

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Intervention:
Helping the Rural Baptist Church Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness for Greater
Kingdom Service**

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Intervention: Helping the Rural Baptist Church Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness for Greater Kingdom Service

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The rural Baptist Church has historically been a place of tradition, cultural importance, and refuge. It has been led by a wealth of great leaders who have served generations of faithful members. Over time, many rural Baptist Churches have seen a gradual decline, and some are on the verge of extinction.

This decline may be a direct result of those churches attempting to continue unnecessary traditions and unproductive ministries. These churches also sacrifice future interests and prospects for institutional practices that do not fulfill the Great Commission and promote destructive practices.

To initiate an intervention into the destructive practices of these churches, this author will develop a paradigm shift that may reduce those suicidal practices and slow the destruction.

The potential value is in strengthening the Rural Baptist Church by highlighting value, developing effective ministry strategies, and refocusing vision. The research will be conducted within the four counties that make up the Northern Neck of Virginia. Members and visitors of the various Baptist churches in the Northern Neck will participate in this research. Research of published material on this subject will also be conducted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to give my greatest thanks to God, who sent His Son Jesus the Christ to die as a sacrifice for my sins, who did not leave me alone but made way for the precious Holy Spirit to dwell within me as my guide. Without God's grace, mercy, and provisions, I could not have expected to finish this journey after ten years of work. I did not expect to achieve this major milestone in my life without the help of God. God gave me the courage and strength to survive cancer, to witness my wife slowly going blind and losing her independence, and finally struggling to provide and keep the family together as my only child entered the emotional challenge of her teenage years.

I also want to thank my wife Beverly and my daughter Trinity who put up with my attempts at juggling so many responsibilities while often neglecting the ones who mattered most in my life. I love you both and hope this finished work will make you both proud of supporting me. Finally, I want to thank my mentor, Dr. Gary Waller, for his patience, prayers, and long-suffering displayed towards me during my silent moments as he gently pushed me toward completion.

“When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. (Nehemiah 6:16 NIV)”

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
GHBC	<i>Grants Hill Baptist Church</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
NKJV	<i>New King James Version</i>
LURSOD	<i>Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
NNBA	<i>Northern Neck Baptist Association</i>
NNMC	<i>Northern Neck Ministers Conference</i>
NNVA	<i>Northern Neck of Virginia</i>
RBC	<i>Rural Baptist Church</i>

Chapter One

Introduction: Help Wanted

Background

The book of Exodus records a familiar story that is frequently used as an example to prevent pastoral burnout. This story reveals Moses' father-in-law intervening in the self-destructive practices of Moses, who attempts to serve as "judge and jury" in every situation of his people and not accept any help from others. After observing Moses, Jethro made his intervening statement, "The thing that thou doest is not good (Exodus 18: 17 KJV)."¹ Jethro goes on to explain to Moses that what he is doing is not good because he will "surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee (Exodus 18: 18 KJV)." Jethro then suggests to Moses that he should listen to his advice and God would be with him. As a result, Moses followed the counsel of Jethro and saved himself and the newly freed children of Israel from certain self-destruction.

This Old Testament story has many interpretations, but one conclusion can be reached; anyone can be involved in harmful practices or behavior, which may never change unless an intervention occurs. If Jethro had not intervened, would Moses have been the first casualty of burn-out in ministry? If Jethro had not intervened, would Moses have figured out how to correct his downward spiral? If Jethro had not intervened in Moses' self-destructive practices, would there have ever been a nation of Israel? Fortunately for the children of Israel, Jethro's advice changed Moses' destructive practice and saved the newly formed nation.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the King James Version (1611).

Similarly, the rural Baptist church has experienced a gradual decline over time, and many reasons point to self-destructive practices and traditions. Like Moses, if self-destructive practices exist in the rural Baptist church, change may only come by an intervention. This section will give an introductory foundation of some of the characteristics of the rural Baptist church, what led to initiate this project and what this project will attempt to accomplish through the research process.

Ministry Context: In the Beginning

The Bible states, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.” (Gen 1: 1 – 4). When this nation was born out of the darkness of foreign oppression, the hope of freedom, liberty, and faith in God was the light of this new world. McBeth states, “In Colonial America, most Baptist churches were small, often with no more than a dozen members. Few had their own building, and they may have gone for years without a pastor. Worship tended to be informal, with great emphasis upon the Bible.”²

There were cities, towns, or established communities in this new world, but most were rural. Many scattered rural inhabitants, being followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, came together to strengthen their faith and established the church as the light of this new world. Those rural churches became the birthplace and light of many rural communities, and some remain in existence today. Unfortunately, many of those beacons of God's light in the rural community have long burned out and are now lost to history.

² Harry Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 150.

The question remains how those landmarks of the community, the light of a dark world, slowly burned out over time when the spirit of God burns for eternity. Could the problem be found in the leadership of the church? Shurden states, "One of the pressing problems faced by Baptists of the South in the first half of the nineteenth century was the scarcity of preachers. While many reasons were given for this, one explanation was that the churches did not sufficiently "encourage the gifts" among them. Baptists believed strongly in a divine call to preach."³ Was the influence of family strongholds within the church a detriment to growth and sustainability? Did the communities around the church simply die and leave abandoned their source of strength and unity, or was it a natural death that comes with time? Before an answer can be formulated, a better understanding of the basic characteristics of the rural church must be explored, beginning with its leadership.

The Bi-vocational Minister

Most rural Baptist churches originated from a small group of believers who practiced Christianity with Baptism by submersion and participating in Holy Communion as its ordinance. The leadership of the rural Baptist church has traditionally been found in the deacon, minister, or elder. This person would serve as a leader to the group or preach at designated gathering times, mostly in the individual homes of the group members. This person may have led the newly formed rural church, but they could not fully support them. To survive and function in this primitive environment, the leaders of these rural churches, had to depend on their own means for support. Along with being head of their households, many were farmers, fishermen, teachers, or whatever vocation they could do to generate an income to support themselves and their families.

³ Walter B. Shurden, "Documents on the Ministry in Southern Baptist History," *Baptist History and Heritage* 15, no. 1 (November 1980), 47.

The leadership style of most newly formed rural churches was known as “bi-vocational.” Bickers states, “A bi-vocational minister is anyone who serves in a paid ministry capacity in a church and has other personal sources of income.”⁴ Although Bickers definition refers to the pastor being paid, many rural ministers received support from members by means other than money, like food, help on the farm, help to build their home, or church building, or help with household responsibilities. The bi-vocational minister would handle the responsibilities of fulfilling leadership obligations without the benefit of receiving a salary. The bi-vocational minister in a newly formed church in this rural community was expected to fulfill their role in the community, including putting food on their table and leading the church while preaching God’s word. Despite the heavy load, Dorr states, “Bi-vocationalism is not an excuse for a second-rate performance by a minister.”⁵

The expectations of bi-vocational ministers haven’t changed over time other than the type of jobs they do to support themselves. Today, the impact and effect of a pastor’s income or lack thereof can easily be explained by his or her family. In reference to her reflections as a preacher’s kid, Olson shares a common example, “My dad was the pastor at the biggest church in town, but unlike his peers in business or medicine, bigger didn’t translate into more pay or other incentives either, if you don’t count the clergy discount, he received at the local 9-hole golf course. We were broke. Five kids and one small income will do that, even after the car allowance and parsonage are factored in. We often relied on the money my dad earned by officiating at funerals and weddings just to make ends meet.”⁶

⁴ Dennis W. Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 2.

⁵ Luther M. Dorr, *The Bivocational Pastor* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1988), 13.

⁶ Suzanne Olson, "Reflections of a Preacher's Kid," *Clergy Journal* 82, no. 6 (April 2006), 25.

Many bi-vocational pastors work outside of their churches, and while performing secular work, many share the struggles of their community, the concerns of their people, and the actions of their teachings being played out before them. Many times, they have the perfect opportunity to minister to people beyond the pulpit. These bi-vocational ministers are often looked upon as role models because of their shared role in the community and their approachability. Senske states, “Parishioners struggling to find balance and significance in their own lives, are bombarded by less-than-useful role models in the media, at work, among their neighbors, and even sadly, in their congregations.”⁷ Many times the bi-vocational minister “fills the void” of those people because of their connection to the community and their relationship with God. People who may not want to schedule a time for counseling or meeting with the pastor at church often find meetings at the local grocery store or the local post office works best. Bickers states, “The bi-vocational minister’s second job often places him or her out in the community more. People in the community can see him or her as something else than simply a pastor.”⁸

The Bible reveals the best example of bi-vocationalism in the book of Acts, where the Apostle Paul uses his secular skills to support himself during his ministry. The New Testament states,

¹After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; ²And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. ³And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. ⁴And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (Acts 18: 1 – 4).

⁷ Kurt Senske, "Pastor: CEO and Role Model," *Clergy Journal* 80, no. 8 (July 2004), 4.

⁸ Dennis W. Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), 51.

This passage reveals that Paul was a tentmaker and supported himself while doing ministry. Paul was not high-minded or felt above the people he encountered. He believed earning income lessened the burden on the church. Paul was the first bi-vocational pastor. Noelliste states,

“Bi-vocationality is the third tenet of the approach being proposed. My argument is simple. In contexts where the church is able to fully absorb a theologically trained workforce and provide full support for its workers, a case can be made for a purist approach to theological education. But in areas where such ability is lacking, clearly, an eclectic approach is the preferred option. Here, instead of confining training for the ministry to the study of theological disciplines alone, theological education should purposefully bring under its purview the study of non-theological disciplines which bear relevance to the wider society as well as the practice of ministry within the church. In so doing, theological education prepares persons to participate meaningfully in both domains, thereby playing the role of bridge between them.”⁹

The Bible reveals clear evidence of bi-vocationalism in the Apostle Paul, who worked as a tentmaker to support himself, who ministered in the synagogue every worship service, and interacted with all the people of the community Jews and Gentiles. This interaction meant Paul spoke the people's language and communicated on their level. John MacArthur emphasizes that a good leader must communicate effectively with all people. This communication does not always have to occur across the pulpit, but it may be outside the church, on the job, at the grocery store, or at the high school football game. He states, “Just the fact that one speaks or writes does not mean he communicates. Communication is the process we go through to convey understanding from one person or group to another. The key to being a good communicator is, first, to understand people.”¹⁰ This understanding of people may not occur unless the pastor or leader experiences daily life with the people, feels their pains, and witnesses their concerns.

⁹ Dieumeme Noelliste, "Theological Education in the Context of Socio-Economic Deprivation," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (July 2005): 280.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 237.

Like the Apostle Paul, when the leadership of the rural church cannot depend on the church to fully fund them, they must become bi-vocational to fulfill the call of God and support their family. This leadership style still exists in the modern rural Baptist church today and, in some cases, is the only means by which those churches can maintain leadership. Not only is the leadership style of the rural Baptist church unique, but its membership, characterized by strong family ties and connection to the community, are noteworthy.

All in the Family

The rural Baptist church was established, and in most cases, continues to exist due to the generations of families that continue to support it. Since the church comprises of people who support it and is not represented by the building where they meet, the next unique characteristic to explore in the rural Baptist church is its members and supporters. Because these families support the “home” church, visitors are often not allowed to enter the inner circles of fellowship and support because those families are often suspicious of outsiders and slow to reveal the inner working of their church. These rural churches believe they have a perfect place to worship and do not understand why those who visit may not return. Bickers states, “Most small churches insist they are friendly churches that love everybody. However, if you ask people who visit these churches, a different story is sometimes told. They may have found the church cold and unfriendly. The church members probably did not mean to be unfriendly; it’s just that their social needs were already being met by their church community, and they failed to offer that same community to their guests.”¹¹

¹¹ Dennis W. Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church: Diagnosis and Treatment for the Big Issues* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005), 82.

These rural churches may continue to exist, believing that they do not need outsiders if the “core” families stay in control and continue to support. They may have depended on generations of family members over the years rather than reaching out to unrelated persons in their neighborhood. This characteristic may allow the rural church to survive for several generations, but it is a cancer that leads to death over time. In the research article, “When the Final Bell Tolls: Patterns of Church Closings in Two Protestant Denominations,” the researchers reveal how generations of families are credited for the survival of their church. The researchers state,

At 40 – 50 years, the power and presence of a founding generation are fading in a congregation. A new generation must take ownership and participate in enabling the congregation to continue. Most congregations enjoy a ready pool of second-generation participants, though. It is the offspring of the founders. Out of loyalty to place or parents, enough offspring may stay committed to a congregation to give it as second generation of life.¹²

But, on the other hand, if that second-generation decides to move their membership or their place of residence and fail to support their “family” church, that church faces decline and potential death.

After the Civil War in the United States, many black churches began to spring up throughout the rural communities. At that time, worship service became the most segregated time of the week, which remains to this date. During this time, many black and white families who helped establish these rural churches began to make their influence known above the pastor or elders. In these churches, many may have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but the persuasion of their family may have influenced many of the decisions. In the article, “Race,

¹² Kevin D. Dougherty, Jared Maier, and Brian Vander Lugt, "When the Final Bell Tolls: Patterns of Church Closings In Two Protestant Denominations." *Review of Religious Research* 50, No. 1 (September 2008): 70.

Religion, and Religious Involvement: A Comparative Study of Whites and African Americans,”

the researchers reveal how many in the rural church may have connected themselves to the church out of an obligation to family. The researchers state,

Specifically, in making the church a place dramatizing the separation of the races (more so than most other settings), segregation and white domination likely made both black and white churches key institutions in the rural South. For blacks, the church’s role was one of lessening the direct economic impact of segregation through mutual support systems (family); for whites, it helped justify the system of structured racial inequality. Thus, it seems possible that the legacy of slavery, especially after blacks were “legally” free to begin building their own institutions, created community pressures among both blacks and whites to support separate churches as moral and community centers sustained by semi-involuntary patterns.¹³

These “semi-involuntary patterns” would imply that many believers may have first accepted the call of the family or community to support the church rather than God. This same pattern may have been followed by generations in the rural community, which helped the rural Baptist church remain viable, and “attendance is based more on institutional constraints than on personal choice under a semi-involuntary condition.”¹⁴ The argument that a semi-involuntary condition means “broadly based norms and sanctions act as external constraints on behavior and generate attendance even when subjective commitment or intrinsic motivation is lacking.”¹⁵ The idea of personal choice would mean that a person would attend church because of their choosing rather than attending because it is a family tradition, an annual event, or for some other reason other than a personal desire.

¹³ Larry L. Hunt and Matthew O. Hunt, "Race, Religion, and Religious Involvement: A Comparative Study of Whites and African Americans," *Social Forces* 80, no. 2 (December 2001): 623.

¹⁴ Larry L. Hunt and Matthew O. Hunt, "Regional Patterns of African American Church Attendance: Revisiting the Semi-Involuntary Thesis," *Social Forces* 78, no. 2 (December 1999): 780.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Many reasons support how these rural Baptist churches have existed, but there is sufficient evidence to support that the call of God and the influence of family may have had competing roles. Moberg states,

A study of 104 out of 107 persons who had joined five congregations in four Baptist denominations during the preceding twelve months revealed many influences upon their decisions. These influences were classified individually by a panel of judges as to whether each was more likely to be “sacred” or “secular” for a person joining a Baptist church. The outstanding reasons given for joining were “family, familiarity of the people and nearness of the church to home.”¹⁶

These influences have been a critical component in the sustaining of the rural Baptist church over the years, but the connectivity to the local community is another characteristic that should be further explored.

The Landmark of the Community

Throughout most rural communities, many buildings and places could be considered landmarks of the community, such as the local grocery store, the post office, and the church building, including its cemetery. Bickers states,

The community surrounding the small church benefits from the presence of the church. In many places, the small church still serves as a meeting place for the community. The small church also provides its community with a sense of hope and an awareness of God. Some people may live almost within the shadow of the steeple but never attend the church services. However, the mere presence of the church gives them a sense of strength and hope.¹⁷

The church as the community's landmark has long been accepted as a place where community decisions are made, family gatherings are celebrated, and the deceased are honored and respected. The church as the community's landmark has even been recognized by having the street or road on which it is located named after it. Whether believers or not, property owners on

¹⁶ Davis O. Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution: The Sociology of American Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 402.

¹⁷ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 17.

that street would be assigned an address using the church's name; in some cases, the cemeteries of these churches are still recognized with signage and maintained in the rural community even though the church building no longer physically exists.

Throughout the history of rural America, the rural church building has long been seen as an image of a normal society in which God is represented, family values are honored, and hard work is respected. The community's landmark, both black and white churches, was seen as a place of American heritage, representing the true heart of being American. Neitz states, "The dominant image of the rural church in the media, and in most people's minds, is of the simple white building with a steeple, the heart of the community, the heart of a vanishing America of two-parent families and family farms."¹⁸ Unfortunately, this image of the rural church has become a fading memory just as the divorce rate rises in America and the family farms go bankrupt.

This true landmark of the community may have become a victim of economic change, which has caused many to migrate to urban areas or cities that offer a "nine to five" job and the possibility of wealth that does not require tilling the earth. This great landmark of the community could have declined as more families sent their children to college and made them see rural living beneath their advanced degrees. Neitz states,

Described thus as a declining institution, it is implicitly embedded in economic and demographic change, and it has a moral consequence, the loss of a sacred and place-based way of life in the community. In this mythic image, the declining rural church was the heart of what was good and true about the United States, and we may be losing it forever.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mary Jo Neitz, "Reflections on Religion and Place: Rural Churches and American Religion." *Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 3 (September 2005): 245.

¹⁹ Neitz, "Reflections on Religion and Place," 245.

Because many rural churches are long past their “church plant” years and may even be celebrating their centennial, the decline may be tracked by stages of maturity. A brief discussion about another unique characteristic must be explored; the maturity of the church.

You Cannot Stop the Clock

The maturity of many Rural Baptist churches can be better understood in that most were established at the same time or shortly after the establishment of their community. Unlike the local grocery or hardware store, which may have been sold to new owners several times, the rural Baptist church has remained the same. If it does not promote the acceptance of new members or the inclusion of youth in leadership, then it is more likely to have clear stages of growth and decline that can be marked with time. For example, after the church plant, the rural church sees growth with many people in the local community supporting it financially and with their time. This stage reflects a Godly vision, work using Biblical doctrine, and the growth of a loyal following which excitedly witnesses to the remaining community around them. At this stage, the clock begins to tick.

Stages later, the church reaches a comfortable plateau where the previous characteristics of evangelism and Biblical doctrine vanish, and tradition and institutional practice take their place. Unfortunately, like a clock slowly losing time because its battery loses power, the rural church slowly begins to lose momentum because the power that supported growth has weakened. Coutta states, “Decline is the stage of negative membership growth, negative church growth, negative financial growth, the final takeover of vested interests.”²⁰

²⁰ Ramsey Coutta, *Divine Institutions: The Nature of Denominational Growth and Decline in America* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2006, 48.

In the article, “*When the Final Bell Tolls: Patterns of Church Closings In Two Protestant Denominations*,” the researchers provide a better understanding of the life cycle that occurs due to the impact of depending on generational support within the church. The researchers reveal,

At the very least, congregations need to retain the offspring of present members in order to ensure continuance. For some congregations, the gap between first generation and second is wide enough to doom existence beyond 40 – 50 years. For others, the final bell tolls a generation later when the transition from second generation to third generation fails. The alternative is for congregations to reinvent themselves to appeal to new generations and new environmental conditions. The clock on obsolescence may then reset and tick for perhaps another 40 years before its alarm sounds again.²¹

The next section will briefly discuss some of the ministry settings of Grants Hill Baptist Church, Colonial Beach, Virginia, a typical rural Baptist church in the Northern Neck of Virginia, and a church that provides similar examples of some of the characteristics previously stated.

Rooted in the Community

The Northern Neck of Virginia is a peninsula located in northeast Virginia on the Maryland / Virginia borderline. It is bordered to the north by the Potomac River, the East by the Chesapeake Bay, and the south the Rappahannock River. Before the two bridges were built in the 1950s and 1960s, only one rural road allowed access into the peninsula. The Northern Neck of Virginia comprises four counties: Westmoreland, Richmond, Northumberland, and Lancaster County.

In the county of Westmoreland, there is a hill named after victorious civil war General Ulysses S. Grant. It is said that one could stand on that hill and look south over the Rappahannock River, and this represented Grant’s “looking” toward Richmond before marching his Army during the American Civil War. In 1870, the white southern Baptist congregation of

²¹ Dougherty et al., “When the Final Bell Tolls,” 70.

Popes Creek Baptist Church, Westmoreland, Virginia, planted a church for “freed” African Americans, which would later be named Grant’s Hill Baptist Church at this historic location.

This was not a typical church plant as seen today because there were different challenges to overcome in the nineteenth century. Coutta states,

Southern Baptists faced an uphill struggle after separating from Northern Baptists in 1845. The Civil War stalled their efforts and post-war Baptists faced a completely new social landscape. Millions of newly freed blacks confronted them with overwhelming physical and spiritual needs. Political turmoil, immigrants, economic devastation, sharecropping, and poor health faced most Southerners. Southern Baptists managed to turn these challenges to their advantage. Scotch-Irish immigrants and blacks readily accepted Christianity and became Baptist.²²

After 150 years of ministry and service to the community, Grants Hill Baptist Church remains in this rural community.

As many of these newly “freed” African American’s began to build on their freedoms of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Grants Hill Baptist church was the newly established center of this African American community. Hunt states, “Historically, the segregated Black church – largely Baptist and Methodist congregations – was the central institution of the African-American community in the rural South.”²³ Within this community, GHBC has had many religious leaders, and all of them have served as bi-vocational ministers because the church was mainly supported by farmers, watermen, and laborers who could not afford to support a full-time pastor. The original church building was built by donations from the founding families, and many gave lumber left over from building their own homes and barns.

GHBC has continued its acceptance of the bi-vocational ministers over the years and has benefited in keeping a pastor during challenging economic times. Even as the congregation has

²² Coutta, *Divine Institutions*, 139.

²³ Matthew O. Hunt and Larry L. Hunt, "Regional Religions? Extending the “Semi-involuntary” Thesis of African- American Religious Participation. *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 4 (December 2000): 571.

aged over the years, and second or third-generation families have left the rural community depleting the reserve of youth, the bi-vocational minister remains. Bickers states, “Many bi-vocational ministers lead older, established churches that may have plateaued many years ago. Some may be close to shutting their doors.”²⁴ GHBC has had many “near-death” experiences, but like many other rural churches, the dedication and loyalty of its founding families have endured.

As stated earlier, GHBC has had several generations of families connected to the founders, which have supported it since its establishment. Even though there may have been clear signs of decline and decay, the “founding” families continue to communicate outside of the church business meeting and make up their minds to keep the church doors open at all costs. Some family members have left the rural community, but they still provide financial support because they are descendants of those who rest in the church cemetery. Many support from a distance because they do not want the annual celebrations and traditions to end, which bring them back to their “home place” each year. Bierly states, “In a small church, where board and committee members know each other well and have been together for years, it’s likely that many “mini-meetings” have already occurred over the phone, at family picnics, at the supermarket, in the church parking lot, etc. before the scheduled meeting takes place. Therefore, people assemble with their minds already made up, not to search for the truth together.”²⁵

As stated earlier, GHBC also follows similar traditions and institutional practices that do not promote evangelism. Rather, church members are encouraged to invite families and friends

²⁴ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs*, 90.

²⁵ Steve R. Bierly, *Help for the Small-Church Pastor: Unlock the Potential of Your Congregation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995, 31.

back to the church to fundraise rather than focusing on saving souls because many people who once supported the church have long left the rural community along with their checkbooks.

Because GHBC is considered a historic site in Westmoreland County and a true landmark of the community, the road that leads to the church has been named Grant's Hill Church Road. Unfortunately, many people who live along this rural route do not attend the church but use the church name to receive their mail. GHBC has become a landmark in the community, and many people in Westmoreland County refer to the church's name when giving visitors directions because it is near many historical sites. It is well known that generations of families often use the church name when giving directions to their birthplace in Westmoreland County.

GHBC has existed for over 150 years, and the question that many church members either refuse to discuss or would rather not address is whether the clock is running out due to dwindling numbers, financial shortfalls, and the substitution of evangelism for supporting annual events and tradition. GHBC has a rich heritage in Westmoreland County, Virginia, which supports the reason many are willing to continue to help even though it appears that the church has matured beyond its years. GHBC has historically been a place of tradition, cultural importance, and refuge, and it has been led by a wealth of great leaders who have served generations of faithful members. It appears that GHBC may be on the verge of extinction, but an intervention into its decline may allow the clock to be reset. To initiate an intervention into the destructive practices of rural churches like GHBC, this author will present a paradigm shift that may reduce the decline and slow the destructive practices of these great God-given landmarks.

Problem Presented

Many Rural Baptist Churches have seen a gradual decline over the years, and some are on the verge of extinction. This decline may be a direct result of those churches attempting to continue unnecessary traditions and unproductive ministries. These churches also sacrifice future interests and prospects for institutional practices that do not fulfill the Great Commission and, thereby, promote destructive practices. To initiate an intervention into the destructive practices of these churches, this author will develop this project to encourage a paradigm shift that may reduce those suicidal practices and slow the destruction.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to identify areas of strength and weakness in the Rural Baptist Church so that a paradigm shift may occur to promote spiritual health, which will promote growth, not in numbers but maturity. Four core topics will be used to identify and explore as a standard for evaluating the rural church characteristics. First, the role of the pastor and church leadership will be identified and understood. Secondly, the topic of church health will be defined, and levels established. Third, this project will investigate whether there is a Godly vision guiding the Rural Baptist Church and identify whether it is missing because most small churches “lack any, common vision except for survival.”²⁶ And finally, the importance of knowing when and how to change in the Rural Baptist Church will be articulated and understood so that a paradigm shift may occur.

²⁶ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 9.

Basic Assumptions

The first presupposition of this project centers on the fact that the rural church does not really want to be a “mega-church” but only wants to remain viable and a place for its people to continue to fellowship, worship, and celebrate annual religious events. This project aims to use the results as a tool to encourage the rural church and emphasize that “megachurch” may be the will of God for some churches, but spiritual health and maturity are essential. Bierly states,

Leaders are being foolish when they become angry with small congregations who fail to be motivated by ideas that are alien to their culture. The small church cannot be a seminary or a megachurch. There is no sense in trying to make it into one. The wasted effort will only bring frustration and heartache. The small church is simply a different animal.²⁷

The next presupposition of this project is found in the fact that small rural churches want discipleship, like their urban counterparts, but they do not want to be forced to change their rural characteristics to attain this. The rural church is proud of its rural beginnings, history, and heritage but often ignores warnings of decline if that heritage is threatened. This is a sign of spiritual immaturity and an unhealthy characteristic. This project will explore church health while highlighting the value of the rural church as the landmark of the community and fulfilling the will of God in their unique way. Bierly states,

The small church has a bad reputation for being “against growth” because it balks at plans coming out of the church-growth movement. But smaller congregations have been unfairly labeled. It’s not that they are against growth; it’s that they are against changing the characteristics that make them unique. Small congregations aren’t opposed to bringing men and women to Christ, but they are opposed to becoming mega-churches. They don’t want to be asked to become something they are not. Unfortunately, some evangelism programs ask small churches to do just that. The congregation rebels at the idea, and the leader becomes discouraged because his or her people “won’t do anything to help the church grow.” Actually, small churches can work for growth as long as they are first assured that the resulting congregations will still have a small-church flavor.²⁸

²⁷ Bierly, *Help for the Small-Church Pastor*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

Finally, the last presupposition of this project assumes that the rural church is currently dominated by an older generation, who do not like or encourage change. Because many of the older generations in the rural church are notorious for resisting change, methods to help educate and create a paradigm shift will be introduced. This project will discuss how educating the congregation and giving necessary time and space for the acceptance of correcting destructive practices within many beloved traditions and events could encourage change. In the section entitled “Time for a Checkup,” Bickers states,

People would prefer that their doctors find nothing wrong when they go in for their checkup. I wish my doctor had not found I had high blood pressure, but I’m thankful it was found before it had done any permanent damage. With the proper medication, a commitment to exercise and eating a more sensible diet, my blood pressure is under control. You may not like the results you get when you give your church a health checkup, but if you can find problems before they have done any permanent damage, you’ll have the opportunity to make the needed changes to return your church to health.²⁹

Definitions

Safe Zone. In reference to speaking in confidence, a place that the conversation is being kept secret, anonymity exists, speaking in private.

Instrument. Churches and denominations that seek to meet the needs of spiritual consumers and effectively execute the purpose for which they were established.³⁰

Institution. Misused instruments: achieving the original purpose with decreasing efficiency, and the structure begins to slowly stagnate, resulting in a decline.³¹

Institutional practices. The instrument is comprised of both productive and nonproductive members, the human nature of the members and leaders of hold an excessively egocentric point of view, unwilling to make sensible adjustments to adapt to societal changes without compromising core Christian values.³²

²⁹ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 137.

³⁰ Ramsey Coutta, *A Practical Guide for Successful Church Change* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2008), 16.

³¹ Coutta, *A Practical Guide*, 17.

³² *Ibid.*, 18 – 19.

Spiritual Strength. In reference to ministry, it is doing what is necessary within the ministry to fulfill an element found in the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19).

Spiritual Weakness. In reference to ministry, it is failing to do what is necessary within the ministry that fulfills an element found in the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19).

Church Growth. Indicated by an expanded and solidified doctrinal belief system and associated practices; increasing membership; increasing production of religious goods and services that benefit members and attract newcomers, increasing physical and geographical growth of the organization.³³

Church Decline. The stage of negative membership growth, negative church growth, negative financial growth, the final takeover of vested interests, and declining commitment to original doctrine and practices.³⁴

Church Expansion. An exciting time for the membership of the organization and morale is generally high, members are usually mission-oriented working together harmoniously to accomplish the next goal, leadership typically acts selflessly and is goal-directed as well, leaders have not begun to view the organization to serve themselves but a tool to carry out the work of God.³⁵

Church Reform. To be reorganized and its methods of action altered to become more of an instrument and achieve its purpose to such a degree that the tension is reduced.³⁶

Connectivity. The ability to identify with people and relate to them in a way that increases your influence with them.³⁷

Hospitality. The quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.

