do so within the conviction that fulfillment is impossible apart from the indwelling Christ, the enabling of His Holy Spirit, and the power of the Father.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{33}\) Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 135.


\(^{35}\) Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 21.


\(^{37}\) Ibid., 55.
Wim Dreyer expresses the fact that Church leaders must lead from the conviction that Christ is never absent from His church, because He chooses to be present. Numerous times throughout Scripture, Christ reassured His followers that He will never leave or forsake them (Matt 28:20, Heb 13:5, & Jn 14:18). F.F. Bruce shared that Christ is actively concerned with His people and still supplying spiritual sustenance to meet their varied needs. The church and its leadership has been and is still being provided with all that it needs to be successful. With this conviction, church leaders understand that their power for leadership stems and is empowered through their relationship with the risen Jesus, as expressed by Stan Toler. As a caveat to this concept, Don N. Howell stated that “Jesus…invited his followers to intimate communion with him, and invited them to participate in the mission of extending the Father’s kingdom, which he has openly communicated to them.” Church leaders have become mere stewards of God’s kingdom on earth; and as such, they have been commissioned to follow God as the King of His domain (His kingdom). God alone is the sovereign ruler and, according to Bruce, the church is strengthened by the life of the risen Lord and energized by His Holy Spirit. Martin Hanna added to this thought by sharing the concept that Christ sends the Holy Spirit to be the guide or leader of church leadership and it is this Leader-follower synergy that is essential to church

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42 Bruce, Paul, 138.
vitalization and health.\textsuperscript{43} It is also this relationship between church leaders and the Holy Spirit that the church is empowered within the day to day service within God’s Great Commission. Therefore, as expressed by Brian DeVries, church leaders are to see themselves as the means through which the Holy Spirit gives and develops spiritual gifts for the growth and operation of the church.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Leadership Values}

The literature conversation also expresses that leaders with the conviction of the sovereignty, call, and leadership of God will also value being a part of His family. According to White and Acheampong, these leaders view the church’s ministry team as family, operating in the same care and concern for one another that God has displayed to all within His family.\textsuperscript{45} Their ministry management is influenced by a shared sense of mission and vision. They, therefore, become a conduit of God’s love within the church, expressed within its ministry context. In addition, because they place a high value on teamwork and cooperation, the ministry’s goals are pursued selflessly and sacrificially.\textsuperscript{46} According to Dreyer, the church leaders also bear witness to the importance of ecclesial integrity\textsuperscript{47} and views certain social values not only as obedience to God, but as part of their call to missional service.\textsuperscript{48}


\textsuperscript{44} DeVries, "Spiritual Gifts," 8.

\textsuperscript{45} White and Acheampong, "Planning and Management," 4-5.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{47} Dreyer, “Church Mission and Ethics,” 2.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 3.
Servant-Leadership

A church leaders’ conviction and service to God and others is most expressed in that of servant-leadership. Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg state that “one of the paradoxes of Christian leadership is that the leader is not a boss but a servant—someone who follows in the footsteps of Him who washed His disciples’ feet.”49 This is not a new concept. Servant-leadership is found within the Old Testament terminology use of “servants of the Lord” (II Kgs 9:7). According to Howell, this term was used for those who found joyful abandonment of their will to follow the will of the Lord.50 There was a peace and benefit to be within the will of God and a dissatisfaction with being contrary. Within the New Testament, Jesus was the example of what servant-leadership in the new covenant involves.51 According to Malphurs, through both, the Old and New Testaments, service to the Lord and others is the very essence to leadership and love is the motive that energizes such leadership.52 This is the sum of the servant-leadership concept. It is the love of God within His commission to serve that God’s compassion for the care and concern for the church and others can be expressed through the servant-leaders of the church. Also, ensconced within God’s servant-leaders are the divinely inspired traits of humility and selflessness.53 In summary, Hanna shared that only those church leaders who are willingly led by God as servants are qualified to lead His church.54

49 Prime and Begg, On Being a Pastor, 30.
50 Howell, Servants of the Servant, 7.
51 Ibid., 13-14.
52 Malphurs, Being Leaders, 21.
53 Ibid., 34.
Leadership Character

Toler expressed that church leaders will never move others onto God’s agenda without first taking their own trip to Calvary’s cross.\textsuperscript{55} They must first submit in humility to the Gospel of Christ themselves, before endeavoring to lead others. When they do so, clinging to the Gospel message, it will shape them, and according to Jared C. Wilson, give them the mind and heart of Christ for others.\textsuperscript{56} To add, Perman expressed that having the right heart and mind is the foundational prerequisite for any employable lists or techniques. Operating within this revelation, leaders will produce the fruit they have been called to produce.\textsuperscript{57} Such a mind can only be shaped through the gospel message. This mind will set the stage for the development of the leaders’ character and it is the character of the leaders that is at the heart of what God requires and the essence of their productive lives. Therefore, the greatest success of church leaders is to be a people of character, who walks with God, in Christ, and seeks to express this relationship through all aspects of their lives.\textsuperscript{58}

Mohler stated, “leaders of character produce organizations of character because character, like conviction, is infectious.”\textsuperscript{59} Followers adopt the view and characteristics of who they are following - that is the mere definition of a disciple. Therefore, church leaders cannot be effective without the expression of a godly character. Good church leaders stand out when their character

\textsuperscript{55} Toler, \textit{Stan Toler’s Practical Guide}, 170.

\textsuperscript{56} Jared C. Wilson, \textit{The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo} (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 152.

\textsuperscript{57} Perman, \textit{What’s Best Next}, 128.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{59} Mohler, \textit{The Conviction to Lead}, 80.
is matched with competence and the virtue of knowing what to do.\textsuperscript{60} A corresponding confidence of faith is seen in the leaders by their followers and according to Malphurs, this example of faith and confidence within the church leadership is critical to casting a vision for the church. Their followers need to see that the leaders believe what they are expecting them to believe and follow.\textsuperscript{61} In essence, according to Forrest and Roden, church leaders are always carrying the banner of Christ, and because of that, their followers will always be watching for the leaders’ consistency or inconsistency within it.\textsuperscript{62} This display will be part of the determining factor of the extent the followers will follow the leader. Therefore, according to Dreyer, church leaders should live as Christians who have received a new life, following in the footsteps of Christ. Ensconced within this new life, is a life of obedience, simplicity, and authentic Christian values.\textsuperscript{63} This is the life leaders are to lead and to expect others to follow. According to Malphurs, this display godly character is the essential foundation to what qualifies church leaders to lead within the church.\textsuperscript{64} However, according to Prime and Begg, this godly character is only developed within leaders as they seek to add goodness to their faith, knowledge to their goodness, self-control to their knowledge, perseverance to their self-control, godliness to their perseverance, brotherly kindness to their godliness, and love to their brotherly kindness.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{60} Mohler, \textit{The Conviction to Lead}, 83.

\textsuperscript{61} Malphurs, \textit{Advanced Strategic Planning}, 143.

\textsuperscript{62} Forrest and Roden, \textit{Biblical Leadership}, 514.

\textsuperscript{63} Dreyer, “Church Mission and Ethics,” 5.

\textsuperscript{64} Malphurs, \textit{Being Leaders}, 19.

\textsuperscript{65} Prime and Begg, \textit{Understanding Our Calling}, 84.
Toler expressed that great pastors and church leaders know how to pray, and they have personal integrity, great flexibility, a sense of direction, and a great commitment.\textsuperscript{66} These character traits are common and necessary within good church leadership. In addition, according to Hanna, effective leaders make themselves vulnerable by modeling humility before those they lead. They are willing to admit, acknowledge, apologize, accept, and then act, according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{67} This humility is the most important character trait for church leaders to develop. As Bill Hull expressed, Jesus modeled humility, and as His followers, all church leaders must learn to do the same.\textsuperscript{68} They must ultimately commit to live a humble life before Christ and those they are called to lead. The commitment to be humble is a lifelong commitment, with everyday consisting of new challenges and choices that will ultimately develop the leader’s character.\textsuperscript{69}

**Leadership Influence**

Malphurs expressed that as servant-leaders with credibility and capabilities, successful church leaders can influence others in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction: both traits are essential ingredients to influencing of others.\textsuperscript{70} As Howell shared, influencing others in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction is accomplished when church leaders take the initiative to influence their followers to grow in holiness and by passionately promoting the extension of God’s kingdom in the world in which they live.\textsuperscript{71} As they are called

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} Toler, *Stan Toler’s Practical Guide*, 16-18.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Hanna, “What is Christian,” 25.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Hull, *The Christian Leader*, 102.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 109.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 3.
\end{itemize}
to use their power to impress Christ on others,\textsuperscript{72} church leaders influence their follower in two major ways – by who they are and by what they do, according to Blackaby.\textsuperscript{73} All leaders make an impression on those they lead, regardless of their intent. Sometimes the impression is in opposition to the what the leader may have intended. However, the impression is still made, as shared by Hull.\textsuperscript{74} Therefore, according to Gangel, it is a must that church leaders be intentional in nurturing godliness within their relationships with those they have been assigned to lead. This is an interactive and mutually dependent relationship.\textsuperscript{75}

**Leadership Disciplines**

Church leaders cannot lead others to Christ or be effective for His church, if they themselves, are not invested in His truth.\textsuperscript{76} They must learn to exercise convictional intelligence, as defined by Mohler, “the product of learning the Christian faith, diving deeply into biblical truth, and discovering how to think like a Christian.”\textsuperscript{77} Church leaders must come to understand that their leadership development is synonymous with their personal development. As they grow in personal maturity in Christ, so will they grow in their ability to lead others in His church. According to Blackaby, this will, ultimately, increase the capacity of the church to grow.\textsuperscript{78} Therefore, leaders must understand that their relationship with God is more important than their

\textsuperscript{72} Hull, *The Christian Leader*, 73.

\textsuperscript{73} Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 154.

\textsuperscript{74} Hull, *The Christian Leader*, 61.

\textsuperscript{75} Gangel, "Acts," 338.

\textsuperscript{76} Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 26.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 31.

\textsuperscript{78} Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 51.
service.\textsuperscript{79} As expressed by Prime and Begg, they must seek to live a godly life rather than the achievement of what others may call success.\textsuperscript{80} It is important for church leaders to understand that their success is to be measured within their obedience in living a godly life within the will of God. To maintain godly focused life, prayer must be the main discipline of church leaders.\textsuperscript{81} It is an integral part of church health. According to Rodney Mills, without an active prayer life in reliance on the Holy Spirit’s guidance and power to change lives, they will vastly miss the target of living on and leading other into God’s agenda.\textsuperscript{82}

Leadership Service/Mission

The church and its leaders were created, called, and commissioned by God. Therefore, according to Perman, their service/mission can only come by revelation from Him.\textsuperscript{83} Accordingly, the mission of the church and its leaders is seen as a movement that requires the personal and relational intervention of the Holy Spirit. Church leaders may utilize different systems to aid in the fulfillment of the church’s mission but according to Wilson, they must remain cognizant that the mission of the church is not a system.\textsuperscript{84} It is a commission that comes from God, given through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit commissions church leaders to cooperate in “the divine-human synergies of conviction-confession, conversion-repentance, consecration-obedience, and confirmation-perseverance”; fostering a dissatisfaction with the

\textsuperscript{79} Prime and Begg, \textit{Understanding Our Calling}, 82.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{81} Prime and Begg, \textit{Understanding Our Calling}, 65.
\textsuperscript{82} Rodney Mills, “Healthy Churches Grow,” \textit{The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership} 10, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 73.
\textsuperscript{83} Perman, \textit{What’s Best Next}, 152.
\textsuperscript{84} Wilson, \textit{The Prodigal Church}, 144.
social norms, a redirection of perceptions and perspectives, empowering toward long-term motivation, and flexible short-term action plans, as shared by Hanna.\textsuperscript{85}

In the New Testament, according to Forrest and Roden, leaders were seen as guides, shepherds, helpers, and coaches (using a more contemporary metaphor) within the fulfillment of the God-given mission.\textsuperscript{86} Over the years, there have been many views on leadership, with some remaining according to the biblical standards of the New Testament, while others became warped and polluted within the secular influences of the times. However, according to Blackaby, modern history is once again calling for the church to fulfill their God-ordained mission to impact their world.\textsuperscript{87} This impact will only take place when church leaders live and lead according to the true nature of the biblical call and response to church leadership. This call and response can only be found within the will of God. Once church leaders understand God’s will, it is imperative that they make every effort to move the church unto God’s agenda.\textsuperscript{88} According to Gangel, when their leaders communicate a biblical, meaningful message to the church, the church will operate from the knowledge and understanding of what business they are in and what function they perform.\textsuperscript{89} This knowledge and understanding is the foundation to the church’s and its leaders’ mission and strategy. Malphurs considered the two as mutually reliant upon one another: the mission feeds the strategy, and the strategy lays out how to accomplish the mission.\textsuperscript{90}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Hanna, “What is Christian,” 29.
\item Forrest and Roden, \textit{Biblical Leadership}, 305.
\item Blackaby, \textit{Spiritual Leadership}, 28.
\item Ibid., 37.
\item Malphurs, \textit{Advanced Strategic Planning}, 108.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Church Growth

Christ, in preparation for the gospel to be spread across the world, turned away from the masses, and invested Himself in those He called to follow Him to lead the movement. According to Towns, Jesus invested His time, left His message, and commissioned them to lead.\textsuperscript{91} Likewise, DeVries shared the concept that church leaders are to be intentional toward the development of the spiritual giftedness of the church membership they have been assigned to care for.\textsuperscript{92} They are to seek the growth of the membership of the church more than growing the numbers in the church. Church growth has always been the central theme within the mission of the church and its leaders.\textsuperscript{93} However, according to Mills, the leaders must remain focused that their responsibility is to be used by God to create an environment conducive for growth, but it is God’s responsibility for the growth itself (physical and spiritual).\textsuperscript{94} They are to continuously pray for spontaneous use of the spiritual giftedness within the church body as they endeavor to create a growth climate.\textsuperscript{95}

Shepherd-Leadership

Those called to be leaders of the church must fully understand the biblical model of shepherd-leadership. According to Resane, shepherd-leaders lead through caring, courage, and guiding the church.\textsuperscript{96} Prime and Begg added to this concept by sharing that God has called

\textsuperscript{91} Towns, \textit{The Gospel of John}, 15.
\textsuperscript{92} DeVries, "Spiritual Gifts," 9.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{94} Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," 70.
\textsuperscript{95} DeVries, "Spiritual Gifts," 8.
\textsuperscript{96} Resane, "Leadership for the Church," 6.
church leaders to shepherd His flock and to care for their well-being - by showing them how to live their lives worthy of God their Savior. They accomplish this task by becoming an example of what they desire from others. Therefore, the main functional trait of these shepherd leaders becomes the example they set for others to follow. In addition, according to Resane, within the shepherd-leader concept, leaders and followers experience life together for the mutual benefit of both, creating an atmosphere that is desirable for those within and without. Church leaders start by following the Good Shepherd in leading the flock to pastures and water, teaching and restoring them, guiding them in righteousness, and protecting them. In other words, According to Malphurs, church leaders are to protect, teach, and lead the flock into living spiritually healthy and being obedient to Christ’s Great Commission. They are to influence them away from their own agenda onto God’s agenda. Furthermore, they are to give their lives for the flock, despite their own reputations, friendships, livelihood, and possibly, their lives.