High Traffic Areas. In reference to human encounters, an area where many people may pass one another or pass through an opening, door, or path, where many people walk next to each other in the opposite direction like entering or exiting a building.

³³ Ibid., 41.

³⁴ Ibid., 48.

³⁵ Ibid., 97.

³⁶ Ibid., 20.

³⁷ John Maxwell, *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do Differently* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 3.

Triangulation. To allow the research data to be cross-checked for accuracy with a simple system using personal interviews, surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, participant journals, observations, and field notes.³⁸

Theme. In the research process, themes are common answers given by participants that are similar.³⁹

Slippage. In the research process, slippage identifies disparate answers; distinct in kind; essentially different; dissimilar.⁴⁰

Silence. A reality known by the researcher that the participants' responses did not cover and why did the participant miss it.⁴¹

Limitation

This project encountered several limitations found early in the research process, beginning with the various works written about the rural church. Much has been written on discipleship, church growth, and prosperity methods, but research on the rural church and its leadership in America is limited. In the research findings of the article entitled “*Are Rural Clergy Worse Off*,” the authors agree that sources are limited. The authors offer limitations in their study on occupational conditions and pastoral experiences in a rural church. The authors state,

Determining the extent and nature of these differences is essential for addressing the needs of clergy, for nearly one-third of churches in the United States are in predominately rural areas. Unfortunately, work to date does not allow for an easy examination of clergy experiences in rural churches – particularly in the United States – for three main reasons. First, writings on rural churches, clergy, and ministry are divided between “pastoral” and “empirical” works. By “pastoral,” we mean those books and articles that are intended primarily as guides to improving rural ministry rather than rigorous scholarly analyses of it. In contrast, “empirical” treatments are those that rely on established social scientific

³⁸ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 75 - 78.

³⁹ Ibid., 197 – 200.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

methods such as in-depth ethnographies, survey-based data collection, and statistical analyses.⁴²

This project is also limited to some aspects of the leadership of the rural church because not every aspect can be thoroughly addressed. There were limited research and sources to compare to the urban and city church pastors and leadership, which hampered an exhausted list of methods for comparison.

In the previous article, another limitation was found similar to this project in that “the rural pastoral experience is that rurality in both England and the United States is changing and has been for some time. “Thus, inherited notions of what the rural church is like may no longer be accurate.”⁴³ Another limitation exists because traditions and annual functions are handled differently within each rural church, and it is difficult to identify whether their impact is seen as a “growth-restricting diseases”⁴⁴ because this project did not make a comparison of individual churches.

The final limitation was found in the fact that this project surveyed a diverse population in the Northern Neck of Virginia only. The participants were members and non-members of the Rural Baptist churches of the Northern Neck, and no one outside of that area was surveyed. This limitation presents an opportunity for further research outside of the Northern Neck in other rural communities, providing results that may change the findings gathered.

⁴² Andrew Miles and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, "Are Rural Clergy Worse Off?: An Examination of Occupational Conditions and Pastoral Experiences in a Sample of United Methodist Clergy." *Sociology of Religion* 73, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 24.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church: Every Church is Big in God's Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 16.

Delimitations

The delimitations were established during the recruitment and screening process of this project. First, an introductory letter was randomly read to potential participants that stated that as a doctoral candidate, the researcher would conduct research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. This introductory letter explained that the purpose of the research was to answer the question of whether unnecessary traditions and unproductive ministries have resulted in the rural Baptist church losing its place of importance in the rural community and its ability to attract and retain new members. If the potential participant were interested in participating, a brief screening process would occur at that moment.

The screening process would qualify the potential participant using three questions, and the fourth question would serve statistical purposes if the potential participant did not qualify. The qualified participant would then be asked to complete a brief anonymous questionnaire.

These questions created an inclusion/exclusion criterion for participants for the Northern Neck of Virginia, which included the counties of Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond County, respectively.

Thesis Statement

The rural Baptist church has historically been a place of tradition, cultural importance, and refuge, but over time it has experienced a gradual decline which necessitates the need to identify the potential destructive practices and to present a paradigm shift that may be used to intervene in those destructive practices. This project will explore areas of strength and weakness in the rural Baptist church and attempt to articulate how “church health, not church growth,” is

key to the survivability of the rural church in the 21st century.⁴⁵ Warren states, “The task of church leadership is to discover and remove growth-restricting diseases and barriers so that natural, normal growth can occur.”⁴⁶ Most rural Baptist churches, known for their traditions and annual events, normally take up the church calendar doing things they traditionally do, whether it is productive to growth or not. Those traditions and annual events create what Warren describes as “growth-restricting diseases.”⁴⁷ The challenge of the rural Baptist church leadership is to promote a paradigm shift in which church health becomes more important than traditions and annual events.

Bierly reveals why discovering and focusing on the good work of the small church is key to having a successful, fulfilling, and faithful ministry. Bierly states, “I believe God looks at the small church and sees much good there.”⁴⁸ Most rural Baptist churches are considered small compared to their urban counterparts, but they still have an enormous responsibility and an important job in advancing God’s Kingdom. In his book, Bierly explains that small churches struggle with the same difficulties as larger churches, such as inadequate facilities, power struggles, financial obligations, and member conflicts, and they are still expected to fulfill the will of God. This chapter has covered the ministry context, identified the problem, and put forth a thesis statement. This project will now review the conceptual framework to include a literature review and a discussion of theological and theoretical foundations.

⁴⁵ Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Bierly, *Help for the Small-Church Pastor*, 12.

Chapter Two

Conceptual Framework

Review of Literature

The conceptual framework behind this project draws from many sources which will assist in addressing the various issues relating to the rural Baptist church. There are many reasons for the gradual decline in membership and financial support but continuing the current trends will only lead to death. This problem is being addressed because this writer believes that the rural Baptist church is not a place in the rural community that should slowly disappear over time, but it is a gift of God where “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few” (Matthew 9: 37). Therefore, change must come with a paradigm shift, which may reinvigorate new life.

In his book, *Transforming Church in Rural America*, O’Dell articulates his support for the rural church and offers a first-hand account from his experience as pastor of Southside Baptist Church in South Lead Hill, Arkansas, which transformed it into a thriving “Brand New Church.” O’Dell states,

Listen. God loves rural – no question about it. Most Old Testament prophets were called from a small town. Jesus was born rural and grew up rural. When the invitation to join Him at His banquet table fell on indifferent ears in the cities, Jesus invited small-town people to His party. Jesus said, “Go out to the roads country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full” (Luke 14: 21).⁴⁹

Another noteworthy example of support for the rural church is the study conducted by the rural sociology department of the University of Missouri and by the Missouri School of Religion, in which 500 rural and small-town churches in 99 townships in Missouri were performed. This

⁴⁹ Shannon O’Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking all the Rurals* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2010), 10.

was a restudy conducted initially in 1952, then again from 1998 to 2001, funded by the Lilly Foundation, and is still in development. In his book, *Rechurched Rural America*, Farley presents findings in which he was a consultant and prepared studies to provide background for persons who did the fieldwork. His findings reveal vast knowledge of rural life in America and provide an example of his support for the rural church. Throughout his work, he shows the importance of having a source of information for more than “200,000 congregations in rural North America”⁵⁰ and for those who belong and care about them. Farley states,

We have selected as our title for this report *The Rechurched Rural America*. What we mean by the unfamiliar term, “rechurched” is that rural places have indeed changed over the past half century; that, some will need to make changes soon if they are to continue; that, many new churches have been born during this half century; that, more new churches will need to be planted in the decades to come; and that denominational leaders need to be very intentional about strategizing for the church life of rural America.⁵¹

This project will draw from similar sources to strategize a plan and present a paradigm shift for church leaders in rural America. The conceptual framework, as stated earlier, will focus upon literature and theological sources based on four core topics; pastoral issues, church health, vision, and change.

Pastoral and Leadership Issues

As stated earlier, the review of literature begins from the topic of pastoral and leadership issues. In an article that studied the impact of ongoing education of Baptist ministers, the authors present their results from a national survey of 255 randomly selected pastors analyzing their perceptions of pastoral preparation, leadership roles, and styles. The authors found that results show that “pastors of color perceive themselves as playing more of a social role and a political

⁵⁰ Gary Farley, “The Re-churching of Rural America: A Report of the Restudy of Rural Churches in America,” *RuralChurch.US* (October 2005), 3, accessed November 17, 2020. <https://ruralchurch.us/rechurched-rural-america/>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

leadership role in their communities than their white counterparts.”⁵² In contrast, many rural congregations value traditions which may not have been established by the pastor and may create conflict when a new vision or change is introduced so that the pastor perceives themselves taking a “back seat” to church tradition. The information in this article is relevant in developing a conceptual framework because this project surveyed the community on the pastor's relationship with the congregations and how they perceive the pastor, directly impacting leadership influence in the church. The findings from this report may also better explain why many rural churches have difficulty with change and may help develop a better understanding of how to handle conflicts when change is introduced within the church.

Next, the author Dorsett provides methods to assist pastors serving small churches that may not be able to “fully-fund their salaries.”⁵³ Dorsett believes “the principles found in this book will assist pastors in creating pastoral leadership teams”⁵⁴ when they do not have a church budget that can cover a full-time salary. Dorsett uses New Testament church leadership principles to present lessons, exercises, and worksheets to teach and train select church leaders to assist the pastor. Dorsett reveals the danger of burnout while pasturing a small church, like that of larger churches. He also shares his personal experience of the increased stress forced on the pastor's family in a small church; that the small church family can experience disappointment, failure, and fatigue the same as the pastor himself. The information in this book is relevant in developing a conceptual framework because this project will present ministry strategies using leadership teams to assist the pastor for more effectiveness in his role.

⁵² Kirkpatrick G. Cohall and Bruce S. Cooper, "Educating American Baptist Pastors: A National Survey of Church Leaders." *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 19, no. 1 (January 2010), 27.

⁵³ Terry W. Dorsett, *Developing Leadership Teams in the Bivocational Church* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2010), 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Finally, the core topic on pastoral issues and leadership will explore factors evaluating and revealing levels of Pastor's risk of termination and exit from the church. The authors of this article researched online surveys of 285 Evangelical Pastors and provided results to evaluate the levels of differences in each pastor's response. This article reveals that there are common trends that have caused pastors' dismissal or leaving the ministry. This problem is being addressed because, in the same way as their urban and city counterparts, the rural pastor also experiences burnout.

The authors state, "contributors to clergy fall-out include such issues as interpersonal disagreements with parishioners, role overload, lack of personal and professional boundaries, loss of hope for positive change, and financial pressure."⁵⁵ The authors also articulate that moral failures, unfulfilled expectations, and family stresses caused pastors to leave their leadership roles within the church faster than their secular counterparts. The information in this article is relevant to this project because these topics are relevant in understanding the level of stress a ministry leader may encounter that a religious degree fails to cover. Carter states, "I am just as convinced that a basic theological degree is not enough. It is a beginning, perhaps, but it is not sufficient for a lifetime of service. To express it another way, it is a source of capital that is quickly depleted or, better yet, it is a well that runs dry."⁵⁶

Church Health

One of the most overlooked issues in the rural Baptist church is whether the church is operating in a spiritually healthy manner. Like that of a typical family, if the parents do not have

⁵⁵J. Louis Spencer, Bruce Winston, and Mihai Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors' Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 1, (February 2012): 87.

⁵⁶ Kenneth H. Carter Jr., "My Continuing Education as a Pastor," *Clergy Journal* 85, no. 3 (January 2009): 18.

a healthy relationship, the children may also catch the same disease. Arguing openly, mistrust, physically fighting or no communication are examples that may affect the children who then grow up to display those same characteristics. In his book, Scazzero reveals his own experience when the reality of an unhealthy household was carried over and displayed in his unhealthy ministry. Scazzero states,

The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader's internal life than with the leader's expertise, gifts, or experience. It took me a long time to realize that yet another leadership seminar or more information was not the key to "successful" church leadership. In fact, my journey toward leading an emotionally and spiritually healthy church was not triggered in a seminar or book. Instead, it was brought to a head with a very painful conversation at home.⁵⁷

Scazzero reveals in his book that his wife finally had enough of the unhealthy environment in the home and the stresses of ministry and wanted to quit: him and the church. This topic of church health is being addressed in this project because church leaders and pastors are not exempt from domestic problems carried over into their ministry. Scazzero states,

But it is not enough for the leader to change. God wants to set others free as well – whether this is their first year as a Christian or their fiftieth, whether they are single or married, and whatever their church role may be (new member, leader, or pastor). When you do the hard work of becoming an emotionally and spiritually mature disciple of Jesus Christ, the impact will be felt all around you.⁵⁸

The challenge most bi-vocational pastors find in the rural church is how to balance the time it takes to manage their many responsibilities at home and church. Scazzero believes something is desperately wrong in the church, and "we cannot grow an emotionally healthy church if we ourselves are not addressing issues deep beneath the surface of our lives."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 20.

⁵⁸ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 37.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 47.

Scazzero emphasizes that “emotional health and spiritual health are inseparable, and it is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.”⁶⁰ In the rural community, mental and emotional health services are limited; many people do not find it necessary, and most do not encourage seeking help. And suppose the leadership of the rural church does not promote or encourage mental and emotional health but only focuses on Sunday’s message. In that case, the congregation will not see the importance of this human aspect.

The church's health is being addressed in this project because the rural church currently finds itself in survival mode due to low attendance, depleted financial support, and lack of evangelism. This problem may be rectified if the leadership of the rural church is willing to take the time and effort to make their personal health and church health a priority. Scazzero states,

“For this reason, it takes work, energy, inconvenience, time, courage, solitude, and a solid understanding of the grace of God in the gospel to grow in Christlikeness. This further contributes, I believe, to why the frontier of emotional health has largely been ignored in most discipleship, spiritual formation, and mentoring models in our churches and seminaries. For this, we are paying the heavy price of stunted growth and shallow disciples in our churches.”⁶¹

In other words, the challenge of the bi-vocational pastor in the rural church of today will be taking the time and putting forth the effort to create and promote a healthy environment at home and church.

Vision

The third core topic will support the conceptual framework presented by the author George Barna. In this book, Barna presents his theories about discovering and applying God’s plan for life and ministry by harnessing the power of vision. Barna believes that “it is imperative

⁶⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁶¹ Ibid., 58.

that we grasp God's vision for each church."⁶² Traditionally, many rural Baptist churches believe that the reading of a mission statement at the beginning of worship service is the same as a reading of a vision statement. Barna articulates how some church leaders may be confused and have unintentionally led their congregations away from God's vision for the church and towards their selfish ambitions. This problem is being addressed because most rural churches do not have or do not understand what a Godly vision statement is for their church. The information in this book is relevant to this project because this project will explore the understanding of a Godly vision and focus on casting a Godly vision in the rural Baptist church.

Next, O'Dell shares his experience as a rural bi-vocational Pastor and how rural America is perhaps more "churched and more un-churched than any place on earth."⁶³ O'Dell believes that rural people come from a rich heritage, and few have experienced "the living Cornerstone of the church."⁶⁴ O'Dell explains that there is a rich history within most rural churches because many rural churches started when their rural community formed. This means that many rural churches have deep roots in the community through the various families connected within the church and not a true relationship with Jesus. The information in this book is relevant in developing the conceptual framework of this project because this project will address how many rural churches may have fallen into a level of disrepair because they focus more on traditions and are unwilling to change.

⁶² George Barna, *The Power of Vision: Discover and Apply God's Plan for Your Life and Ministry*. 3rd ed., (Ventura, CA: Regal/Gospel Light, 2009), 12.

⁶³ Shannon O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking all the Rurals* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2010), 18.

⁶⁴ O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America*, 18.

Finally, Browning explains an element found in his book called “*Multility*, - a noun - as a commitment to multiples of something, instead of a larger version of that thing.”⁶⁵ Using this element, a rural church leader may cast a vision that church growth is possible even in the remotest of locations. Browning articulates his definition by stating, “Multility contends that more is better than bigger. Multility is growth by cell division, the replicating model of organic systems.”⁶⁶ He shares his vision of a Deliberate Simple church growing exponentially by multiplying believers, leaders, groups, services, sites, and it “mirrors a restaurant chain.”⁶⁷ In a Deliberate Simple church, Browning encourages the use of ministries instead of programs because “this allows for diversity and innovation and multiplies the opportunities we have to reach out.”⁶⁸ Multility is the process of growing by using groups and various sites as those groups grow rather than building new additions onto the church building as membership grows; i.e., more groups in various sites are better than a bigger building for more people.

Change

The last core topic in developing the conceptual framework of this project is change. Many rural Baptist churches are celebrating their centennial year of service, and because of this, many have older members who are not willing to change. They are loyal to their church and are willing to support it, even though it may be heading in the wrong direction. The challenge of having faithful members is a problem every church experiences, but this may be why many rural churches are on the verge of extinction. Many rural churches model their community in which

⁶⁵ Dave Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 128.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 135.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 136.

they form groups with family and friends of the community. In the article "*A Place to Belong: Small Group Involvement in Religious Congregation*," the authors Kevin D. Dougherty and Andrew L. Whitehead present their report on individual involvement in congregations and how these groups are essential for human development and the support of the church. The authors state,

Congregations, like all voluntary organizations, depend on committed participants to exist. Individuals' voluntary contributions of time and money are essential resources for congregations. Vital congregations are those that mobilize high rates of commitment and participation. Organizational attributes play a key role in fostering commitment. One feature of groups that impacts commitment is size. It is expected that people would feel a strong sense of belonging to small, intimate, primary groups made up of family and close friends; such groups are fundamental to human development.⁶⁹

The natural human development of belonging to a small group can create an environment in which change can be introduced. If the already established group can be encouraged and agrees to stay together and operate in a different way towards a common goal, change may be possible because the group remains the together. For example, many rural churches have ministries and auxiliaries that meet at the church, pray, and conduct business, practice songs and share experiences, but they fail to create an environment for discipleship. If it were possible for those same ministries or auxiliaries to meet as a small group and enhance their meeting with discipleship formation, then change would be possible. Walton states,

There are very good reasons for promoting small groups as a vehicle for discipleship formation. They give a space for the construction of faith thinking, they provide support and care, they can empower all-member ministry, and they encourage engagement with the Scriptures. In small groups, people learn to talk about their faith, gain confidence in praying, discover gifts, and help each other keep alive a worldview that is widely dismissed and eroded in the western world.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Kevin D. Dougherty and Andrew L. Whitehead, "A Place to Belong: Small Group Involvement in Religious Congregations." *Sociology of Religion* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 93.

⁷⁰ Roger Walton, "Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation." *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 8, no. 2 (December 2011): 112.

The rural church's change problem may be better accepted if the existing ministries or auxiliaries understood that the change would not interfere with their established small group.

A paradigm shift in the ministry and auxiliaries of the rural church would be necessary for change, but how would a change in a ministry that may have functioned in a church celebrating 100 plus years of service be possible? In the book *DiscipleShift*, Jim Putman and Bob Harrington present a solution to this problem, the necessity of alignment. The authors state, “Within this shift, we are advocating the principle of *alignment*, in which every program and ministry of a church exists in harmony with the overall goal of making disciples. Various ministries are not seen as isolated components of the church. They are not silos functioning as competitors for resources and leaders. If a program is to exist (and clearly some should), it must move people to venues where spiritual growth can occur. Everything the church does relates in some way to the primary mission of discipleship.”⁷¹

Simply asking the women’s auxiliary to change its meeting place rather than meeting in the church to allow easier access for visitors would not be enough for change. If the women’s auxiliary understood that what they are doing is considered successful in the eyes of Jesus because it fulfills the Great Commission, then they may be motivated to change. Putman and Harrington state,

By applying this principle, church leaders protect their people from spending energy on thing that led to something other than what Jesus would consider success. Success for the church is not feeding the poor a meal to satisfy their hunger. Success is feeding the poor in such a way that they will wonder why we are doing what we do. Our actions should lead them to hunger for the Bread of Life.⁷²

⁷¹ Jim Putman and Bob Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciple*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 171.

⁷² Ibid.

Indeed, change will not come without proper planning and a strategic plan promoting small, deliberate step. This problem is being addressed because the rural church is notoriously slow at decision-making, and without a strategic plan, the vision could die before the next business meeting. As stated earlier, alignment issues within each ministry or auxiliary, now operating as a small group, may be resolved with a strategic plan. In his book *Advanced Strategic Planning*, Malphurs states, “Strategic planning addresses a number of concepts that require alignment. I have observed many churches that have failed to make proper alignments and have suffered diminished returns as a result.”⁷³

Since change may only occur in the older rural churches if the existing group is not threatened, and the change should be seen as gradual, small strategic steps. Each small group must stay in alignment over time so that no one losses focus or motivation. Reed states, “Strategy is unbelievably important. It does not matter where you find your church organizationally. Whether you have got zero small groups. Or you are wanting to launch small groups alongside a Sunday school model. Or you are just trying to ratchet up the excellence level of your groups.”⁷⁴ Even though a strategy is important, as a follower of Christ, the most important element that leads to change cannot be overlooked; the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Cooperating with the Holy Spirit is the key to successfully changing anyone or any church. Christians must understand that lives are changed when Jesus Christ is accepted as Lord and Savior, and when one accepts Him, he is indwelled with the promised Holy Spirit. This writer believes that change will come if one prays to be guided to change with the help of the

⁷³ Audrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 27.

⁷⁴ Ben Reed, *Starting Small: The Ultimate Small Group Blueprint* (Cookeville, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2013), 28.

Holy Spirit. For example, GHBC already has ministries and auxiliaries meeting together, who may shift the way they see themselves as small groups praying for change with the help of the Holy Spirit. This problem is being addressed because this writer believes change is possible with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Earley states,

Let us encourage you as you share your faith; do not rely solely on yourself. You cannot convict, or convince, anyone. The Holy Spirit can. You cannot know everything that is going on in another person's life or mind. The Holy Spirit does. You cannot save anyone. The Holy Spirit can. Since the Holy Spirit plays such a key role in bringing a person to salvation, it behooves us to rely on His help.⁷⁵

The church's leadership and the ministries and auxiliaries, now small groups, should be supported with their alignment by what also comes across the pulpit. The pastor and leaders of the church should echo the same thoughts for change and create a preaching plan to support the change. Gibson states,

You may have thought; a preaching and discipleship plan won't work in my church. Granted, every church is different as far as location and makeup. Congregations vary greatly in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age range, and other factors. Regardless of these, none of us can escape the responsibility of thoughtful planning in how we will make mature disciples.⁷⁶

The bi-vocational pastor should not think that their small rural church does not need a preaching plan because, like all churches, distractions and resistance never end, and it is easy for people to lose focus. Gibson states, "Size does not matter. The size of the church does not make a difference when it comes to assessing where the church is spiritually. The concern is where they are spiritually. When we know this, it helps us, and our leaders discern where we want to move as a church."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013), 35.

⁷⁶ Scott M. Gibson, *Preaching with a Plan: Sermon Strategies for Growing Mature Believers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 119.

⁷⁷ Gibson, *Preaching with a Plan*, 120.

Not only will change be supported with a strategic plan for the church and a preaching plan for the congregation, but every function of the rural church should try to have a strategic plan in place with one goal in mind. In his book, *The Case for Antioch*, Jeff Iorg presents a case study of the church in Antioch found in the New Testament book of Acts in which he reveals a biblical model for a transformational church. Iorg states,

The story of the church at Antioch is an inspiring drama, a model of transformational church in the first century for the church of the twenty-first century. Antioch is an ancient model for the future church. This church, composed of transformed people, transformed its community, the Mediterranean region, and the world as we know it. We are fortunate to have an extensive biblical record of its beginning and early years of growth, along with examples of how it handled doctrinal debates, personality conflicts, and practical matters of church life, Christian devotion, and missionary outreach. This record provides a case study for starting and growing transformational churches.⁷⁸

This problem is being addressed because the rural Baptist church is experiencing a gradual decline, and without transformation, it may not survive. Iorg presents his work in the form of a biblically based case study, which would provide a strong example for the rural church to justify a Godly change. Iorg continues to add,

Most churches have some type of teaching program offering services, classes, courses, and/or seminars on a variety of subjects. Simply having a teaching program however, based on evidence already cited, apparently is not enough to produce life transformation. Healthy churches teach strategically, with measurable steps of progress guiding people toward specific outcomes through their instructional ministry.⁷⁹

With this in mind, a paradigm shift in how the various ministries and auxiliaries in the rural church will see themselves and how they will operate may happen with a strategic plan for change using a Biblical model of a transforming church and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The

⁷⁸ Jeff Iorg, *The Case for Antioch: A Biblical Model for a Transformational Church*. (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 7.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 85.

conceptual framework of this project will now build upon theological foundations found in the Old and New Testaments.

Theological Foundations

The Church is a Particular and Peculiar People

The theological foundation for this project begins in the Old Testament, which reveals the existence of a particular people. The writer of Chronicles states, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).” This passage presents the idea that a particular kind of people exists in the world with a particular kind of relationship with their Creator, which is not measured in an earthly fashion but by their obedience and love for Him. According to Bierly, “If only we could truly see things from God’s perspective and realize that small congregations have what it takes when it comes to fulfilling His desires for the church.”⁸⁰

The understanding and relationship with God are dependent on the understanding and relationship with His word. Being “particular” would imply that these people spend time in God’s word and act according to his instructions. These particular people would also want to share their God and His Word with the world. Kwakkel states, “Spirituality can be worthy of the name ‘evangelical’ only if it takes the lessons of the Holy Spirit in the written Word of God to heart. Therefore, if one wants to develop evangelical perspectives on spirituality, it is absolutely necessary to explore what the Bible teaches about these matters.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Bierly, *Help for the Small-Church Pastor*, 80.

⁸¹ Gert Kwakkel, "Models of Spirituality in the Bible: Abraham, David, Job and Peter." *European Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (April 2010): 17.

Therefore, the theological foundation for this project must build on principles found in the Old and New Testaments. The Apostle Peter states, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9). Peter uses the word “peculiar” to identify God’s people as being distinctive in character and belief. This idea of the rural church being a “peculiar” people, distinctive in character, is reflected throughout this project because each member of a rural church, whether young or old, is chosen, royal, and holy unto God. Bierly states, “I believe God looks at the small church and sees much good there.”⁸² This review will draw from theological sources that focus on four core topics; pastoral issues, church health, vision, and change.

Pastoral and Leadership Issues

Galatians 6: 1,2

This theological review begins with addressing pastoral issues in reference to the verses found in the book of Galatians. In the book of Galatians 6: 1, 2, the Apostle Paul instructs the church members to “restore” the fallen and “bear” one another’s burdens. These verses speak to a pastoral function of helping others by exercising the humility to “restore” them and to “bear” burdens together. These verses reveal that everyone, including the church, can be tempted to fall into sin, but because of the sacrifice of Christ, one can be restored. These verses will support the idea that church leaders and their members should care for and minister to one another and not be judgmental. The authors state,

The first responsibility of those who are spiritual is the restoration of one who has sinned. Paul's conditional clause, *if someone is caught in a sin*, is framed in such a way as to point to the high probability that members of the church will sin. Sin in the church is not

⁸² Kwakkel, "Models of Spirituality in the Bible," 12.

a hypothetical possibility, it is a reality. Paul and his readers both knew of believers in the church who had been trapped by sin. The kind of sin in view here is not specified by Paul. It could be any one of the "acts of the sinful nature" (5:19-21). Paul is more concerned about the way sinners in the church are treated than in the sin itself.⁸³

The reality of sin is inescapable. Many rural and urban church members have left the fellowship due to moral failure because they knew that the church was unforgiving and hypocritical. This is not new to the church. The IVP commentary author states,

Moral failure in the church should not be a surprise, nor should it be considered fatal to the life of the church. What is important is the church's response when such failure occurs. The church may respond with harsh condemnation under the law. That response will crush the sinner and divide the church. That seems to have been what was happening in the churches in Galatia. The zealots for the law were merciless to sinners. But Paul wants to show that the occasion of sin is the opportunity for Spirit-led people to display the fruit of the Spirit in order to bring healing to the sinner and unity in the church.⁸⁴

These verses are relevant in developing the conceptual framework of this project because this project supports ideas and methods that encourage and direct church leadership and the members to look beyond each other's faults and fulfill the will of God by showing love and forgiveness to others.

1 Timothy 3: 1 – 7

In the book of 1 Timothy 3: 1 – 7, the Apostle Paul is teaching Timothy about the personal character of the Overseer or Pastor. These verses are relevant to this project because they give a Biblical example of the characteristics of the Pastor or that of a well-grounded church leader. In the early years of the rural Baptist church, those in leadership were selected using similar basic core principles. That expectation has changed over time, and many churches, including rural counterparts, have relaxed this basic standard. Paul gives Timothy sound advice

⁸³ Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2011, 171.

⁸⁴ Osborne, et al., *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Galatians*.

to begin his leadership role, and this project will reference some of those characteristics for church leadership, which can be used to rate Biblical strength and weakness.

In this passage of scripture, the Apostle Paul presents several “codes of conduct” for church leadership, whether deacon, pastor or overseer. Paul begins with being “above reproach” or being above disgrace, discreditation, or blame. Paul defines this “irreproachability” by identifying qualifying characteristics in verses 2- 7, which can be used to rate church leadership.

The IVP commentary author states,

The code that follows in verses 2-7 gives guidelines for measuring a candidate's reputation, which *must be above reproach*. This requirement, one word in the original Greek, is the only one in the code that requires further definition. The items that follow give an idea of the directions that "irreproachability" should move in. Generally, the focus is on observable conduct. Most of the items of behavior that follow require little explanation.⁸⁵

These characteristics are being addressed because the moral failure of the pastor and church leaders may negatively impact members of the church because of this “observable conduct.”

The danger of “observable conduct” within the church, which falls short of the high bar set by the Apostle Paul, may be seen as normal and modeled by the congregation and may then be reflected in the action of the people.