Leadership Vision

Many of the strongest churches began with a group of visionary leaders who did not follow the normal way of doing things or traditions of their day as the necessary best way to operate. These leaders tapped into the key that it is not for church leaders to develop visions and set the direction for their churches, but to follow Jesus’ model for spiritual leadership.

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97 Prime and Begg, Understanding Our Calling, 18.

98 Resane, "Leadership for the Church,” 6.

99 Ibid., 4.

100 Malphurs, Being Leaders, 30.

101 Resane, "Leadership for the Church,” 4.

102 Wilson, The Prodigal Church, 21.
According to Blackaby, God already has the vision for His church and all He requires of the leaders is their obedience to His will.\textsuperscript{103} Therefore, church leaders are to remain prayerful, in order to know His will and receive His instructions to obey. However, within the revelation of His will, the core principle for effective church leaders is to know and schedule the church’s priorities and not to prioritize the church’s schedule, as Perman expressed.\textsuperscript{104} Therefore, the best way for church leaders to lead starts with prayer and being obedient to the guidance given by the Holy Spirit, as concluded by Hull.\textsuperscript{105}

God has given the church the task of being a beacon of hope to the world around them, exhibiting the grace and acceptance displayed through the life of Jesus.\textsuperscript{106} Discernment is one of the ways church leaders connect with God and lead others into the same. It opens their spirits to God’s movement and, according to White and Acheampong, flows out of a commitment to yield their attention, agenda, and actions toward God.\textsuperscript{107} As followers within the charge of the Lord, church leaders never set a new course. Their course is already given and set for a continuous forward movement: they receive their commissioning from the Lord and use their God-given authority for the continual accomplishment of their assignment, according to Forrest and Roden.\textsuperscript{108} The bottom line, as expressed by Dryer, is that from the earliest existence of the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{103} Blackaby, \textit{Spiritual Leadership}, 47.
\bibitem{104} Perman, \textit{What’s Best Next}, 141.
\bibitem{105} Hull, \textit{The Christian Leader}, 165.
\bibitem{106} Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," 69.
\bibitem{107} White and Acheampong, “Planning and Management,” 3.
\bibitem{108} Forrest and Roden, \textit{Biblical Leadership}, 515.
\end{thebibliography}
church, its vision has included a clear understanding of the interrelatedness between church, mission, and an ethical way of life.\footnote{Dreyer, “Church Mission and Ethics,” 3.}

According to Mohler, the leadership vision of the church is to have a God-centered worldview that brings every issue, question, and cultural concern into submission to the Word of God.\footnote{Mohler, \textit{The Conviction to Lead}, 44-45.} It should never be the other way around. Church leadership should never compromise the Word of God for the sake of the context in which it exists and operates. The role of the church within this worldview is what is received through prayer and communicated to the church through its leadership. However, according to Blackaby, as the church grows spiritually, more people will grow in the relationship with God and will hear from Him for themselves. As they do so, no one will have to force or persuade them to follow God: following Him will be their natural heart response.\footnote{Blackaby, \textit{Spiritual Leadership}, 110.}

Malphurs expressed that this growth should be the vision of church leaders and should be pursued by faith in the vision that God has given. Church leaders can see where the church is going by faith. This is the key to leadership.\footnote{Malphurs, \textit{Advanced Strategic Planning}, 130.} Toler added that if church leaders cannot see the future of the church, they will not get there. Therefore, not only must they see the vision of the church’s future, they must also believe that the church will get there.\footnote{Toler, \textit{Stan Toler’s Practical Guide}, 177.}

\textbf{Cultural Understanding}

The contemporary church has found itself in a complex environment of technological advancements, secularized and modernized societies with various anti-biblical ideologies, and
multiple human rights issues. As shared by White and Acheampong, the world has become a globally connected village. What happens in one part of the world affects the operations in another.\textsuperscript{114} Distance and cultural differences are no longer a barrier or stumbling block to the effects of the world’s varied activities and challenges. During these challenges, as expressed by Howell, church leaders are to see the church as a supraracial family formed on the basis of the gospel message and is in heart allegiance and submission to God.\textsuperscript{115} The Gospel is not dependent on political or cultural influences, but it is free. Therefore, as the church follows the Gospel message, like the Gospel, it becomes powerful through the Holy Spirit. In addition, as concluded by Dreyer, through both, the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, faith becomes possible to maintain the Christian values amid the contemporary environment of the church, breaking the chains of political and cultural influence and control.\textsuperscript{116}

**Strategic Planning/Management**

According to Gangel, church leaders must ensure that their church make and implement policies and procedures in the pursuit of fulfilling the mission and vision God has given the church.\textsuperscript{117} In authoring these policies and procedures, White and Acheampong expressed that church leaders must join in with the God and the Holy Spirit to clarify what He wants the church to accomplish in their ministry context as they plan their resources.\textsuperscript{118} The creation, call, mission and vision of the church stems from the absolute will of God. Therefore, church leaders are not

\textsuperscript{114} White and Acheampong, “Planning and Management,” 2.

\textsuperscript{115} Howell, *Servants of the Servants*, 138.

\textsuperscript{116} Dreyer, “Church Mission and Ethics,” 5.

\textsuperscript{117} Gangel, “Acts,” 252.

\textsuperscript{118} White and Acheampong, “Planning and Management,” 1.
to attempt to lead the church without receiving instructions from its sovereign Creator and Shepherd. Afterward, all important decisions affecting the life of the church must be clearly communicated.\textsuperscript{119} The same goes for the church’s strategic vision planning. According to Malphurs, the readiness of the church to begin strategic planning starts with an assessment of the church to see if they are ready to do so.\textsuperscript{120} If church leaders do not establish the reasons why strategic planning is needed, some following will not discipline themselves toward the planning necessities of working through various critical issues within the strategic planning process.\textsuperscript{121} Once the process begins, it is important for leaders to develop the ability for goal orientation along the path of continual progress, remembering that theological absolutes never change and philosophical purposes seldom do, as expressed by Hanna. The church also needs objectives for the long-term, as well as short-term goals.\textsuperscript{122}

In summary, this section covered the literature review within the conceptual framework of this thesis action research project. It provided insights to what others have shared concerning the church’s leadership conviction, character, service/mission, and vision. As the world is exploding with change, the insights provided within this review of literature are the conceptual underpinnings of a leader’s life that should not succumb to change. They are the core concepts ensconced within the next section of the chapter – the theological foundation of this action research project.


\textsuperscript{120} Malphurs, \textit{Advanced Strategic Planning}, 55.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{122} Hanna, “What is Christian,” 28.
Theological Foundations

Every good endeavor should be established upon a good foundation. This action research thesis project is no different. Go and Teach Christian Ministries is a Christian church established on the person and doctrine of God. With the person of God at its core, the plan and assignment of God (doctrine) encompasses its purpose and direction. Therefore, throughout every phase of this project, the theology of God and His plan are the founding principles upon which an effectual strategic plan will be developed for GATCM.

Once the leadership of GATCM develops this strategic plan - through the leading of the Lord, an atmosphere of growth will be enabled through its implementation. Consequently, equipping the congregation of GATCM to be well on its way to fulfilling its call to reach its community with the Gospel of Christ. What follows is a more in-depth look at four main theological emphases of such a plan: view of God, following God, church growth, and ministry outreach.

View of God

The leadership and congregation of GATCM view God as the same great God of the Bible. This view of God inspired the writers of old, such as the psalmists, and is still stirring believers today. The membership of GATCM receives the revelation that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:24). In addition, G.R. Lewis stated, “God is a living, personal Spirit worthy of whole-soul adoration and trust (because of his many perfect attributes), separate from the world yet continuously active in the world.”

\[^{123}\text{Millard J. Erickson, } Christian Theology, \text{ 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2013), 253.}\]

GATCM, God is seen as an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God, worthy of worship, service, and praise.

Along with the greatness of God, the leadership and congregation of GATCM also accept the Trinity doctrine. Within this doctrine is found the concept that God is one in being or essence who exists externally in three distinct persons. God triumphantly reveals Himself in the saving action of His Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. They both are recognized by GATCM as a personal manifestation of God Himself.\(^\text{125}\) In short, the membership of GATCM sees God as one God manifested in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Wherefore, in each manifestation, in agreement with what is written in Psalms 48:14, GATCM declares, “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” It is this view of God that sets the stage for understanding the sovereignty, love, plan, and grace of God.

**God’s Sovereignty**

Ensconced within the view of God’s greatness is the revelation of His sovereignty. Within GATCM, God is viewed as an all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-powerful God. According to what is recorded in Romans 13:1, “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” This power is not only a reference to God’s ability but to His authority as well. According to Erickson, “From the Christian standpoint, God is the authority in [all] matters because of who he is. He is the highest being, the one who always has been, who existed before we or any other being came into existence. He is the only being having the power of his own existence within himself, not dependent on anyone or anything else for it.”\(^\text{126}\) In addition,


\(^{126}\) Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 214.
Erickson also stated, “God himself is the ultimate authority in religious matters. He has the right, both by virtue of who he is and what he does, to establish the standard for belief and practice.”

It is this concept that establishes the foundation of this action research project within GATCM.

Throughout world history, God’s sovereignty is expressed through a comprehensive plan or decree for humankind. According to Ephesians 1:11, He has continuously worked everything out in conformity with the purpose of His will. Therefore, in GATCM, God is seen as “before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:17-18). Because of the reception of this revelation, the leadership of GATCM has committed to give God the preeminence within this research project with the underlying belief that He knows what is best for the church, according to its purpose in His will.

God’s Love

In addition to the sovereignty of God, the view of God’s love for His creation is another founding source for this action research project. As one reflects on God, through the myriad of His moral attributes, the first most likely attribute to come to mind is His love. Love is viewed by many as the very nature of God, Himself. This concept gives validity to Jesus’ Great Commandment found in the following passage of Matthew 22:36-40.

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

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127 Erickson, Christian Theology, 215.


129 Erickson, Christian Theology, 262.
Love is shown as the connecting force that binds God and humankind. This belief is also strengthened through scriptures such as John 3:16 and Romans 5:8. In addition, written in I John 4:8-16 is “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him… And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” The love of God is seen throughout the Bible as a love that is unselfish and unmerited.  

It is this unselfish and unmerited love that the leadership of GATCM is endeavoring to express in and through this action research project.

**God’s Plan**

As with GATCM leadership’s view of God’s sovereignty and love, it is also believed that God has a plan for His creation. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with His people and history reveals that His planning and ordaining work is undoubtedly tied up with that covenant. God created the world and directed history, “which was the unfolding of a plan prepared in eternity and related to his intention of fellowship with his people. Creation in its vast extent and the details of individual lives were included in this plan and would surely come to pass as God designed.” God set the stage for the foundational fulfillment of His divine plan in the Old Testament and continued it throughout the written annuls of the New Testament.

In the New Testament, God continued to affect His plan for mankind through the giving of His Son, Jesus. According to Erickson, Jesus saw the events of his life and the events of the

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131 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 320.

future as necessary components of God’s plan. He became the catalyst of God’s redemption of mankind and the impetus for the church to function. In his exhortation to the saints of Galatia, Paul stated, “Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:3-4). Jesus became the fulfillment of God’s plan to redeem mankind, restoring the fellowship between God and humankind. God has called and is calling humankind to receive the person of Christ and the gift offered through his testimony.

Also, in the view of God’s will to fulfill His plan, God called and is calling people not only to salvation but also to service. Through this revelation, the church is seen as, “the sphere of action of the risen and ascended Lord…All their gifts and activities continue the work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, originate from Christ, and are coordinated by him to the final goal.” Service unto God, through fellowship in Christ, is seen coherently with the His plan for service within the Kingdom of God. For the leadership of GATCM, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (I Cor 1:9). Therefore, the strategic planning within this action research project will be conducted under the inspiration of God’s plan for the church within the kingdom of God.

**God’s Grace**

God’s grace is generally understood as God’s unmerited favor toward humankind. It is understood in terms of God not giving people what they deserve (Rom. 3:23 & 6:23). According to Erickson, “God deals with his people not on the basis of their merit or worthiness, what they

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133 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 321.


135 Clouse, “Church,” 246.
deserve, but simply according to their need; in other words, he deals with them on the basis of his goodness and generosity.”\(^{136}\) The ultimate display of God’s grace was in the giving of His son, who was said to be “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). For this cause, “no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (I Cor 1:29-31). Wherefore, Paul also stated, “by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (I Cor 15:10). Truly, God’s people become what they become by the grace of God.

A more specific, but not as widely understood, meaning of God’s grace is His equipping for ministry. As it is written in II Corinthians 9:8, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” When God’s grace is understood as unmerited, a person’s past cannot be used against him or her to make him or her feel inadequate. He or she will be encouraged through the recognition of God’s grace within his or her call from God to continue the work, knowing that “he which hath begun a good work in [him or her] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). In addition, through the grace of God, He has given His Holy Spirit to believers to guide them into all the truth. The Holy Spirit will lead believers within God’s will and authority, speaking only what He hears (Jn 16:13).\(^{137}\) Therefore, it is only through God’s grace that an effectual strategic plan for GATCM can be developed.

\(^{136}\) Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 265.

\(^{137}\) Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 219.
In summary, the view of God held by the leadership and congregation of GATCM is one that sees God as a great God who triumphantly reveals Himself in the saving action of His Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. He is seen as a loving God that calls humankind to salvation and service within His divine plan for this world and the world to come, and through His grace, equips them for this service. This view of God provides the inspiration to follow Him throughout the course of this action research project.

Following God

Following God is not a new concept. It can be found within the Old Testament scriptures from God’s leading of Abraham in Genesis 12 to His continual leading of the nation of Israel. Through passages such as Deuteronomy 28:1 and Leviticus 26:3, God continuously urged His leaders to hearken to His voice and to keep His commandments. In the New Testament, according to the gospel message, God’s love for humanity resulted in the giving of Jesus for their redemption and spiritual growth and in Matthew 17:5, God told Jesus’ disciples that “[Jesus] is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”

In John 10:2-7, Jesus identified Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep (those following) and expressed that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. Therefore, church leaders, according to Jesus’ instructions within passages such as Matthew 4:19, Mark 2:14, Luke 9:23, John 12:26 and the like, are to follow him. Likewise, Paul told the church at Corinth to “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor 11:1). He realized that, as a leader within the church, he had become an extension of God’s leading of - and care for - His people. Therefore, Paul told those of Ephesus to “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Eph 5:1). According to Gangel, “the leaders of the church at Ephesus were followers of both Paul and Christ. Still, as elders they took responsibility for leading spiritual growth in congregational life.
at Ephesus.” These Ephesian elders understood their connection with Paul and Christ to be in concert with the spiritual growth and development of those they had been commissioned to lead. Likewise, contemporary church leaders are still seen as an extension of God’s care and concern for the welfare of His people - through the following of Christ and becoming an example of followership for others to emulate.

Christ is the Head of the church (Col 1:18) and every leader is called to follow Him humbly and faithfully. As church leaders endeavor to follow Christ’s example as they lead His church, it is important for them to note that Jesus is never seen handing out pamphlets and programs to His disciples, but, according to Wilson, He is seen “sitting with them, walking with them, eating with them, praying with them, touching them and encouraging them and counseling them and correcting them.” In addition, Paul is seen as a leader who did not just obey the gospel but lived and felt gospel ministry. Jesus and Paul both showed that genuine gospel ministry is found within the root of God’s love for His people - ensconced within the gospel message. Church leaders should seek to grow and operate in this same love and intimate care: through which, they will be enabled to remain connected to Christ, concentrated on the mission, and founded on the Word of God. As they do so, it will become natural for others to follow, for them to be concerned about those following, but to remain steadfast in knowing that to obey Jesus is the ultimate goal of their leadership.


139 Ibid., 345.

140 Wilson, The Prodigal Church, 144.


Church Growth

As the church is an extension of Christ’s ministry, Jesus commissioned those within it to go and teach all nations (Matt 28:19-20). However, before He released His disciples into this work, He prepared them for the work. Go and Teach Christian Ministries’ leadership has the same responsibility to prepare the church for the current work of Christ’s Commission. It is important for leaders to recognize that “the potential for edification is the criterion by which all activities, including our speech, are to be measured.” The activities of the GATCM leadership should be captured within the purpose of the following snapshot of Ephesians 4:12-16:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

In concert with this thought, in Acts 20:28, Paul admonishes leaders to “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” In addition, in I Peter 5:1-3, he instructs leaders to “feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.” Therefore, it is the leadership’s responsibility to nurture those within its congregation into being who God has created them to be and doing what

143 Erickson, Christian Theology, 975.
He has called them to do. It is with this thought in mind that the leadership of GATCM is going through the strategic planning process of this action research project.

Ministry Outreach

As stated earlier, God has a plan and purpose for humankind within His kingdom. He has called and is calling individuals to salvation and service within His divine plan. Service within this plan is fulfilled in the compelling of those outside of the fellowship in Christ to favorably answer His call to salvation and service in fellowship with Him. This idea can be seen in the parable of Luke 14:16-23, where it is written, “the lord said unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” Likewise, in Matthew 4:19, Jesus told His disciples that as they follow Him, He would “make [them] fishers of men.” As church leaders follow Jesus in nurturing the growth and development of the congregation, He will continue to make them “fishers of men.” The church will become a mature witness and evidence of God’s grace found in Jesus, His love, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.144

The church is the extension of Christ’s ministry, and as He sent his disciples to evangelize, baptize, and teach, so is He still doing the same today – with the same promise that he would be with the church always, even to the end of the age.145 In essence, if the work of Christ is done at all, it will be done by his body, the church – as they mature daily into becoming more of who they have been created to be, doing more of what they have been called to do.146 Through the shining light of God’s glory upon their lives, others may come to see, experience,

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144 Clouse, “Church,” 249.
145 Erickson, Christian Theology, 961.
146 Erickson, Christian Theology 962.
and know the God of the Bible and can be compelled to accept His call to salvation and service as many others have done before them.

Conclusion

As every good endeavor should be established upon a good foundation, what was stated above underpins this action research thesis project. In summary, GATCM is established on the person and doctrine of God. Throughout every phase of this project, the theology of God and His plan will be the founding theological principles from which the GATCM strategic plan will be developed. The theological foundation of GATCM’s strategic planning is found in the church’s view of God, its willingness to follow God, its growth, and its ministry outreach. As the leadership of GATCM develops and implements this strategic plan, GATCM will be well enabled to fulfill its call to reach its community with the gospel of Christ.

Theoretical Foundations

Throughout the course of history, there have been numerous attempts at developing avenues to best suit Jesus’ Commission to make disciples. However, the most fitting for this action research can be summed up within two: small groups and church cells. As these two concepts have been previously explored by others, the following will reveal the key points that some church leaders found to work successfully. In the end, nuggets gleaned from these two concepts will be brought into the local context of GATCM to create an atmosphere where the church will move from informing people to equipping people.147

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Small Groups

Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley stated, “learning to lead a small group where people
move from isolation to connection and from loneliness to love is one of the greatest ministries on
the planet!”\textsuperscript{148} The concept of small group ministry is referred to as the method Jesus and the
early church employed and has provided many good precepts within its reasoning for the
contemporary church to employ the same as its means to making disciples of Christ.

According to Jacob Armstrong, small group success is found in providing an atmosphere
more akin to a family gathering than that of a church meeting or business setting.\textsuperscript{149} In such an
atmosphere, light conversation and sharing of the deepest parts of life can foster a comfortable
and safe place for transparency. As people are reluctant to share their issues or temptations
within a large church setting, some -such as Jeffrey Arnold- have found small groups to provide
an intimate family atmosphere that will foster the close relationships needed for human survival,
support, emotional strength, and stimulation.\textsuperscript{150} Therefore, small groups can provide a great
support toward congregational development through various specified small group ministries
(i.e., age, gender, single/married, etc.).

Small groups also find success in being more conducive to developing leaders. According
to Arnold, small group ministries provide opportunities for church leaders to find “‘anonymous’
members, discovering their leadership potential and developing that potential for the benefit of
the church.”\textsuperscript{151} These future leaders can glean more closely from the group leader and experience

\textsuperscript{148} Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley, \textit{Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups} (Lynchburg:

\textsuperscript{149} Jacob Armstrong, \textit{The Connected Life: Small Groups That Create Community} (Nashville: Abingdon

\textsuperscript{150} Jeffrey Arnold, \textit{The Big Book on Small Groups}, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 10.

\textsuperscript{151} Arnold, \textit{The Big Book on Small Groups}, 35.
more opportunities to lead others within the group projects. Ultimately, they can grow into becoming part of the church’s leadership and/or future church planters.

Another avenue of success of small groups within the church is unchurched people are more willing to connect in a small home group setting before they connect to a church. While discussing Small Groups at Providence Church, Armstrong stated, “At Providence we have multiple stories of people who joined small groups as nonbelievers and over time gave their lives to Christ, eventually being baptized and serving actively in the life of the church.” He also shared that “one member of my own small group, a man with a brilliant scientific mind who works in a medical field, attended the group regularly for three years before confessing his belief in Christ. The small group gave him a safe place to listen, observe, ask questions, and finally commit.” As Armstrong’s words reveal, small groups can be an effective tool in transforming nonbelievers into believers and integrating them into the church.

An additional strength of small group ministry is its successful identification with the biblical pattern of the early church. According to Acts 2:46, Christ’s followers continued daily “breaking bread from house to house.” According to Acts 5:42, “in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” In addition, according to the Acts 20:20, the apostle taught publicly and “from house to house.” As Arnold shared, leaders and teachers in the early church went from house to house as they taught and made disciples. They “met together in their homes to break bread together and to use the opportunity to encourage each other to live out their faith in ever greater obedience. There were home prayer meetings like the one held while Peter was in

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153 Ibid.
prison (Acts 12:12), and Paul’s letters allude to ‘house churches’ (Romans 16:5).”154 The church started with small groups within the homes of Christ’s followers, with the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40) as the center focus of operation. Dempsey and Earley stated that “we teach people to love another by connecting them to each other in groups and encouraging them to use their spiritual gifts to serve each other.”155 This is a great strength within the small group ministry concept.

Perhaps the most persuasive use for small group ministry is it is seen as the best avenue for following the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20), because small groups are the best method for true discipleship. Disciples of Jesus are made by proclaiming and showing the Good News, connecting people to Christ through disciplines, connecting them to each other in small groups, and connecting the groups to the mission.156 According to Arnold, biblical evangelism is “a person-to-person process of sharing the good news.”157 Small groups offer the most natural place for this type of evangelism because they provide the most personal setting of the church.158 According to Brad House, church services can contextualize the gospel at a macro level but small groups can do so on a more specific and intimate level.159

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156 Ibid.
158 Ibid., 38-39.
Church Cells

Church cells work on the same concepts of small groups. However, where small groups are focused on specified groups within the church’s congregation – based on age, gender, social, etc., church cell groups are more singularly focused to providing an intimate atmosphere of growth for the overall congregation of the church. Cell groups operate as small churches within the local church. The cell group concept can be seen through Jesus’s concentration on twelve disciples He commissioned to model community. Within Mark 3:13-14, it is recorded, “And [Jesus] goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (see also Matt 10:1-3, Luke 6:13, & Luke 8:1). After calling the twelve disciples, Jesus spent time teaching and equipping them for their future service (Matt 4:19/28:19-20). He intimately taught the members of this small cell group to be as He was and to live as He lived. Therefore, according to Joel Comiskey, “The cell group is much more than a weekly meeting designed to meet an individual’s need for a personal church. It is a manifestation of God’s life now, today - or at least there is the potential for that. It is a chance for face-to-face interaction that will bring us in contact with people and a chance to practice community.”160 This personal face-to-face atmosphere that can be provided within church cells is an echo of what Jesus’ disciples experienced.

An added strength for cell groups is found in what Jesus’ twelve disciples discovered. The twelve chosen by Jesus found this intimate community to be a difficult place to mask limitations, egotism, ignorance, and jealousies. As a result, they were unable to conceal their

selfishness and slowly recognized that they had to abandon their competitive lifestyles (Matt 16:24/18:4 & Luke 22:23-26). They discovered their true worth was not found in their reputation, but in their readiness to give themselves unselfishly to others. By living with twelve men, Jesus made a clear statement about the way community develops. He did not simply gather them once a week for a “discipleship class.” He spent much time with them. As an example, for cell group leaders to follow, Jesus not only taught his disciples about prayer, but He also asked them to accompany him to prayer meetings.\textsuperscript{161} In addition, according to what is written in Luke 8:1, “[Jesus] went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him.” Jesus did what He did in the presence of His chosen cell group. Wherefore, His disciples were enabled to learn, through this intimate communal observation and practice, how they should operate within their call to ministry and service.

Local Context

The local context of GATCM will consist of a blend of church cells and small groups. There will be environments of intimate, personal, social, and public relationships created for each discipleship need.\textsuperscript{162} To address the challenges and issues of the modern age in forming effectual small groups and effective church cell groups, the leadership of GATCM will embark upon the strategic planning process. According to Aubrey Malphurs, this process encompasses four distinct phases: mission development, vision development, core values discovery, and

\textsuperscript{161} Comiskey, \textit{Biblical Foundations}, 76.

\textsuperscript{162} Putnam and Harrington. \textit{Discipleshift}, 106-110.
strategic designing.\textsuperscript{163} The culmination of this strategic planning process is the development and implementation of a biblically sound strategic plan that is unique to God’s will for GATCM.

Written in Habakkuk 2:2 is a command to “write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” Strategic planning is the phase that lays out the practices to put God’s plan for GATCM in action and initiates the actions of those practices. Through this process, the GATCM leadership will be enabled to produce a unique, biblically sound ministry model, leading to the church’s own authentic ministry model.\textsuperscript{164} The GATCM leadership will, through the help of the Holy Spirit, develop an effectually sound strategic plan to accomplish and maintain the original intent of Christ’s Commission to His church. However, it is important to note that without implementation, no matter how biblically sound and applicable the plan may be, not much will happen toward the accomplishment of its purpose.

This chapter covered the conceptual framework of the thesis action research to be conducted within GATCM. It included a literature review that discussed what others have shared concerning the church’s leadership conviction, character, service/mission, and vision. Also provided were four theological foundations that undergird the purpose of this research: GATCM’s view of God, following God, church growth, and ministry outreach. Finally, it provided the theoretical foundations that stimulates this research project. This chapter provided the necessary groundwork for this action research project; now, it is time to move on to the next step of the project – the identification of the research methodology.

\textsuperscript{163} Malphurs, \textit{Advanced Strategic Planning}, 30.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 31.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

For this thesis action research project, the researcher has chosen to utilize a qualitative research method. The research will include a survey to gather the general atmosphere GATCM towards its congregational growth and maturity. It will also include a questionnaire to be verbally addressed during interviews of the selected personnel (Figure 2). After the completion of the interviews, using the data collected, there will be two necessary focus groups with the GATCM leadership to conduct the strategic planning process. The research will begin immediately upon approval of the Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the research project and will continue until the research project has been completed. This chapter details the intervention design of this action research process (Figure 1), as well as its implementation. The result will be the development and implementation of a strategic plan for GATCM that can create a more conducive atmosphere towards the spiritual growth of the congregation.

![GATCM Action Research Methodology](image)

**Figure 1. GATCM Action Research Methodology**
**Intervention Design**

Because this is a qualitative action research project, the facilitator will focus on acquiring data from the experience and perspectives of each selected participant. It is not a search for numbers but a search for experiential observation and clarity. The participants will be selected from a mixed variety of age, gender, and economic status within the circles of the GATCM membership – to include its leadership. However, only those who are at least 18 years old and older will be considered. A general survey (Appendix A) will be provided to the entire church membership via all mediums (i.e., social media, email, hardcopy, etc.). This survey will be anonymously completed online. From the survey responses, the senior pastor will randomly select members to participate within the research interviews. Interview research has provided no set standard for the number of interviewees required. According to Bryan Marshall et al., “Most qualitative methodologists openly recognize the lack of standards for sample size. At the same time, some qualitative methodologists are not troubled by the lack of guidelines, even considering the vague nature of sample size guidelines as a reflection of the qualitative orientation to research.”

Therefore, for this research project, the senior pastor will choose no less than 12 and no more than 15 members of the church to participate in the one-on-one research interviews. Each participant selected for an interview will be notified via telephone and/or face-to-face of the intended interview and its purpose; whereby, an initial commitment of intent will be solicited via text and or email. Afterwards, upon receiving an initial confirmation, a formal informed consent request (Appendix B) will be given to each selected participant for his

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or her signature of agreement to solidify his or her willingness to participate in the research project interview.

Interviews

After the participant signs the consent form validating his or her willingness to participate in the research project, an interview will be scheduled with each consenting participant. The members who choose not to participate will receive no further communications concerning the research project and no adverse actions or treatment will be levied because of such – it is their choice. Each interview will be coordinated for an acceptable day and time between the facilitator and the participant and will be held at a mutually informal location conducive for such an interview. During each interview, the participant will be given a refresher of the purpose of the research and reassured of the confidentiality of the information they are willing to share. He or she will then be asked a series of questions to capture his or her overall experience, perception, and desire (figure 2). Each answer will be recorded in written notes and/or by audio: audio will only be used with the participant stating his or her name and granting consent to be recorded (at the onset of the recording). At the end of each interview, the recorded information will be examined for accuracy by the participant. The interview will conclude with the facilitator solidifying the participant’s willingness to participate in any follow-up interviews, if needed, and an offering of gratitude given to the participant for his or her participation. After concluding each interview, the recorded notes will be secured in a safe place – not to be used for any other purpose than this research project. All collected data and recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
GATCM Action Research Interview Questionnaire

1. How are things going for you?
2. How would you like for them to go?
3. How are things going for you at GATCM?
4. How would you like for them to go?
5. How do you feel about your relationship with Christ?
6. How does your relationship with Christ affect your current situation?
7. How can your relationship with Christ help you to get where you want to be?
8. How has the church helped you grow in your relationship with Christ?
9. How can the church better help you grow in your relationship with Christ?

Figure 2. GATCM Action Research Interview Questionnaire

Data Review

After all interviews have been completed, the data collected from each interview will be catalogued and compared for similarities and differences, looking for common coherent threads throughout the interviews. Within each thread, the key experiences will be grouped with their supporting underlying features and elements. This grouping may include the actions of the experiences, as well as the causes or stimulus of each experience. Once identified, the common threads will be grouped into related themes to provide for a more in-depth analysis of the data provided through the interviews. As the research project moves forward, this information will be provided in a table chart within the final thesis research project. Once the data has been catalogued, compared, and grouped into themes of common threads, it will be charted, prepared, and presented to the GATCM leadership during the strategic planning process.