The IVP commentary author also states,

Although we might cringe at the thought, most of us would probably admit that one's marriage sheds a good deal of light on one's character. Paul apparently held similar feelings. But the meaning of the condition that the overseer be *the husband of but one wife* (literally, a "one-woman man") continues to provoke discussion, and some of the interpretations bear a closer look. 1. The qualification prohibits polygamists from holding this office. 2. The qualification excludes those who have remarried after the death of a spouse. 3. The qualification specifically rules out those who have remarried after divorce. 4. The qualification is a requirement of faithfulness in marriage.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1 Timothy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 253.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

The evidence in most churches and their congregation is that the requirements of marriage and its expectations have relaxed and may support the idea that divorce is seen as more accepted in society.

Titus 1: 1 – 3

In the short book of Titus 1: 1 - 3, Paul reveals that crucial events in God's plan occur at His designated time and are not influenced or controlled by sinful man. In these verses, Paul goes on to explain that through preaching, God reveals His plan. Paul explains that his responsibility to preach is so that the world might receive God's word. Throughout Paul's ministry, he expresses the understanding that he and all the pastors are the under-shepherds of Christ. This implies that the pastor is accountable for caring for God's prized possession and God's Word.

At the beginning of Titus, the Apostle Paul introduces himself as a "servant," indicating his position in ministry in serving and fulfilling the will of God serving under the leadership and direction of Jesus Christ. Paul gives his testimony in the introduction of this book to show he lived to serve God, and he wanted others to follow his example.

The IVP commentary authors state,

Paul uses two terms to introduce himself in verse 1. *Servant of God* occurs only here in the Pastorals (see "servant of Christ Jesus," Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1). It describes Paul as one who is under compulsion, committed to faithful service as a slave to a master. It also indicates his submission to the will of God. *Apostle of Jesus Christ*, as we have seen at 1 Timothy 1:1 (though there it is "Christ Jesus"; compare 2 Tim 1:1), signifies Paul's selection for service and his sending by Christ himself. This is a technical designation of one to whom Christ's authority has been delegated. From the accounts in Acts and his own letters, it is very apparent that Paul lived to serve God. It is also apparent that he wanted to see this motivation duplicated in the lives of others. The greeting in Titus reflects both of these interests as Paul describes what makes life meaningful for him.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Titus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 123.

This topic is being addressed because all believers in Christ should follow Paul's example and live to serve God. Unfortunately, with today's many distractions, God's children have become easily drawn away from this level of faith, even in the rural community. This fascinating truth may be the answer to why church attendance has declined in all churches. It may explain why faith and religion have taken a back seat to the interest of social media, sports, extracurricular activities, and worldliness.

Church Health

Ezekiel 37:1-3

In the book of Ezekiel 37: 1 – 3, the writer presents a common experience shared by many people at some time in their lives: finding answers about the unknown. Often, people face questions that they cannot reasonably answer, and they say, “God knows.” In these verses, Ezekiel is facing a similar challenge from God himself, and Ezekiel, as a mortal man, answers the question the same; “God knows.” But believers should understand and trust that God knows the answer, even in life's difficult moments. These verses are relevant to this project because this project will address rural church health in terms of trusting God even when life presents the unknown, i.e., will we meet the budget this month, will we be able to fulfill the vision, can a rural church out in the middle of nowhere be able to survive in the world of so many distractions? Duguid states,

Can such dead people live? Is it possible, not merely theoretically but actually, for people like us to be resuscitated and brought back to life toward God? That question cannot simply be answered, “Of course!” as if it were trivial matter. Because of our sin we are under God's wrath, so the question is not merely “Can God in general raise dead people to life?” but rather “Will he raise rebels like us to life?” Thanks be to God, the answer for us is positive, as it was for Israel. Thus Paul tells the Colossians, “When you were dead in your sins and in the un-circumcision of your sinful nature, God made you

alive with Christ” (Col. 2: 13). In Christ, there is life for the spiritually dead. How, though, is this new life received? It is received through union with Christ.⁸⁸

From this chapter in Ezekiel, one can observe that when God instructs the prophet to prophesy to the bones, and they live again. But one should also understand that when Ezekiel follows God’s instructions, God’s power is released to do the impossible. Similarly, Jesus’ act of love, while serving as a living sacrifice for hopeless man, did the impossible and saved him from the penalty of sin. The people of the rural church need encouragement to turn away from institution practices for survivability during the unknown challenges of church life and turn to God for the answer.

Matthew 16: 17, 18

The book of Matthew 16: 17, 18 reveals the end of a conversation between Jesus and Peter in which Jesus states to Peter that what he said was not from his human knowledge but divine insight. This verse reveals sinful man cannot share divine insight unless it was imparted to him by God. This verse also reveals that divine insight, which is by faith, will be the cornerstone upon which Christ will build his church. This project will promote Godly health in the rural church by promoting the ability to hear from God by remaining and trusting in the Word of God. The rural church, like its urban counterpart, is constantly under demonic attack, which may result in creating an unhealthy environment, but it is reassuring to know that the promises of God are the same yesterday, today, and will be forevermore. This verse is relevant to this project because this project will emphasize that God’s people may experience challenges, but they must remember that they are not alone because God is with them. This problem is being addressed

⁸⁸ Iain M. Duguid, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ezekiel*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 431.

because the rural church may experience times of isolation and the belief that no one cares, which creates an unhealthy environment. The IVP commentary authors state,

Peter did not receive his revelation from *man*, literally "flesh and blood" (compare Gal 1:16), a common expression for "mortals" or "humans" (as in 1 Cor 15:50; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14; *1 Enoch* 15:4; *Mek. Pisha* 1.120). Peter's understanding of Jesus' identity came by divine revelation (Mt 16:17; 11:25), undoubtedly including God's revelation through Jesus' miraculous acts (14:33; compare 15:22). This revelation of Jesus' identity was foundational for God's purposes in history.⁸⁹

Not only was this revelation foundational but healthy because this would indicate God's presence in His people. The rural church may lack in its ability to hear from God because it may have drifted away from the fundamental doctrines found in the Word, creating unhealthy environments.

Vision

Hebrews 11: 1 – 3

The first three verses in Hebrews 11 have been interpreted in many ways and are poetically written to reveal a foundational revelation of God's divine authority and identify Him as the creator of all by His Word. This chapter of Hebrews gives the reader a superb list of witnesses of faith to support the fact that faith in God is the substance of creation. But this faith cannot be measured by man's ability but must be displayed by men to endure to finish the race when the finish line is not in sight. Guthrie states, "Hebrews 11, often referred to as the great "Hall of Faith," has become through the centuries one of the church's most-loved portions of Scripture. Poetic in its cadence, panoramic in its historical sweep, and imminently relevant in its

⁸⁹ Osborne, Briscoe, and Robinson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1 Timothy*, 253.

challenge, the chapter calls the believer to faithful endurance by use of voluminous testimony from the lives of ancient saints.”⁹⁰

Hebrews 11: 1 – 3 specifically refers to “things which are seen were not made of things which do appear,” meaning if anything hoped for is to come to pass, one must have faith in God that it is possible. These verses are relevant to this project because the rural church has been an example of a faithful witness to God over the years, and their faith will help develop a Godly vision. This Godly vision is not something that is easily understood by man, but it is understood by and through faith. Guthrie states,

The Christian journey is a sure-but-blinded flight, brought home on the instruments of divine revelation. The blinding sin-rage and naturalistic wisdom of the age blow relentlessly against the windshield of our progress in the faith, but faith keeps a steady nose pointed to where God’s Word indicates we have a promised destination. Just as the pilot in the storm had a bold though, perhaps, tension-filled confidence in his flight plan, so the Christian lives step by steady step on a path whose Maker and end are imperceptible to an earthbound eye.⁹¹

The understanding of faith in God will assist the task to develop a Godly vision in the rural church and to believe their vision can come to pass with the help of God. To believe the vision can come to pass, the church must believe that a “Now” faith is required. Cockerill states,

Faith is the objective “evidence” or “proof” of unseen reality. How does faith “prove” the unseen reality of God, his power and faithfulness? As the examples of this chapter show, through trust in God the faithful experience his power in their life and receive his approval. Thus, they confirm his reality. The pastor offers these examples of faith, and the way God demonstrated his power in their lives as evidence for the reality of God and his present activity on his people’s behalf. He would also have his hearers live “by faith” that they might experience this power themselves and know this confirmation.⁹²

⁹⁰ George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 373.

⁹¹ Ibid, 393.

⁹² Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 521.

This problem is being addressed because traditionally, the rural church is slow to change because they do not see nor buy into the vision because they lack faith or trust in the leadership.

James 1: 12

The last supporting Biblical reference on vision comes from the New Testament passage in the book of James. James, the brother of Jesus, describes how blessings come to the chosen of God when they endure temptation that tests moral strength by resisting sin. James emphasizes that if a man can pass the test, he will receive God's promised crown of life. The Apostle James presents a word picture that the church can use to envision the struggle required when living out a Christian walk with God. This passage is relevant to this project because the rural Baptist church is not immune to the temptation and sins of the world, and it must endure the temptation and resist the sin through the power of Jesus Christ. This problem is being addressed because the rural church often misunderstands the vision casting necessary to move forward because they may have lost sight of the goal due to sinful distractions. The IVP commentary authors state,

James the Just, with his deep moral earnestness, wants to help suffering Christians find the strength to make tough moral choices. He therefore calls us to face the issue of *worth*. Persevering is worth doing because the crown of life is worth more than avoiding the trial. James calls for courageous applications of this principle. Giving up on a difficult ministry, retaliating against people who are mistreating you, withdrawing from active participation in worship and fellowship, compromising moral standards, interrupting your life of obedience, turning away from a walk of fellowship with the Lord—all these responses to adversity assume that escaping the trial is of more value than gaining the crown of life. The Christian is called to place greater value on the goal of becoming mature and complete in Christ. With such applications, the Christian life is taken out of the realm of sentimentality and placed in the realm of significant moral choice.⁹³

⁹³ Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: James*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011, 217.

Change

Genesis 1: 1 – 4

One of the most popular and well-known words found in the Bible is in Genesis 1: 1 – 4, in which the author states, “In the beginning.” In these verses, the Bible records that there was darkness and chaos, but God’s spirit moved upon the chaos, and there was order in the form of light. Similarly, the rural church brought God’s light to many rural communities, and that light provided order to the chaos and spiritual darkness in those rural communities. God spoke to the chaos through the rural church, and God spoke light into existence in the rural community. Change in the rural church is commonly met with resistance because many supporters are older and do not like change. These verses provide support for change because change occurs when God speaks. If the more senior members realize that God is speaking in their dark moments, then the light of change may shine brightly. Walton states,

Genesis 1 is a simple but majestic account of God’s bringing order to the cosmos. In the context of Genesis, chapter 1 is intended to show that the world was not always as it is now. The chaos of sin and the struggle to survive were not part of the original picture. God’s initial work dispelled the chaos and brought everything into perfect order and equilibrium. It is important to understand that hope for the future does not depend on the attempt to achieve something that have never been but to restore what has been lost. God’s intent was not to be distant or inaccessible. The corruption of the cosmos that plagues humanity does not testify to his inability to harness chaos or to any inadequacy in his person or power. God demonstrates his grace that instead of resolving the chaos of sin through judgment and destruction, he chose a path of reconciliation and restoration – but that already moves beyond Genesis 1.⁹⁴

Verse 4 reveals that God saw this light, and it was good, which could be interpreted that this change from chaos and darkness was good. The rural church must understand that change is good if it brings godly order. This problem is being addressed because the rural church, with

⁹⁴ John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001, 65 - 66.

many older supporters who do not see change as being “good,” so this verse is relevant to this project to support that change is good. Walton states, “The author’s concerns were much like others in the ancient Near East, where the greatest exercise of the power of the gods was not demonstrated in the manufacture of matter but in the fixing of destinies.”⁹⁵ And with change, the rural church is destined to survive and thrive for the glory of God and for the good of the world.

Acts 12: 1 – 5

The topic of change will also be supported from verses found in the book of Acts. In Acts 12: 1 – 5, the author reveals that the church continuously prayed for him while the Apostle Peter was in prison. One could assume that they prayed for his protection, his health, and his release. Scripture reveals that Peter miraculously escaped from prison while being led by an angel and returned to his people. The major focus of this passage reveals that because the church prayed for Peter, God moved in his favor and answered their prayers. This project will encourage and remind leaders and members of the rural Baptist church about the importance of creating a prayer life in which they pray together for God's guidance when change is presented.

This problem is being addressed because if the rural church wishes to successfully accomplish change, it must create a prayer life in which corporate prayer is focused on a Godly change. These verses are also relevant to this project because this project will emphasize the importance of having a healthy prayer life and how changing the way one manages personal prayer time is important. The IVP commentary authors state,

Luke skillfully juxtaposes the power of the state—*so Peter was kept in prison*—and the power of the church, prayer—*but the church was earnestly praying to God for him*. In continuous (the verb construction indicates duration), fervent (Lk 22:44; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:8), united prayer, the church intercedes for Peter. Prayer is the only weapon it has, but it is more than enough. Luke presents prayer as “the natural atmosphere of God's people and the normal context for divine activity” (Longenecker 1981:409; Acts 1:14, 24; 2:42; 6:4;

⁹⁵ Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 71.

13:2). If extended, fervent, united prayer is not a church's *first* resort in a time of crisis, the church reveals that it is ultimately depending on something or someone other than God.⁹⁶

And when the rural church begins to depend on something or someone other than God, it creates an environment in which change, and survival are impossible.

Ephesians 6: 12 - 18

The last topic of change will reference another New Testament verse where the Apostle Paul concludes his letter to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesians 6: 12 – 18, Paul reminds the church that the struggle they experience as believers originate from demonic resistance and must be fought using God's strength, relying on His Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In these verses, God has given many defensive weapons, but God has given only one offensive weapon; the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. This verse is relevant to this project because it will emphasize that the rural church must change the way they see and understand their struggle against change is because of demonic resistance. This resistance can be overcome with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and this project will encourage the rural church to use the Word of God in its plans to change.

Theoretical Foundation

Church Health ignites Church Growth

The theoretical basis behind this project is framed by the belief that church health ignites church growth and not in numbers but spiritual maturity. Also, the idea that every church has the potential to reach the level of “mega” is deceptive. It is not indicative of a healthy congregation because God would rather have a spiritually healthy church than a mega-church. Jesus gives a

⁹⁶ Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Acts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011, 157.

clear example of how the grower of grapes or the “husbandman” trims the unproductive branches from the vine, indicating that they are not healthy because they do not produce fruit. Jesus said,

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 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. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15: 4 – 6)

Warren states, “The task of church leadership is to discover and remove growth-restricting diseases and barriers so that natural, normal growth can occur.”⁹⁷ The goal of having a healthy church implies that having a healthy congregation is more important than increasing membership with people who do not really have a true relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ because people who do not have a relationship with Him are spiritually sick.

In the report of rural churches in America, Gary Farley presents *The Rechurcing of Rural America*, which reveals a restudy of about 500 rural and small-town churches in 99 townships in Missouri, conducted first in 1952 and again from 1998 to 2001. This study was funded by the Lilly Foundation and conducted by the rural sociology department of the University of Missouri and by the Missouri School of Religion. Farley served as a consultant and prepared some of the studies to provide background for those who did the field work. Farley reveals alarming findings in his report regarding rural church health, which has impacted its survivability. Farley states,

We have selected as our title for this report *The Rechurcing of Rural America*. This title is indicative of and a response to four important facts the study reveals. One, rural and small towns America is much changed since 1950. Second, the number of churches in the 99 townships which have been the focus of the study has dropped from 505 in 1952 to 428 in 1999. Third, and most alarming, we found that the percent of the persons living in these townships who are church members may have dropped from just under 50% to just more than 36% over the past 50 years or so. The sociologist data calls for a theological

⁹⁷ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 16.

response and activity. Fourth, while the Baptist movement has become dominant in much of rural America, some of our data suggests that its influence and effectiveness is on the wane.⁹⁸

In the report on the occupational conditions and pastoral experience of clergy in the United Methodist Church, Andrew Miles and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell present their findings which reveal a report from data collected on whether rural clergy are worse off occupationally and experientially. The authors state,

Scholars have shown that clergy work can be stressful and that these occupational strains can lead to negative physical and mental outcomes. Even though nearly one-third of all congregations in the United States are rural, little work has examined how occupational conditions and clergy experiences might vary systematically by geographical context. This study uses recent data from United Methodist Church clergy in North Carolina to test extant depictions of rural ministry, which typically portray rural churches as challenging occupational settings.⁹⁹

Some believe that low attendance, rural communities, and simply leading a rural church are more stressful than its urban counterpart, but previous research shows that the occupational stress level is similar. In the research done for this report, the authors agree that further research is necessary.

The authors state,

Taken together, pastoral and empirical accounts paint a picture of rural ministry against which we can compare our data. They suggest that rural clergy face several difficulties that could potentially function as occupational stressors, yet the limited evidence to date provides little support for the idea that well-being is lower among rural clergy. This seeming contradiction, combined with the scarcity of empirical studies of American rural clergy, suggests the need for further testing.¹⁰⁰

The research for this examination was done during the Duke Clergy Health Initiative in North Carolina in which the authors state, “The data used in the following analyses come predominately from the Duke Clergy Health Initiative, a recent survey-based study of the health

⁹⁸ Farley, “The Re-churching of Rural America, 3.

⁹⁹ Miles and Proeschold-Bell, “Are Rural Clergy Worse Off?” 23.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 29.

of UMC clergy in North Carolina conducted by Duke Divinity School.”¹⁰¹ The authors reveal their methodology in which “participation was offered to all clergy serving in the NC and Western NC UMC conference (N = 1,820). The study was administered in the late summer and fall of 2008 by Westat, a contract research organization. Duke University and Westat Institutional Review Boards approved all procedures. Of the 1,820-clergy offered participation, 1,726 participated (a 95 percent response rate).”¹⁰²

This project will continue to build on theoretical ideas found in the book *Small Groups with Purpose* by Steve Gladen. Gladen presents his ideas as a successful small group leader. He has served since 1998 in Saddleback Church, Orange County, California, where he concluded, “a very small church may be very healthy; a very large church may be very unhealthy, and this is true of small group ministries – size is not indicative of health.”¹⁰³ Gladen oversees more than 3500 adult small groups at Saddleback and “loves seeing a big church become small through true community developed in group life.”¹⁰⁴ Gladen offers practical steps to create and develop an intentionally small group strategy using principles he practiced as a pastor of small groups at Saddleback Church in Southern California. Gladen states, “Our small group ministry is not just another program, but it is an embedded and integrated piece of everything we do as a church, our infrastructure, where care happens, our delivery system for all spiritual formation, our method of balancing the biblical purpose and fostering healthy lives.”¹⁰⁵ Most rural Baptist churches have ministries and auxiliaries that are technically small groups, but those churches do not recognize

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 30

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Steve Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 23.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 47.

them as small groups. Many could maximize their spiritual impact and strengthen the church's spiritual health if a paradigm shift could occur. This project will present ideas and methods that may shift the paradigm of the rural church toward using techniques from successful small groups to help strengthen and spiritually grow the church.

An example of this paradigm shift that will be presented is in reference to an old tradition in almost all rural churches, the institution of Sunday school. Sunday school has long been a method of teaching children, new members, and potential converts the Word of God in a school-like setting. But, over time, this practice of attending Sunday school has waned in popularity, and many churches have either discontinued the practice or moved to a small group model. Gladen states,

The debate over Sunday school versus small groups continues. Each side debates the merits of their system while pointing out the flaws in the other system. A common question is: “Does your church have Sunday School or small groups?” which is often a veiled way of asking, “Is your church a traditional one that is stuck in the rut of Sunday school?” As more and more churches replace Sunday school with small groups, the common notion is that Sunday school is a system traditional churches cling to while more modern and progressive churches move toward small groups.¹⁰⁶

Since change is a difficult topic of discussion in most rural churches with older members, the discussion of changing traditional Sunday schools may be met with strong resistance from most rural congregations. The theoretical foundation of this project will approach the debate on changing any established ministry in the rural church with this understanding in mind. Gladen states,

The truth, however, is not that simple or clear-cut. Both systems have their advantages and disadvantages. More important than the system used is the desired result: spiritual growth and health. If the goal is to teach the Word of God and apply the Great Commission and Great Commandment, does it matter if your people meet in a church

¹⁰⁶ Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 191.

classroom or a living room? Before you decide whether to use Sunday school or small groups as a delivery system, make sure you understand your goal: spiritual health.¹⁰⁷

The information in this book is relevant to this project because this project will discuss topics in reference to how the rural Baptist church should understand and see ministry, which may strengthen the church's health.

Another model used to develop the theoretical foundation in this project comes from the work found in the book by Shannon O'Dell. In the book *Transforming Church in Rural America*, Shannon O'Dell presents his real-life experience of leaving a 4000-member church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to follow his calling from God to pastor Southside Baptist Church in South Lead Hill, Arkansas, with a membership of 31 attendees in 2003. Today, the church is now named "Brand New Church," and it has 2,000 people in person and 1,500 registered attendees online worldwide. In his book, O'Dell states,

Yes, rural people come from rich church heritage – but so few have experienced the living Cornerstone of the Church, and so the buildings and the congregations are dwindling, falling into disrepair, collapsing. But that's not the way it has to be. A great harvest for Christ is waiting in the heartland and rural communities of America and in that harvest are the seeds to reach the world.¹⁰⁸

The model O'Dell presents provides useful evidence and experiences on how change was possible in his church. O'Dell agrees with previous statements on how difficult change comes in older rural churches, but if a change is possible, it must be intentional. O'Dell states,

That's where we started; that's what happened every Sunday. I would jump up on the stage and think, *God, is there any way on earth this place is going to grow?* (We did grow that first week, though, from 31 to 33 – a remarkable 8 percent growth!) No doubt it was a very sobering start. If the past 50 years had taught them anything, and if those first weeks had taught me anything, it was that change would not come easy, naturally, or randomly. If things were to change, we would have to be intentional, and God would have to be faithful. I learned right away that if you want to go somewhere else, you have

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁰⁸ Shannon O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America*, 18.

to start where you are, and God is ready to meet you on the backside of your own desert.¹⁰⁹

The previous chapters have covered the ministry context, identified the problem, put forth a thesis statement, and provided a conceptual framework supporting this project. This project will now cover the methodology used in the applied research for this study.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 38.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction: Valley of Dry Bones

In the book of Ezekiel, a conversation between God and the prophet Ezekiel reveals God asking Ezekiel if the bones of fallen soldiers could be brought back to life. Ezekiel's response is like anyone facing the unknown. He states, "*O Lord God, thou knowest* (Ezekiel 37: 3)." Today, the pastor, church leaders, and people concerned about the future of the rural church are facing unknown challenges with dwindling resources, low membership, and unfulfilled vision. Kuhne states,

In the Care-Giver role, ministers act as people-helpers through counseling, crisis intervention, hospital visitation and other acts of mercy when emotional, spiritual, or other forms of personal needs arise. This working role puts special demands on the pastor since he must maintain the managerial leadership of the organization while fulfilling a care-giving role in the organization. The interpersonal implications of being both aware of, and involved in, the personal lives of church members create a professional demand that normal managers of organizations never face.¹¹⁰

Many pastors and church leaders find themselves in a desperate situation. They may attempt taking matters into their own hands when all else has failed rather than humbly admitting that only God knows.

The rural Baptist church is experiencing what appears to be a gradual decline, and many are on the verge of extinction. Many rural church leaders, and those who love the rural church, struggle to resolve problems and have resorted to their own limited abilities out of desperation. Malphurs states, "Leadership is situational. The same leader can be highly successful in one

¹¹⁰ Gary William Kuhne and Joe F. Donaldson, "Balancing Ministry and Management: An Exploratory Study of Pastoral Work Activities." *Review of Religious Research* 37, no. 2 (1995): 159.

context but fail miserably in another.”¹¹¹ Many are like Ezekiel when facing the unknown, respond by saying, “God knows.” Fortunately, when reading this passage fully, the writer reveals that God asked Ezekiel to do something to bring the dry bones back to life. The question remains; could God be asking the rural church leaders if their dry churches will live again? Is God asking them to speak life back into those “dry” souls? Or has the rural church leadership drifted away from the Biblical model of leadership? Howell states, “Those who would lead others, at least in the Scriptural definition of the term, must align their practice of leadership with these essential priorities on the expressed heart of God. With the divine blueprint in mind, we now offer a definition: ‘Biblical leadership is taking the initiative to influence people to grow in holiness and to passionately promote the extension of God’s kingdom in the world.’”¹¹²

This project will attempt to address the decline in the rural Baptist church by using a simple approach of identifying strength and weakness according to what our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ has established. Jesus said, “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 with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28: 19, 20).” In other words, if the rural church is putting forth resources, time, and effort into ministries that fulfill, support, or promote activities relating to the Great Commission, then it is strong because Jesus has promised to be with them. Conversely, if there is anything that the rural Baptist church is doing that does not fulfill, support, or promote the Great Commission, then it may be weak or growing weak. Rathge states,

¹¹¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 2003.

¹¹² Don H. Howell, *Servant of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 3.

The church is perhaps one of the most tenacious of all institutions. Nevertheless, important shifts have occurred among churches and church attendees during the past several decades. Our study indicates that the relationship between change and rural church viability is a complex issue. If we are better to understand the factors influencing church growth, we need to examine more critically the total system in which the church operates.¹¹³

This project was initiated out of a concern for the rural church, and that the danger of abandonment by the community surrounding it is apparent. Many questions of fault arise like; has the rural church outlived its usefulness; has the rural church become “old fashioned” and lost touch with the modern world; or has the rural church closed its doors to the diverse community surrounding it and is suffocating itself? In the words of Ezekiel, God knows. Busby states, “Successful churches are continually looking at where they have been, where they are now, and where they are going. Wise church leadership is always looking for new ideas and impartial perspectives – and is open to outside counsel. This helps to keep the mission in clear focus.”¹¹⁴ This project will attempt to reveal some of the answers to the unknown, but this project cannot and will not be able to fully exhaust this great task.

By understanding whether the rural church has become “dry,” uninviting, unproductive, or institutionalized, the church would benefit from having a shift in paradigm from its current focus. This study is worth doing because “rural America is one of the most over-churched, unreached people groups in the world and the number of church buildings says nothing about the state of Christianity in rural America.”¹¹⁵ This project will focus on the strengths and weaknesses using a questionnaire designed to ask people of the rural community questions about

¹¹³ Richard W. Rathge and Gary A. Goreham, "The Influence of Economic and Demographic Factors on Rural Church Viability," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 1 (March 1989): 73.

¹¹⁴ Dan Busby, "Starting a New Church – IV," *Clergy Journal* 80, no. 1 (October 2003): 22.

¹¹⁵ Shannon O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking all the Rurals* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2010), 17.

the rural church. The participants of this study will be members and visitors of the local rural church. These participants will be contacted in what will be called “safe” zones and will be allowed to respond anonymously to create an environment for an unbiased opinion.

Because loyalty to the local church is one of the most recognized characteristics of its members and their lack of giving an unbiased opinion, this project will attempt to focus on patterns found in the results of an anonymous questionnaire. In the chapter entitled “Show Them the Termites,” Bierly states,

It takes time for small congregations to decide to take action. Often it will take a while to reach a crisis point where there is no alternative but to take action. Congregations will wait for that point. The bottom line for the small-church leader is not to get too discouraged when nothing seems to be happening. The idea may just be taking a while to simmer. The crisis may need time to come to a boil.¹¹⁶

One of the assumptions made in this project is that small, rural congregations are slow to change. Still, they may be willing to change once the cancer of decline has been clearly identified and the majority has agreed upon a recovery plan.

Intervention Design: Doing things Decent and in Order

The Apostle Paul provided rules for governing public worship in the church of Corinth and gave a concluding statement in which this project will follow by doing “all things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14: 40).” The potential problem has been that many rural churches have seen a gradual decline over the years, and this decline may be a direct result of those churches attempting to continue unnecessary traditions and unproductive ministries. These churches may have strayed from their original vision or have moved into survival mode to keep the doors open and lights on. The design approach for this project will follow a simple method of identifying problems and troubling patterns in the rural church by randomly asking people in

¹¹⁶ Bierly, *Help for the Small-Church Pastor*, 84 - 85.

the rural community what they know or have experienced about the rural church through ten topics covered in an anonymous questionnaire. This project chose to use an anonymous approach, not specifically targeting church leadership or the pastor, because a “self-serving” opinion would not give the results necessary for a well-rounded conclusion. Lonsway states in his work entitled *Profiles of ministry; history and current research*, “Self-Serving Behavior captures behaviors and attitudes in which the young minister considers him or her as someone who is separate from the congregation, above them, and because of calling, his or her own opinion as a minister should be accepted without question.”¹¹⁷ This method of randomly asking congregants and visitors about the church is based on a classic conversation between Jesus and His disciples. The Apostle Matthew reports the conversation, “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? (Matt 16: 13 – 15).” Clearly, Jesus wanted to know who his disciples believed He was based on what they had seen in His example before them. This project will use a similar example in asking the community what they see in the rural church by engaging with them anonymously.

In reference to engaging with the religious community, the authors of the article “Pastor, are You a Religious Illiterate?” reveal their findings that support engaging with the community to fully understand their needs and shortcomings, thus revealing who or what the church should be to them. They report pastors speaking about whether the church truly fulfills the Great Commission and becomes “religiously literate.” They state,

¹¹⁷ Francis A. Lonsway, "Profiles of Ministry: History and Current Research." *Theological Education* 41, no. 2 (2006): 118.