Strategic Planning

The strategic planning process for this research will take place within the use of focus groups. According to Erminia Colucci, “Qualitative methodology incorporates a variety of
methods, of which participant observation and individual interview are among those predominantly used. Focus group discussion is a qualitative method that possesses elements of both these techniques while maintaining its own peculiarity and uniqueness...\textsuperscript{166} The culmination of the research for this thesis project will take place within two separate focus groups, with both requiring the attendance of the entire leadership of GATCM (unless approved by the senior pastor, those refuse to attend will be released from their current leadership roles). The first group will take place within a 4-hour allotted period. It will be geared toward the collected survey and interview data, and a GATCM ministry analysis in preparation for the second focus group. This focus group will be a dedicated time for the facilitator to brief the data from the survey and interviews and for the leadership of GATCM to reexamine the church’s mission, vision, and core values against that data. The second focus group will take place within an 8-hour allotted timeframe, which, can be conducted in up to four 2-hour increments (within a two-week period), if needed. This focus group will be geared toward the redevelopment of the church’s strategic plan in the light of the information gleaned from the first focus group.

The author is the facilitator of the focus groups and senior pastor of the GATCM - therefore, all required resources will be authorized to complete the research project, including the strategic planning focus groups. The focus group participants will be involved in the creation of a new mission and vision statement, identification of the church’s strengths and weaknesses, development of the GATCM ministry strategy, and a continuous assessment of the church’s activities via the strategic plan.\textsuperscript{167} As with the rest of this research project, these focus groups

\textsuperscript{166} Erminia Colucci, “‘Focus Groups Can Be Fun’: The Use of Activity-Oriented Questions in Focus Group Discussions,” \textit{Qualitative Health Research} 17, no. 10 (December 2007): 1422.

\textsuperscript{167} Patricia Wright, "Strategic planning," \textit{Nursing Management} 51, no. 4 (April 2020): 42.
will be held without closing the doors of the church or shutting down any of its programs and services. Ongoing education and training are important to the research process and building church structure. The following captures the intricate details of each focus group.

**Focus Group 1**

As previously stated, this focus group will be geared toward the identified themes presented from the survey and interview data and a GATCM ministry analysis. It will begin by answering the following seven questions from that perspective:

1. Why are we meeting today? What is the purpose?
2. How does it affect the church?
3. Who is being affected?
4. What is the mission of GATCM?
5. What is the vision of GATCM?
6. What are the core values of GATCM?
7. How does the mission, vision, and core values correlate to Christ’s Great Commission?

After these questions have been answered, the facilitator will brief the leadership on the data provided through the interview process. The themes and common threads for each theme will be displayed. The group will also conduct an analysis of GATCM’s mission and its mission statement. It will answer the following questions: What is the mission of GATCM; Is the church’s mission statement biblically coherent; and has the current operation of the church been meeting its assigned mission? In addition, the group will also conduct an analysis of the GATCM vision and vision statement. Whereby, it will also answer the following questions: What is the vision of GATCM; Is the church’s vision statement biblically coherent; and What is the overarching or general purpose of the organization (education, health improvement, or assistance for the needy)? Furthermore, the group will examine the core values of the church to ensure that the mission, vision, and core values are coherently aligned. In the end, the leadership will
compare the information gleaned from the survey and interviews and the information gathered from the GATCM mission, vision, and core values analyses to identify the shortcomings within the church’s operation in fulfilling its God-given purpose. These identified shortcomings will be the group’s focus as the GATCM leadership moves on to the next focus group.

Focus Group 2

This focus group will be geared toward the redevelopment of the church’s strategic plan in the light of the information gleaned from the first focus group. Just as with the first focus group, this group will begin by answering the following questions from that perspective:

1. What is/are the problem(s)? What is happening?
2. How does it affect the church?
3. Who is being affected?
4. Where are things happening?
5. When are things happening?
6. How are things happening?
7. Why are things happening?
8. What things need to be omitted?
9. What things need to be added?

Each question will set the stage for the development of the good strategic plan to create an atmosphere conducive to the spiritual growth of the congregation of GATCM. As the leadership works through this strategic planning process, the following additional questions will be answered by the group: In which ways does the organization seek to enact its vision (providing educational services, courses, and classes; engaging in health promotion programs; or providing welfare services)? Within the completed plan, the group will clarify the roles of those who will be assigned to each of the church’s courses of action for enacting its vision, by answering the following questions: Are roles clearly delineated; Who works with whom; Who has authority over whom; Who supervises and gives directions; and to whom? In addition, the following questions will be answered concerning the responsibility of those assigned in each course of
action: What types of people are responsible for which activities; and Who performs which types of tasks? For rules and procedures, the question that will be answered is “Is it clear what needs to be done and how it is to be done?” Finally, the plan will address the resources required for the selected courses of action by answering the questions: Are the resources required for tasks adequate and available (e.g., time, materials, skills); If not, can this task be outsourced; or What is the alternative means to accomplish this task? In the end, after a good strategic plan has been developed by the GATCM leadership, it will be implemented immediately upon the conclusion of the focus group. After its implementation, it will be reassessed after 30 days and annually thereafter.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Throughout this thesis action research project, the researcher chose to utilize a qualitative research method that employed the “triangulation” concept. According to Tim Sensing, within this triangulation concept, there are three angles of vision that supports a trustworthy criterion for a qualitative research project: insider’s angle, outsider’s angle, and the researcher’s angle. All angles were captured during the implementation of this project, whereas three different modes of collection were used to attain the sufficient research data. In addition to the project’s literary review, the research included an initial survey that was used to gather the general atmosphere GATCM towards its congregational growth and maturity. It also included a questionnaire that was verbally addressed during the interviews of the selected personnel (Figure 2). After the interviews were completed, using the data collected, two specialized focus groups were held with the GATCM leadership to conduct the strategic planning process.

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The implementation of this thesis action research project commenced upon approval of the research project by Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity IRB and continued until the research was completed (this research project was deemed to consist of quality improvement activities by the IRB; therefore, the researcher received a waiver from the IRB to commence the research – see the attached IRB Approval). The research followed the baseline of the proposed intervention design, as mentioned above. Any changes required are properly addressed and recorded within this implementation section of the research project.

Because this is a qualitative action research project, the facilitator focused on acquiring data from the experience and perspectives of each selected participant. It was entered into as not a search for numbers but a search for experiential observation and clarity. Its participants were selected from a mixed variety of age, gender, and economic status within the circles of the GATCM membership – to include its leadership. However, only those who were at least 18 years old and older at the beginning of the research were considered. The final pool of participants ranged from 18 to 82 years of age.

The author realizes that this thesis research project may be used by its future readers within their own ministry context. Therefore, for the sake of translating the data of this research for use within varying church sizes, percentages were more commonly used than hard numbers. The intent is to support the development process of an effective strategic plan to foster the spiritual growth and maturity of the congregation of any church, through the lives and actions of the church’s leadership. The data and plan achieved within this project was derived within the circles of GATCM, but the same process can be utilized to accomplish the unique goals of any ministry seeking to use its content.
Survey

The research implementation started with a general survey (Appendix A). Though “it seems clear that Web surveys generally get lower response rates than mail surveys,”\textsuperscript{169} the facilitator chose to use the Web survey - due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and the ease of access for the selected participants, the Web survey provided the best avenue to achieve the initial GATCM thesis project research within a timely manner. There were numerous web applications that could have been used to assist in the survey (such as Hub Spot, Typeform, Survey Sparrow, Survicate, Wordstream, etc.); however, the chosen medium for the development and tracking of the GATCM survey was Survey Monkey.\textsuperscript{170} After creation of the survey, it was sent out to approximately 40 GATCM members/affiliates via social media, email, and the church’s website. The list of those chosen for the survey was derived from the GATCM membership roster. Again, only those who were 18 years of age or older were invited to participate.

Approximately 70\% of those invited to participate completed the GATCM survey anonymously online – it was 28 out 40 invitees completed that it. While considering this completion percentage rate, the facilitator used the same thought process shared by Catherine Hoegeman within her work, \textit{Survey Data Collection Methods and Discrepancy in the Sociological Study of Religious Congregations}. Hoegeman stated, “Our results suggest that congregational surveys focused on any dimension of race or ethnicity need a response rate over


\textsuperscript{170} www.surveymonkey.com
60%, otherwise their results are likely to be inaccurate."\textsuperscript{171} Therefore, the 70% completion percentage of the GATCM survey was deemed acceptable by the facilitator and the data was used for this research project.

After the survey was completed, the data was compiled into a suitable form of analysis. Within this analyzation process, the data file underwent some minor post-survey adjustments to account for the nonresponse errors.\textsuperscript{172} The adjustments removed no data from the survey results but rearranged or deleted data that was deemed irrelevant to the purpose of this thesis research project. Collecting and analyzing the survey data was a patient part of this research process that took approximately 45 days to complete. In the end, the survey data captured the collective ideas, experiences, and/or opinions in the GATCM membership population\textsuperscript{173} and was presented in the next chapter of this thesis research project.

Throughout the development, collection, and analyzation of the survey and its data, the general sense of the survey proved to be helpful in providing a good direction for follow-on research through the interview process. While several participants seemed to be content with the way things were going in their lives, as well as with their church, some were more revealing as to what could help them in their pursuit of growth within their relationship with Christ. However, nearly all the survey participants seemed to agree that their relationship with Christ was essential to their current situations and future success. The participants also shared a collective voice that having more opportunities to get involved within the ministry would be a great asset in helping

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{172} Robert M. Groves et al., \textit{Survey Methodology}, 2nd ed (Hoboken, NJ: John A. Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009), 48.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 61.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
them grow more in their relationship with Christ. In the end, the data received using this survey provided the needed fuel to continue to the next phase of this thesis project – the interviews.

Interviews

After the surveys were completed, the senior pastor randomly selected 12 members of the church to participate more in-depth within the research project by submitting his or her willingness to engage in a one-on-one research interview. The participants selected for the interview ranged from 27 to 82 years of age. They were notified via telephone and/or face-to-face of the intended interview and its purpose. An initial commitment of intent was solicited via text and/or email. Each willing participant was provided a consent request (Appendix B) for his or her signature of agreement to solidify his or her willingness to participate in the research project interview. Each selected member provided the requested consent to participate in a research interview.

Due to Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) restrictions, there was a slightly different approach taken for the interviews than the proposed plan established within the intervention design. The concept stayed the same but because of the COVID-19 social distancing requirements, most of the interviews were conducted telephonically instead of a physically meeting. Therefore, those participants who did not meet for a physical interview and/or were not able to physically sign and return the consent form, verbally stated their consent at the beginning of each interview and was annotated as such—each interview was recorded and captured the participant’s verbal consent.

Whether physically or telephonically, each interview was coordinated for an acceptable day and time between the facilitator and the participant and was held at a mutually informal
location or median conducive for such an interview. Each interview was slotted for one hour but the average median for the interviews was around 20-30 minutes.

The facilitator/interviewer entered each interview as an empathic listener, and a subjectively embedded and affected story builder. As Kelly R. Rossetto stated, “Wherever we find ourselves, we are ethically responsible to recognize the change that can occur through our inquiries in order to best serve our participants and produce valid, representative interpretations of our data.”174 As a sole data source for qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were used within this research project and were centered around a predetermined set of open-ended questions (Figure 2).175

During each interview, the participant was given a refresher of the purpose of the research and reassured of the confidentiality of the information they were willing to share. Each interview was recorded (audio only) and began with the participant stating his or her name and granting consent to be recorded at the onset of the recording. He or she was then asked a series of questions to capture his or her overall experience, perception, and desire (Figure 2). At the end of each interview, the recorded information was examined for accuracy by the participant and the facilitator. Each interview was concluded with the facilitator solidifying the participant’s willingness to participate in any follow-up interviews, if needed, and an offering of gratitude given to the participant for his or her participation. After concluding each interview, the recorded notes were secured in a safe place – to be used for this research project only. All collected data and recordings were stored on a password-locked computer.


As with the utilization of the GATCM Survey, the interviews provided an added confirmation to the need to revisit and redevelop a good strategic plan for GATCM that would become instrumental in creating a good atmosphere for the spiritual growth of its congregation. It was revealed that though many would think that the leadership of GATCM was doing a fairly good job overall, the church could do better in providing for the spiritual growth of its congregants. Wherefore, the interview process provided four key elemental thoughts of focus for the data review that would be presented within the first designated focus group of this action research project. The first thought was to make the GATCM Bible Study more interactive. The second thought provided was to create additional specified ministry groups to reach those who may not be helped by the church’s current ministry groups. The third thought was to enhance the church’s published media through more use of the available social networks and streaming channels. The fourth and final elemental thought gleaned from the interview data was to record and publish shared testimonies that could provide encouragement for others who may be going through the same experience. These four thoughts were discussed in more detail within the next chapter of this project.

Data Review

Data collection took place from the beginning to the end of the interview process. According to Barbara DiCicco-Bloom and Benjamin F Crabtree, “Qualitative data analysis ideally occurs concurrently with data collection so that investigators can generate an emerging understanding about research questions….” Therefore, as the data was collected from the survey and interviews, as stated above, a concurrent qualitative data analysis was conducted to prepare for the next phase of the research project.

176 DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, "The Qualitative Research Interview," 317.
After all interviews were completed, the data collected from each interview (as with the survey) was catalogued and compared for similarities and differences, looking for common coherent threads throughout the interviews. Within each thread, the key experiences were grouped with their supporting underlying features and elements. This grouping included an analysis of the collective actions of each participant within his or her shared experiences, as well as the causes or stimulus of each experience. Once identified, the common threads were grouped into related themes to provide for a more in-depth analysis of the data provided through the interviews. The interview data, in concert with the survey data, was presented to the GATCM leadership with the first specialized focus group of this thesis action research project. This data was discussed in detail in the next chapter of this thesis project.

Strategic Planning

Once the data was catalogued, compared, and grouped into themes of common threads, it was charted, prepared, and presented to the GATCM leadership during the strategic planning process. The data was presented with the following Patricia Wright’s statement in mind, “Development of a strategic plan enables all [members] to refer to the same framework when engaging in decision-making and envisioning the organization’s future and helps link [members’] daily work to overall [ministry] goals.” The GATCM strategic planning process was embarked upon with the goal of establishing a good strategic plan for the spiritual growth of the church’s congregation that will span its future numerical growth and arising needs. Therefore, the desired auxiliaries and ministries that are not yet active, due to the current size of the church, were included within the completed strategic plan for GATCM.

177 Wright, "Strategic planning," 41.
The strategic planning process for this research took place within two separate focus groups - both attended by the leadership of GATCM. These focus groups were arranged with Cory R. Woodyatt et al.’s statement at the forefront. According to Woodyatt et al., “Advances in technology and the popularity of the Internet have enabled researchers to adapt in-person focus group methods for use in an online environment. Online FGDs may be delivered through a range of online platforms, including asynchronous (message/forum-based) and synchronous (real-time/“chat room”) groups.” Wherefore, due to scheduling and the COVID-19 protocols, both groups were held via the Zoom video conference Web application for real-time discussions and the Box document sharing application for message-based discussions (though used most for document sharing).

The author served as the facilitator of the focus groups and is senior pastor of the GATCM - therefore, all required resources were authorized to complete the research project, including the strategic planning focus groups. As with the rest of this research project, these focus groups were held without closing the doors of the church or shutting down any of its programs and services. Ongoing education and training were important to the research process and building church structure. The following captures the intricate details of each focus group.

**Focus Group 1**

The first focus group took place within an approximately 2 ½ hour period. It was geared toward the collected survey and interview data and a GATCM ministry analysis in preparation for the second focus group. It was a dedicated time for the facilitator to brief the data from the survey and interviews, and for the leadership of GATCM to reexamine the church’s mission.

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178 Cory R. Woodyatt et al., “In-Person Versus Online Focus Group Discussions: A Comparative Analysis of Data Quality,” *Qualitative Health Research* 26, no. 6 (May 2016): 741.
vision, and core values against that data. As previously stated, this focus group was geared toward the identified themes presented from the survey and interview data, and a GATCM ministry analysis. The goal of this focus group was accomplished as the group answered the following questions from that perspective:

1. Why are we meeting today? What is the purpose?
2. How does it affect the church?
3. Who is being affected?
4. What is the mission of GATCM?
5. What is the vision of GATCM?
6. What are the core values of GATCM?
7. How does the mission, vision, and core values correlate to Christ’s Great Commission?

In his book *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission*, Rick Warren stated, “What is needed today are churches that are driven by purpose instead of by other forces…There are two essential elements of this paradigm. First, it requires a new perspective…Second, this paradigm requires a process.” In addition, Warren stated that “strong churches are not built on programs, personalities, or gimmicks. They are built on the eternal purposes of God.” That is the goal of thesis research project. The vision of GATCM is set to be mission focused. In contrast to what many people have come to believe, these two concepts – vision and mission - are not one in the same, as many churches (or organizations as a whole) have viewed them. According to George Barna, the church’s mission statement is a definition of its ministry objectives, while the vision statement provides a clarification of the specific direction and activities the church will undertake in pursuit of making a true ministry

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180 Ibid.
impact within the fulfillment of its assigned mission.\textsuperscript{181} To further clarify, Barna shared the concept that a mission statement is a broad, general statement that is essentially a philosophic statement that undergirds the very heartbeat of the ministry. It relays to those involved, the core about who the ministry wishes to reach and what it hopes to accomplish.\textsuperscript{182} In contrast, a vision is a more specific, detailed, customized, distinctive, and unique statement that is uniquely developed for each ministry, church, or organization. The development of a vision statement allows the leader to say no to opportunities, provide direction, empower people for service, and to facilitate the progress of the ministry toward the accomplishment of its mission.\textsuperscript{183} Each successful organization or ministry has at its core, both – a mission and a vision statement. They both work together to give understanding to the purpose and direction of the organization or ministry. For the congregation of GATCM, according to Barna, “knowing the content of the mission statement generally enables [them] to feel confident that the church is Christian and is ministry minded. The vision statement puts feet on the mission, detailing how the church will influence the world in which it will minister.”\textsuperscript{184} Therefore, leaders must possess the ability to discover and successfully communicate God’s mission and visionary plan to those within the ministry.


\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
GATCM Current Mission Statement

We are an “Educational Citadel” in this community, bringing people into the presence of the Word of God that they may receive wisdom and understanding concerning the things of God. Thereby, equipping this community with the Word, that they may live delivered, developed and destined lives through Jesus Christ.

Figure 3. GATCM’s Current Mission Statement

With the above comments in mind, the group conducted an analysis of GATCM’s mission and its mission statement, and answered the following questions: What is the mission of GATCM; is the church’s mission statement biblically coherent; and has the current operation of the church been meeting its assigned mission? During this focus group, it was determined that the current mission statement of GATCM (Figure 3) needed to be adjusted to cover the true nature of the call and purpose of the church. According to Ephesians 4:11-12, the leadership of the church was determined to have been called to mature the saints (those assigned within the church’s circles), for the work of the ministry, and to edify those within the church’s congregation. In addition, the church as a whole (the universal church) was determined to be responsible in fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission to go into the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, it was concluded that the mission of GATCM, as determined by the group is to welcome, teach, train, and deploy those assigned, within the service of Christ’s Great Commission.
GATCM’s Current Vision Statement

Go and Teach Christian Ministries is an “Educational Citadel” in which we teach, train and certify those within its ministry—through active Bible study, Bible school, and hands-on practical application— to become able ministers of the Gospel of Christ through the words they preach and the lives they live.

Figure 4. GATCM’s Current Vision Statement

In addition to the mission analysis of GATCM, the group also conducted an analysis of the GATCM vision and vision statement. Whereby, it also answered the following set of questions: What is the vision of GATCM; is the church’s vision statement biblically coherent; and what is the overarching or general purpose of the organization (education, health improvement, or assistance for the needy)? During this focus group, it was also determined that the current vision statement of GATCM (Figure 4) needed to be adjusted to cover the true nature of the call and purpose of the church, as captured within its new mission statement. The group determined that though natural health and assistance to the needy are important aspects of Christ’s commission to His followers, the overarching purpose for GATCM, as the mission relates, it to teach, train, and equip the congregation of the church to lovingly fulfill Christ’s Great Commission by understanding how to become more avid followers of Him. It was determined that the leadership of the church will accomplish its mission and the Great Commission through the following steps within the GATCM vision. The leadership will first welcome its newly assigned personnel through an established New Members orientation class/program. Secondly, the leadership will provide in-depth biblical and practical teaching
through sermons, interactive Bible Study, specified ministry study groups, & ministry schools within the church. Thirdly, the leadership will provide training through ministry provided opportunities and mentorship with the axillaries and specified ministry groups of GATCM. Finally, the leadership of the church will deploy the members to serve those within the surrounding community through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to the mission and vison discussions, the group also examined the core values of the church to ensure that the mission, vison, and core values are coherently aligned. It was determined that there were seven primary collective core values of GATCM. The first and foremost shared value is the belief that Jesus is the center of a Christian’s faith – it’s all about Him. It is his love that lights the life of every Christian and inspires him or her to let that light shine. The second shared value is belief in the Trinity – the Father, Son & Holy Spirit are one and are to be revered as such. The next shared value is the belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God – written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak and write was said and done. It is also collectively believed that the New Covenant, as recorded in the New Testament of the Bible is the infallible guide to a Christian’s conduct and practice. The fourth shared value is belief in the gospel message of Christ – including the creation of humankind, their fall, and redemption. The next shared value is the belief in the new birth and eternal life that is made available to all through the reception of the sacrificial redemption of Jesus Christ. The sixth collective value shared within GATCM is the belief and agreement that the collective core mission of the universal church is to reach souls for Christ. The seventh and final shared core value of GATCM, for the purpose of this thesis action research, is the belief and agreement that GATCM has been ordained by Christ as a place purposed to teach, train, and equip the saints for
service in Christ’s call. It was concluded that the identified collective core values undergird the mission and vision statements of GATCM and are, therefore, properly aligned.

The leadership compared the information gleaned from the survey and interviews, and the information gathered from the GATCM mission, vision, and core values analyses to identify the shortcomings within the church’s operation in fulfilling its God-given purpose: such as, the need to provide more opportunities for members to get involved, the need to make Bible Study more interactive, the need for more specific specified ministry groups, etc. These identified shortcomings were the group’s focus as the GATCM leadership moved on to the second focus group. They are discussed in more detail within the next chapter of this thesis research project.

In reflection, this focus group brought about a more in-depth awareness to the GATCM leaders’ perception of their roles in the mission and vision of GATCM toward the fulfillment of its God-given assignment in His kingdom. It was an eye-opening experience that brought about greater understanding of their requirements, as highlighted in Ephesians 4:11-16, to help those within the GATCM congregation to grow into a deeper, more mature relationship with Christ, being nurtured to follow Him more closely. It provided a great foundation and segway into the next focus group. It also created and increased attitude of excitement and anticipation toward the completion of this thesis research project.

**Focus Group 2**

The second focus group took place within an approximately 3 ½ hour timeframe. This focus group was geared toward the redevelopment of the church’s strategic plan in the light of the information gleaned from the first focus group. Just as with the first focus group, the goal of this second focus group was accomplished as the group answered the following questions:

1. What is/are the problem(s)? What is happening?
2. How does it affect the church?
3. Who is being affected?
4. Where are things happening?
5. When are things happening?
6. How are things happening?
7. Why are things happening?
8. What things need to be omitted?
9. What things need to be added?

Each question set the stage for the development of a good strategic plan in creating an atmosphere conducive to the spiritual growth of the congregation of GATCM. As the leadership worked through the strategic planning process, the following question was also answered by the group: In which ways does the organization seek to enact its vision (providing educational services, courses, and classes; engaging in health promotion programs; or providing welfare services)? The answer to this question, in conjunction with the nine listed above, pointed the focus group more toward developing a plan that leaned more toward educating and training the congregation through the GATCM, auxiliaries, ministry groups, and ministry schools.

Within the completed plan, the group clarified the roles of those who will be assigned to each of the church’s selected courses of action for enacting its vision. This was done as the group answered the following questions: Are roles clearly delineated; who works with whom; who has authority over whom; who supervises and gives directions; and to whom? These questions pointed more to, and were defined more toward, the leadership of GATCM. It was the roles of the auxiliary leaders, ministry group leaders, and school administrators were highlighted during the group’s discussions.

In addition, the following questions were answered concerning the responsibility of those assigned in each course of action: What types of people are responsible for which activities; and who performs which types of tasks? For rules and procedures, the question that was answered is “Is it clear what needs to be done and how it is to be done?” These questions posed a caveat to
the questions concerning roles. However, discussion concerning these questions pertained more
toward the activities themselves, not to the leadership roles of the activities.

Finally, the plan addressed the resources required for the selected courses of action by
answering the questions: Are the resources required for tasks adequate and available (e.g., time,
materials, skills); If not, can this task be outsourced; or what is the alternative means to
accomplish this task?

Through all the questions and discussions, a good strategic plan was developed for
GATCM by its church leadership. After which, the implementation of the newly developed plan
began immediately upon the conclusion of this second focus group. However, when strategic
planning is used to explore an organization’s culture, ministry, and growth, the result is a plan
that is implemented over the course of several years.\textsuperscript{185} Therefore, after its initial
implementation, it was agreed upon to be reassessed after 30 days and annually thereafter.

In the end, according to Katherine E. Ryan et al., the success of a good focus group can
be determined through answering the following questions: 1) Did the focus group participants
establish common ground in conversation or primarily act as individuals? 2) What were the
power dynamics between the moderator and participants, both as a group and as individuals?
What were the relations among the participants—collective or dominant? 3) What were the
participants using the focus group for?\textsuperscript{186} Through the answers to this question, both focus
groups were deemed to be very successful.

\textsuperscript{185} Wright, "Strategic planning," 42.

Due to the stage that was set in the first focus group, this second focus group was full of excitement and anticipation. Every leader participated and because of it, they were able to meet the goals of the group within a timely manner. It was exciting to see the GATCM leadership team come together with a renewed sense of purpose and direction. It appears that God has truly used this research project to address a seemingly negative issue to bring about a much-needed change. Not only does there seem to be a change in the leadership perspectives toward their purpose but also a rejuvenation within their attitudes of service from what had seemed to become one of complacency.

Conclusion

This thesis research project implemented a qualitative research method that employed the “triangulation” concept of utilizing three different medians of collecting data. The research included an initial survey that was used to gather the general atmosphere of GATCM toward its congregational growth and maturity. It also included a questionnaire (Figure 2) that was verbally addressed during the interviews of the selected personnel. After the interviews were completed, using the data collected, two specialized focus groups were held with the GATCM leadership to conduct the strategic planning process. As a result, a good strategic plan was developed for GATCM to create an atmosphere conducive for the spiritual growth of its congregation.

To conclude, the development and implementation of this thesis project was embarked upon with Jim Collins’ statement, concerning his flywheel analogy, in mind. He stated that “the flywheel image captures the overall feel of what it was like inside the companies as they went from good to great. No matter how dramatic the end result, the good-to-great transformations never happened in one fell swoop…Good to great comes about by a cumulative process—step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn of the flywheel—that adds up to
sustained and spectacular results.”187 This ministry was developed and still operates under this understanding: everything is a process and God’s process cannot be cut short. Within the implementation process of this project, the researcher facilitated the revision of GATCM’s current mission and vision statements and, using the collected data, accomplished the goal of facilitating the development of a strategic plan for GATCM that will create an atmosphere conducive for the growth of its congregation for years to come.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

For this thesis action research project, three different modes of collection were used to attain sufficient research data. The research included an initial survey (Appendix A) that was used to gather the general atmosphere of GATCM toward its congregational growth and maturity and a questionnaire (Figure 2) that was verbally addressed during the interviews of the selected personnel. After the interviews were completed, using the data collected, two specialized focus groups were held with the GATCM leadership to conduct the strategic planning process. The following are the detailed results of the three research activities used within this thesis project.

Survey

The implementation of this thesis research project started with a general survey (Appendix A) that was sent out to approximately 40 GATCM members/affiliates via social media, email, and the church’s website. Approximately 70% of those invited to participate (28 out of 40) completed the survey anonymously online. The percentage of the GATCM survey completion was deemed acceptable by the facilitator and the data was captured and utilized for this research project.

After the survey was completed, the data was compiled (edited and coded) into a suitable form of analysis. Collecting and analyzing the survey data was a patient part of this research process that took approximately 45 days to complete. In the end, the survey data provided the collective ideas, experiences, and/or opinions of the GATCM membership population to be briefed within the Focus Group 1. The following are the results of the question-by-question data analysis of the survey as well as the overall collective thought for improvement the survey provided.
This first question of the survey was purposed to be more of an opening icebreaker. However, the answers provided a good overall picture of the general sense of the GATCM congregation’s attitude concerning their relation to the church. For approximately 89% of the congregation, the general sense is that things are going well for them at GATCM. Close to 61% of the congregation feels that things are going very well for them at the church. There were a little less than 11% of the congregation that shared the feeling of being in the middle, or neutral, about how things are going for them at the church – things are going neither good nor bad for any of the respondents.

Though there were no responses given within the “bad” or “really bad” categories of the survey, the neutral response still proved a concern for the research. According to Revelation 3:16, Jesus told the Laodicean church, “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” Neutral responses relay a lukewarm attitude and the
possibility of these members becoming or having become complacent, which works against their growth. The goal of this research is to address, if possible, what may help re-flame the 11%.

**Figure 6. GATCM Survey Question 2**

This second question of the survey was geared toward obtaining the general sense of the congregation’s perception of their relationship with Christ. Most of the responses, approximately 96%, provide the perception that most of the congregation feels good about their relationship with Christ – with over 64% of them feeling really good about it. There were no neutral or middle responses. However, there was one response given that relayed a congregant’s perception of feeling bad about their relationship with Christ. Though it may only be one response, this is still concerning.

A church leader’s goal is to reach all those assigned within his or her leadership area of influence and to help them grow more in Christ. As followers of Christ, when there is one on the outside, the leader reflects on what can be done to reach such a one. According to Luke 15:4, Jesus said, “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave
the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" This research is to help set an atmosphere that will be able to help every GATCM congregant feel good about his or her relationship with Christ. No member is to be ignored or left behind.

![Figure 7. GATCM Survey Question 3](image)

Question three is geared toward discerning the spiritual maturity of the GATCM congregation. The responses show that approximately 89% of the congregation believes that their relationship with Christ is impactful to their current situations – with approximately 71% of them believing that it is extremely impactful. Approximately 7% of the survey responses saw their relationship with Christ as neither impactful nor unimpactful to their current situations – they were neutral. One response showed a perception of his or her relationship with Christ as having very little impact on his or her current situation. Though most responses were positive, it is the latter two that are concerning.