The question of “Who is my neighbor?” starts with us. As pastors, it is our responsibility to the community and our parishioners to be religious literates. Like the lawyer who questioned Jesus, we need to know about the people around us to fully understand all components of our community. It is up to us pastors to take the first steps towards engaging our neighbors by asking “Who” they really are, and why their faith is important.¹¹⁸

This project will ask the rural community, anonymously, what they think about the church and its ministries so that a true, unbiased answer may be received out of compassion for the rural church, which may reveal strengths and weaknesses. Patrick McCormick states,

Jesus offers us a very different model of the superhero. The Bible reports that he had wondrous powers, calming storms, walking on water, multiplying loaves, curing the sick and lame, healing the blind and possessed, and raising the dead. But it also reports that, unlike the man from Krypton, Christ took on our frail human flesh and embraced our mortality and powerlessness. As Paul tells us, though in the form of God, Christ did not deem equality with God as something to be grasped at but took the form of a slave – and not just as a secret identity. Jesus teaches us that the only superpower that means anything is the power of compassion. To be a good superpower, America doesn’t need men of steel. We need hearts of flesh.¹¹⁹

The first major element of this study is to gather the information that identifies whether the rural Baptist church presents characteristics of becoming institutionalized and spiritually dysfunctional. Secondly, this study will collect information about how members or visitors of the rural Baptist church feel about the various ministries, positive or negative. This data will advance the research question and help determine whether the rural Baptist church shows characteristics not in line with a biblically based ministry. Jung states, “Rural congregational life demands a high level of individual participation and involvement. Time and time again, God calls the people of Israel to act – to break out of their traditional ways of doing things, to recognize a need or problem situation that requires attention, and then to assume personal responsibility for that

¹¹⁸ Michael Gutzler, Moses Penumaka and Daren Erisman, "Pastor, are You a Religious Illiterate." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 46, no. 4 (December 2007): 379.

¹¹⁹ Patrick McCormick, "Who will save the day?" *U.S. Catholic* 68, no. 6 (June 2003): 44.

call to service.”¹²⁰ This research will also be able to compare whether the opinion of the people who have experienced the rural church and its ministries see it as being hospitable, helpful, or uninviting. Based on that information, this project will present findings to determine whether there is an opportunity to present a shift in paradigm to intervene in potential dysfunctions.

The intervention design of this project aligns with the thesis statement, which emphasizes that the rural Baptist church has historically been a place of tradition, cultural importance, and refuge. Over time, it has experienced a gradual decline, requiring this project to identify those destructive practices and present a paradigm shift that may slow its destruction. The intervention design also aligns to identify areas of strength and weakness to promote spiritual health, promoting growth, not in numbers but maturity.

This project began with submitting the required application, including abstract and supporting documents, to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board in February 2017. The title of this project is; *Intervention: Helping the Rural Baptist Church Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness for Greater Kingdom Service*. The abstract presented the problem of decline in the rural Baptist church, and it suggested that this decline may be a direct result of the actions of the church itself. The abstract indicated that initiating an intervention into the destructive practices would offer the opportunity to develop a shift in paradigm that may reduce those harmful practices and slow the decline in the rural church. The abstract concluded by emphasizing that the potential value is in strengthening the rural Baptist church by highlighting value, developing effective ministry strategies, and refocusing vision. It revealed that research would be conducted within the four counties that make up the Northern Neck of Virginia.

¹²⁰ L. Shannon Jung and Mary A. Agria, *Rural Congregational Studies: A Guide for Good Shepherds*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997, 60.

Members and visitors of the various Baptist churches in the Northern Neck of Virginia would participate in the research, and that research would also include published research material on the subject.

After working through the application process required by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the research for this study was exempted from further IRB review and approval to begin the investigation, with data safeguard methods in place. This study was approved under the exemption category, which identifies situations in which human participants researched are exempt because information obtained would be recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or linked to the subject. Upon approval, this project was given the IRB Exemption number: 2838.042817: *Intervention: Helping the Rural Baptist Church Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness for Greater Kingdom Service*. This project received approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board on April 28, 2017, and research began in the Northern Neck of Virginia. The approval letter for this research is in Appendix A of this project.

The research process was designed to be simple in its approach so that the highest level of success would be attained in a community suspicious of inquiries relating to rural churches and their sustainability. The primary goal was to recruit a total of 500 participants from the Northern Neck of Virginia. The number of participants hoped for enrollment or acceptance to participate would average approximately 125 qualified people per county for the four counties in the NNVA, which include Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond County. This sample size per county is to ensure that the sample size is evenly spread across the four counties of the Northern Neck so that the total participants would not come from one county or

the other. All counties that make up the Northern Neck of Virginia are considered rural. The nearest city of Fredericksburg is 30 miles to the west, Washington D.C. is over 100 miles to the north, and Richmond, Virginia is 65 miles to the south. The Chesapeake Bay borders the Northern Neck to the east, and no other cities are near the surrounding area.

During the research, participants were contacted regarding this study by approaching only adults and reading a recruitment letter as they exited, what will be defined as “high traffic” areas. If interested, the screening questions were read, and if they qualified, they were given the consent letter and questionnaire form enclosed in a self-addressed envelope to be returned by mail. The qualified participant would take the packet with them, keeping the consent document for their records, and complete the questionnaire in the privacy of their own home. The participant would return the completed questionnaire in the same self-addressed envelope originally given to them.

This would support anonymity and create an opportunity for an unbiased opinion and maximize honesty to the questions in the questionnaire. In his section on *Looking to Mark's Gospel*, Francis states,

The point of my analysis is that the environment in which Jesus was operating was not dissimilar from the environment in which the rural church may be operating today. The people who responded to Jesus’ invitation were not people who had been part of the Christian narrative all their lives (the good soil), or people who had rejected the Christian narrative on the grounds of previous exposure to it (the soil covered with thorns), but people who were becoming part of the narrative for the very first time (the rocky soil).¹²¹

The location, setting, and timing for recruitment began in “high traffic” areas in the local community, which was identified as the grocery store's parking lot, especially on Friday and Saturday because most people in the rural community shopped after payday or on weekends. As

¹²¹ Leslie J. Francis, "Taking Discipleship Learning Seriously: Setting Priorities for the Rural Church," *Rural Theology* 13, no. 1 (2015): 18-30.

the potential participant would exit, they were approached with a smile and a simple “Hello.”

The introduction reads,

My name is Anthony Baylor, and as a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to answer the question of whether unnecessary traditions and unproductive ministries have resulted in the rural Baptist church losing its place of importance in the rural community and its ability to attract and retain new members. I am inviting you to participate in this important study which will provide valuable information that can help the rural church. It should take only a few minutes of your time. Your participation will be completely anonymous; no personal, identifying information will be required on this questionnaire.

If they were willing to participate, they would be asked four questions to complete the initial screening:

1. Are you 18 years old or older?
2. Are you a member of a Baptist church in the Northern Neck of Virginia?
3. If you are not a member, do you occasionally visit a Baptist church for worship service or Bible study in the Northern Neck of Virginia?
4. If you are not a member and you do not visit, have you ever been invited to a Baptist church for worship service or Bible study in the Northern Neck of Virginia?

The two qualifiers were: having a “yes” answer to question #1 and a “yes” answer to question #2 or #3. Question #4 is asked for statistical purposes and does not qualify a participant but was asked to show if the potential participant has experienced an evangelistic / outreach presence in the rural community.

If they qualified, they were given the consent document and questionnaire form enclosed in a self-addressed envelope to be completed at their homes and returned by mail. The conclusion of the conversation read, “Now that you qualify and at your convenience and privacy, please complete and return the questionnaire using the self-addressed envelope provided. Thanks for your help, and have a blessed day.” If they did not qualify, the conversation was ended by thanking them for their time. This process was repeated over most of the summer and fall

Semester 2017 until 500 questionnaires were given to qualified persons across the four Northern Neck of Virginia counties.

The steps taken to protect participants' privacy were that the participants were given the consent letter and questionnaire form with a self-addressed envelope. The participant kept the consent letter and returned the completed questionnaire form by mail to have complete privacy and anonymity. After the participant completed each questionnaire, they would mail it to a designated post office box for collection. They were not required to provide their name or return address on the questionnaire or the self-addressed envelope. The questionnaires were gathered at the post office, and data was compiled at a home office. No contact was made between the researcher and/or the participant during the survey, and the data collection process ensured that this research was anonymous.

The risk involved in this study was minimal, no more than the participant would experience in daily life. The “step-by-step” approach used to identify research project participants was a simple approach using friendly, non-threatening interactions. The researcher was professionally dressed and would approach people as they exited one of the five Food Lion Grocery stores in the Northern Neck because of the “high” people traffic. Also, these places of business did not have “no soliciting” signs posted on the property in the rural community, so no laws were violated while soliciting participants. In case of inclement weather, all Food Lion stores have shelters at their exits so that the participants and the researcher would find cover during the initial screening.

The most important element in the screening process was that an individual must be 18 years or older and either be a member or visitor of a rural Baptist church in the Northern Neck of Virginia. The reason for selecting the above population is to specifically focus on the rural

Baptist church. The reason for choosing the above age group is to focus on people who may be more capable of giving an informed, mature answer to the questions. Persons under 18 years of age or younger or not a member or visitor of the rural churches in the Northern Neck of Virginia were excluded.

The research began in Westmoreland County at the Food Lion parking lot at 600 McKinney Blvd. Colonial Beach, VA 22443 from 3 pm until 7 pm on Fridays and at the Food Lion parking lot at 18044 Kings Hwy Montross, VA 22520 from 3 pm until 7 pm on Saturdays. The county of Westmoreland has two Food Lion Grocery Stores, which helped make it easy to distribute the 125 questionnaires in that county. Potential participants were approached as they exited the store to ensure they would take the questionnaire home and not throw it away inside the store, which would draw negative attention to the efforts by littering.

Next, the research continued in Northumberland County at the Food Lion parking lot at 7424 Northumberland Hwy Heathsville, VA 22473 from 3 pm until 7 pm on Friday and Saturday. Only having one location in this county was more time-consuming because the same people were repeatedly encountered, but that county eventually reached. Next, the research continued in Lancaster County at the Food Lion parking lot at 424 North Main Street Kilmarnock, VA 22482 from 3 pm until 7 pm on Friday and Saturday until 125 participants had been reached. Finally, the research concluded in Richmond County at the Food Lion parking lot at 4665 Richmond Road Warsaw, VA 22572 from 3 pm until 7 pm on Friday and Saturday. The canvass of the whole NNVA community ended once 500 anonymous questionnaires were handed out. The returns came in slowly for a total of 105 total returns or 21%. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was contacted during the Spring Semester 2018 per policy, and the research process was concluded.

The “buy-in” for participants was achieved because the consent form included information that the participant would understand that their participation was necessary and important toward the benefit of the local church. Since one of the qualifying reasons to participate was because the person either was a member or visited the rural church, the belief that they would have a concern for the betterment or future success of the church would encourage participants to “buy-in.” Bickers states, “One of the most difficult tasks the bi-vocational pastor will have in church is to convince them that God wants to do even greater things in their future than He did in their past.”¹²² There was no signature required on the consent form, and it was given to the participant to take home and read before completing the questionnaire. This was another element that made it easy to “buy-in” to the process. The consent form would inform the participant that they have been invited to a research study of the Baptist churches in the Northern Neck of Virginia. The consent form would inform them that they were selected as a possible participant because they may be a member or occasionally visited a Baptist church in the local community. They were asked to read the consent form and offered the opportunity to ask any questions before agreeing to be included in this study. Contact names and numbers for researcher and faculty were included on the consent form.

After a brief introduction allowing them to know the student conducting the study and the affiliated School of Divinity of Liberty University, background information was given to encourage participation. The background information simply explained that the research question is hoping to answer whether unnecessary traditions and unproductive ministries have resulted in the rural Baptist church losing its importance in the rural community and its ability to attract and retain new members. Again, the assumption was based on the belief that the rural church

¹²² Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs*, 36.

members or visitors cared and wished to see the rural church survive and thrive. The consent form invited the participant to this study to help better understand the nonproductive trends of today's rural Baptist church. They were informed that this study had minimal risk and no monetary benefit to participating in this study. They were also informed that this study was anonymous, and no record of their participation would be kept. At this point, "buy-in" was highly likely if the participant read the information given.

The resources required were kept at a minimal level to make the entire process easier to manage and more cost-effective. This part of the research required 500 letter size envelopes and 2000 sheets of paper for printing which amounted to 4 reams. There was no printing cost because the researcher used a personal home printer. The participant was given the consent form to read during the initial encounter, and they were able to keep that form for their records. The completed questionnaire form, three pages printed on both sides, would be returned in a letter-size envelope. Because the questionnaire was only three pages, return mail only required regular postage, making it easy to participate. The return questionnaires were stored in the researcher's home file cabinet after recording then later disposed of. There were no materials produced to facilitate this research other than printing the consent form and questionnaire.

The type of data collected was information collected from a three-page questionnaire (front and back) which covered 45 questions. The questionnaire for this research is in Appendix C. Most questions on the questionnaire were "yes and no" questions for easy response. The questions were grouped into ten categories: Ministry Profile, Instrument or Institution, Functioning as an Instrument or Institution, Church Environment, Growth and Decline, Expansion, Reform, Connectivity, Hospitality, and Small Groups. For example, under the

Ministry Profile topic, the questions focused on whether the participant was involved in church ministry and would they be interested in serving.

Ministry Profile

1. Do you belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, such as a Youth ministry, Worship (choir) ministry, Ushers ministry, Food Service ministry, Sick and Shut-In ministry, Missionary ministry, etc.? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No (If you answered no, skip to #3.)
2. If you belong to a ministry, do you believe that ministry should meet within the church or outside the church? (Circle One) A. Inside the church B. Outside the church C. Either D. Not Sure (If you answered this question, skip to question #5.)
3. If you do not belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, would you like to join a ministry? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not sure
4. If you do not belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, have you ever been invited to join a ministry? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No

The ministry profile will provide data on those who belong to the church and actively serve. Also, this topic would provide data on those who serve in ministry and would be willing to meet outside the church. And those who may attend a rural church but are not serving; would like to serve and have or have not been invited to serve. The data was collected by first retrieving completed returns from the post office box. Then each answer to the various questions was added cumulatively so that the total number of each response was recorded according to the total returns. Once all returns were collected, a cross-tabulation was performed to analyze the relationship between the multiple variables quantitatively.

The data were analyzed using cross-tabulation to analyze the categorical data in comparison to one another. After the data was analyzed, the resulting analysis was submitted and used in this project. Table and figures are used in Chapter 4 for better visual comparisons. The

data will also show how correlations change from one variable grouping to another. This correlation will show patterns, trends, themes in the participating group.

Implementation of the Intervention Design: Statistics from the Sticks

The process of putting the intervention design of this project in effect considered the problem that the decline in the rural Baptist church may be a direct result of those churches attempting to continue unnecessary traditions and unproductive ministries. Because of this, the research process was focused on getting the questionnaires out into the community with no pressure on participants. This would clearly indicate whether people really cared or were concerned enough about the local church to take the time to answer a questionnaire. Even though people believe rural living means little to do, people who live in rural communities still have many distractions at their disposal in this world of social media and modern transportation. The immediate impression found during the canvass of the community is how many people did not want to participate even though they may have been qualified because they said they did have time to complete a questionnaire. Because they were qualified, this indicated that they belonged to or visited a rural church, and they did not or were not willing to take the time to possibly help the church.

In reference to challenges for the minister, Bickers states, “Time management is the number one problem among bi-vocational ministers, according to respondents of my survey. People who attend the workshops and conferences I lead also identify this as their greatest challenge. Time management is really life management.”¹²³ An after-action note was made to determine how many potential participants qualified according to the screening questions but did not participate because of time restrictions. This may be another reason for decline because if the

¹²³ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister*, 48.

rural community has found something that competes with their ability to give their time to the church, it would be as detrimental as not giving monetarily.

Another immediate impression noted in the after-action review of this research was the level of non-participation from people who did not want to talk about their church. Surprisingly, many potential qualified participants refused to participate because they did not want to talk about their church even when they were informed that their participation would be anonymous. This made the impression that either they did not want to expose something that may have been in “critical decline,” or they did not want to be seen as an “informant” to their church disaster.

Overall, the immediate impression was that most potential participants were friendly and wanted to help even though the percentage of returns did not indicate this. The return percentage may have been improved upon had the questionnaire been collected at the screening site, but this would have added to the time to perform this study, and the study would not have been considered anonymous. The IRB approval process and exemption would have changed without anonymity.

The implementation of traveling from each canvass location was not difficult since the home office location of the researcher was centrally located in the rural town of Warsaw, Virginia, which is considered the “gateway” to the Northern Neck. This location is on the main highways, which divide all four counties in the Northern Neck, so each canvass location was an approximately 30-minute drive from the home office. Each weekend during the research phase, the researcher would drive using Rural Route 3 or Highway 360 to each small town where the Food Lion was located. The researcher would simply stand or sit near the exit door of the business and approach people as they exited the stores to their cars. Most weekends would include four hours on Friday and Saturday afternoon which was an excellent time for meeting the

community, fellowship, and bonding. After completing a day of soliciting at the various Food Lion exits, the researcher would drive to the designated post office to collect any received returns. In the beginning, returns were very slow coming. Once the last questionnaire was given at the Food Lion in Richmond County, the returns collection concluded 30 days later to allow enough time for all returns to come back to the post office.

Overall, progress in research moved slowly, like almost everything in rural America, but very rewarding. It was observed that many people who were approached during the canvass of the community did not regularly attend church. Many admitted to once attending but had fallen away because the rural church had become dull, boring, out of touch, and some even said, hypocritical. This was very significant and indicated that as Jesus said, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest (Matt 9: 37, 38).” There was clearly ministry work that could be done in the rural community to advance the kingdom of God, but where were the workers? Based on this observation, this research process revealed that rural America might have “unreached people groups,”¹²⁴ and this may be another of the many problems with the rural church; lack of basic evangelism. Unfortunately, the topic of evangelism was not exclusively targeted during the research process, which creates an opportunity for further study.

The triangulation method to cross-check data accuracy was based on the participant answering the questionnaire as honestly and unbiased as possible. Because the research process was anonymous, the researcher could not personally ask the questions but depended on the participant to answer to the best of their knowledge. Steps were taken to protect the participants' privacy while answering the questionnaire and when returning the answers by mail to a post

¹²⁴ Shannon O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America*. 17.

office box. The triangulation method was further advanced for honest and unbiased answers since the participant's signature was not required, nor did they have to provide their return address to remain anonymous. The questionnaires were gathered, and data were collected only by the researcher at the home office for accuracy. Every questionnaire remained secured within a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home to prevent tapering.

The most notable theme revealed during the research process was found when comparing the answers to the screening process to the answers given on the questionnaire. It was found that all participants who reported being members of a Baptist church in the Northern Neck also answered that they belong to some type of ministry in the church. This common theme may indicate that either most people who belong to a rural church work actively in ministry or are forced to work because no one else is willing to help.

During the screening process, everyone who answered "yes" to question #2 should also answer "yes" to question #1 on the Questionnaire under Ministry Profile.

Screening Question:

2. Are you a member of a Baptist church in the Northern Neck of Virginia, which includes the counties of Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond? (Circle One) A. Yes, B. No (If the answer is YES, skip #3 and #4 and Go to the Questionnaire.)

Questionnaire

Ministry Profile

1. Do you belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, such as a Youth ministry, Worship (choir) ministry, Ushers ministry, Food Service ministry, Sick and Shut In ministry, Missionary ministry, etc.? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No (If you answered no, skip to #3.)

In reference to pursuing excellence in ministry, Bickers warns that having too many ministries in a small church may be detrimental and should be changed if possible. He states,

I recently consulted with a small church that was having a number of problems. Finances were down, people were leaving the church, and the leadership was under attack. During the consultation process, one thing that quickly became evident was that people were overwhelmed with responsibilities in the church. Some reported they served on four or five committees plus had other responsibilities. They were worn out and felt they were not giving their best effort to the church because they were spread so thin.¹²⁵

There was slippage found in that 50% of participants answered question #2 in the questionnaire under the topic of Functioning as an Instrument or Institution topic which asked about accumulated surplus or savings in the church. It was reported that 50% of all responses answered “C” not sure or did not answer the question, which may indicate church members don’t know the financial level of their church or are not told by the leadership. The reality is that this could be an obvious problem for the rural church if its members do not know or understand the church's financial condition.

Questionnaire

Functioning as an Instrument or Institution

2. Is there an accumulation of surplus or savings in the rural church that you attend (i.e., savings in the bank, investments, food bank, clothing bank, etc.)? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure.

There was silence when analyzing this question because when responding to question #2 with a “not sure” answer to the level of accumulated surplus or savings, there should have been an additional follow-up to explain why. The question should have asked, “Why don’t you know the level of accumulated surplus or savings?” Is it because you do not care to know, you do not attend business / financial meetings, or the information is not shared? This would have been valuable information to reveal a potential alarming problem if this had been reported.

A baseline for measuring change will follow the four-core topic established earlier in this project under Pastoral Issues, Church Health, Vision, and Change. The questionnaire is designed

¹²⁵ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 121.

to be randomly outlined so that the questions fall under these core topics and will reveal areas to shift the paradigm, which may help to promote change, if necessary. For example, under Pastoral Issues, question #1 under “Church Environment,” the questionnaire asked, “Does the worship service within the rural church that you attend follow a traditional step-by-step program, or does the church allow an open and spontaneous worship service?” (Circle One) A. Traditional Program B. Spontaneous Service C. Not Sure. Then, question #2 asked, “Can you feel a low level or high level of excitement in the rural church that you attend?” (Circle One) A. Low Excitement B. High Excitement C. Not Sure. Depending on the average response to these questions, this may be where the pastor needs help, maybe a worship leader or a change in worship service from the traditional method.

Under the topic of Church Health, a baseline for measuring change would be found in response to the question under the topic Ministry Profile in which question #1 asked, “Do you belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, such as a Youth ministry, Worship (choir) ministry, Ushers ministry, Food Service ministry, Sick and Shut In ministry, Missionary ministry, etc.?” (Circle One) A. Yes B. No (If you answered no, skip to #3.) The common theme already shows that people answered yes to screening question #2, “Are you a member of a Baptist church in the Northern Neck of Virginia, which includes the counties of Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond?” (Circle One) A. Yes, B. No (If the answer is YES, skip #3 and #4 and Go to the Questionnaire.) This may indicate that there may be too many ministries in the church or only a few members are doing all the work, which is not a healthy situation for any church.

Under the topic of Vision, a baseline for measuring change would be found in response to question under the topic of Small Groups where question #1 asked, “Have you ever attended a

small group meeting at the rural church that you attend?” (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure and question #3, which asked, “If you were in a small group such as for Bible study or as an interest group, would you prefer to meet at the church or could you meet at a group member’s home?” This is an area of change because the paradigm could be shifted to see traditional ministries as small groups and move them outside the church to promote growth. The final core topic will explore the most challenging subjects found in the rural church, change. In the book *Making Small Groups Work*, the authors reveal that more and more churches are beginning to use small group ministries to support “specific life topics such as marriage, parenting, dating, addictions, or divorce recovery.”¹²⁶

They explain that some churches use small groups, not in total commitment, but use them in varying degrees, such as an “add-on program or optional.”¹²⁷ The authors emphasize that what happens within a small group should not be considered a secondary concern but of utmost importance to healing, service, and growth. They state, “What happens in a good small group is part of the very work of the church itself. It is primary and should be seen that way.”¹²⁸

Lastly, under the topic of Change, a baseline for measuring change would be found in the responses to the question under the topic “Instrument or Institution,” where question #1 asked, “In the rural church that you attend, does it appear that non-members are openly invited and welcomed to join in with the fellowship, group conversations, and socialization before or after the normal worship service?” (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure. This area, depending on the response, would require an immediate change because a notable area of decline in the rural

¹²⁶ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 13.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 28.

church is the lack of attracting and inviting outsiders into the core groups, which would help church growth and sustainability. Warren Bird states in his article,

In a wider church, adapting and experimenting with new forms can be a sign of health and strength. It can also signal a lack of purpose or direction. However much the small-group movement has grown and flourished, it stands at a critical juncture. As it continues to help many people discover deeper levels of community and emotional wholeness, it must also find new ways to meet the churches' – culture's – need for grounding in the unchanging truths of the Christian faith.¹²⁹

Conclusion

Now that the implementation plan has been explained, data collecting and analysis plan are revealed, this project will report and analyze the results in the next chapter. Chapter 4 will show the results of data collected through the research project's intervention plan and any patterns, trends, and themes. This section will conclude with a word of encouragement from Dennis Bickers on bi-vocational ministry. Bickers states,

You may or may not have the education you wish you had. Your church may be a small, struggling church in the foothills, a poor urban church, or a new church plant trying to get started. You may be serving a church that once had a great ministry, but those days went away long ago as the church declined. At times it may seem to be an impossible task to juggle the needs of the church, the demands of your second job, and the family and personal needs you have. Remember this: your faith in God allows you to draw upon His limitless resources.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Warren Bird, "The Great Small-Group Takeover. (Cover Story)." *Christianity Today* 38, no. 2 (February 7, 1994), 29.

¹³⁰ Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs*, 95.

Chapter Four

Results

Introduction

The first goal of this study is to gather the information that identifies whether the rural Baptist church presents characteristics of becoming institutionalized and spiritually dysfunctional. Secondly, this study will gather information about how members or visitors of the rural Baptist church feel about the various ministries, positive or negative. This data will advance the research question and help determine whether the rural Baptist church shows characteristics of weakness and decline. This research will also evaluate the opinions of the participants of this study, who have experienced the rural church if they see it as hospitable or uninviting. Based on that information, this project will present findings to determine whether there is an opportunity for intervention into any dysfunctions of the rural Baptist church.

As stated earlier, this project primarily focused on four core topics, and under each topic, there are 45 randomly placed questions in the questionnaire intended to gather data to analyze various strengths and weaknesses of the rural Baptist church. The research process began with each participant completing the screening process. There were four screening questions used in this process. The screening question, Q#1, qualified participants by asking if the potential participant is 18 years or older. If they met the age requirement, they would be asked Q#2 whether they are members of a church in the NNVA; if not, Q#3 would ask if they have ever visited a church in the NNVA. If they were not members or visitors of churches in the NNVA, they were asked Q#4 if they had ever been invited to a church in the NNVA. After the interviewer reached a maximum of 500 qualified participants who answered “yes” to either Q#2 or Q#3, then the canvassing of the community ended according to the approved IRB standard.

This research process did not record the total number of people asked to participate, but a total of 686 people met the screening qualification, according to Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Screening

Total # people approached who were asked to participate	Q#1. Total # people screened who were 18 years old or older	Q#2. Total # people who are church members within the NNVA	Q#3. Total # people who are visitors of churches in the NNVA	Total # people given questionnaires to participate anonymously	Q#4. Total # people who were not church members or visitors
unrecorded	686	325 +	175 =	500	186

Out of the 686 qualified participants, 500 were church members, or visitors and 105 surveys were returned anonymously, 21% as seen in Table 2. Once the questionnaire answers were collected, counted, and compiled, a complete tabulation of the data was performed, starting with pastoral and leadership issues.

Table 2. Completed Questionnaire Returned from Qualified Participants.

Total qualified participants were given questionnaires to participate anonymously	Total questionnaires completed and returned anonymously	Percentage of completed and returned questionnaires
500	105	21%

Pastoral / Leadership Issues

The analysis of the four core topics used ten categories: Ministry Profile, Instrument or Institution, Functioning as an Instrument, or Institution (Innovation), Church Environment, Growth and Decline, Expansion (Innovation), Reform, Connectivity, Hospitality, and Small Groups. More time will be spent on Pastoral and Leadership issues in this section of the review of results because the leadership of any church will determine if it is being led correctly, according to Robert Welch. Welch presents theories in his book to assist in becoming an

effective leader, an efficient manager, and an administrator with the characteristics of administration related to the church or religious organizations and not as a not-for-profit organization. Welch reveals that many churches conduct church administration based on how they see businesses administration. He explains that most church leaders do not understand the correct role of managers and administrators; thus, they do not lead the church or assign responsibilities correctly. Welch states, “Managers tell you what to do; administrators tell you how to do it. Managers see that the right work is done; administrators see to it that the work is done right.”¹³¹

Under Pastoral and Leadership Issues, the question under ministry profile, Q#3 & Q#4 are intended to identify if participants who do not belong to a ministry but attend a Baptist church in the NNVA are willing (Q#3) or have been invited (Q#4) to work in the church. These questions were intended to reveal whether the rural church was intentionally seeking new workers, indicating a lack of church administration. From the result shown in Table 4, the statistics reveal that most non-members or people who did not belong to a ministry would like to join, but many have not been invited.

Table 3. Pastoral / Leadership Issues

Total non-members or people who do not belong to a ministry in the NNVA	Q#3. Total non-members who would like to join a ministry	Q#3. Total non-members who would not like to join a ministry	Q#4. Total non-members who have been invited to join a ministry	Q#4. Total non-members who have not been invited to join a ministry
27	22 – 81.5%	5 – 18.5%	16 – 59%	11 – 40.7%
	strength		Weakness - go	Weakness - go

The next question under Pastoral and Leadership issues was covered under Expansion (Innovation). Q#3 was intended to identify whether church leadership promotes

¹³¹ Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 12.

evangelism/proselytism, and Q#5 was intended to identify if the members or visitors of the church have seen an increase in outreach programs. The observation found in Table 5 reveals that the church leadership was promoting evangelism/proselytism within the church, but the church members are failing to take the message to the intended target.

Table 4. Pastoral / Leadership Issues

Total people who responded to this question	Q#3 People who said pastor or church leadership promotes evangelism/proselytism	Q#3 People who said pastor or church leadership do not promote evangelism/proselytism	Q#3 People who said they are not sure if pastor or church leadership promotes evangelism/proselytism	Q#5 People who said they had experienced an increase in outreach programs	Q#5 People who said they had not experienced an increase in outreach programs	Q#5 People who said they are not sure if they have experienced an increase in outreach programs
105	86 – 81.9%	5 – 4.7%	14 – 13.3%	29 – 27.6%	5 – 4.7%	71 – 67.6%
	Strength - teach			Weakness - go	Weakness - go	Weakness - go

Both Table 3 and #4 shows a current trend in the rural church where the desire to “go” may have weakened amongst the membership, although many rural and small-town churches still find a way to remain in existence and some prosper even though they may be well beyond their years of growth. Boyer states,

The rural and small-town churches have become almost an anachronism of the good old Norman Rockwell days. Everyone has warm feelings about them, and people do enjoy the stories of the “go-to-meet-n days” of yester year where the flock would gather for the singing of the “Sweet Bye and Bye” and other “golden oldies.” The fact is that far from passing quietly into extinction, there are rural and small-town churches that are very much alive today.¹³²

¹³² Wayne Wendell Boyer, "Refocusing the Vision of the Rural/Small Town Church," Order No. DP18568, Winebrenner Theological Seminary, 2007, 118.

Instrument or Institution

The next series of questions under Pastoral and Leadership issues attempted to identify whether there has been a change in the church's view on social issues such as homosexuality, a new definition of marriage, social drug use, and social alcohol use. Under Instrument or Institution, Q#4 asked participants whether views about social issues that have not been traditionally accepted (i.e., homosexuality, a new definition of marriage, social drug use, social alcohol use, etc.) have changed? The responses revealed that 18% said yes, 50.4% said no, 18% were not sure, and 13.3% did not answer the question. This data may reveal whether the teaching or preaching of the leadership has changed or has begun to change doctrine. A change in doctrine is the responsibility of the spiritual leadership within the church, whether it leans toward a conserving or liberal view.

Blackaby's state, "Spiritual leaders are people who seek to lead God's way, regardless of where they serve him. They are as essential to the marketplace as they are in the church."¹³³ This means that spiritual leaders must understand that their influence is necessary if they want God's influence to be felt throughout the world. Once the spiritual leader has grasped this concept, they are to use their influence on "moving people from where they are to where they ought to be, which results in people not being in the same place they were before they were led."¹³⁴

Functioning as an Instrument or Institution

Pastoral and Leadership issues continued to be researched by evaluating whether the participants witnessed the church functioning as an instrument or institution. Under this category,

¹³³ Henry Blackaby and David Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B & H Books, 2001), 33.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 34.

Q#1 asked if members are encouraged to create new ways of doing things in the rural church that they attended (i.e., improving the program, improving evangelizing, improving the organization)? The responses show 54.2% of the participants said yes, and 22.8% reported no. Many traditional churches do not invite change, nor do they improve on what “they have always done” in the church. In his work, Min Yong defines what traditional church means and how over time, the belief in continuing to do it the way it has always been done is detrimental to growth. Its leadership has the responsibility to lead change. Min Yong states,

A traditional church means that first, it is timely old, and secondly, it is a church that has formed an institution, customs, and principles over time. The traditional church in Korea has made many positive contributions to this society. It consoled the people who had to live in a time of hardship and encouraged them with the words of God to overcome adversity. It has also achieved unprecedented growth and revival and contributed to the development of society. But as time passes, customs and institutions hardened and the church began to decline. Traditional churches turned to have building-centered beliefs and especially have lost social intercourses of small group communities.¹³⁵

Church Environment

The next Pastoral and Leadership issue reveals how the church environment reveals another area of strength or weakness in the rural Baptist church. Under Church Environment, Q#1 asked the participants if the worship service in the rural church they attend followed a traditional step-by-step program, or did the church allow an open and spontaneous worship service? The results show that 50.4% of the participants said their church followed a traditional program, whereas 45.7% said their church environment was spontaneous. Next, Q#2 asked if the level of excitement in the rural church they attended was low, high, or not sure. The results reveal that 31.4% said the church has low excitement, and 63.8% reported a high level of

¹³⁵ Min Yong Park. "A Study on the Healthy Church Growth through the Revitalization of Small Group in Traditional Church." Liberty University, 2020, 14.

excitement. These results may indicate that some church leaders who follow a traditional church program with low excitement will negatively impact youth attraction and involvement.

Growth and Decline

Under the topic of Growth and Decline, Q#4 asked if the participants were taught core Biblical principles in the rural church they attended (i.e., salvation, Jesus is Lord, the Holy Trinity, etc.)? The results show that 100 people out of 105 or 95.2% responded yes, reflecting the traditional church. Hunt states, "More important than being the leader, who is in charge, is the leader who is continually willing to learn and grow. Leaders in today's churches must be directional; they are tasked with keeping the church moving in the right direction-its God-given direction-the Great Commission."¹³⁶ Although the previous statistics show a traditional pattern in the rural community, which may not be attractive to a diverse and younger congregation, core biblical principles remain prominent in the rural church.

Reform

Next, under Pastoral Leadership issues, the topic of reform surprisingly reveals how embedded the traditional and institutional ideals are seen in the church by the participants of this project. When the participants were asked Q#3, under the topic of reform, if it appeared that there were programs or activities that had little to do with church growth or evangelism, the results show that 10 out of 105 (9.5%) responded yes, and 85 (80.9%) responded no, indicating that most of their programs had something to do with growth or evangelism.

The next question under reform reveals whether participation or the lack thereof in evening church-sponsored events or programs is an indicator of church health. Under the topic of

¹³⁶ Terry Hunt, "Shifting a Small Rural Congregation's Understanding of Church Leadership." 10127138, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2016, 70.

reform, Q#4 asked if the evening church-sponsored services or the evening programs in the church has poor attendance or are they only attended by the “core” members of the church? The results show that 66 out of 105 (62.8%) participants said yes, and 23 out of 105 (21.9%) said no. These statistics show that most participants believe the church has poor attendance during evening church-sponsored programs. The leadership may be aware of this trend but continues to allow these wasteful traditions to occur because of pressure to continue traditions or from fear of change. Because the leadership continues these events and programs which have poor attendance and continue to support them, attendance continues to decline because some begin to disagree with the way the church is run or may feel the leadership is unwilling to listen or change. In the study, *Staying Away: What Keeps Rural Churches Empty*, the researchers report,

The scale of alienation from the local church makes it clear that most people who live in the community and do not see themselves as regular churchgoers do not stay away out of a sense of having been put off by specific matters. Nonetheless, nearly a third claim that they have been put off by the leadership of the church hierarchy, or by clergy attitudes to matters of doctrine, and a quarter claim that they have been put off by the church’s pastoral care provision, by clergy attitudes to social issues, or by the way they see the church being run.¹³⁷

Connectivity

Finally, under Pastoral and Leadership issues, participants were asked if their pastor or leadership actively connected with members or visitors. In Q#3, the participants were asked if the pastor connects with the congregation personally. (i.e., Does the pastor try to know the congregation?) The results show that 100 out of 105 (95.2%) said that the pastor or leadership connects with the congregation. This may explain why rural churches have long-term pastors because they have found ways to connect with the families of that church similar to being

¹³⁷ Leslie Francis and Keith Littler, "Staying Away: What Keeps Rural Churches Empty?" *Implicit Religion* 6, no. 2/3 (2003): 167.

adopted or being accepted into the community not as a newcomer but as someone who is trusted among the people because they live similar lifestyles and experience similar challenges.

Honeycutt reflects in his article entitled “Moving down in the World” that connectivity is a reward to rural ministry because he could live the rural lifestyle, which in most cases is free from the distraction of city or urban life. He reveals that he has more time to reflect and observe his community as he literally walks the country roads. Honeycutt states, “There is time to stroll around town and pray for businesses that have fallen on hard times. There is time to write and make sense of ministry and my own oddness. There is actually time to walk to church from my house less than half a mile away.”¹³⁸ This connectivity between the rural pastor and leadership and the congregation may also be seen in the results from Q# 4, where participants were asked if the weekly sermon makes sense and is easy to understand? The results revealed that 105 out of 105 participants said they understood the weekly sermon and that it made sense, which may indicate the pastor and leadership are doing a good job at preaching or have the total support of their congregation and visitors.

Hospitality

Since the way visitors are treated is another responsibility of the Pastor and Leadership of the church, this project addresses the topic of hospitality by asking participants in Q#2: if the church in which they attend or visit has a system in place for greeting first time guests, collecting information from them, and making them feel welcomed. The results showed that 81 out of 105 participants (77.1%) said yes, and 19 or (18%) said no. In the next question, Q#3, the participants were asked if there is a system in place where designated members are responsible

¹³⁸ Frank G. Honeycutt, "Moving down in the World." *Christian Century* 129, no. 14, (July 11, 2012): 11.

for making follow-up contact with visitors? The results show that 19 out of 105 (18%) participants said yes, and 57 (54.2%) said no, with 29 (27.6%) being unsure. In other words, most participants believe there is a system in place to support hospitality, but they also believed or were not sure if there was a system in place to follow up on visitors to the church, which may help in recruitment.

Small Groups

The last topic under Pastoral and Leadership issues, was covered under the topic of small groups. This question revealed if leadership promoted or allowed any function of small groups\ within the church. Under this topic, Q#1 asked the participants if they attended a small group meeting at their rural church. The results show that 95 out of 105 (90.4%) said yes, and 10 (9.5%) participants said no. In the rural Baptist church, the participants may see or understand small groups as Sunday church school or weekly Bible study, and if the rural church follows the traditional patterns as previous statistics show, then this would indicate that rural church leadership has high regard for small group activity.

The core topic of Pastoral and Leadership issues reveal that the rural Baptist church participants show similar patterns as stated in previous chapters. This project will now move from the results of the core topic of Pastoral and Leadership issues in the rural Baptist church to research questions under the core topic of Church Health.

Church Health

The analysis of the core topics of Church Health begins by evaluating topics that look beyond the physical health of the church but the ministerial health. Although church health is a topic that is very popular in many mega-church environments, it is not so popular in the rural church or within the rural community. One of the reasons that church health is misunderstood in

the rural church is because church health has a lot to do with the church's finance. Although many rural church congregations struggle to make their monthly budget, they fail to realize that the church's finances can negatively impact the church's health, and most do not want to talk about it. Under the topic of Reform, the participants were asked in Q#2 if there appears to be a decline in the giving in their local church. The results show that 24 out of 105 (22.8%) participants said yes, and 47 (44.7%) said no, and 34 (32.3%) were unsure. These results show that more than 50% said that giving is down or they are not sure of the financial wellbeing of the church. Bickers states,

A church will never be healthier than its finances. When churches struggle each month to merely pay their utility bills and the pastor's salary, they can't fulfill their ministry to those outside the church. Churches that face constant financial problems usually suffer from a lack of stewardship training or a lack of vision. Many small-church pastors are reluctant to address financial matters from the pulpit or conduct any type of stewardship training in the church. The Bible is not reluctant to talk about money, and neither should the pastor if the church is to be healthy and vital.¹³⁹

Church health also has a lot to do with the environment in which worship is conducted. This research continues under the topic of the Church Environment, where Q#1 asked participants whether the church follows a traditional worship service, and Q#2 sought to identify the level of excitement in the church. From the results of Table 5, a split is reported on the type of worship service experienced. Still, the majority have experienced excitement in the church, whether it is traditional or spontaneous.

Table 5. Church Health – Church Environment

Total people who responded to this question	Q# 1 Does the church follow a traditional worship service, or is it spontaneous?	Response	Q# 2 What is the level of excitement in the church?	Response
105	Traditional	53 – 50.4%	Low Excitement	33 – 31.4%

¹³⁹ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 95.

	Spontaneous	48 – 45.7%	High Excitement	67 – 63.8%
	Not sure	0	Not Sure	5 – 4.7%
	No Answer	4 – 3.8%		
		split		Strength - teach

Also, under Church Environment, the next question, Q#3, sought to identify whether work is shared or if the same people perform the church's work. And the last question, Q#4, sought to determine whether people of the church were asked to help with the work within the church or if it was controlled by the same people who do not ask for help. Another split is shown in Table 6 below, which reveals who works in the church, but it also shows that the majority said everyone was asked to help. In other words, everyone was asked to help with the church's work, but it appears the same people did the work, possibly because there were no new volunteers or those who did the work did not want help.

Table 6. Church Health – Supporting the work of the church

Total people who responded to this question	Q# 3 Who does the work of the church?	Response	Q# 4 Is everyone asked to help with the work of the church or is it controlled by the same people?	Response
105	Most people work	53 – 50.4%	Everyone is asked to help	67 – 63.8%
	Same people work	52 – 49.5%	Controlled by the same people	33 – 31.4%
	Not sure	0	Not sure	5 – 4.7%
		split		Strength - go

Supporting the work of the church, like having workers to run a business, prevents potential burnout or premature resignations. Church health can be moved into a positive direction if the leadership or pastor can identify whether the work is being managed correctly. This project is intended to identify areas of strength and weakness in the rural Baptist church, but the church leadership would do well to invest into similar or additional methods to evaluate the churches well-being.

Reid states,

In a similar way, church health will not just happen. For churches to become healthy, determining their current state of well-being is imperative. Some means of evaluation is necessary to determine where they are so that they can determine where they need to go and how to get there. Although every church will benefit from such an evaluation, those making up the 80% of plateaued and declining churches will especially profit. These evaluative checkups are not to determine if one is terminal or to simply find the negative aspects of church health. On the contrary, they are a means to discover the strengths of the church along with the challenges that threaten their health. Such evaluative tools are important to increase the strengths and to begin dialogues on how to increase health in areas of weakness. With the future of the church at stake, there is far too much at risk to maintain the status quo. The church would do well to have some tool to gain valuable data by which they can evaluate their current health, come up with a plan to become healthy, and continue to remain healthy so that they can fulfill the mission of Jesus.¹⁴⁰

The next topic under Church Health evaluates the Ministry Profile of the church, which shows whether the church promotes members to be involved using their gift and talents in ministry, the beneficiary of ministries, and openness to future ministry. Under the topic of Ministry Profile, the result shown in Figure 1 (Q#5) reveals that 90% of the 105 participants who have attended a church in the NNVA said the church openly encourages recruitment and provides an opportunity for members to discover their gifts and talents. Q#6 reveals 89.5% of the 105 participants who have attended a church in the NNVA said a ministry has personally helped them. Q#7 shows 77.1% of the 105 participants who attended a church in the NNVA said members and non-members were given an opportunity to express their needs.

¹⁴⁰ J. David Reid, "Combating Church Tradition Freeing the Church to Reach Their Community for Christ." Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2014, 58.

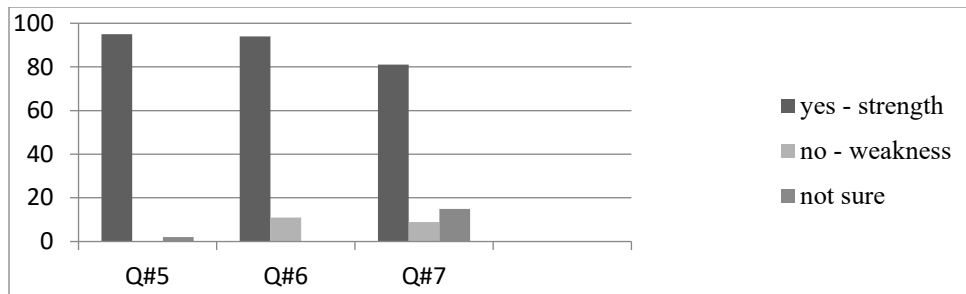


Figure 1. Ministry Profile (Church Health)

The participants in this study revealed strength in the previous ministry profile, but under Instrument or Institution, the results show strong institutionalize characteristics reflected in Figure 2 below. Results from Q#1 show 86.6% of the 105 participants said non-members are openly invited and welcomed to join fellowship, group conversations, and socialize within the church. Still, Q#2 shows 45.7% of the 105 participants said the church is open to change while 40.9% said the church is slow to change. Surprisingly, Q#3 shows 81.9% of the 105 participants said the church promotes unnecessary traditions that have nothing to do with church growth or evangelism, which contradicts previous reports. Finally, Q#4 shows 50.4% of the 105 participants said the church had not changed traditional views about social issues such as homosexuality, marriage, drug and alcohol use, but 36% said yes, or they are not sure, which reveals a potential change in church doctrine.

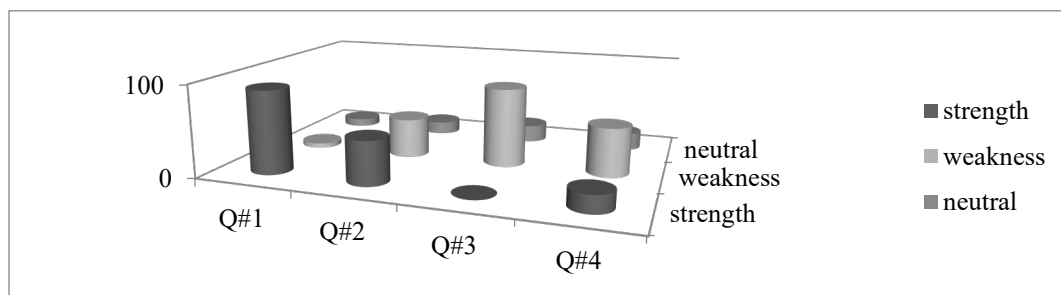


Figure 2. Instrument or Institution (Church Health)

Ministry Profile

Another unique characteristic revealed about the health of the church under the Ministry Profile topic show that 78.3% of the participants said that they belong to a ministry in the rural church that they attend, such as a Youth ministry, Worship (choir) ministry, Ushers ministry, Food Service ministry, Sick and Shut In ministry, Missionary ministry. Uniquely, 81.5% of the participants who reported that they do not belong to a ministry in the rural church they attended would like to join a ministry. This is a unique characteristic in the rural church because, as stated earlier, most people in rural churches serve in multiple roles and do multiple jobs for various reasons, which may indicate an unhealthy practice.

Growth and Decline

The research on the core topic of Church Health continues by exploring the individual family size and how participants were originally connected to the rural church, which may reveal as family sizes decline from past trends, the potential reduction in new members who are sent because of family influence will also be reduced. Under Growth and Decline, Q#1, the first question asked the participant about their family size. The results show 33 out of 105 (31.4%) participants report a large family of 4 or more children, 29 (27.6%) report a medium-sized family (2 – 3 children), and 38 (36.1%) report a small family. The next question supports that decline may be seen as the family size declines because the traditional act of sending children to the local church, whether they wanted to go or not, has also declined. Results from Q#2 show that 86 out of 105 participants (81.9%) stated that their mom or dad attended a rural church regularly, and one can assume as tradition has it that they also required their children to attend.

One could also assume that if the family size decreases, then there will be a lower number of youths required to attend, and over time there would be a decline in membership.

Credle agrees in her study findings,

The participants ranged in age from 39 to 66 years, with the average age being 48 years old. An overwhelming number of participants have been a member of an African American church for their entire lives, most stating that they were born into the church, having been taken there by parents or grandparents. Participation in the church ranged from 18 years to 66 years, with an average time attendance of 39 years.¹⁴¹

Likewise, under the topic of Growth and Decline, Q#3 revealed a distribution of Young - 0 (0%), Middle Aged - 5 (4.7%), Older - 19 (18%), and Mixed – 81 (77.1%). This would indicate, as stated earlier, that the age range of the rural church is older, but there is a mixed age range that may desire a break from the traditional norms. Parrett states,

Unquestionably, ministry that is intentionally aimed at particular audiences can be very fruitful. It is a wise church that seeks to make its ministries culturally congruent for the realities of its congregants. This means we must pay attention to all aspects of the cultural milieu that continue to shape both our members and those outside the church whom we are seeking to serve. Developmental realities and generational issues are a large part of such attention, and we certainly must try to minister in age-appropriate ways.¹⁴²

Expansion

The next topic of research explored the opposite of Growth and Decline, which is covers Expansion. Participants were asked in Q#3 if the rural church they attended was experiencing increasing attendance, and the results show a split of 57 out of 105 (54.2%) said yes, and 48 (45.7%) said no, indicating growth stagnation. Also, under Expansion, participants were asked in Q#4 if the people in the rural church they attended were allowed to make suggestions to improve the way ministry is conducted. The results show that 86 out of 105 (81.9%) participants said yes,

¹⁴¹ Stephanie Hampton Credle, "Conflict, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in Rural, African American Churches in the South: A Phenomenological Study." Order No. 10142504, Nova Southeastern University, 2016, 89, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁴² Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009), 309.

and 5 (4.7%) said no, which may indicate that even though suggestions to improve ministry were made by congregation members, change may be resisted, reflected in stagnated growth.

Reform

As stated earlier, an area of reform in giving is revealed under church health because in Q#2, the participants were asked if the rural church that they attend show signs of a decline in giving, and the results show 24 out of 105 (22.8%) said yes, 47 (44.7%) said no, and 34 (32.3%) were not sure. This decline may be in relation to the decline in new member recruitment. Miles states,

We hypothesized that rural and non-rural churches would have fewer members and less income due to less job opportunity and lower wages in rural areas. Data revealed that rural churches had lower average offerings and averaged \$116.22 less in budget per member compared to non-rural churches, a difference which corresponds to .36 standard deviations (SD) of the total range of per capita budget values, and that rural churches averaged 119 members vs 298 in non-rural areas. Significant per capita budget differences remained even after taking into account church size and ordination status, suggesting a persistent link between rural location and lower church income. We also found that local pastors and retired pastors were more likely to serve in rural churches, with 61.8% of local pastors and 68.1% of retired pastors working in rural areas.¹⁴³

Connectivity

Church health can also be evaluated based on results found in Q#1 under the topic of connectivity. Participants were asked if there is a growing and healthy youth ministry, and 66 out of 105 said yes (62.8%), and 28 said no (26.6%). Also, under the same topic, participants were asked in Q#2 if the youth were invited to participate in worship or church functions, and 105 (100%) said yes. These statistics would reflect a healthy connection to the youth who belong to the rural Baptist church.

¹⁴³ Andrew Miles and Rae Proeschold-Bell, "Exploring Rural/Non-Rural Differences Among United Methodist Churches and Clergy in North Carolina." *Review Of Religious Research* 53, no. 3, 2011, 371.

Hospitality

Church Health can be evaluated based on the results found in Q#1 under the topic of hospitality. Participants were asked if there is evidence that members make visitors feel welcomed and appreciated for their visit to the church, and 100 out of 105 said yes (95.2%). Also, Q#4 asked if the ushers or greeters of the church welcomed members and visitors with a smile and a greeting, and 105 said yes (100%). These statistics would indicate a sign of church health in terms of hospitality to visitors and friends based on the participants of this study. The core topic of Church Health reveals that the rural Baptist church shows areas of strength and weakness. This project will now move from the results of Church Health to Vision.

Vision

The book of Proverbs states, “Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). This verse has offered divine wisdom to mankind for centuries, but it has been ignored to their detriment, including the church. Carney states,

Visionary pastoral leadership sees beyond the immediate moment. Methods that were relevant at one time may no longer be fulfilling a relevant purpose. Visionary pastoral leadership guides the congregation through the changes of releasing ineffective methods. The message of the gospel never changes but the methods used to conduct ministry do change. Visionary leadership provides guidance through those changes.¹⁴⁴

Because some rural churches may continue to conduct ministry as they did 20 years ago, they have become out of touch, and those who will not change are destined to perish.

During the participant screening process, the researcher evaluated whether there was an outreach/proselytism presence in the NNVA Baptist churches. Table 7 below shows that out of the 186 people who were not church members or visitors, more than half, or 59.67%, had not

¹⁴⁴ Joseph F. Carney, "Pastoral Leadership in a Rural Congregation." Order No. 3443913, Winebrenner Theological Seminary, 2010, 28, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

experienced an outreach presence in the NNVA. This data is relevant to the topic of vision because it shows an area of improvement that the church and its leadership should envision and capitalize upon, which may directly impact church growth.

Table 7. Proselytism / Outreach Presence found during Participant Screening.

Q#4. Total people who were not church members or visitors	Total # people who <u>have ever</u> been invited to church or Bible study in the NNVA? Proselytism	Total # people who <u>have never</u> been invited to church or Bible study in the NNVA? Proselytism	Percentage of people who <u>have</u> experienced proselytism/outreach presence in the NNVA.	Percentage of people who <u>have not</u> experienced proselytism/outreach presence in the NNVA.
186	75	111	40.32%	59.67%
				Weakness - go

The research continues under the core topic of Vision, exploring the topic of Reform. In Figure 3 below, results from Q#1 shows that 90.4% of the 105 participants said traditional programs or activities are promoted regularly; from Q#3, 80.90% of the 105 participants said that there are no programs or activities that have little to do with church growth or evangelism. From Q#4, 62.8% of the 105 participants said that evening church-sponsored services and programs have poor attendance or are only attended by the “core” members. These statistics offer an opportunity to envision a change from traditional programs that do not support church growth to those that attract new members or visitors.

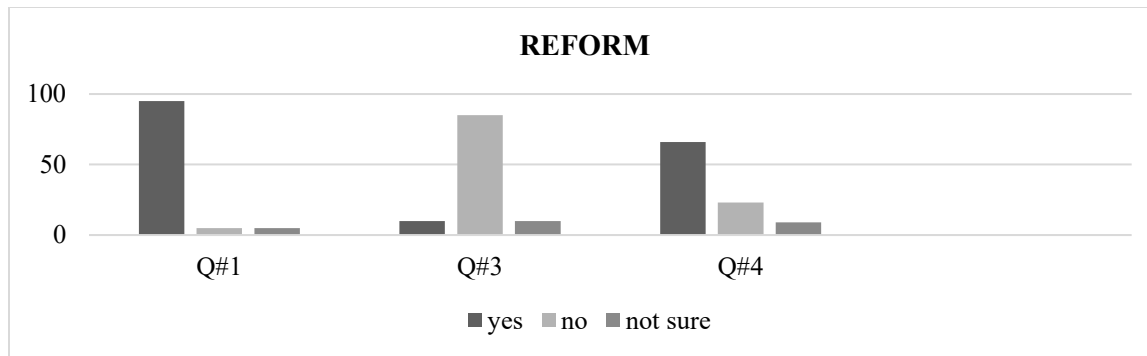


Figure 3. Reform use in Vision Casting (Vision)

The core topic of Vision also evaluated the data under the topic of functioning as an Instrument or Institution. In Q#1, the research intended to identify whether the church is open to allowing members input toward improvements or controlled by the leadership. In Q#2, the research sought to identify whether church members know about the church's financial position or accumulated possessions. In Q#3, the research sought to identify whether the church is open to visitors' participation in ministry. And finally, in Q#4, the research sought to identify whether the church is open to visitors being involved in the church's decision-making process. Figure 4 below shows that NNVA churches function as institutions in some cases and as instruments in other cases according to the previous definition. For example, 57 out of the 105 participants said their church allow member's input on improvements (instrument), 53 out of the 105 participants said most churches do not have a surplus of savings, and most members do not know about the financial position of the church (institution), 67 out of the 105 participants said visitors could help with the work (instrument), and 43 out of the 105 participants said visitors are not allowed in church decision-making (institution). This data provides information that could be used in vision casting when evidence is needed to show if the church has become institutionalized or remains a healthy instrument to advance God's kingdom.

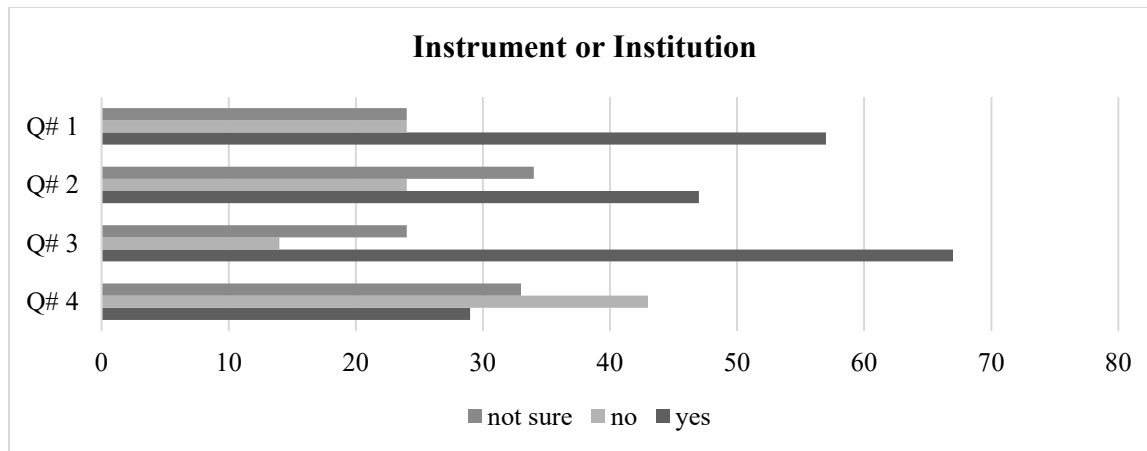


Figure 4. Functioning as an Instrument or Institution (Vision)

Ministry Profile

The topic of Ministry Profile was evaluated under Vision, and Q#1 asked if the participant belonged to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, such as a Youth ministry, Worship (choir) ministry, Ushers ministry, Food Service ministry, Sick and Shut-In ministry, Missionary ministry. Results show that 78 out of 105 said yes (78.3%), and 27 said no (25.7%). This indicates that most participants who are members of the rural church participate in ministry. Next, Q#2 asked if the participants who belong to a ministry if they believe that ministry should meet within the church or outside the church. The results show that 46 out of 105 participants said they wanted to meet inside the church (59.1%), and 32 (41%) said they would meet inside or outside the church. This data shows that a high percentage of participants would be willing to meet inside or outside of the church to do ministry. In reference to vision casting for change, the key element would be whether these same people could collaborate the same as within the church or continue to work together beyond the walls of the building. Everist states in his chapter on collaboration,

Labor is part of life. Collaboration is essential to life together in the church. To collaborate means, “to work together.” A second meaning is “to side with the invaders of one’s country.” Collaboration means work! Collaboration is work we do together, a

high-energy style particularly suited to people in long-term relationships such as a faith community.¹⁴⁵

Church Environment

Another essential element about Vision is how the work of the church is performed, which was evaluated under the topic of Church Environment. In Q#3, the participants were asked whether there was clear evidence that most people in the rural church helped with the work of the church, or does it seem that the same people are always doing the work? The results show that 53 out of 105 (50.4%) participants said that most people work, and 52 (49.5%) said that the same people do the work. In his section on the “unwillingness to develop other leaders,” Stanley states,

Leaders miss opportunities to play to their strengths because they haven’t figured out that great leaders work through other leaders, who work through others. Leadership is about multiplying your efforts, which automatically multiplies your results. We must never forget that the people who follow us are exactly where we have led them. If there is no one to whom we can delegate, it is our own fault.¹⁴⁶

This data would support vision casting, where the work of the church is communicated as every member's responsibility, and there is work that everyone can do to support the church and advance God’s kingdom on earth. In Q#4, the participants were asked if everyone was asked to help with the work and responsibilities of the church or the work and responsibilities were controlled by the same people? The results show that 67 out of 105 (63.8%) participants said everyone was asked to help, and 33 (31.4%) said the same people controlled the work.