According to Psalm 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” It is the goal of the GATCM leadership to develop a strategic plan that will create such an
atmosphere that every congregant will come to not only know that God is a very present help in trouble but will also come to trust him to lead them in every aspect of his or her life. This comes with spiritual growth and maturity in the knowledge of Christ.

**Figure 8. GATCM Survey Question 4**

Like question three, question four is also geared toward discerning the spiritual maturity of the GATCM congregation. Approximately 89% of the survey responses shared the belief that their relationship with Christ is very helpful in the achievement of their life goals. One of the survey participants gave a “somewhat” response. Another participant provided a “neutral” response. There was also a “very little” response given. Though it is great to see that 89% of the survey participants view their relationship with Christ as very helpful in achieving their life goals, it is the latter three responses that this thesis is preparing to address.

It is the leadership’s goal to help every GATCM congregant come to know that not only is God a present help in trouble but to also come to know that He is faithful to His promises about their future and is able to lead them into those promises. According to Ephesians 3:20,
Christ “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” The foundation of that power is faith. Therefore, the intent of the leadership, through this project, is to set an atmosphere within the church that is conducive for the growth in such a faith.

Figure 9. GATCM Survey Question 5

Question five was geared toward gauging how effective GATCM has been in the development of its congregation. Approximately 82% of the survey participants deemed the church to be very helpful. About 14% of the participants believed the church to be somewhat helpful. One survey response provided a participant’s neutral feeling toward being helped in growing in his or her relationship with Christ. The last two categories – somewhat helpful and neutral - is what is to be addressed within this project.

The leadership of GATCM is focused on the development of every GATCM member and associated affiliates. Though most of the participants seem to view the church as helpful in their
development in Christ, it is the other approximately 18% that the leadership will endeavor to reach and help develop through the strategic plan developed within this research project.

**Figure 10. GATCM Survey Question 6**

For the researcher, question six is where the cornerstone of this research is found. This question provides the initial fuel to focus the research on the direction of the current GATCM analysis. It shows where the weaknesses of the church may be present in the pursuit of providing an atmosphere for the spiritual growth of the congregation. Nearly 11% of the participants believed that the church could better help them grow in a relationship with Christ by adding new programs and events. Over 21% believed that improving the current programs and events would help. However, most of the survey participants, approximately 71%, believed the church needs to provide more opportunities for them to get involved. This providing of more opportunities to get involved is viewed by the researcher as an ancillary opportunity for growth through service.
Question seven was purposed to gauge the congregation’s attitude toward GATCM. It was a question designed to determine the willingness of the congregation to continue at GATCM and their willingness to invite others to the church. Within the researcher’s thought, most congregants will not invite someone to be a part of something they, themselves, are not willing to be a part of. Approximately 93% of the survey participants responded with a positive response that revealed they would recommend GATCM as a place to grow in Christ. The other approximate 7% provided a neutral response.

**GATCM Interview DATA’s Key Thoughts for Improvement**

A collective voice was shared that having more opportunities to get involved within the ministry would be a great asset in helping them grow more in their relationship with Christ.
Throughout the development, collection, and analyzation of the survey and its data, the general sense of the survey proved to be helpful in providing a good direction for follow-up research through the interview process. Nearly all the survey participants seemed to agree that their relationship with Christ was essential to their current situations and future success. They also shared a collective voice that having more opportunities to get involved within the ministry would be a great asset in helping them grow more in their relationship with Christ.

In the end, the data received using this survey provided the needed fuel to continue to the next phase of this thesis project. Though all the data from the survey was addressed indirectly, the main thought gleaned from the survey for the purpose of this research project will be the collective voice of the need to provide more opportunities for the congregation of GATCM to get involved, as captured within Figure 12 above.

**Interviews**

After the surveys were completed, 12 members of the church participated in a one-on-one research interview. The participants selected for the interview ranged from 27 to 82 years of age. Each interview was coordinated for an acceptable day and time between the facilitator and the participant and was held at a mutually informal location or median conducive for such an interview. Half of them took place telephonically and the other half were conducted face-to-face. Each interview was slotted for one hour but the average median for the actual interviews was around 20-30 minutes.

After the interviews were completed, as with the survey, the data was compiled (edited and coded) into a suitable form of analysis. The data gathered within the interview process provided an added confirmation of the need to revisit and redevelop a good strategic plan for GATCM that would become instrumental in creating a good atmosphere for the spiritual growth
of its congregation. This data, as captured within the interviews, was presented within the following pages of this thesis research project.

Figure 13. GATCM Interview Question 1

The first question of the interview was an icebreaking question. It gathered the general sense of how things were going for the members of GATCM. This question was not focused on the spiritual side of things alone, it also focused on the natural and physical aspects of the interviewees’ lives as well. For most of the interviewees, approximately 67%, things were going good for them. For approximately 17% of the interviewees, things were going great. For the remaining interviewees, approximately 17%, things were going ok.
Question two was a caveat to question one. Like the first question, this question was also an icebreaking question that was purposed to gather the general sense of how things were viewed for the members of GATCM. For about 58% of the interviewees, things could go better than they currently are going – close to 17% of them would like for things to go much better. Around 42% of the interviewees would be content with things going about the same are they currently are.

Most of those interviewed expressed contentment with how things are going for them. They believed that everything happened for a reason, and they are where they are supposed to be. However, there was a consensus from the participants that things could go better, if they had their way. It was expressed that there is always room for improvement – within and without. As expressed by the interviewees, nobody is perfect and there is no completely perfect situation.
Figure 15. GATCM Interview Question 3

This third question of the interview was also purposed to be an icebreaker. However, as with the survey, the answers provided a good overall picture of the general sense of the GATCM interviewees’ attitude concerning their relation to the church. For approximately 83% of the interviewees, the general sense is that things are going well for them at GATCM. According to 50% of the interviewees, things are going great for them at the church. There were approximately 8% of the interviewees that shared the feeling of being in the middle, or neutral, about how things are going for them at the church – things are going neither good nor bad. In addition, about 8% admitted that things were not going well. It was this last percentage that generated a concern.
As with question two, in relation to question one, question four was a caveat to question three. Like the third question, this question was also an icebreaking question that was purposed to gather the general sense of how things were viewed for the members of GATCM in reference to their participation desires at the church. For about 50% of the interviewees, things could go better than they are currently going – close to 8% of them would like for things to go much better. The remaining 50% of the interviewees would be content with things staying the same as they currently are.

Half of those interviewed expressed contentment with how things are going for them but there was a consensus that things could always go better. Again, according to the interviewees,
there is always room for improvement – within and without, and as expressed by them, no church is perfect.

Figure 17. GATCM Interview Question 5

This fifth question of the survey was geared toward obtaining the general sense of the Interviewees’ perception of their relationship with Christ. Most of the interviewees, approximately 91%, expressed the perception that most of them felt good about their relationship with Christ – with close to 42% of them feeling very satisfied about it. About 8% of the interviewees expressed a neutral or middle response. There were no expressions given that relayed an interviewee’s perception of feeling bad about their relationship with Christ.
Question six is geared toward gauging the collective spiritual maturity of those interviewed. The responses show that all of those interviewed believe that their relationship with Christ is impactful to their current situations – with approximately 42% of them believing that their relationship with Christ impacts their current situation a great deal. None of the interviewees saw their relationship with Christ as neutral in impacting their current situations. Neither did any interviewee give the perception of his or her relationship with Christ as having very little or no impact on his or her current situation. The responses to this question showed a somewhat favorable spiritual growth and maturity in the knowledge of Christ within those interviewed.
Figure 18. GATCM Interview Question 7

Question seven is also geared toward discerning the spiritual maturity of the GATCM congregation. Again, all the responses to this question shared the belief that their relationship with Christ is helpful in getting them where they want to be. Approximately 58% of the interviewees believe that Christ will help by guiding them through their trials. Close to 42% of those interviewed believe that Christ will help by their trust in His ability to remove their fear, doubt, and unbelief in keeping them encouraged to get where they need/desire to be. Around 33% of those interviewed believe that Christ will help by leading them to His promises concerning their future. Finally, approximately 17% of the interviewees believe that Christ will help by their belief that His love for them will keep them comforted in times of loneliness and
discouragement and believing that by rehearsing what He has already done for them will keep them trusting that He will continue to help them.

Figure 20. GATCM Interview Question 8

For the researcher, question eight is where the rubber begins to meet the road. This question provides fuel to focus the research on the direction of the current GATCM analysis. It shows where the strengths of the church may be present in the pursuit of the providing an atmosphere for the spiritual growth of the congregation. Nearly 33% of the interviewees confessed that the church has helped them grow by preaching of the Word. Approximately 25% of the interviewees confessed that the church has helped them grow in a relationship with Christ through the pastor’s example and through the church’s fellowship and outreach ministries. Close
to 17% of those interviewed believed the church has helped them through the established Bible Study programs.

Figure 21. GATCM Interview Question 9

As with question six of the survey, for the researcher, question nine of the interview is where the project’s keystone is found. This question also provides fuel to focus the research on the direction of the current GATCM analysis. It shows where the weaknesses of the church may be present in the pursuit of providing an atmosphere for the spiritual growth of the congregation. 50% of those interviewed believes that church can better help their spiritual growth by making the midweek Bible Study more interactive. Around 8% of the interviewees believe that the church can better help by creating additional specialized ministry groups. The remaining approximately 42% confessed that the church was already providing all they needed for growth
but admitted they could do better in utilizing the resources for growth the church has already
made available. In addition, though it was not captured in the above figure (Figure 21), it was
also noted within the interview conversations that church could also do better by making better
use of social media/streaming platforms and by providing recorded testimony services for
encouragement throughout its congregation.

**GATCM Interview DATA's Thoughts for Improvement**

1. Make the GATCM Bible Study more interactive.
2. Create additional specified ministry groups to reach those who may not be
   helped by the church’s current ministry groups.
3. Enhance the church’s published media through more use of the available social
   networks and streaming channels.
4. Record and publish shared testimonies that could provide encouragement for
   others who may be going through the same experience.

*Figure 22. GATCM Interview DATA's Thoughts for Improvement*

As with the GATCM Survey, the interviews provided an added confirmation of the need
to revisit and redevelop a good strategic plan that would be instrumental in creating a good
atmosphere for the spiritual growth of the GATCM congregation. Though it was revealed that
many would think the leadership of GATCM was doing a fairly good job overall, it was also
revealed that the church could do better in providing for the spiritual growth of its congregants.
Wherefore, the interview process provided four key elemental thoughts of focus for the data
review (Figure 22) that were presented within the first designated focus group of this action
research project. The first thought was to make the GATCM Bible Study more interactive. The
second thought was to create specified ministry groups to reach those who may not be helped by
the church’s current ministry groups. The third thought was to enhance the church’s published
media through more use of the available social networks and streaming channels. The fourth and final elemental thought gleaned from the interview data was to record and publish shared testimonies that could provide encouragement for others who may be going through the same experience.

Focus Group 1

The first focus group took place within an approximately 2 ½ hour period. It was geared toward the collected survey and interview data and a GATCM ministry analysis in preparation for the second focus group. It was a dedicated time for the facilitator to brief the data from the survey and interviews, and for the leadership of GATCM to reexamine the church’s mission, vision, and core values against that data. In the end, the results of this focus group were the development of a new mission and vision statement for GATCM.

Mission

The focus group members conducted an analysis of GATCM’s mission and its mission statement, and answered the following questions: What is the mission of GATCM; is the church’s mission statement biblically coherent; and has the current operation of the church been meeting its assigned mission? According to Ephesians 4:11-12, the leadership of the church was determined to have been called to mature the saints (those assigned within the church’s circles), for the work of the ministry, and to edify those within the church’s congregation. In addition, the church as a whole (the universal church) was determined to be responsible in fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission to go into the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). This assignment has not been properly met under the previous understanding of the GATCM mission and its mission statement. There has been more of a focus on bringing people in to increase the numbers of the church, under the umbrella of the Great Commission, rather than growing those already
within to properly go out. To use an adage, the leadership had been “putting the cart before the horse.” The leadership had been sending the membership out before properly preparing them to go. Therefore, during this focus group, it was determined that the current mission statement of GATCM (Figure 3) did not properly address the true mission of the church and needed to be adjusted to cover the true nature of its call and purpose. Therefore, the group concluded that the mission of GATCM is to welcome, teach, train, and deploy those assigned, within the service of Christ’s Great Commission. The new mission statement for GATCM is shared in Figure 23 below.

![GATCM’s New Mission Statement](image)

**GATCM’s New Mission Statement**

The mission of GATCM is to welcome, teach, train and deploy those assigned, within the service of Christ’s Great Commission.

**Figure 23. GATCM’s New Mission Statement**

Vision

In addition to the mission analysis of GATCM, the group members also conducted an analysis of the GATCM vision and vision statement. Whereby, they also answered the following set of questions: What is the vision of GATCM; is the church’s vision statement biblically coherent; and what is the overarching or general purpose of the organization (education, health improvement, or assistance for the needy)? During this focus group, it was determined that the current vision statement of GATCM (Figure 4) needed to also be adjusted to cover the true nature of the call and the newly refined mission of the church, as captured within its new mission statement. The group determined that though natural health and assistance to the needy are important aspects of Christ’s Commission to His followers, the overarching purpose for
GATCM, as the mission relates, is to teach, train, and equip the congregation of the church to lovingly fulfill Christ’s Great Commission by understanding how to become more avid followers of Him. It was determined that the leadership of the church will accomplish its mission and the Great Commission through the following steps within the GATCM vision. The leadership will first welcome its new members through an established New Members orientation class/program. Secondly, the leadership will provide in-depth biblical and practical teaching through sermons, interactive Bible Study, specified ministry study groups, and ministry schools within the church. Thirdly, the leadership will provide training through ministry provided opportunities and mentorship with the auxiliaries and specified ministry groups of GATCM. Finally, the leadership of the church will deploy the members to serve those within the surrounding community through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The new vision statement for GATCM captures these steps as shown in Figure 24 below.

**GATCM’s New Vision Statement**

GATCM will accomplish its mission and the Great Commission by:

- welcoming its newly assigned personnel through an established New Members orientation class/program.
- providing in-depth biblical and practical teaching through sermons, interactive Bible Study, specified ministry study groups, & ministry schools within the church.
- providing training through ministry provided opportunities and mentorship within the auxiliaries and specified ministry groups of GATCM.
- deploying its members to serve those within the surrounding community through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*Figure 24. GATCM’s New Vision Statement*
Core Values

In addition, the group examined the core values of the church to ensure that the mission, vision, and core values are coherently aligned. It was determined that there were seven primary collective core values of GATCM. However, though all seven were equally important, it was four of the values that were determined to truly undergird this research project. The first and foremost value is the belief that Jesus is the center of a Christian’s faith – it is all about Him. It is his love that lights the life of every Christian and inspires him or her to let that light shine. Therefore, it is imperative for every Christian to grow in the knowledge of who He is, what He has done, and what He will do. Within the passage of Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said, “come unto me” and “learn of me.” This is the goal of this project – to set an atmosphere conducive for the congregation of GATCM to come to Him and learn of Him. The next value is the belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God – written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak and write what was said and done. It is through this inspired Word of God that the members of GATCM will learn of Him. The third value deemed vital to this research project is the belief and agreement that the collective core mission of the universal church is to reach souls for Christ according to His Great Commission found within Matthew 28:19-20. The final shared core value for the purpose of this thesis action research, is the belief and agreement that GATCM has been ordained by Christ as a place purposed to teach, train, and equip the saints for service in Christ’s call within His Great Commission. It was concluded that the identified collective core values undergird the mission and vision statements of GATCM and all three are, therefore, properly aligned.