¹⁴⁵ Norma Cook Everist, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 146.

¹⁴⁶ Andy Stanley, *Next Generation Leader: 5 Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2006), 27 - 28.

Growth and Decline

The topic of Growth and Decline also provides important data in developing a vision for the rural church. Under this topic, the participants were asked Q#5: how long have you been attending the rural church that you currently attend, whether you are a member or not? The results show that 18 out of 105 participants (13.3%) said they have attended under five years, 5 out of 105 participants (4.7%) said they have attended between five to ten years, and 86 out of 105 participants (81.9%) said they have ten years or more. These trends would support the fact that most people in the rural community attend their rural church for ten years or more and would create a base of support that may be used to make future projections and long-term planning.

Expansion (Innovation)

Under the core topic of Vision, the research data explored whether the rural church shows signs of expansion by evaluating attendance and recruitment. Participants were asked in Q#1 if the rural church they attended experienced an increase in attendance? The results show that 57 out of 105 (54.2%) participants said yes, and 48 out of 105 (45.7%) said no. This may indicate that many rural churches are at a stage of stagnation or decline. The next question, Q#2, asked the participants if the rural church they attended used radio advertisements or the local newspaper to invite the public to the church. The results show that 48 out of 105 participants (45.7%) said yes, and 43 out of 105 (40.9%) said no. These statistics reflect those in Q#1 and may explain why stagnation has occurred.

The topic of expansion explored the innovation found in the rural church by researching whether leadership is effectively recruited, equipped, and prepared to fulfill their responsibilities. Participants were asked Q#6 if the church leaders effectively recruited, equipped, and

empowered to oversee their area of responsibility. The results show that 90 out of 105 participants (86.6%) said yes, and 15 out of 105 (14.2%) said no. Sherin states,

The changing nature and diversity of rural communities makes it challenging for rural preparation programs to stay relevant, inclusive, and diverse in their course offerings. In general, rural clergy should be able to discern the contextual implications of working in a rural place and be able to operate with an understanding of rural culture and ethnic diversification.¹⁴⁷

Many ministers' complete seminary training and achieve a religious degree which demonstrates that they have achieved a scholastic goal, but this does not mean they are prepared for the work within a rural community. Sherin suggests in his work that a specific preparation for rural service would be innovative and helpful for future leaders of a rural church. This would also help the rural church leaders to form a better vision more in line with their rural church characteristics in their rural community. Sherin states,

Many programs exist that combine a ministerial degree and business degree and other programs combine a ministerial degree with a social work degree. A ministerial degree combined with a rural development, rural studies, rural sociology, or community development degree would provide the cross-disciplinary training rural clergy need to stay relevant, inclusive, and diverse.¹⁴⁸

Connectivity

One of the most important elements found in preparing and casting a vision is whether the message or plan connects with the congregation that the leader seeks support from. Maxwell reveals important characteristics of connecting the message, which has a lot to do with the messenger. Maxwell states,

Any message you try to convey must contain a piece of you. You can't just deliver words. You can't merely convey information. You need to be more than just a messenger. You must be the message you want to deliver. Otherwise, you won't have

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth Mark Sherin, "Preparing for Rural Ministry: A Qualitative Analysis of Curriculum used in Theological Education to Prepare Clergy for Ministry in a Rural Context." Order No. 3533981, University of Missouri - Columbia, 2012, 179.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 180.

credibility and you won't connect. You must connect with it on a personal level. Nothing can happen through you until it happens to you.¹⁴⁹

Under the core topic of Vision, the research explored whether the youth may have the opportunity to participate and include their perspective, which would help the youth in the church connect to the vision. The participants were asked in Q#1 if there is a growing and healthy youth ministry, and 66 out of 105 (62.8%) said yes, and 28 out of 105 (26.6%) said no. Next, the participants were asked Q#2 if the youth were invited to participate in worship or church functions, and 105 (100%) said yes. This statistic points to the rural church's recognition that youth participation needs to be encouraged and their opinions heard. Jones reveals statistics in his work concerning youth decline in attendance and support for the promotion of youth in all facets of church functions. He states,

Another important observation from the outcomes of the study is based on the general church leadership, which is founded on the differences between the aged and the young people, in terms of how they view how things should be done. While reprimanding the youth for certain positions, the old people tend to make lack of participation look evil so that they can discourage the youth and keep them from such activities. Unfortunately, such approaches to some extent work in a retrogressive manner since some youth members decide to flee the church altogether. This works against the premises of the youth ministry, which instead should focus on the facets of attracting more and more young people to Christ, as opposed to discouraging people from Him.¹⁵⁰

Hospitality

Finally, under the core topic of Vision, this research project included hospitality statistics and whether that characteristic was found in the rural church. The participants were asked Q#2 whether the church they attended had a system in place for greeting first-time guests, collecting information from them, and making them feel welcomed. The results revealed that 81 out of 105 participants (77.1%) said yes, and 19 out of 105 (18%) said no. Also, the participants were asked

¹⁴⁹ Maxwell, *Everyone Communicates*, 50.

¹⁵⁰ Marion Diane Jones, "Youth Decline in Church Growth and Attendance." Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2020, 119.

Q#3 if there is a system in place where designated members are responsible for making follow-up contact with visitors. The results show that 19 out of 105 participants (18%) said yes, 57 out of 105 participants (54.2%) said no, and 29 out of 105 (27.6%) were not sure. These statistics show that most of the participants said that their church lacks a follow-up system which would be another valuable source of information in developing a vision statement that could impact church growth.

This section on the review of the statistics drawn from the research under the core topic of Vision in the rural Baptist church now moves to the final core topic of Change.

Change

The rural Baptist church has historically been a place of tradition, cultural importance, and refuge, but it has experienced a gradual decline over time. This decline may directly result from the rural Baptist church refusing to change from its unproductive practices. This section will review some of the results in reference to topics under Change. This section will begin with comparing the results of Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7 below. In Figure 5, participants were asked Q#1 if they belong to a ministry in the rural Baptist church that they attend. The results show 78 out of 105 participants (74.3%) said they belong to a ministry and 27 out of 105 (25.7%) said they do not belong to ministry. This figure shows that 3 out of 4 participants who attend a rural Baptist church belong to a Ministry.

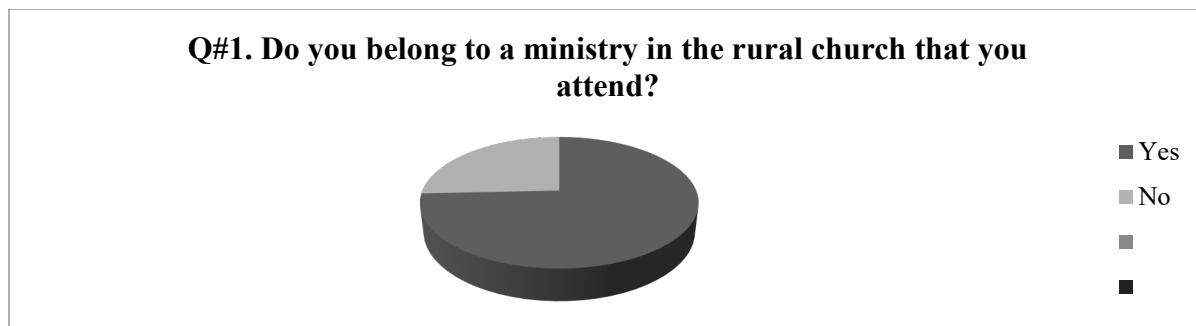


Figure 5. Do you belong to a ministry? (Change)

Next, Figure 6 shows the responses from participants who belonged to a ministry when asked Q#2 where the ministry should meet. The results in Figure 2 show that 46 out of 78 (59%) participants said that they would rather meet in the church, and 32 out of the 78 (41%) said they could meet in or out of the church. These statistics show that most participants who belong to a ministry in the rural Baptist church would rather continue to meet in the church, but almost half are willing to change the meeting location.

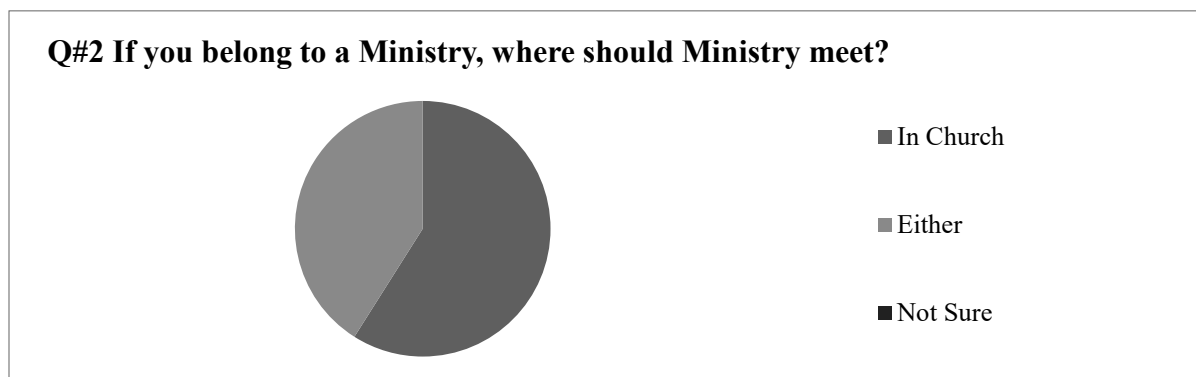


Figure 6. Where should the ministry meet? (Change)

Finally, Figure 7 shows results of Q#1, reporting 90.4% or 95 out of 105 participants said they had attended a small group meeting at church (note: they may see this as Bible study, Sunday school, Business meeting, etc.). The next question, Q# 2, reports 81 out of 105 (77.1%) participants said they knew small religious groups existed. In Q# 3, the results show 71 out of

105 participants, or 67.6%, said if they were in a small group, they prefer meeting at church instead of in the home, and from Q# 4, 90.4% or 95 out of 105 participants said they could study, worship and serve God inside or outside of the church.

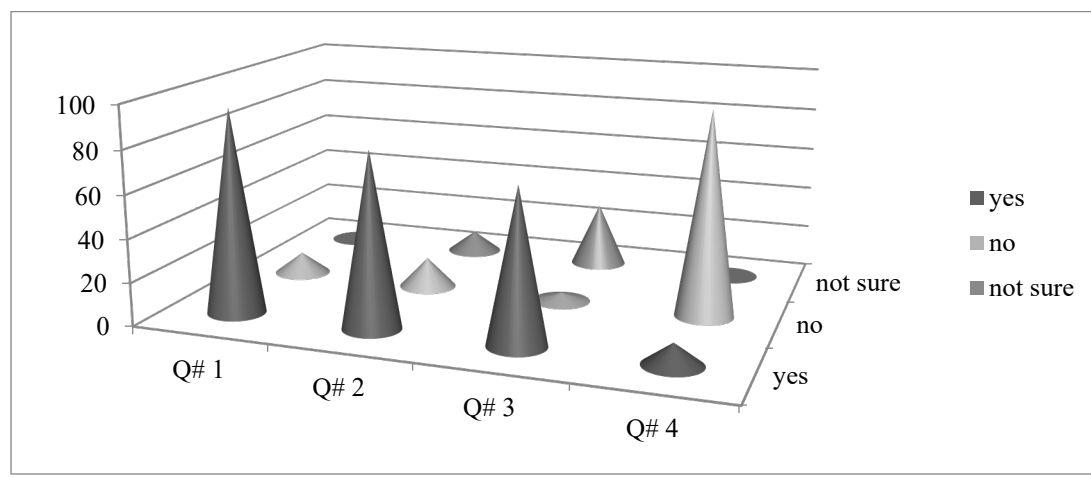


Figure 7. Small Groups (Change)

The comparison of the above figures reveals most participants belong to a ministry. According to Figure 5, almost half said they could meet in or out of the church according to Figure 6, and Figure 7 shows that most participants said they knew small groups exist and have attended a small group setting in the church. Most participants also said they would prefer meeting as a small group in the church instead of the home. But almost all participants said they could study, worship, and serve inside or outside the church. This comparison presents an opportunity for a paradigm shift in the understanding, function, and purpose of small groups in the rural church and where they could meet, which opens the door for growth.

Ministry Profile

The core topic of Change, under Ministry Profile, explores the results from Q#7 when the participants were asked if church members and non-members were given an opportunity to express their needs which may determine or create future ministry opportunities and goals. The

results show 81 out of 105 (77.1%) participants said yes, 9 out of 105 (8.6%) said no, and 15 out of 105 (14.3%) said they were not sure. The ability to hear the community's needs presents the opportunity to show change is needed to serve the current needs of the community when unproductive ministries are present.

Instrument or Institution

Under the topic of Instrument and Institution, Q#1 explores the responses from the participants when asked if it appears that non-church members are openly invited and welcomed to join in with the fellowship, group conversations, and socialization before or after the normal worship service. The results show that 91 out of 105 (86.6%) said yes, and 5 out of 105 (4.8%) said no. Likewise, under the topic of connectivity, Q#1 was intended to predict future growth. Q#2 was intended to predict future leadership within the church when the youth are involved in worship and church functions. According to Figure 8 below, 66 of the 105 participants (62.8%) said that they have a growing and healthy youth ministry that is allowed to participate in worship and church functions. The observation shows that most NNVA churches said that they have a growing and healthy youth ministry that is involved in worship or church functions which would support future growth. As stated earlier, the rural church has traditionally had generations of family members supporting the local church and family members encourage their youth to be involved. Both results show that with a welcomed youth presence, the rural Baptist church must change its way of doing church to keep the youth connected and actively participating.

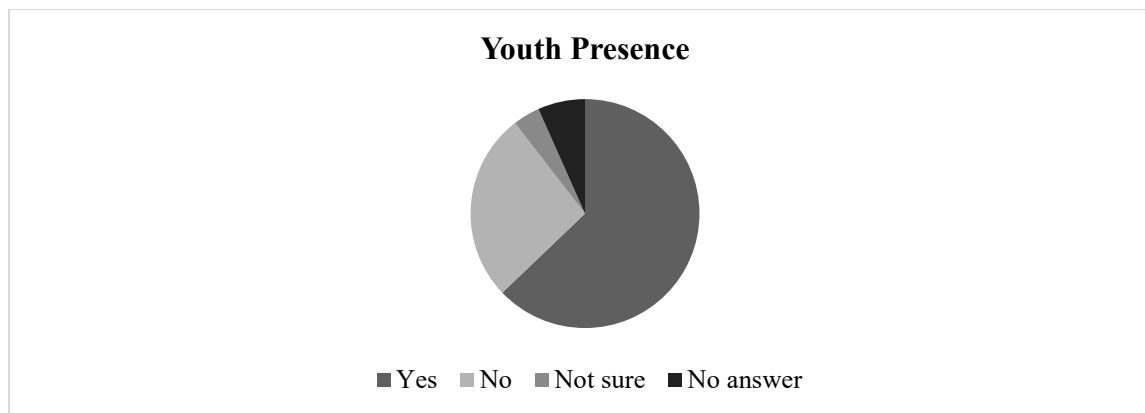


Figure 8: Youth Presence (Change)

Church Environment

The topic of church environment reveals information to support change. In Q#3, participants were asked if there was clear evidence that most people in the rural church that they attended helped with the work of the church or did it seem that the same people were always doing the work within the church. The results show that 53 out of the 105 (50.4%) participants said most people work, 52 out of 105 (49.5%) said the same people did the work. In other words, these results show that nearly half of the church is idle and not helping with the church's work.

Similarly, Q# 4 asked participants if everyone in their church was asked to help with the church's work and responsibilities or if the church's work and responsibilities were controlled by the same people. The results show that 67 out of 105 (63.8%) participants said everyone is asked to help, and 33 out of 105 (31.4%) said the work is controlled by the same people. These results support a need for change in the church's environment in reference to who helps with the work of the church and who can assign or delegate who performs that work.

Expansion (Innovation)

The topic of expansion offered the opportunity to determine if participants feel that innovation or introducing new things or methods is possible in the rural Baptist church. Since it is well noted in many rural church studies that members are slow to change or resist change, this

project wanted to examine the possibility of accepting expansion or innovation to the current ministry strategy. Stroup articulates his findings on church innovation,

Nonprofits depend upon the generosity of others to fund their budgets; the church is no different. Why does it seem like we resolve year after year to “wait and see” just how strong or weak the economy will be and what impact it will have on church giving? As churches become more complex in an attempt to meet even more complex ministry needs, it’s a perfect time to begin to talk about things like innovation. My prediction is that churches will need to become much more intentional about how they spend their money to ensure every dollar received is maximized for ministry. Innovation usually comes out of necessity.¹⁵¹

Under the topic of expansion, Q# 4 asked if the people in the rural church they attended were allowed to make suggestions to improve the way ministry is conducted. The results revealed that 86 out of 105 (81.9%) said yes, 5 out of 105 (4.7%) said no, and 14 out of 105 (13.3%) were not sure. A high percentage of participants indicated that their church allowed suggestions to improve on ministry, which may support change or innovation within the rural church. Stroup states,

Innovation is important. Now it’s more important than ever to demonstrate what every dollar received is accomplishing by measuring ministry results, it’s time to consider new ways, better ways to yield the same if not greater results. I wonder what vital ministries are on the proverbial chopping block that could be maintained, dare I suggest strengthened, with a simple touch of innovation.¹⁵²

Next, participants were asked in Q#5 if the rural church they attended has experienced an increase in outreach programs that benefit members and the public, such as helping the sick and shut-in, feeding the hungry, or providing community service to the poor. The results reveal that 29 out of 105 (27.6%) participants said yes, 5 out of 105 (4.7%) said no, and 71 out of 105 (67.6%) said that they were not sure. These results would also support some expansion or

¹⁵¹ Ben Stroup, *Church Giving Matters: More Money Really Does Mean More Ministry* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2009), 28.

¹⁵² Ibid, 29.

innovation to change the ability of the church to perform relevant outreach programs and share the Gospel, which is important to its sustainability. Truss states,

Reaching beyond the four walls of the church is the only solution for declining attendance. The fears of not sharing the gospel needs to be confronted head-on to get the church moving. The church must first understand the tactics of the enemy, then move toward sharing Jesus Christ with others. Evangelism is the approach needed to reach the unchurched.¹⁵³

The next question, Q#6, continued to gather data to evaluate areas to support expansion and innovation. This question asked if the leaders of the rural church they attended were effectively recruited, equipped, and empowered to oversee their areas of responsibility. The results revealed that 90 out of 105 (86.6%) participants said yes, and 15 out of 105 (14.2%) said no. These results may show that many participants feel that they are ready to lead once the pastor or leader is installed. No ongoing training or education is necessary, and this presents an opportunity for change. In his article “My Continuing Education as a Pastor,” Kenneth Carter argues that the tradition of having the pastor retire from education after installation is ill-advised for a lifetime of service. He concludes, “I have learned that there has never been a good time to disengage in continuing education – some matter is always more urgent – and, at the same time, I trust that congregations have benefited from some learning, some insight, some discovery. This is, finally, the beauty and the necessity of continuing education.”¹⁵⁴

Reform

The topic Reform evaluated responses from the participants through two questions comparing whether a change was necessary for the programs and activities held in the rural Baptist church. Participants were asked in Q# 3 if it appears that there are programs or activities

¹⁵³ Eric Q. Truss, “The Decline of Church Attendance in Black America: A Biblical Mandate for Black Males to Godly Leadership.” Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2019, 106.

¹⁵⁴ Carter, “My Continuing Education as a Pastor,” 19.

in the rural church, they attended that have little to do with church growth or evangelism. The results reveal that 10 out of 105 (9.5%) participants said yes, 85 out of 105 (80.9%) said no, and 10 out of 105 (9.5%) said they were not sure. Next, participants were asked in Q# 4 if the evening church-sponsored services and evening programs in their churches had either poor attendance or were only attended by the “core” members of the church. The results show that 66 out of 105 (62.8%) participants said yes, and 23 out of 105 (21.9%) said no. In other words, most participants agreed that church-sponsored services and evening programs have poor attendance or are attended by mainly “core” church members. If Q#3 results are compared to Q#4, this would indicate that most people believe that programs or activities support church growth or evangelism, but “core” members only attend those same activities. This represents an area of opportunity in changing the understanding of what church growth means and what is involved in evangelism.

Hospitality

The topic of hospitality used three questions to evaluate areas of change in the rural Baptist church. Participants were asked in Q# 1 if there is evidence in the church, they attended that members make visitors feel welcomed and appreciated for their visit to the church. The results show that 100 out of 105 participants (95.2%) said yes, and 5 out of 105 (4.7%) said no. Next, participants were asked Q#2 if the church they attended had a system in place for greeting first-time guests, collecting information from them, and making them feel welcomed. The results show that 81 out of 105 (77.1%) participants said yes, 19 out of 105 (18%) said no, and 5 out of 105 (4.7%) were not sure.

Finally, participants were asked in Q# 3 if there is a system in place in the church they attended that has a designated member or members responsible for making follow-up contact

with visitors. The results show that 19 out of 105 (18%) participants said yes, 57 out of 105 (54.2%) said no, and 29 out of 105 (27.6%) said they were not sure. In review, the results from questions Q#1 and Q#2 show that hospitality in the rural church is considered high toward visitors. But the participants also reveal that most rural churches attended do not have a system to follow up those visitors, which presents an area of change that could potentially be improved to impact church growth.

Small Groups

The rural Baptist church already has historically had a small group setting in its traditional Sunday church school system, which has been in most rural churches since its beginnings. This tradition may offer an opportunity for change if presented correctly. This research evaluated whether participants from the rural church were willing to meet outside the church building even though the traditional Sunday church school has always met at the church. The 105 participants were asked if they belonged to a ministry in the rural Baptist church of the NNVA. Under Ministry Profile, Q #1 results found that 74.3% or 78 participants said they belong to a ministry and 25.7% or 27 said they do not belong to a ministry. Under the topic of Ministry Profile, the outcomes of Q# 2 shows that 59% of the 78 participants who participate in ministry would rather meet in church and 41% of the 78 participants who participate in ministry are willing to meet in or out of the church. In other words, most participants who belong to a ministry in the rural Baptist church would rather continue to meet in the church, but almost half are willing to change. These results may indicate that if the participants can continue to meet with their familiar groups, like Sunday church school, the location of the meeting place may not be important.

Emilie Lemmons reports on an observation from several rural church settings she experienced during her research. Lemmons states, “Most groups comprise fewer than a dozen members, often from the same parish. They meet regularly – usually weekly – to pray, read scripture and reflect. For some, it can become a long-term commitment. Some groups have met for 10, even 20 years. Over time, many small Christian communities become active in social issues and volunteer together in the community.”¹⁵⁵ One can assume, from Lemmons’ research, that if groups have been meeting for 10 or even 20 years, they may not stay together because of the meeting place but because of their relationships.

As stated earlier, the rural Baptist church has historically been a place where many generations have supported the church over time. Many generations continue to support the church because of their similarity or family ties. These similarities may indicate that introducing a small group setting for change is possible if these similarities or family ties continue outside the church and others who have these same connections are invited in. Olson states, “Of course, it is well established that people do not form their social ties in a purely random fashion. People tend to prefer social ties to others like themselves, a tendency known as homophily.”¹⁵⁶ Homophily is the tendency for people to seek out or be attracted to those who are like themselves.

The topic of small groups presented data that would support small groups meeting outside of the rural church. Under Small Groups, Q#1 responses reveal that 90.4% or 95 out of 105 participants said they had attended a small group meeting at church (note: they may see this

¹⁵⁵ Emilie Lemmons, "Small Groups Said To Personalize a Church Too Large For Relationships." *National Catholic Reporter* 43, no. 35 (August 31, 2007): 3.

¹⁵⁶ Daniel V. A. Olson, "Why Do Small Religious Groups Have More Committed Members?" *Review of Religious Research* 49, no. 4 (June 2008): 358.

as Bible study, Sunday school, Business meeting, etc.). Next, Q#2 shows that 77.1% or 81 out of 105 participants said they knew small religious groups existed. Then, Q#3 indicated that 71 out of 105 (67.6%) participants said if they were in a small group, they would prefer meeting at church instead of the home. Finally, Q#4 concluded that 90.4% or 95 out of 105 participants said they could study, worship, and serve God inside or outside the church.

The overall observation shows that most participants said they knew small groups existed and had been in a small group setting in church. Most participants also said they would prefer meeting as a small group in the church instead of the home. But almost all participants said they could study, worship, and serve inside or outside of the church, which may present an opportunity for a paradigm shift in the understanding, function, and purpose of small groups in the rural church. As stated earlier, it is common for rural church members to have established relationships with one another and are already connected in or outside of the church through family or community. Carroll Quigley gives a better explanation of this type of social group, which he calls an “aggregate of persons.”¹⁵⁷ Quigley clarifies,

A social group is an aggregate of persons who have had relationships with one another long enough for these to have become customary, and for them to come to regard themselves as a unit with well-defined limits. The essential thing about a group is that its members can say who is in it and who is not. The term covers such aggregates as a class in history, a football team, a fraternity, a university, a business concern, a parish or church, a political party, or a state. All these groups come into existence gradually as relationships are established and mutual recognition grows. When a class in history or a football squad assembles for the first time, it is not a group, but simply an aggregate of persons, and the group comes into existence only gradually. In fact, it continues to develop as long as it is of any social significance.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Carroll Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1979), 71.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Conclusion

Brief Observations in the Data Collection Process

The first goal of the data collecting process was to identify whether the rural Baptist church presented characteristics of becoming institutionalized and spiritually dysfunctional. This process focused on research questions under the topics of pastoral and leadership issues, church health, vision, and change. This study gathered information about how members or visitors of the rural Baptist church understood the various ministries and functions within the rural Baptist church. This data advanced the research question and helped to determine whether the rural Baptist church shows characteristics of strength or weakness. This research also compared the opinions of the participants and whether there were common themes or differences.

Each chapter began by evaluating aspects of church leadership and how its leadership impacted church members and its visitors. Each chapter ended by evaluating the topic of change and how the traditional rural Baptist church could accept a shift in paradigm leading it to change. Robert Welch supports the idea that in the congregational polity of the traditional rural church, change is possible if the leadership, along with the congregation, takes an active role in making it happen. Welch states,

The congregational form of polity is best illustrated by the Baptist denomination and its democratic autonomy, which forms denominational governance or hierarchy. In this polity structure, the local church or organization executes its own rules of conduct and appoints or elects its own leaders, who act for or on behalf of the church. In hierarchical church organizations, leaders must lead because the congregation will expect them to provide the form and function for what they do. However, in a congregational polity setting, the church or organization expresses a democratic philosophy for doing church and will rebel at any attempt by a denomination – or leader – imposed hierarchy. Does this mean that leaders cannot effect change? No, but administrators must become change agents rather than directors of change.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Welch, *Church Administration*, 67.

This project will conclude with a brief overview to discuss the strengths and weaknesses found in the rural Baptist church and if there is an opportunity for an intervention into destructive practices and traditions, and if improvements can be made on the existing strengths.

Chapter Five

Project Overview

Introduction

The rural Baptist church has experienced a gradual decline over time, and many reasons point to self-destructive practices and traditions. Many other reasons, such as economic challenges, were causing supporters to relocate to the city for work, no resources but survival, or discontinuing support altogether for other attractions. This project evaluated the responses from members and visitors of the rural Baptist church, specifically targeting the ministries within the church. The potential value is in strengthening the rural Baptist church by highlighting value, developing effective ministry strategies, and refocusing vision. Stephen Witmer expresses the importance of why this type of research should be performed in the rural community and shares his thoughts on the value of the small-place ministry. Witmer states,

Two things here are enormously encouraging for small-place ministry. First, in God's plan there's a disproportionate relationship between the means and the ends. Paul's humble proclamation of the gospel (he's suffering in prison) and the humble presence of a church in Ephesus produce the greatest results imaginable: God's wisdom made known to the universe and God's character praised forever. No matter how small our ministry or how much suffering it entails, as we steward the grace of the gospel (Ephesians 3:2) God will manifest his wisdom and display his glory. We don't control the size of our platform or the degree of our suffering. God does. But as we remain centered on the gospel, we can be certain nothing will be wasted.¹⁶⁰

The purpose of this project was to identify areas of strength and weakness in the Rural Baptist Church so that a shift in paradigm may occur to promote spiritual health, which will promote growth, not in numbers but in maturity. Four core topics were used as a basis for research, and that data was evaluated for characteristics of strength and weakness. The role of the

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Witmer, *A Big Gospel in Small Places: Why Ministry in Forgotten Communities Matters*. Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019, 71 - 72.

pastor and church leadership, church health, vision, and change were explored using a series of questions posed to members and visitors of the rural Baptist church in the Northern Neck of Virginia.

In the introduction of this project, the Old Testament story of Moses and Jethro was used to show how detrimental practices or behavior may not change unless an intervention of some kind occurs. If God had not sent Jethro to intervene, Moses would have been the first casualty of burn-out in ministry, he may not have been able to correct his downward spiral, and there may not have been a nation of Israel. Fortunately for the children of Israel, God sent an intervention into the destructive practice and saved the newly formed nation.

This research began identifying areas of strength and weakness in the rural church. The data obtained was intended to support intervention into self-destructive practices, if they existed, and would suggest a shift in paradigm in the way rural ministry is performed. Likewise, if the data revealed strength in ministry, that data would build on that strength using more effective ministry strategies. Wilson states, “Moses listened wisely to his father-in-law to prevent the imminent collapse of his strength and leadership credibility. If he had not, chaos would have taken over, and no one was prepared to take the leadership reins. Many churches saw growth only to have lost it because a lead pastor tried to micromanage it or failed to develop leadership for the growth.”¹⁶¹ Following Wilson’s thought, the participants of this project revealed areas of strengths and weakness under the topic of pastoral and leadership issues. The research project results were like the information gleaned from work analyzed in the literature review of this project.

¹⁶¹ Jimmy Derek Wilson, "Development of a Lay Leadership Training Conference for Rural Appalachian Churches." Order No. 3709102, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015, 24.

Paradigm Shifts in Pastoral / Leadership Issues

In the review of pastoral and leadership issues, the topic of connectivity investigated whether the pastors or the church leadership connected with members or visitors—the participants were asked a question to determine if the pastor attempted to connect to the congregation personally. The results show that in question #3, under connectivity, 95.2% of the participants said their pastor and church leaders connected with them personally, which supports the fact that most rural churches have long-term pastors who are connected. In most cases, the rural pastor and his family became part of the rural community and shared a relationship with their congregation like a normal family. The rural pastor or leader is seen as part of the community and the families at large. Because most rural communities have fewer distractions to consume their time, the people, rural pastor, and church leaders may have more time to maintain a balanced healthy family life. According to J. B. Martin, under the topic of healthy family life, “A pastor, while neglecting his or her family, may be an extremely effective leader. However, without a reasonable balance between church and family, a pastor would be neglecting his or her primary responsibilities as a Christian. Effective clergy leaders must maintain a healthy family life.”¹⁶² Suppose the rural pastor or church leader is seen as having a healthy family life, with similar challenges and difficulties as others. In that case, the ability to connect to the traditional rural family becomes possible because they will be seen on the same level as the congregation.

This connectivity between the rural leadership and the congregation was also seen in the results from the question asking participants if the weekly sermon made sense and was easy to understand. This pastoral and leadership question has shown strength in connectivity because the

¹⁶² J. B. Martin, "Church Turnaround: A Study of Formerly Declining Churches that are Growing." Order No. 3742817, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2015, 35.

participants understood and connected to the message. All pastors and leaders are often faced with the challenge of communicating with the people in their language, having their worldview in mind. The results revealed that 100% of the participants said they understood the weekly sermon and that it made sense, indicating the rural pastor and leadership are connecting through preaching, teaching, and communicating to their rural community.

The way the pastor perceives himself or herself and how the congregation perceives him or her directly impacts leadership influence in the church. The benefit of having long-term, bi-vocational pastors, like the ones seen in the rural church, is that pastors are not regularly leaving their place of leadership. They connect to the congregation, and the congregation is more likely to follow their lead if a change is introduced through a Godly vision. But those churches that constantly change pastors will never be open to change, according to John Flowers. Flowers articulates the reason that some churches constantly change pastors and why those churches may be in decline. In the section on *The Need for Stability*, Flowers states,

Strange as it may seem, there is one systemic change that will have enormous payoffs for those who wish for things at their local church to stay the same: change pastors. To prevent changes in the local church, it is essential that there is frequent pastoral change in that church. It is well documented that healthy, thriving, and growing churches, more often than declining churches, have long-term pastorates. Declining churches have a carousel approach to pastoral leadership. Many declining and dying churches have two-year or three-year pastorates.¹⁶³

Those churches with this two-year or three-year trend often use the excuse of having a pastor who only wanted to use their church as a “steppingstone” for something bigger and more financially stable. But most rural churches have long relied on the bi-vocational pastor, and those new pastors certainly know what they are getting financially before accepting the job. In other

¹⁶³ John Flowers and Karen Vannoy, *10 Temptations of Church: Why Churches Decline and What to do About It* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 71.

words, those churches that have a “carousel” approach to pastoral leadership may be in denial that they are resisting change. MacDonald states, “Though small evangelical congregations have long relied on unpaid pastors, mainline churches haven’t. They’ve generally paid full-time or nearly full-time salaries. That’s changing, however, as churches face declining numbers and look to new ministry models to make ends meet.”¹⁶⁴ What MacDonald is alluding to is that many traditional churches are taking on a new ministry model, which includes long-term bi-vocational pastorates that lessens the financial load on the church and creates stability.

In continuing the review of pastor and leadership issues under the topic of hospitality, this project found that the way visitors are treated is another reflection of the Pastor and Leadership of the church. It was found that the hospitality data reported 77.1% of the participants reported a positive response in collecting information and making visitors feel welcomed. However, a weakness emerged from the report showing that even though these churches show signs of great hospitality, less than half (54.2 %) of respondents said they did not follow up on visitors. This weakness would indicate that even if the rural church had visitors and gathered information, the pastor or leadership failed to implement systems to take advantage of potential growth. The pastor or church leadership may have the opportunity to use this data to introduce a shift in the way visitors are seen from the perspective of increased offerings or new members. Leadership teams could assist with this shift in paradigm in which the pastor and church leader establish team members to reach out to visitors they may know.

This ministry strategy was taken from the conceptual framework of this project. Terry Dorsett suggested using leadership teams to assist the pastor for more effectiveness. Dorsett provides methods to assist pastors serving small churches that may not be able to “fully-fund

¹⁶⁴ Jeffrey G. MacDonald, "Churches turn to part-time clergy." *Christian Century* 130, no. 21 (October 16, 2013): 14.

their salaries.”¹⁶⁵ Dorsett uses New Testament church leadership principles to present lessons, exercises, and worksheets to teach and train select church leaders to assist the pastor. These lessons and exercises can be as simple as having someone perform a proper visit to the sick and shut-in to free up the pastor’s time or follow up on visitors they may know or who live in their community. He suggests exercises to teach leadership teams to perform more complicated tasks like conducting worship service if the pastor is absent and a guest evangelist is present. Because all pastors and church leaders need help, time off to take a break, or vacation, delegating responsibilities to capable associates is important in preventing the danger of burnout while pasturing a small church, like that of larger churches.¹⁶⁶

Dorsett also shares his personal experience with the increased stress forced on his family as the pastor in a small church. He reveals that the families of a small church can experience disappointment, failure, and fatigue the same as the pastor himself. Divorce rates are similar for all church leaders, and the pressure on the pastor’s wife can be unbearable, especially because most members of the congregation set high expectations for the pastor’s spouse whether he or she wants it or not. Rebuli states,

The pastor’s wife finds her primary position in the fact that she is a woman and wife. She is a believer who is to function within her spiritual gifting in the local church. There is no biblical mandate regarding role or responsibility of the pastor’s wife. At most, moral characteristics are required of women in ministry as well as general spiritual characteristics responsible of all believers. The ideal, from a biblical perspective, for the pastor’s wife is that of any woman who is specifically influential in her conduct, to function effectively as a woman of God, to support her husband, and be an active member of the local church.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Dorsett, *Developing Leadership Team*, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Leschenne Rebuli and Kevin Gary Smith, "The Role of the Pastor's Wife: What does the Bible Teach?" *Conspectus (South African Theological Seminary)* 7, (March 2009): 114.

Unfortunately, the pastor's spouse is often put under extreme pressure because of their intimate relationship with the man or woman of God, although the Bible only requires them to meet the same expectation as any other believer. This presents another opportunity for pastors and church leaders to communicate a better understanding for connectivity to their congregation.

Another useful tool to help rural pastors and the church leadership identify areas of strength and weakness is outlined by Patrick Bland when he suggests implementing quarterly evaluations and forums. As stated in the introduction of this project, an intervention into destructive practices may not be accepted in the rural church's tradition if the congregation does not see or understand what it is doing wrong. Bland suggests using a system of evaluations. He states,

Any successful establishment has a great assessment process that provides efficient maintenance in its development. It is important to have an authentic assessment plan in place to reinforce the implementation of the other strategies. This plan is also known as an evaluation. Much like in the employment world, the evaluation system assesses workability, thoroughness, and durability. After giving great attention to the proceeding strategies, there is a strong possibility that it will not sustain without a constant evaluation system. Many of the pastors interviewed suggested that they have evaluation systems in place, but those systems are not extensive. Some have the evaluations in place for the purposes of the various ministries and some only have evaluations for staff personnel. However, to eradicate the vindictiveness of conflict among the various generations in the rural Baptist church, an intense and consistent evaluation system needs to be in place.¹⁶⁸

The review of the core topic under pastoral and leadership issues will conclude on the advice given to Timothy from the Apostle Paul in the New Testament book of 1 Timothy: 3. Paul gives Timothy sound advice to begin his leadership role, and these characteristics can be a model for the rural church leaders and pastors and to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in its leadership. Paul describes the work as "a good work" in verse 3. The rural pastor and church

¹⁶⁸ Patrick Ward Bland, "Resolving Intergenerational Conflict Within the Rural Black Churches of Central Virginia," Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2019, 108.

leadership should be encouraged that their work, no matter the size of the congregation, is a good work, and they should display a spirit of enthusiasm. Paul suggests in verse 2 that the leadership should be “apt to teach,” which suggests the rural leadership must be willing and able to teach the congregation on sound Godly doctrine. There should be support for the pastor and leadership to have progressive and ongoing educational goals. Paul emphasizes that the leader should not be a “novice” or not a new convert because their pride may interfere with the mission of God. And finally, Paul explains that the leadership should be of a “good report” to avoid the snare of the devil, which could bring strife into the church. As stated earlier, the rural Baptist church has been led by a wealth of great leaders who have served generations of faithful members. There were many strengths and weaknesses found under the core topic of pastor and church leadership issues. The success of rural Baptist church leadership over the years can ultimately be credited to the grace and mercy of God. Its failures can be seen when the leadership does not follow the example of Ezekiel and makes leadership decisions without God.

Paradigm Shift in Church Health

The core topic of church health presented many areas of study which did not focus on physical health and its impact on the church. But the physical health of the pastor, church leaders, and the congregation is important to good spiritual health because physical sins such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and sexual perversions have a negative impact on the overall health of the church. Thomas states in his book *Every Body Matters*,

The curse of today is that so many Christians equate bodily sins with sexual sins. The only possible bodily sin, in their minds, is related to lust. If they are not sinning sexually, they believe this doesn't apply to them. The contemporary age of the church is the only

generation that has believed this. We cannot be faithful believers if we ignore our bodies.¹⁶⁹

This project attempted to identify areas of strength and weakness in church health by researching topics beyond physical health, such as the church environment, the work of the church, ministry profile, growth and decline, reform, and connectivity. Because church health can be revealed in the environment of the church, questions were asked about worship. The research topic on the church environment asked participants whether the church follows a traditional worship service (Q#1) and if there was a certain level of excitement in the church (Q#2). From the answers, participants reported a split in the type of worship service experienced. Still, the majority reported having experienced excitement in the church whether there was a traditional or spontaneous worship service.

Also, participants were asked whether the work of the church is shared (Q#3) and if people of the church are asked to help with the work (Q#4). Another split was found, which reveals everyone is asked to help with the work of the church, but the same people did most of the work. This may be because there are no new volunteers, or those who do the work do not want help and want to control what is done. An exciting church may be seen as a strength for members and visitors rather than a boring, lifeless setting. Still, a weakness was found that is like information revealed from previous sources used in this project, that most rural churches have a weakness when the same members perform all the work whether they volunteer to do it or not. This presents an opportunity for change that would improve the overall health of the church. When there are new members or visitors, the leadership of the church or those who oversee the various tasks should channel the new excitement toward service and then equip them with better

¹⁶⁹ Gary Thomas, *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011), 35.

leadership skills, empowering delegation, and working with others. The paradigm shift will come when new members or visitors are asked to help without giving up control and power, allowing them to connect to that rural church and create ownership in ministry. Brooks states,

A key component in reinventing the culture of the local church is to redefine the understanding of what constitutes a leader. Returning to the paradigm that is driven by church members' affiliation and familiarity with business models, some organizations define a leader as the person who is in charge or one who is ultimately accountable for making the decisions within the organization. He has people who report to him and who take direction from him. Ultimately, the responsibility, credit, and blame fall to the leader. But to redefine leadership means to shed such paradigms and understand that a leader is anyone who has influence. Hence, this strategic plan predicates that everyone in an organization is a leader. Thus, everyone must be developed for leadership.¹⁷⁰

The church health review continued by evaluating what participants understood or knew about church finance. One of the most unpopular topics of discussion in most church environments or business meetings is discussing shortfalls and not meeting the budget. Church health can be greatly impacted because of the stress and disappointment associated with the reality of a financial crisis. Under the topic of Reform, the participants were asked whether they could see a decline in giving (Q#2), and 22.8% said yes, and 44.7% said no, and 32.3% were unsure. These results show that more than 50% said that giving is down or they had no idea. Whether they wanted to admit it or not, most current reports show that giving is down in all churches. This fact is a weakness in any church or non-profit organization and would require immediate attention by leadership before it is too late. One of the ministry strategies suggested here is biblically based teaching on regular tithing, which would be required of all leadership and core members, then encouraged of the congregation and visitors.

¹⁷⁰ Douglas Brooks, "An Organic Model of Leadership Development for the Rural, Traditional Church." Liberty University, 2015, 76 - 77.

The evaluation on church health continued by asking participants questions related to connectivity. Participants were asked (Q#1) if there is a growing and healthy youth ministry in the church, and 62.8% reported yes, and all participants said the youth are invited to participate in worship or church functions. These statistics would reflect a strong and healthy characteristic found in the rural church. With the many distractions and temptations today, the youth face many more temptations than in times past. As stated earlier, the rural church has traditionally had families influence their youth to support the local church, and if the families remained in the rural community, membership remained stable.

Today, reports of opioid abuse, depression, suicide are on the rise, and many traditional families no longer live in the rural community. The rural church is faced with a new challenge on how to reach the youth. Even though the above statistic is promising for youth ministry, a new strategy to provide ministry for today's youth is required. To have influence and relevance on today's youth, the way the traditional rural church does ministry will require change. The older members of the church must be educated on a better understanding of the importance of having a youth connection within the church because without the youth there is no future for the church, and money cannot replace membership. If the current programs are driven by fundraising or tradition, a course change may be necessary, or decline is inevitable.

Next, the topic of ministry profile was addressed to show whether the church promotes members to be involved using their gift and talents in ministry, did anyone benefit from outreach ministry, and if the church shows an openness to future ministry. The participants reported that 90% who had attended a church in the NNVA said that the church openly encouraged recruitment and provided an opportunity for members to discover their gifts and talents (Q#5), 89.5% have personally been helped by a ministry (Q#6), and 77.1% said members and non-

members were allowed to express their needs (Q#7). The results from all three questions show a perfect opportunity to introduce small group ministry to fulfill the needs of others within the rural Baptist church, other than Sunday Bible school.

Even though the participants revealed strength in the previous ministry profile, under the topic of “instrument or institution,” there was a weakness concerning deeply entrenched institutionalized influences. The participants report that 86.6% said non-members are openly invited and welcomed to join fellowship, group conversations, and socialize (Q#1), but only 45.7% said the church is open to change, while 40.9% said the church is slow to change (Q#2). In reference to church health, if the congregation is slow or not open to change, this may be the root of the problem and reason for the decline.

Similarly, under the topic of Expansion, participants were asked if the rural church has experienced increased attendance (Q#3). The results show a split where 54.2% said yes, and 45.7% said no, indicating stagnation in growth. Also, under expansion, 81.9% of the participant’s said members were allowed to make suggestions to improve the way ministry is conducted. What emerged from this data is that even though suggestions to improve ministry are made, change may be resisted or slow in coming, which is reflected in stagnant growth as members and visitors become frustrated or disconnected.

Finally, participants reported 50.4% said the church had not changed traditional views about social issues such as homosexuality, marriage, drug, and alcohol use, but 36% said yes, or they are not sure (Q#4). Even though the numbers may reveal a low percentage of change in doctrine, a potential weakness may be occurring in the rural Baptist church because it appears that a change in traditional views is reported by some of its members. The church leadership may

require self-evaluation and examination on its teaching and preaching doctrine to investigate whether they remain biblically based.

During this research, an alarming characteristic emerged regarding the lack of care for individual needs in the rural community. For example, many rural communities must travel for miles to the nearest hospital, counseling center, or nursing home. The church's health may be impacted by the topics discussed above, but there is an even greater need for pastoral care due to this lack of basic services. When the community falls short of basic health care needs and support, the church should be there to fill the void, but, unfortunately, many aging, rural churches cannot meet this demand. In *Practicing Care in Rural Congregation and Communities*, Jeanne Hoeft reports her finding from research conducted in a rural community on the importance of rural health and wholeness.

Participating in the healing of people's lives has always been a primary function of pastoral care and those who minister on behalf of the church. Wanting to nurture wholeness through pastoral care in any community of faith requires that leaders attend to the health needs of individuals and families, as well as of the community in general. People everywhere wrestle with issues of aging populations, dying patients and their families who deserve quality care, the specialized needs of mental health care for adolescents and children, or the recruiting and retaining of qualified and dedicated physicians, emergency personnel, nurses, dentists, and mental health providers.¹⁷¹

With this in mind, it was noted under the topic of pastoral and leadership issues, 95.2% of the participants said that the pastor connects with the congregation personally, i.e., the pastor tries to get to know the congregation (Q# 3). This statistic supports that rural churches with long-term pastors have connected with their congregations and communities and are trusted among the people living there. This would be a strength in church health because the pastoral care and

¹⁷¹ Jeanne M. Hoeft, L. Shannon Jung, and Joretta L. Marshall, *Practicing Care in Rural Congregations and Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 151.

wholeness of the rural church would be enhanced if the trusted pastor could help find resources beyond his ability. Similarly, in the article on “Understanding Women’s Health Promotion and the Rural Church,” findings show having the support of pastoral care benefits rural life when community support is lacking. The authors state in their study, “Findings from this study support the church as a health-promoting resource for rural women. Individual and collective health can be promoted with access to social structures and relationships stemming from the rural church.”¹⁷²

Church health in the rural community ultimately comes from their ability to hear from God and remain faithful and trusting in His Word. As stated earlier, the Old Testament book of Ezekiel reveals an experience that many people encounter when faced with unknown challenges. The prophet Ezekiel answered the question posed by God by admitting his moral limitation and stating that only God knows (Ezekiel 37:1 – 3). Believers should understand and trust that God knows the answer, even when a man believes it is unknown. Whether the health of the rural church is in decline due to financial challenges, low membership, or no youth interest, trusting God’s direction can make “dry bones live again.” This study will move into how trusting God’s direction by understanding and creating a Godly vision can lead to positive change and ultimately good church health, not in numbers but in maturity.

Paradigm Shift in Vision

The book of Proverbs states, “Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18). But the question remains: how does this Godly vision come, who is it spoken through, and who should facilitate it when it comes? Elmer Towns gives a clear answer to these questions

¹⁷² Robyn Plunkett, Beverly Leipter, Joanne K. Olson, and Susan L. Ray, "Understanding Women’s Health Promotion and the Rural Church," *Qualitative Health Research* 24, no. 12 (2014): 1730.

in his definition of the visionary leader. Town states, “The visionary leader is one who defines the task of leadership not by what could be done but by what should be done. He looks beyond his own abilities and the immediate needs to recognize a larger goal. Then he develops effective strategies to accomplish that vision. In the process, he accomplishes much more than he might have originally thought possible.”¹⁷³ Of course, the visionary leader does not accomplish the work to advance God’s Kingdom on earth alone; he must have followers who buy into the vision received from God.

The core topic of vision was explored in this project by investigating several topics under reform, ministry profile, the work of the church, growth, and decline, and youth participation. Under Reform, participants reported that 90.4% said that traditional programs or activities are promoted regularly (Q#1), 80.90% said that those programs or activities promote church growth or evangelism (Q#3), and 62.8% said that evening church-sponsored services and evening programs have either poor attendance or are only attended by the “core” members (Q#4).

In other words, the participants said that traditional programs are regularly promoted. They believe the programs have something to do with church growth or evangelism. Since programs are normally sponsored in rural churches after regular service as an evening event, they have poor attendance by visitors or non-members. Since all these statistics show a weakness in the type of programs offered, the understanding of church growth or evangelism, and the lack of attracting visitors or new members, the need for a vision is imperative. This vision should clearly correct the misinterpretations of the past and guide the followers into the future. Along with a

¹⁷³ Elmer L. Towns, *Biblical Models for Leadership*. Mason (OH: Cengage, 2011), 156.

new vision, if these statistics remain true, the need for intense education and training of the followers is necessary to connect and understand the vision. Bickers states,

Vision is essential for the healthy small church. It enables the church to better focus on the ministry God has given it, unites the church, and reduces the potential of conflict. Vision also helps the church look beyond its four walls to the needs of those in the community. Many churches spend their time and energy simply reacting to events around them; vision challenges them to become more proactive and provides them the opportunity to shape their own future.¹⁷⁴

The topic of ministry profile was evaluated under vision when participants were asked if they belonged to a ministry in the church, and 78.3% said yes, and 25.7% said no (Q# 1). These statistics would indicate that most members of the rural church participate in ministry, but it also reveals, as stated earlier, that many of the same people could be serving several different roles. Next, the participants were asked if they believe anyone serving in ministry should meet within the church or outside the church (Q#2), and 59.1% wanted to meet inside the church, and 41% said they would meet inside or outside of the church.

This data shows that a high percentage of people would be willing to meet inside or outside of the church to do ministry. The visionary leader could use these statistics to support evidence that a change in the traditional church exists, and if the vision to serve outside of the four walls of the church was presented correctly, there are people, even small groups, who would follow. In reference to building a foundation for health and balance, Gladen believes it all starts with community. He states,

Even though fellowship may be the most frequently cited benefit of a small group, it is a mistake to allow groups to stay in the comfort zone of this benefit. True Christian community goes deeper than spending social time together. It dives below the surface into the heart and enables us to speak into each other's lives. It provides the strong foundation for living out all the purposes in a safe environment and is the glue that holds

¹⁷⁴ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 41.

your group together when times get tough. This type of community will not happen, however, without direction and focused leadership.¹⁷⁵

This direction and focused leadership toward a Godly vision must be guided by the visionary leader, as stated earlier by Townes. There should be no one who feels they are the reason for success, the mission of the church will not be accomplished individually, and everyone should know that they are important to fulfilling the final goal. In Q#3, the participants were asked whether there was clear evidence that most people in the rural church helped with the work of the church or did it seem that the same people were always doing the work. The results show that 50.4% of the participants said that most people work, and 49.5% said that the same people do the work, which may indicate that there may be those who feel they are the only persons who can do the work of the church.

The vision must be a shared effort, and the visionary leader must find ways to teach others to delegate for the health of the church. Bickers states,

A church without a clear understanding of God's vision for its ministry is like an octopus on roller skates. There may be a lot of activity, but it's not going anywhere. Without a commonly understood vision, everyone in the church has his or her own vision of what the church should be doing. When these visions collide, and they will, problems develop, and ministry comes to an abrupt halt.¹⁷⁶

The results of this research found similarities in the information from sources used in the literature review. For example, Dorsett suggested developing leadership teams in the bi-vocational church to support the pastor and leadership at large. This would also be necessary for casting and supporting the vision because the team or teams would be speaking the same message to all church members. This would also be necessary for the longevity of the pastor or visionary leader to prevent fatigue as he or she attempts to move the church forward. According

¹⁷⁵ Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*, 55.

¹⁷⁶ Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church*, 32.

to researchers Spencer, Winston, and Bocarnea in their study on "Predicting the Level of Pastors' Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church," having a leadership or ministry team is important in preventing an early exit of leadership in case the challenge of fulfilling the vision becomes too great. They state,

Focusing on the issues related to vision conflict and compassion fatigue among clergy can cultivate an interest in pursuing remediation for those affected as well as increase better methods of understanding and promoting prevention of forced and unforced exits from the ministry. As we discovered in this present research, whether clergy have a support team and/or serve in a congregation where the attendance is declining are significant main effects respectively upon vision conflict that result in greater likelihood for clergy to exit the ministry. The same two effects also contribute to clergy exits in terms of compassion fatigue. However, with compassion fatigue the lack of a support team is the only main effect. Attendance problems are seen here as amplifying that effect through an interaction with the lack of team support.¹⁷⁷

The next supporting document is an article written by Roger Finke, who researches Southern Baptist churches and the transformation of those churches from small fellowships with bi-vocational clergy to larger churches with seminary-trained professionals. Finke documents this transformation to demonstrate how increasing congregational size “reduces membership commitment and conformity.”¹⁷⁸ Finke states, “Based on a sample of 58 Protestant churches in Indianapolis, it was found that church size has a negative effect on member involvement and identification with the church.”¹⁷⁹ This information would also support why a team approach at casting the vision using small groups would be beneficial and offer a way to change how the rural church sees and understands small congregations. The small congregation could be

¹⁷⁷ J. Spencer, Bruce Winston, and Mihai Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors' Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 1 (February 2012): 95.

¹⁷⁸ Roger Finke, "The Quiet Transformation: Changes In Size And Leadership Of Southern Baptist Churches," *Review of Religious Research* 36, no. 1, (September 1994): 7.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

encouraged that their small intimate size makes it possible for the vision to be fulfilled because the visionary leader could use the example of a small family unit to connect to the congregation.

The topic of Growth and Decline also provided important data in developing a vision for the rural church. Under this topic, the participants were asked Q# 5 how long they've attended their rural church and whether they are a member or not. The results show that 13.3% of the participants said they have attended under five years, 4.7% said they had attended 5 to 10 years, and 81.9% said they have ten years or more. These trends would support that most people in the rural community attend their rural church for ten years. This information would provide the visionary leader with the data necessary to support casting a vision with a long-term approach in mind. Patience will be necessary because this study has shown that most members will be with the rural church long-term. Douglas Bixby gives the foundation for beginning the vision and how accounting for long-term membership is important. Bixby states,

I encourage pastors in a new call to write a twenty-year scenario during the first few weeks of their ministries. This is an opportunity for lead pastors to look down the road and creatively imagine what their churches could look like in this future. Casting this kind of vision helps pastors because it allows them to see beyond their immediate circumstances. It also allows churches to believe that things can be different in the future. There is typically a grace period given to pastors when they first get started. They can aim high with their eyes for at least a few weeks. This allows the clergy person to dream big about the future without much interference. Eventually, budget shortfalls, program challenges, and conflict issues start to take over and make vision casting more difficult. Once this grace period passes, church leaders want their pastors to join them in focusing on the immediate concerns, including practical realities and fiscal challenges.¹⁸⁰

Finally, this research explored whether the youth might have the opportunity to participate and have their interest included in ministry, which would help them connect to the vision. The participants reported that 62.8% said there is a growing and healthy youth ministry,

¹⁸⁰ Douglas J. Bixby, *Navigating the Nonsense: Church Conflict and Triangulation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 75, accessed January 12, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

and 26.6% said there was not (Q#1). Next, the participants were asked if the youth were invited to participate in worship or church functions, and 100% said yes (Q#2). In other words, the participants reported that there is a growing and healthy youth ministry, and the youth are invited to participate in worship or church functions. Based on these statistics, the visionary leader should take advantage of this strength because the involvement of the youth is important to future growth.

As stated earlier, the traditionally rural church is known for being slow to change. Many reasons point to the lack of a Godly vision or most of the congregation not buying into it because of a lack of faith or trust in leadership. From the theological review, the book of Hebrews 11:1-3 presents the statement suggesting having a “now faith” when hoping for things is evidence of things not seen, and faith gives us hope when the answer is unclear. As stated earlier, this problem of developing a Godly vision in the rural church can be overcome with faith in God and the belief that the vision can come to pass with God's help. To believe the vision can come to pass, the church must practice a “now” faith. Cockerill states, “Faith is the objective “evidence” or “proof” of an unseen reality. How does faith “prove” the unseen reality of God, his power and faithfulness? As the examples of this chapter show, through trust in God, the faithful experience his power in their life and receive his approval. Thus, they confirm his reality.”¹⁸¹

Ultimately, everyone will benefit when connecting with a Godly vision filled with the love of Jesus, saturated in the Word of God, and being led by the Holy Spirit. Huffman states, “God can communicate His will to any of us regarding any decision. For each of our many

¹⁸¹ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 521.

decisions, if we are desiring to do His will, reading His Word, living in step with His Spirit, and communing with His people, we will be in a better place to know which option to choose.”¹⁸²

Paradigm Shift in Change

This project will conclude on the final topic of change. Several questions under the topic of change show potential for a shift in paradigm in the church. Starting with the first question under Ministry Profile, the participants were asked if they belonged to a ministry in the church. The results show 74.3% of the participants said yes, and 25.7% said no. These statistics show strong participation in ministry work, with 3 out of 4 participants who attend a rural Baptist church in the NNVA.

The next question under Ministry Profile asked the participant who belongs to a ministry if it should meet within or outside of the church. The results revealed that 59% of the participants said they would rather meet in the church, and 41% said they could meet in or out of the church. These statistics show that most participants who belong to a ministry in the rural Baptist church would rather continue to meet in the church, but almost half are willing to change the meeting location for their ministry. As stated earlier, most ministries in the rural church already have established connections outside of the church because of known family and friends in the community. With these statistics in mind, the leadership should understand that there is potential to change the traditional way ministries are performed, even if it begins with a small percentage of loyal workers. This small percentage could establish groups to worship, teach, and do ministry, potentially attracting new members and creating new opportunities for new ministries.

¹⁸² Douglas S. Huffman, *How Then Should We Choose? Three Views on God's Will and Decision Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 248.

Finally, under Small Groups, the participants were asked if they had ever attended a small group meeting at their rural church. It was assumed that they might understand Bible study, Sunday church school, or business meetings are small groups. The results show that 90.4% of the participants said they had attended a small group meeting at church. The next question under Small Groups asked if participants knew that small groups existed and function within and outside of the church, and 77.1% of participants said yes. The third question asked participants if they were in a small group, would they prefer meeting at the church or a group member's home. The results show that 67.6% said if they were in a small group, they preferred meeting at church instead of home. Finally, the last question asked participants whether they believed they could study, worship, or serve God inside or outside the church. Interestingly, 90.4% of the participants said they could study, worship, and serve God inside or outside the church.