In the end, this focus group brought about a more in-depth awareness to the GATCM leaders’ perception of their roles in the mission and vision of GATCM toward the fulfillment of
its God-given assignment in His kingdom. It was an eye-opening experience that brought about greater understanding of their requirements, as highlighted in Ephesians 4:11-16, to help those within the GATCM congregation to grow into a deeper, more mature relationship with Christ, being nurtured to follow Him more closely. It provided a great foundation and segway into the next focus group. It also created and increased an attitude of excitement and anticipation toward the completion of this thesis research project.

**Focus Group 2**

The second focus group took place within an approximately 3 ½ hour timeframe. This focus group was geared toward the redevelopment of the church’s strategic plan in the light of the information gleaned from the first focus group. As the leadership worked through the strategic planning process, the following question was answered by the group: In which ways does the organization seek to enact its vision (providing educational services, courses, and classes; engaging in health promotion programs; or providing welfare services)? The answer to this question pointed the focus group toward developing a plan that leaned more toward educating and training the congregation through the GATCM auxiliaries, ministry groups, and ministry schools.

The group clarified the roles of those who will be assigned to each of the church’s selected courses of action for enacting its vision. To do so, the group answered the following questions: Are roles clearly delineated; who works with whom; who has authority over whom; who supervises and gives directions; and to whom? These questions pointed more to, and were defined more toward, the leadership of GATCM. It was the roles of the auxiliary leaders, ministry group leaders, and school administrators that were highlighted during the group’s discussions.
In addition, the following questions were answered concerning the responsibility of those assigned in each course of action: What types of people are responsible for which activities; and who performs which types of tasks? For rules and procedures, the question that was answered is “Is it clear what needs to be done and how it is to be done?” These questions posed a caveat to the questions concerning roles. However, the discussions concerning these questions pertained more toward the activities themselves, not to the leadership roles of the activities.

Finally, the group addressed the resources required for the selected courses of action by answering the questions: Are the resources required for tasks adequate and available (e.g., time, materials, skills); If not, can this task be outsourced; or what is the alternative means to accomplish this task? A summary of each course of action is covered with the following pages of this research project.

Auxiliaries

The first strategic planning course of action for enacting the newly refined vision of GATCM was to analyze the current auxiliaries of the church and to identify any needed additions. The GATCM leadership identified a list of church auxiliaries (Figure 25) that will account for the current and future needs of the practical day to day organizational and operational requirements of the church. Each identified auxiliary will be encompassed with “very able men [and women] for the work of the service of the house of God” (I Chronicles 9:13).

Each auxiliary will consist of well qualified and trained leaders who will be able to lead his or her assigned auxiliary according to the senior pastor’s guidance, with an understanding of the role it plays in the fulfillment of the church’s vision for accomplishing its assigned mission. The leader will be responsible for teaching, training, and properly employing the GATCM members assigned to the auxiliary he or she has been chosen to lead. He or she will also be
responsible for nurturing opportunities for others to get involved. Each leader will give a monthly accountability report to the senior pastor.

The identified auxiliaries will not only cover the practical operational needs of GATCM, but they will also provide opportunities for its membership to be more involved within the church - for some, hands-on-participation is the best tool for connecting to a concept, people, or cause. In addition, as the church grows in membership numbers, so will the need for the various auxiliary membership. Those auxiliaries that are not currently active will become active through growth.

**GATCM Auxilleries**

* Audio/Video (Live/Recording/Distribution)
* Church Administration
* Church Hospitality
* Church Security Team
* Music (Praise and Worship)
* Pastoral Helps
* Porters (Greeters/Ushers/Parking Attendants)
* Social Media Outreach
* Soul Winning Action Team (SWAT)
* Unseen Hands (Church Custodians)

Figure 25. GATCM Auxiliaries

Ministry Groups

The second strategic planning course of action for enacting the newly refined vision of GATCM was to also analyze the current ministry groups of the church and to identify any needed additions or deletions. The GATCM leadership identified a list of church ministry groups (Figure 26) that will account for the current and future needs of the specialized personnel groups
within the makeup of the GATCM congregation. Using the concept of Acts 6:1-7, each ministry group was identified to meet a specific need within the congregational makeup of the church, so that none will be neglected. These groups provide a place where each member can be edified within his or her own specific makeup, age, social status, and so on. They allow for everyone in the congregation to feel that he or she is a part of the body, not just a number within the church.

Each ministry group will be encompassed with leaders and participants who are able to relate and minister to the members of the group they have been chosen to lead. These leaders will be responsible for reaching out to the group’s membership to check on the spiritual and natural well-being of those assigned to the group. As a five-fold ministry leader, the group leader will serve as the first line of assistance in providing for the group members’ needs. They will forward the needs they cannot handle to the church leadership. In addition, each leader will give a monthly accountability report to the senior pastor. The leaders will also be responsible for meeting with the group members at least monthly to gauge and nurture their spiritual growth.

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GATCM Ministry Groups

* Addictions Ministry (with Medical Community Partnerships)
* Health Care Ministry
* Homeless Outreach Ministry (with Community Partnerships)
* Intercessory Prayer Ministry
* Marriage Ministry
* Men’s Ministry
* New Members Ministry (Orientation & Outreach)
* Seniors Ministry (Age 60+)
* Singles Ministry
* Teen Ministry
* Widows & Orphans Ministry
* Women’s Ministry
* Young Adult Outreach Ministry (Newly Departed Members)
* Youth Ministry (Age 12 & Below)
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Figure 26. GATCM Ministry Groups
Ministry Schools

The third and final strategic planning course of action for enacting the newly refined vision of GATCM was to incorporate two new ministry schools within the church. The GATCM leadership identified these schools (Figure 27) as an added resource toward the development and nurturing of the disciples of Christ – especially those who acknowledge a call into the five-fold ministry of Ephesians 4:11. Both schools were incorporated on the premise of Isaiah 1:17, “learn to do well.” Whatever a Christian is called by God to do, he or she should seek, and learn, to do it well.

The schools will be overseen by an administrator, in conjunction with the senior pastor. As the school attendance grows, a school dean will be added to assist in the school’s oversight. In addition, unless otherwise delegated, course classes will be taught by the senior pastor of GATCM, and assignments will be graded and recorded by the school’s administrator. It is important to note that these schools are not meant for accreditation but for ministry certification. Therefore, a diploma will not be given for completion, but a ministry transcript and certificate of completion will be given instead. The purpose of both schools is to take those members, who are desiring to go, further in learning about Christ and His call to ministry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GATCM Ministry Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Sonship School of the Firstborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* GATCM School of the Prophets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 27. GATCM Ministry Schools
Summary

The implementation of this research project began with a survey and numerous interviews within the GATCM circle of influence. The data collected was analyzed by the researcher and presented to the GATCM leadership within the first scheduled focus group of the research. The data confirmed the need to refine its mission and vision statements and to develop a new strategic plan for the church.

Focus group one was an eye-opening experience that brought about greater understanding of the requirements of the GATCM leadership, as highlighted in Ephesians 4:11-16, to help those within the GATCM congregation to grow into a deeper, more mature relationship with Christ, being nurtured to follow Him more closely. Whereas the GATCM leadership refined the mission and vision statements for GATCM and verified that the collective core values of the church were biblically aligned with them. This first focus group provided a great foundation and segway into the second focus group. It also created an increased attitude of excitement and anticipation toward the completion of this thesis research project.

Due to the stage that was set in the first focus group, the second focus group was full of excitement and anticipation. Every leader participated and because of it, they were able to meet the goals of the group within a timely manner. It was exciting to see the GATCM leadership team come together with a renewed sense of purpose and direction. It appears that God has truly used this research project to address a seemingly negative issue to bring about a much-needed change. Not only does there seem to be a change in the leadership perspectives toward their purpose but also a rejuvenation within their attitudes of service from what had seemed to become one of complacency.
Through all the questions and discussions, a good strategic plan was developed for GATCM by its church leadership. After which, the implementation of the newly developed plan began immediately upon the conclusion of this second focus group. However, when strategic planning is used to explore an organization’s culture, ministry, and growth, the result is a plan that is implemented over the course of several years.\textsuperscript{188} Therefore, after its initial implementation, it was agreed upon to be reassessed after 30 days and annually thereafter.

\textsuperscript{188} Wright, "Strategic planning." 42.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Research Summary

Go and Teach Christian Ministries is a small and growing church in Augusta, Georgia whose leadership had seemingly become focused more on the growth of the church in numbers than the spiritual growth and maturation of its congregation. The problem was the leadership of GATCM seemed to lack a strategic plan to develop spiritual maturity within the congregation. Therefore, this DMIN action research thesis was purposed to teach and model a strategic plan within the GATCM leadership that can develop the spiritual maturity of the congregation.

The research included a literature review that discussed what others have shared concerning the church’s leadership conviction, character, service/mission, and vision. It also provided four theological foundations of that undergirded the purpose of this research: view of God, following God, church growth, and ministry outreach. Furthermore, it addressed the theoretical foundations that stimulated this research project and helped lay the necessary groundwork to move it forward.

Throughout this project, the GATCM leadership recognized that in the Body of Christ, nothing is to be done without first hearing from God to do so. This hearing stems from the leader (God’s point man or woman) exercising an active prayer life within his or her relationship with God. It was the leader of Go and Teach Christian Ministries’ focus to always seek to get in on what God is doing, rather than asking God to get in on something that he had come with without Him. In John 15:5, Jesus said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” There is power in prayer and if the leadership of GATCM wanted the blessings of God upon this assignment, they
had to allow Him to guide them through what He wanted them to do. This was accomplished through the active prayers of the GATCM leadership.

In addition, written in Proverbs 3:5-7 are the instructions to “trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord and depart from evil.” Nothing is to be done without the Lord’s counsel. According to Collins, “one of the dominant themes from our research is that breakthrough results come about by a series of good decisions, diligently executed and accumulated one on top of another.” Within Proverbs 15:22, it is written that “without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors, they are established.” Good decisions are the result of good counsel and the best counsel, according to Proverbs 3:5-7, is from the Lord – through His appointed leader and the mature godly men and women that He has divinely connected to that leader. This is what the leadership of GATCM provided within this research project.

Beginning with the surveys, this research project was designed to be an inclusive participatory project. It was not to be driven solely by the thoughts, beliefs, and intentions of a sole individual or a select few. It was designed to capture the collective thoughts, beliefs, and desires of the membership of GATCM. As a result, it was anticipated that an increased sense of community among all research participants would ensue. Because the collective voice of the church was heard and addressed, each participant (from the surveys to the strategic planning process) felt a part of not only the research but a church that cares about its congregation.

In addition to the enhancing of a sense of community within the church, this research project was also pivotal in recalibrating the leadership’s spiritual gauge toward its purpose, found

189 Collins, Good to Great, 69.
within Ephesians 4:11-16. It fostered a reigniting of the GATCM leadership’s heartbeat of pleasing God through fulfilling the God-ordained mission and vision for creating a ministry and fellowship atmosphere conducive for congregational growth and maturation. This research moved the leadership from focusing on the church’s growth in numbers to focusing on the spiritual growth and maturity of its congregation.

Through the detailed use of surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and strategic planning focus groups, this project resulted in the development of a strategic plan to be taught and modeled within the leadership of GATCM. It produced results within three major areas of observation: community/togetherness, leadership focus/intent, and effectual church operations. Through the effect of the project within these three areas, the members of GATCM have been enabled to enjoy a more invigorating atmosphere of growth within their walk with Christ and others. Therefore, the church is now better equipped toward the fulfilling of its God-ordained mission and vision in Christ’s Commission.

After the development of the plan, the GATCM leadership considered Malphurs’ statement, “ministry navigators can develop the best strategy to get them to their desired port of call; they can recruit the best crew, rent the finest slip, and raise all the necessary funds; however, at some point, they have to launch the boat. If they never set sail and leave port, nothing significant happens.” It was time to launch; however, as with everything else, vision implementation was centered on prayer. The GATCM leadership had to hear from God and allow them to complete the preparation for the endeavor - they did not move ahead of God but followed His leading and at a time appointed, His separating unto the work. Romans 12:6-8 states, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy,
let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering:
or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it
with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness”
(Romans 12:6-8). The leadership of GATCM was purposed to be prepared for the work, so that
they could fulfill it according to Scripture. The Word came and the implantation of the plan
began.

After its implementation is completed, there must be a periodic time of assessment of the
GATCM visionary plan. According to Collins, “Few successful start-ups become great
companies, in large part because they respond to growth and success in the wrong way...As a
company grows and becomes more complex, it begins to trip over its own success...”191 It is
imperative for leaders of GATCM to grow with the congregation of the church. As the church
grows, its leadership must seek more innovative ways to handle the current growth and prepare
the organizational structure to be able to facilitate the future growth as well. The newly
developed strategic plan for GATCM provides the necessary plan to accommodate such growth.
In addition, this is a good place to underscore the following: Most leaders judge the success of
their organization by the increase in numbers (be it cash-flow, membership increase, or products
produced). However, the emphasis of the organization’s success should not be in the quantity but
the quality of the organization’s results. For example, within the setting of GATCM, the gauge of
success should not be on how many new members have joined the church, but on how many of
its members have become true disciples of Christ within the church.

The GATCM leadership will conduct an annual review of the current coherency and
effectiveness of the strategic plan. They will go through the strategic planning process of this

191 Collins, Good to Great, 120.
action research every five years, or as needed, to ensure that it is maintaining an atmosphere conducive to the spiritual growth and maturation of the congregation. Therefore, the process of this research will be explicated in such a way that it will be easy for others to replicate – whether within GATCM or any church experiencing a similar problem or just want to readdress their strategic planning process.

**Research Comparison**

The literary review of this action research thesis project provided insights to what others have shared concerning the church’s leadership. This review revealed that previous research has covered the leaders’ conviction, character, service/mission, and vision. It provided a good foundational base for the direction of this research project. However, though the insights shared within this review of literature provided the conceptual underpinnings of a leader’s life that should not succumb to change, it did not cover the practical application of the information shared in a functional format. That is what this thesis project adds to the conversation. As the world is exploding with change, church leaders need to know how to develop a plan to accommodate and facilitate such change within their circles of influence without compromising the core mission and vision of God’s call for the church.

This thesis project was embarked upon to provide a practical step-by-step process in developing a strategic plan for GATCM that is conducive for creating an atmosphere of congregational growth and maturity. From the beginning to the end, the researcher utilized the information others provided through their research, input from the congregation, and the strategic planning focus groups to present a practical application of previous and current research to provide a visual picture of how to successfully develop a strategic plan that can be easily replicated within any church/ministry, no matter the size of the church/ministry, its geographical
locale, or the social makeup of its congregation. Through the picture provided, it is anticipated that more church leaders will embark on a similar strategic planning process to refocus their leadership on developing, or refining, a strategic plan that is conducive for the spiritual growth, maturation, and well-being of the church’s congregation, not just a plan that is focused on increasing the church’s numbers.

Lessons Learned

Written within his book *The Performance Factor: Unlocking the Secrets of Teamwork*, Pat MacMillan stated that “people often drift into and then out of extraordinary team situations, wondering what made that group ‘click’ and how to replicate it.”192 According to McMillan, a key step to better team performance is understanding the common characteristics of those teams that have consistently achieved exceptional results.193 Throughout this research project, the researched gleaned that there were three distinct characteristics illuminated and enhanced within the leadership team of GATCM.

The first characteristic in operation was the leaders’ willingness to learn, and then teach what they have been taught. They have seemed to encapsulate Bob Briner’s & Ray Pritchard’s thought that “Leaders are teachers. No matter what enterprise - a family, school, church, or business – leaders are teachers.”194 Their willingness to learn and teach what they have been taught meets the biblical qualification to be “apt to teach,” found within I Timothy 3:2 and II


193 Ibid.

Timothy 2:24. In addition, it empowers them in the fulfillment of Christ’s Great Commission to teach others to observe whatsoever Christ had commanded them (Matthew 28:20).

The second characteristic illuminated within the actions of this research project was the revelation of Briner and Pritchard that “A leader attracts people to a cause and holds them with the power of his or her teaching.” It was noted within the focus groups that it is the leaders’ lives that attract people and it was the teaching power of their testimonies in Christ that empowered those listening to go deeper in growing in their relationship with Christ. It is like the adage, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Those following must first see what is being taught within the lives of those leading and teaching. Within the GATCM leadership, this concept enhanced the heartbeat of GATCM’s motto of the church being “A Place Where Your Life Becomes His (Jesus) Message.”

Due to the revelatory attributes of the above two concepts, the third characteristic of the GATCM leadership enhanced through this project can be found in the statement, “Kingdom leadership…is measured by the life of a leader who cuts a wide and impactful swath of positive influence because of who they are as a leader and how they lead. It’s the power of a life well lived.” From the discussions within the focus group and through the processes of this research project, the leadership of GATCM reflected on the fact that if they wanted to congregation of GATCM to grow spiritually, they themselves had to seek spiritual growth. They understood that it is the lives they live, due to such a growth, that gives credence and power to their witness and

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maximizes the outcomes of their Kingdom service.\textsuperscript{197} It is the character of their lives that motivates those following to enthusiastically embrace the mission and vision of the church and to excitingly continue their spiritual growth in Christ.\textsuperscript{198}

In summary, the GATCM leadership has expressed what a healthy leadership team looks like. Through this project, their desire to see the spiritual growth of the congregation has been reignited and the understanding of their mission, according to Ephesians 4:11-16, has been strengthened. It was their submission to learn, their willingness to teach what they have learned, and their focus to lead by example that made the strategic planning of this project a great success. Due to the GATCM leadership’s actions within this research project, the church is now headed in the right direction to please God in providing an atmosphere of spiritual growth within the congregation.

**Research Applications**

According to Malphurs, “more than at any other time in history, North America, along with much of the world, is exploding with change—fast, frightening change. I refer to it as megachange. It has affected every institution—business, government, the schools, and the church—and it is occurring at a number of levels: national, corporate, and individual.”\textsuperscript{199} As the leaders and members came together to develop the plan, it was imperative for all involved to consider the various nuances present with the changing of the times – to include gender relations, gender equality, technological advancements, etc. The new GATCM strategic plan addressed the mitigation of these issues in pursuit of the vision fulfillment.

\textsuperscript{197} Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, 19.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{199} Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 7.
In every given situation, there may be the same core principles that apply; however, every situation is unique in its requirements for success. Therefore, leaders must lead with fresh and compelling ideas, constantly thinking, reading, reflecting, and writing about ideas that matter to the organization. In the end, people respond to great and exciting ideas about the purpose of their work and organization. These types of ideas are conceived through good research: internally and externally.

Therefore, according to II Timothy 2:15, leaders are instructed to “study to shew [themselves] approved unto God, [workmen] that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” This study concerns not only the Word of God but the practical operation and application of Scripture as well. Every member should be educated concerning the biblical and practical foundation of the vision. For example, according to Collins, “in a truly great company, profits and cash flow become like blood and water to a healthy body: They are absolutely essential for life, but they are not the very point of life.” This is a very profound statement for leaders to observe because, as stated earlier, most leaders judge the success of their organization by the increase in numbers (be it cash-flow, membership increase, or products produced). However, the emphasis of the organization’s success should not be in the quantity but the quality of organization’s results. Wherefore, within the setting of any church, the gauge of success should not be on how many new members have joined the church, but on how many of its members have become true disciples of Christ within that church.

In addition, as they move forward in the newly developed strategic plan, the GATCM leadership realizes that a church of fifty with limited resources – such as people, money, talents,


201 Collins, *Good to Great*, 194.
etc. - may not accomplish the community impact which a larger church may create or may never accomplish the impact that a megachurch would. However, those who believe within the smaller churches can still fulfill Christ’s Commission to the very best of their ability, perhaps even better than folks in the larger churches, including the megachurches. Therefore, the leadership of GATCM is intentional on staying the course to do their part and to leave the results up to God.

The GATCM leadership has also determined to be more deliberate in engaging those they have been assigned to lead and more engaging within the auxiliaries, ministry groups, and schools they have been assigned to oversee. They do so with Briner’s and Pritchard’s thought in mind, “A wise leader does not rely solely on notes and memos to communicate with those he leads; he makes certain to allow for time to ‘lead by walking around….’” This engagement will allow for a time of fellowship and examination of what is working with the strategic plan and what is not.

**Future Research**

Within Isaiah 1:17, the prophet Isaiah instructed his audience to “learn to do well.” This project has been successful in developing a strategic plan to help facilitate not only the spiritual needs of the GATCM congregation but can also help in creating an atmosphere conducive for their spiritual growth in Christ. The newly developed plan includes the various auxiliary and ministry groups that are and will continue to be pivotal in the future success of the church in accomplishing its God-ordained mission/vision. Wherefore, as the prophet Isaiah instructed, if the church is to find such success in accomplishing its God-ordained mission/vision, its

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leadership and congregation must learn to execute each auxiliary, ministry group, and school well. In doing so, they will, in essence, learn to do ministry well.

Learning to do ministry well is not something that will naturally happen. It takes a willingness to research, prepare, and employ the information gleaned from the research. Therefore, there is a need for the leadership of GATCM to not just stop here at this thesis project but use the newly developed strategic plan as a steppingstone, pointing them in the right direction of their future research. Each auxiliary and ministry group will need to be properly researched to identify and employ this best method favorable for its coherent operation within the mission and vision of GATCM. Each group will have to go through a strategic planning process that is very similar to that of this thesis project. There must be an understanding of the auxiliary’s/ministry group’s purpose, the needs of its attendees, abilities and limitations of the auxiliary/ministry group staff, etc. The list should go on and on until there is a full understanding of each assigned element within the church’s operations. Then, and only then, can the ministry of GATCM function well.

In addition to the need auxiliary/ministry group research, there is also a need for the leadership of GATCM to conduct similar research on how to effectively measure the spiritual maturation of a contemporary church. This research will provide the necessary groundwork to gauge the success of the church’s strategic plan and the foundational support for any changes or adjustments that may be needed in the future.

If GATCM is to operate and remain an effective ministry in the fulfillment of Christ’s call, continual research is not an option, it is required. The bottom-line for the GATCM leadership is research does not stop with this research project but will continue throughout the
life of the church. In essence, this project is not the ceiling where the research ends, it is the floor where it begins.

**Wrapping It Up**

This action research project began with a reflection upon a quote from the late Nate Holcomb: “today’s church is encumbered with many things; mission trips, balancing budgets and remaining relative in the surrounding communities to name a few. Many of the challenges of church work leave us ineffective in performing the work of the church.…” 204 The ineffectiveness in performing the work of the church may be a result of a contemporary misunderstanding of the role of the church within the church’s leadership circles. According to Holcomb, church leaders can live their entire lives and never truly come to understand the purpose for their church’s existence. 205 Many contemporary church leaders have come to interpret survival and relevance as their church’s mission – which is not the intended purpose, nor should be the focus of the leaders of God’s church.

Within the recorded passage of Ephesians 4:12, Christ has given leadership to the church “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Church leadership has been ordained by Christ for the primary purpose of church growth. However, many church leaders have seemed to view their purpose of church growth from the sole perspective of growing the membership numbers of the church. They seemed to lay aside their assignment to help the current and future congregation to grow spiritually in becoming committed followers of Christ. It is this spiritual growth, that has been laid aside, that can be interpreted as the very heartbeat of the Apostle Paul’s message to the Ephesian church.

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204 Holcomb, *Close the Gap*, 83.

According to Paul, church leaders are to seek to bring their congregation into “unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” that they “may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:11-16).

This focus on church growth in membership numbers, rather than the membership, had crept into the leadership of GATCM. It seemed that the programs and events of the church were geared more toward attracting outsiders and adding new members to the church rather than creating an atmosphere of growth within their attendees. A contributing factor to this issue is the leadership of GATCM lacked an effectual strategic plan to create an atmosphere conducive to the growth and spiritual maturation of the church’s current and future congregation. Therefore, it presented the need for the GATCM leadership to start over; as Holcomb stated, “The inventor often needs to go back to the drawing board before completing a project.”

The current mode of operation was not working in GATCM; therefore, it was time for its leadership to go back to the drawing board in pursuit of establishing a new one.

To begin the process, the leadership had to re-examine GATCM’s ministry context. The church is in Augusta, Georgia and, as well as most cities within the Bible Belt, Augusta is filled with people who are accustomed to religious practices. Most of its population go to church and/or claim to be members of a church; however, few have seemed to communicate a lifestyle indicative of growing in a genuine relationship with Christ. Over the years, GATCM has not been exempt from these challenges and issues facing the Augusta church. Like many others, GATCM is surrounded by the ideology of church success being church growth in membership numbers. As a result, the leadership of GATCM had adopted the same mentality of those around

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206 Holcomb, *Close the Gap*, 133.
them; negatively affecting the spiritual growth of its congregation. Programs and events were being catered toward attracting new members to the church but failed to foster an atmosphere of growth for those within the church. It is this perception that prompted the senior pastor of GATCM to embark upon the strategic planning process to reexamine and redesign the church’s strategic plan; and, to teach and model that plan to and before the church’s leadership to create an atmosphere conducive to growth in the congregation’s relationship with Christ, each other, and the community they have been commissioned to serve.

The GATCM leadership came to understand that in order for the congregation of GATCM to grow in Christian maturity, they must learn to be weaned from the world and to lean on the leading of the Lord Jesus Christ. They need to learn that no matter where they may find themselves in life or how far they may have fallen, they can start over again: they cannot go change their yesteryear, but with Jesus, they can look toward tomorrow and bring about a new ending. This was the founding thought that stimulated the focus/purpose of this thesis project.

As the GATCM leaders changed their thinking and focus concerning their role in the purpose of God’s will for His church, they began to seek and follow His leading in developing an effectual strategic plan to accomplish His assigned mission and vision for GATCM. As a result, consideration for every program, event, class, service, sermon, etc. was geared toward the focus of accomplishing God’s will for the church. Programs/Ministries/Events that were not conducive to the mission and vision of the church were deleted and programs/ministries/events not yet added, but determined needed, were developed to be implemented within the strategic plan of GATCM.

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207 Holcomb, *Christian Maturity*, 188.

208 Ibid., 193.
The foundational portion of the process presented within this thesis action research project encompassed a literature review that discussed what others have shared concerning the church’s leadership conviction, character, service/mission, and vision. It also provided three theological foundations that undergirded the purpose of this research: following God, church growth, and ministry outreach. In addition, as with the theological foundations, theoretical foundations were provided that furnished the project’s stimulus.

The practical research for this project began immediately upon reception of the Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity IRB approval of the research project and continued until the research project was completed. The researcher chose to utilize a qualitative research method that started with a survey that gathered the general atmosphere GATCM towards its congregational growth and maturity. It also included a questionnaire that was verbally addressed during interviews of the selected personnel. After the completion of the interviews, using the data collected, there were two necessary focus groups convened with the GATCM leadership to conduct the strategic planning process.

In the end, through all the questions and discussions, a good strategic plan was developed for GATCM by its church leadership. Implementation of the newly developed plan began immediately upon the conclusion of the second focus group. However, it is important to restate that when strategic planning is used to explore an organization’s culture, ministry, and growth, the result is a plan that is implemented over the course of several years. Therefore, after this initial implementation, The GATCM leadership agreed that the newly developed and implemented plan is to be reassessed after 30 days and annually thereafter. It is the researcher’s hope that this undertaking will remain beneficial throughout the life of GATCM.

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209 Wright, "Strategic planning," 42.
Appendix A

GATCM Membership Survey

Go and Teach Christian Ministries' Membership Survey

1. How are things going for you at GATCM?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Really Bad</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Really Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How do you feel about your relationship with Christ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Really Bad</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Really Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>📌</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. How impactful is your relationship with Christ in addressing your current situations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. How helpful is your relationship with Christ in helping you accomplish your life goals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. How helpful has the church (GATCM) been toward your growth in your relationship with Christ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>📌</td>
<td>📌</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6. How can the church better help you grow in your relationship with Christ?

- Improve Current Programs & Events.
- Add New Programs & Events.
- Provide More Opportunities for Me to Get Involved.

Other (please specify)

7. How likely are you to recommend your church to someone seeking a church home where he or she can grow in Christ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will Not</th>
<th>Not Likely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Very Likely</th>
<th>Definitely Will</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix B

GATCM Informed Consent Request

Informed Consent

**Title of the Project:** Church Leadership: Effectual Strategic Planning towards the Congregational Growth and Maturation of Go and Teach Christian Ministries  
**Principal Investigator:** Christopher L. Kingdom, Pastor Go and Teach Christian Ministries (GATCM)/Doctoral Student, Liberty University’s Rawlings School of Divinity

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**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a member of GATCM and at least 18 years of age. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

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**What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to teach and model a strategic plan within the GATCM leadership that can develop the spiritual maturity of the congregation. This research will provide the theological and theoretical foundation toward the development of such a plan, as well as the plan itself.

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**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

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

1. Take the online GATCM Membership Survey (approximately 10 minutes).
2. If selected, participate in a research interview (approximately one hour).

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**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

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

Benefits to society include the development of a more conducive atmosphere toward the congregational growth of GATCM.

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**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

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

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**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any
information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant survey responses will be anonymous. Participant interview responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- 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.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**
Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Is study participation voluntary?**
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with GATCM. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. If you are identified for the interview process, inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation, and do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**
The researcher conducting this study is Christopher L. Kingdom. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [redacted] and/or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. Jeffrey Dowdy at [redacted].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

**Your Consent**
Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.
By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

_I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study._

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and/or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

____________________________________
Printed Subject Name

____________________________________
Signature & Date
February 16, 2021

Christopher Kingdom
Jeffrey Dowdy

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-605 Church Leadership: Effectual Strategic Planning towards the Congregational Growth and Maturation of Go and Teach Christian Ministries

Dear Christopher Kingdom and Jeffrey Dowdy,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
Bibliography


Colucci, Erminia. “‘Focus Groups Can Be Fun’: The Use of Activity-Oriented Questions in Focus Group Discussions.” *Qualitative Health Research* 17, no. 10 (December 2007): 1422–33.