In review, the overall statistics reveal most participants belong to a ministry; almost half said they could meet in or out of the church to do ministry work. Most participants said they knew small groups existed and had attended a small group setting in the church. Finally, most participants also said they would prefer meeting as a small group in the church, but almost all participants said they could study, worship, and serve inside or outside the church. This comparison presents an opportunity for a paradigm shift necessary for changing the way the rural church currently conducts its functions in ministry and worship. This change would not be intended to destroy the church but create an avenue for new members or new ministries to invite the community into fellowship with the church. The rural community may have seen many of its traditional families leave its rural origins, but there may be those who remain that are not connected to the rural church, and there may be new members in the community seeking a church home. By leaving the traditional church building, the rural church would create an

opportunity, as stated earlier, to introduce itself in a new way that would not depend on the traditional family support system.

In reference to understanding how groups fit into your church, Steve Gladen gives an excellent explanation in his book, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*. He states,

The debate over Sunday school versus small groups continue. Each side debates the merits of their system while pointing out the flaws in the other system. A common question is: “Does your church have Sunday school or small groups?” which is often a veiled way of asking, “Is your church a traditional one that is stuck in the rut of Sunday school?” As more and more churches replace Sunday school with small groups, the common notion is that Sunday school is a system that traditional churches cling to while more modern and progressive churches move toward small groups. The truth, however, is not that simple or clear-cut. Both systems have their advantages and disadvantages. More important than the system used is the desired result: spiritual growth and health. If the goal is to teach the Word of God and apply the Great Commission and great commandment, does it matter if your people meet in a church classroom or a living room? Before you decide whether to use Sunday school or small groups as a delivery system, make sure you understand your goal: spiritual health.¹⁸³

With Gladen’s thought in mind, a review of the statistics under the topic of Ministry Profile reveals a great opportunity for change in the rural church. Participants were asked (Q#7) if church members and non-members are given an opportunity to express their needs which may determine or create future ministry opportunities and goals. The results show 77.1% of the participants said yes, 8.6% said no, and 14.3% said they were not sure. The ability to hear the needs of the community supports the opportunity to change what ministries are offered to serve current needs when unproductive ministries are present. The problem comes when unproductive ministries or traditions are allowed to continue when they do not have anything to do with future growth or evangelism. The congregation would rather continue and resist change.

Similarly, under Instrument and Institution, participants were asked if it appears that non-church members are openly invited and welcomed to join in with the fellowship, group

¹⁸³ Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*, 191.

conversations, and socialization before or after the normal worship service (Q#1). The results show that 86.6% said yes, indicating there is an openness to hear the needs of others outside of the core church group.

John Davey articulates the importance of informal structures found in small rural churches because the power of family in decision-making within the church can affect change. He suggests the leadership work closely with that power structure, and if they are given ownership in the plans for change, success in the traditional rural church is possible.

Davey states, "In many rural churches, especially those that are smaller, the informal structure is much more important than the formal one. When there is a power family in the church that has control of many decisions, the formal structure will not be able to move in directions that do not meet that family's approval. In these situations, the formal structure needs to have visionary leaders who take the authority given them by the structure to lead the church. This means working closely with the informal structure, having strong relationships with the power people in the informal structures, but not letting that informal structure dictate what happens in the church when the spiritual leadership is directed elsewhere."¹⁸⁴

As stated earlier, it is common for rural church members to establish relationships with one another, and they are already connected in or outside of the church through family or community. Brett Mann reports in his article, *Successful Minister Shares Growth Tips for Rural Churches*, that,

The competition for church attendance presented by minor hockey on Sunday mornings is present, Rev. Kellar noted, and it's the same everywhere. What can we do to be different? What can we offer?" He suggested solutions as simple as changing the hour of services. One congregation saw a large jump in attendance simply by moving services to the afternoon. Knowing the demographic characteristics of the community served by a church is critical. What areas aren't looked at? Mothers with children? Retirees? Ideas will come from information. And if dreams are big enough, the facts don't count.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ John Frederick Davey, "Growth Options for the Rural Church," Order No. 3260206, Anderson University, 2007, 191, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁸⁵ Brett Mann, "Successful Minister Shares Growth Tips for Rural Churches," Central Hastings News March 27, 2014.

This project has presented ideas and methods that may shift the paradigm of the rural church toward using small groups to help strengthen and grow the church, but nothing will be possible without being led by the spirit of God. As stated earlier, one of the most well-known words found in the Bible is found in Genesis 1: 1 – 4, in which the author states, “In the beginning.” In these verses, the Bible records that there was darkness and chaos, but God’s spirit moved upon the chaos, and there was order in the form of light. Similarly, the rural church brought God’s light to many rural communities, and that light provided order to the unknown and spiritual darkness. God spoke through the rural church, and God spoke light into the rural community. Change in the rural church is commonly met with resistance, but when God speaks, change will come.

Conclusion

While implementing this project, the major observation was that the rural church has survived over time by the grace of God and with the support of generations of believing families in the rural community. Since the beginning, the rural Baptist church has been led by the bi-vocational minister. However, “traditional expectation for a church, at least for the last half-century, has been that an ordained seminary graduate would devote all of her or his time and energy to leading it.”¹⁸⁶ But by the grace of God and the loyalty of the rural families, many rural Baptist churches celebrate 100 or more years of existence and still have a bi-vocational minister. The result from this study may apply to other settings like today’s modern churches, which could model this pastoral leadership style to help their longevity. Ronald Brent Mays states, “Leaders are not leaders until they have followers. Followers do not follow until they are mobilized by

¹⁸⁶ Bickers, *The Work of the Bivocational Minister*, 59.

persons in positions of leadership who can connect to the fundamental motivations and aspirations of the people in their care.”¹⁸⁷ The Rural Baptist Church has historically been a place of tradition, cultural importance, and refuge, and there is no doubt that it has been graced by a wealth of great leaders connecting to generations of faithful members.

Whether the church is rural, urban, or a city church, all church leaders face similar stresses while performing ministry. They, along with their congregation, would benefit from using a team approach to do ministry. Another observation that agrees with previous studies and published work analyzed in the literature review was that the rural church suffers from having only a few members doing all the work. This isolation may also include the rural pastor who finds himself not only leading Sunday worship but also cleaning the church. Unfortunately, the bi-vocational minister finds himself with many faithful members who are unwilling to help because they are not interested in existing ministries or do not have active new members. In reference to creating pastoral ministry teams, Terry Dorsett explains.

When the church rediscovers that shared pastoral leadership is both biblical and more emotionally healthy for the pastors, it will remove significant pressure from pastors serving in single leadership situations. As the church rediscovers the importance of all its members knowing and fulfilling various types of callings to ministry, key people will emerge who can help provide team leadership to the church. As the church discovers its own role in training people for ministry, such ministerial training will be more church-based and therefore more practical and beneficial to the church.¹⁸⁸

The research on the problem of decline in the rural Baptist church shows that the rural church should turn to a Godly vision if it does not have one or revise its existing vision. Many rural churches have a mission statement but fail to have a Godly vision to accomplish their mission. The book of Proverbs states, “Where there is no vision, the people perish (Prov 29:18),

¹⁸⁷ Ronald Brent Mays, "Comparing Turnaround Leadership in a Rural Church and in Schools," ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011, 257.

¹⁸⁸ Dorsett, *Developing Leadership Team*, 109.

and so does the rural church. As previously stated, the bi-vocational minister needs to transform into a visionary leader who can see the church's future, even in the isolated rural community.

Carney states,

Visionary pastoral leadership sees beyond the immediate moment. Methods that were relevant at one time may no longer be fulfilling a relevant purpose. Visionary pastoral leadership guides the congregation through the changes of releasing ineffective methods. The message of the gospel never changes but the methods used to conduct ministry do change. Visionary leadership provides guidance through those changes.¹⁸⁹

Many of the changes the rural community needs include the use of technology to reach people over the internet, new modes of transportation, and moving beyond the church building by using small group ministry. All these new techniques and strategies will require a paradigm shift in the rural Baptist church.

Under church health, an alarming trend emerged that merits future research in the rural community, which is negatively impacting the rural church. The emotional health of the rural community has long been overlooked, and the impact is beginning to show in the rural community with the increase of drug abuse, suicide, and neglect. Concerning an emotionally healthy church, Scazzero states, “Something is desperately wrong with most churches today. We have many people who are passionate for God and his work, yet who remain disconnected from their own emotions or those around them. The combination is deadly, both for the church and the leader’s personal life.”¹⁹⁰

This new challenge in the rural community and its churches will require immediate attention. Many rural communities do not have public service available, and many rural

¹⁸⁹ Joseph F. Carney, "Pastoral Leadership in a Rural Congregation." Order No. 3443913, Winebrenner Theological Seminary, 2010, 28, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁹⁰ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 38.

residences do not openly seek help. In the article on *Suicide in Rural Areas: Risk Factors and Prevention*, the researchers report that rural living promotes healthy independence that can become deadly for the individual and its community.

Rural communities are considered high context cultures where people rely on one another for support in a variety of social organizations. When distressed, individuals frequently try to help themselves alone or to seek informal support from family, spouses, neighbors, friends, and religious organizations rather than mental health professionals. The lifestyles within rural communities promote rugged independence. As a result, suicidal thoughts and behaviors may be neglected because of the independence mandate. Challenges, particularly those associated with mental illness, are often kept within the family. This creates a sense of shame about mental illness, resulting in less knowledge and understanding of risk factors for and prevention of suicide. This stigma of shame makes for a greater suicide risk, since mental illness can run in families, and shame about previous family suicides can preclude getting help for others who are at risk.¹⁹¹

This rugged independence may have been carried over from the early years of the founding of the American Protestantism practiced by Christian agrarians, according to Kevin Lowe. He states,

Although not all Christian agrarians were themselves farmers, they were deeply attached to farming and rural life. They argued that the health of the countryside was an indicator for the health of the country. But they did not do so simply out of romanticism, inertia, or because they believed in some vague “Jeffersonian” myth. Christian agrarians sought to preserve their rural congregations because they believed that living in rural areas and working the land were most in keeping with God’s intentions for the world.¹⁹²

This project began by discussing a familiar story recorded in the book of Exodus, which is frequently used as an example to prevent pastoral burnout. This story shows Moses’ father-in-law intervening in the self-destructive practices of Moses, who attempts to serve the people in every situation without any outside help. God sent Moses help through an intervening statement from Jethro, “The thing that thou doest is not good (Exodus 18: 17).” Jethro goes on to explain

¹⁹¹ Courtney Cantrell, Sarah Valley-Gray, and Ralph E. Cash, "Suicide in Rural Areas: Risk Factors and Prevention." In *Rural Mental Health: Issues, Policies, and Best Practices*, by K. Bryant Smalley, D. Jacob Warren, and Jackson Rainer. Springer Publishing Company, 2013.

¹⁹² Kevin M. Lowe, *Baptized with the Soil: Christian Agrarians and the Crusade for Rural America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Conclusion 1.

to Moses that what he is doing is not good because he will “surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee (Exodus 18: 18).” Because Moses follows the advice of Jethro, the first pastoral burnout is avoided, and the children of Israel survive self-destruction.

Similarly, the rural Baptist church has experienced a gradual decline over time, and many reasons point to self-destructive practices and traditions. Like Moses, if self-destructive practices exist in the rural Baptist church, change may only come by an intervention. This project has attempted to help the rural Baptist church identify areas of strength and weakness for greater Kingdom service but now it is up to the rural church, like Moses, and follow the intervention.

Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 28, 2017

Anthony J. Baylor

IRB Exemption 2838.042817: Intervention: Helping the Rural Baptist Church Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness for Greater Kingdom Service

Dear Anthony J. Baylor,

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

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

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

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

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix B: Screening Questions

Intervention: Helping the Rural Baptist Church Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness for Greater Kingdom Service.

Participant Screening will be read to potential participant by the Researcher

(Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria for the Northern Neck of Virginia which include the counties of Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond)

1. Is the person answering this question 18 years old or older?

(Circle One) A. Yes, B. No

IF “YES,” THEN PROCEED TO QUESTION #2. IF “NO,” STOP HERE BECAUSE THIS PERSON CANNOT PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY.

- 2. Are you a member of a Baptist church in the Northern Neck of Virginia which includes the counties of Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond?** (Circle One) A. Yes, B. No (If YES, skip question #3 and #4 and give them the questionnaire.)
- 3. If you are not a member, do you occasionally visit a Baptist church for worship service or Bible study in the Northern Neck of Virginia which includes Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond counties?** (Circle One) A. Yes, B. No (If Yes, skip question #4 and give them the questionnaire.)
- 4. If you are not a member and you do not visit, have you ever been invited to a Baptist church for worship service or Bible study in the Northern Neck of Virginia which includes Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Richmond counties?** (Circle One) A. Yes, B. No (If the participant is answering this question, they are not qualified to participate but the answer is for statistical data only.)

IF EITHER QUESTION #2 or QUESTION #3 IS ANSWERED “YES,” THEN PROCEED WITH THE QUESTIONNAIRE. IF BOTH QUESTION #2 AND QUESTION #3 ARE ANSWERED “NO,” DO NOT PROCEED WITH THE QUESTIONNAIRE. QUESTION #4 IS USED FOR STATISTICAL DATA ONLY AND DOES NOT DETERMINE PARTICIPATION.

Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire

Intervention: Helping the Rural Baptist Church Identify Areas of Strength and Weakness for Greater Kingdom Service.

Questionnaire

****Please answer each question to the best of your knowledge. You are encouraged to respond to each, if possible. Return this completed document in the self-addressed stamped envelope that you were given. You do not need to provide your name or return address on any of these documents because this is an anonymous questionnaire. ****

Ministry Profile

1. Do you belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, such as a Youth ministry, Worship (choir) ministry, Ushers ministry, Food Service ministry, Sick and Shut-In ministry, Missionary ministry, etc.? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No (If you answered no, skip to #3.)
2. If you belong to a ministry, do you believe that ministry should meet within the church or outside the church? (Circle One) A. Inside the church B. Outside the church C. Either D. Not Sure (If you answered this question, skip to question #5.)
3. If you do not belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, would you like to join a ministry? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not sure
4. If you do not belong to a ministry in the rural church that you attend, have you ever been invited to join a ministry? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No
5. In the rural church that you attend, does the church openly encourage recruitment and provide opportunities for its members to discover their gifts and talents by serving in a ministry? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not sure
6. Have you ever personally been helped or served by a ministry from a rural church? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not sure

7. In the rural church that you attend, are members and non-members given an opportunity to express their needs which may determine or create future ministry opportunities and goals?

(Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not sure

Instrument or Institution

1. In the rural church that you attend, does it appear that non-members are openly invited and welcomed to join in with the fellowship, group conversations, and socialization before or after the normal worship service? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

2. Are the people in the rural church that you attend open to change, slow to change, or do they reject change? (Circle One) A. Open B. Slow C. Reject D. Not Sure

3. Does the rural church that you attend appear to promote unnecessary traditions that have nothing to do with church growth or evangelism? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

4. In the rural church that you attend, have views about social issues that have not been traditionally accepted (i.e., homosexuality, a new definition of marriage, social drug use, social alcohol use, etc.) changed? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

Functioning as an Instrument or Institution (Innovation)

1. Are members encouraged to create new ways of doing things in the rural church that you attend (i.e., improving the program, improving evangelizing, improving the organization)?

(Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

2. Is there an accumulation or surplus of savings in the rural church that you attend (i.e. savings in the bank, investments, food bank, clothing bank, etc.)? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not

Sure

3. In the rural church that you attend, are visitors provided with opportunities to build relationships through fellowship activities, and are they invited to help provide ministry to others? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

4. In the rural church that you attend, are visitors welcomed into the decision-making processes of the church? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

Church Environment

1. Does the worship service within the rural church that you attend follow a traditional step-by-step program, or does the church allow an open and spontaneous worship service?

(Circle One) A. Traditional Program B. Spontaneous Service C. Not Sure

2. What is the level of excitement in the rural church that you attend? (Circle One) A. Low Excitement B. High Excitement C. Not Sure

3. Is there clear evidence that most people in the rural church that you attend help with the work of the church, or does it seem that the same people are always doing the work within the church?

(Circle One) A. Most people work B. The same people do the work C. Not Sure

4. In the rural church that you attend, is everyone asked to help with the work and responsibilities of the church, or are the work and responsibilities controlled by the same people?

(Circle One) A. Everyone is asked to help B. Controlled by the same people. C. Not Sure

Growth and Decline

1. What is your family size: A. Large (4 or more children) B. Medium (2 – 3 children) C. Small

(1 - 0 child)? (Circle One) A. Large B. Medium C. Small

2. Did your mom or dad attend church regularly? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

3. Is the congregation in the rural church that you attend young, middle aged, older, or mixed?

(Circle One) A. Young B. Middle Aged C. Older D. Mixed

4. Are you being taught core Biblical principles in the rural church that you attend (i.e., salvation, Jesus is Lord, the Holy Trinity, etc.)? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure
5. How long have you been attending the rural church that you currently attend, whether you are a member or not? (Circle One) A. Under 5 years B. 5 to 10 years C. 10 years or more

Expansion (Innovation)

1. Is the rural church that you attend experiencing increasing attendance? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure
2. Does the rural church that you attend use radio advertisements or the local newspaper to invite the public to attend the church? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure
3. Does the pastor or other church leaders in the rural church that you attend promote evangelism and inviting the un-churched to attend the church? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure
4. Are the people in the rural church that you attend allowed to make suggestions to improve the way ministry is conducted? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure
5. Is the rural church that you attend experiencing increasing outreach programs that benefit members and the public such as helping the sick and shut-in, feeding the hungry, providing community service to the poor, etc.? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure
6. In the rural church that you attend, are the leaders of that church effectively recruited, equipped, and empowered to oversee their area of responsibility? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

Reform

1. In the rural church that you attend, are traditional programs or activities promoted on a regular basis (i.e., anniversaries, special days of recognition, etc.)? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

2. In the rural church that you attend, does there appear to be a decline in giving? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

3. In the rural church that you attend, does it appear that there are programs or activities that have little to do with church growth or evangelism? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

4. In the rural church that you attend, are there evening church-sponsored services and evening programs that have either poor attendance or are only attended by the “core” members of the church? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. There are no evening services D. Not Sure

Connectivity

1. In the rural church that you attend, is there a growing and healthy youth ministry? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

2. In the rural church that you attend, are the youth invited to participate in worship or church functions? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

3. In the rural church that you attend, does the pastor connect with the congregation personally (i.e., Does the pastor try to know the congregation)? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

4. In the rural church that you attend, does the weekly sermon make sense, and is it easy to understand? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

Hospitality

1. In the rural church that you attend, is there evidence that members make visitors feel welcomed and appreciated for their visit to the church? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

2. In the rural church that you attend, does the church have a system in place for greeting first-time guests, collecting information from them, and making them feel welcomed? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

3. In the rural church that you attend, is there a system in place where designated members are responsible for making follow-up contact with visitors? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

4. In the rural church that you attend, do the ushers or greeters of the church welcome members and visitors with a smile and a greeting? (Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

Small Groups

1. Have you ever attended a small group meeting at the rural church that you attend?

(Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

2. Did you know that small groups exist and function within and outside of churches today?

(Circle One) A. Yes B. No C. Not Sure

3. If you were in a small group, such as for Bible study or as an interest group, would you prefer to meet at the church, or would you rather meet at a group member's home? (Circle one) A.

church B. in a home C. Either

4. Do you believe that believers can only study, worship, and serve God within the church building, or do you believe that believers can study, worship, and serve God inside or outside of the church?

(Circle one) A. Within the church only, B. Within or outside of the church

Appendix D: Statistics of Compiled Returns from Survey Questionnaires

Questionnaire

Final Return Numbers - Final Answer Log

Ministry Profile

1. A. Yes - 78 – 78.3%
B. No - 27 – 25.7%
2. A. Inside the church - 46 – 59.1%
B. Outside the church - 0
C. Either - 32 – 41%
D. Not Sure - 0
3. A. Yes - 22 – 81.5%
B. No - 5 – 18.5%
C. Not sure - 0
4. A. Yes - 16 – 59%
B. No - 11 – 40.7%-
5. A. Yes - 95 – 90%
B. No - 0
C. Not sure - 10 – 10%-
6. A. Yes - 94 – 89.5%
B. No - 11 – 10.5%
C. Not sure - 0
7. A. Yes - 81 – 77.1%
B. No - 9 – 8.6%

C. Not sure - 15 – 14.3%

Instrument or Institution

1. A. Yes - 91 – 86.6%

B. No - 5 – 4.8%

C. Not Sure – 9 – 8.6% -

2. A. Open - 48 – 45.7%

B. Slow - 43 – 40.9%

C. Reject - 4 – 3.8%

D. Not Sure – 10 – 9.5% -

3. A. Yes - 0

B. No - 86 – 81.9%

C. Not Sure – 14 – 13.3%

D. No Answer – 5 – 4.7% -

4. A. Yes - 19 – 18%

B. No - 53 – 50.4%

C. Not Sure – 19 – 18%

D. No Answer – 14 – 13.3% -

Functioning as an Instrument or Institution (Innovation)

1. A. Yes - 57 – 54.2%

B. No - 24 – 22.8%

C. Not Sure – 14 – 13.3%

D. No Answer – 10 – 9.5% -

2. A. Yes - 47 – 44.7%

B. No - 24 – 22.8%

C. Not Sure – 29 – 27.6%

D. No Answer – 5 – 4.76%

3. A. Yes - 67 – 63.8%

B. No - 14 – 13.3%

C. Not Sure – 19 – 18.1%

D. No Answer – 5 – 4.7% -

4. A. Yes - 29 – 27.6%

B. No - 43 – 40.9%

C. Not Sure – 29 – 27.6%

D. No Answer – 4 – 3.8% -

Church Environment

1. A. Traditional Program - 53 – 50.4%

B. Spontaneous Service - 48 – 45.7%

C. Not Sure – 0 – 0%

D. No Answer – 4 – 3.8% -

2. A. Low Excitement - 33 – 31.4%

B. High Excitement - 67 – 63.8%

C. Not Sure – 5 – 4.7% -

3. A. Most people work - 53 – 50.4%

B. The same people do the work - 52 – 49.5%

C. Not Sure – 0 – 0% -

4. A. Everyone is asked to help - 67 – 63.8%

B. Controlled by the same people? - 33 – 31.4%

C. Not Sure – 5 – 4.7% -

Growth and Decline

1. A. Large - 33 – 31.4%

B. Medium - 29 – 27.6%

C. Small - 38 – 36.1%

D. No Answer – 5 – 4.7%-

2. A. Yes - 86 – 81.9%

B. No - 10 – 9.5%

C. Not Sure – 9 – 8.5% -

3. A. Young - 0 – 0%

B. Middle Aged - 5 – 4.7%

C. Older - 19 – 18%

D. Mixed – 81 – 77.1% -

4. A. Yes - 100 – 95.2%

B. No - 5 – 4.7%

C. Not Sure – 0 – 0% -

5. A. Under 5 years - 18 – 13.3%

B. 5 to 10 years - 5 – 4.7%

C. 10 years or more – 86 – 81.9% -

Expansion (Innovation)

1. A. Yes - 57 – 54.2%-

B. No - 48 – 45.7%

C. Not Sure – 0 – 0% -

2. A. Yes - 48 – 45.7%

B. No - 43 – 40.9%

C. Not Sure – 14 – 13.3% -

3. A. Yes - 86 – 81.9%

B. No - 5 – 4.7%

C. Not Sure – 14 – 13.3% -

4. A. Yes - 86 – 81.9%

B. No - 5 – 4.7%

C. Not Sure – 14 – 13.3% -

5. A. Yes - 29 – 27.6%

B. No - 5 – 4.7%

C. Not Sure – 71 – 67.6% -

6. A. Yes - 90 – 86.6%

B. No -- 15 – 14.2%

C. Not Sure – 0 - 0% -

Reform

1. A. Yes - 95 – 90.4%

B. No - 5 – 4.7%

C. Not Sure – 5 – 4.7% -

2. A. Yes - 24 – 22.8%

B. No - 47 – 44.7%

C. Not Sure – 34 – 32.3% -

3. A. Yes - 10 – 9.5%

B. No - 85 – 80.9%

C. Not Sure - 10 – 9.5%-

4. A. Yes - 66 – 62.8%

B. No - 23 – 21.9%

C. There are no evening services - 9 – 8.5%

D. Not Sure – 0 – 0%

E. No Answer – 7 – 6.9% -

Connectivity

1. A. Yes - 66 – 62.8%
B. No - 28 – 26.6%
C. Not Sure – 4 – 3.8% D. No Answer – 7 – 6.6% -
2. A. Yes - 105 – 100%
B. No - 0 – 0%
C. Not Sure – 0 – 0% -
3. A. Yes - 100 – 95.2%
B. No - 0 – 0%
C. Not Sure - 0 – 0% D. No Answer – 5 – 4.7%-
4. A. Yes - 105 – 100%
B. No - 0 – 0%
C. Not Sure - 0 – 0%

Hospitality

1. A. Yes – 100 – 95.2%
B. No - 5 – 4.7%
C. Not Sure – 0 – 0% -
2. A. Yes - 81 – 77.1%
B. No - 19 – 18%
C. Not Sure – 5 – 4.7% -
3. A. Yes - 19 – 18%
B. No - 57 – 54.2%
C. Not Sure – 29 – 27.6% -

4. A. Yes - 105 – 100%

B. No - 0 – 0%

C. Not Sure – 0 – 0% -

Small Groups

1. A. Yes - 95 – 90.4%

B. No - 10 – 9.5%

C. Not Sure – 0 – 0% -

2. A. Yes - 81 – 77.1%

B. No - 14 – 13.3%

C. Not Sure – 10 – 9.5% -

3. A. church - 71 – 67.6%

B. in a home - 4 – 3.8%

C. Either - 30 – 28.5%-

4. A. Within the church only - 10 – 9.5%

B. Within or Outside of the church - 95 – 90.4%-

Appendix E: Tables from Compiled Returns of Survey Questionnaires

Strength VS Weakness

In other words, if the rural church is putting forth resources, time, and effort into ministries that fulfill, support, or promote activities relating to the Great Commission, then it is strong because Jesus has promised to be with us. Likewise, if there is anything that the rural Baptist church is doing that does not fulfill, support or promotes the Great Commission then it may be weakness or growing weak.

Tables Screening Questions # 1, 2, 3, 4.

Table 1: Participant Screening - The screening question (Q#1) qualified participants by asking if the potential participant is 18 years or older. If they meet the age requirement, they would be asked (Q#2) whether they are members of a church in the NNVA or if not (Q#3) if they have ever visited a church in the NNVA. If they were not members or visitors of churches in the NNVA, then they were asked, (Q#4) if they have ever been invited to a church in the NNVA. After the interviewer reached a maximum of 500 qualified participants who answering “yes” to either Q#2 or Q#3, then the research ended according to the approved IRB standard.

Total people approached who were asked to participate	Q#1. Total people screened who were 18 years old or older	Q#2. Total people who are church members within the NNVA	Q#3. Total people who are visitors of churches in the NNVA	Total people given questionnaires to participate anonymously	Q#4. Total people who were not church members or visitors
unrecorded	686	325 +	175 =	500	186

Table 2: Completed Questionnaire Returned from Qualified Participants.

The percentage of anonymous questionnaire returns may show an interest in helping the rural Baptist church or an interest in sharing information about the church.

Total qualified participants given questionnaires to participate anonymously	Total questionnaires completed and returned anonymously	Percentage of completed and returned questionnaires
500	105	21%

Table 3: Proselytism / Outreach Presence found during Participant Screening.

Q#4 was asked whether there was an outreach presence / proselytism by Baptist churches in the NNVA.

Q#4. Total people who were not church members or visitors	Total people who <u>have</u> <u>ever</u> been invited to church or Bible study in the NNVA? Proselytism	Total people who have <u>never been</u> invited to church or Bible study in the NNVA? Proselytism	Percentage of people who <u>have</u> experienced proselytism / outreach presence in the NNVA.	Percentage of people who <u>have not</u> experienced proselytism / outreach presence in the NNVA.
186	75	111	40.32%	Weakness - go
				59.67%

Table 4: Pastoral / Leadership Issues

Under Ministry Profile, Q#3 & Q#4 is intended to identify if participants who do not belong to a ministry but attend a Baptist church in the NNVA are willing (Q#3) or have been invited (Q#4) to work in the church.

Observation: Most non-members or people who do not belong to a ministry would like to join but many have not been invited.

Total non-members or people who do not belong to a ministry in the NNVA	Q#3. Total non-members who would like to join a ministry	Q#3. Total non-members who would not like to join a ministry	Q#4. Total non-members who have been invited to join a ministry	Q#4. Total non-members who have not been invited to join a ministry
27	22 – 81.5%	5 – 18.5%	16 – 59%	11 – 40.7%
	strength		Weakness - go	Weakness - go

Table 5: Pastoral / Leadership Issues

Under Expansion (Innovation), Q#3 is intended to identify whether church leadership promotes evangelism / proselytism and Q#5 is intended to identify if the members or visitors of the church have seen an increase in outreach programs.

Observation: The church leadership is promoting evangelism / proselytism within the church but the church is failing to take the message to the intended target so no results are being seen.

Total people who responded to this question	Q#3 People who said pastor or church leadership promotes evangelism/ proselytism	Q#3 People who said pastor or church leadership do not promote evangelism/ proselytism	Q#3 People who said they are not sure if pastor or church leadership promotes evangelism/ proselytism	Q#5 People who said they have experienced an increase in outreach programs	Q#5 People who said they have not experienced an increase in outreach programs	Q#5 People who said they are not sure if they have experienced an increase in outreach programs
105	86 – 81.9%	5 – 4.7%	14 – 13.3%	29 – 27.6%	5 – 4.7%	71 – 67.6%
	Strength - teach			Weakness - go	Weakness - go	Weakness - go

Table 6: Church Health

Under Church Environment, Q#1 is intended to identify whether the church follows a traditional worship service or is a more open and spontaneous model followed. Q#2 is intended to identify the level of excitement in the church.

Observation: The church is split on the type of worship service experienced but the majority have experienced excitement in the church.

Total people who responded to this question	Q#1 Does the church follow a traditional worship service or is it spontaneous?	Response	Q#2 What is the level of excitement in the church?	Response
105	Traditional	53 – 50.4%	Low Excitement	33 – 31.4%
	Spontaneous	48 – 45.7%	High Excitement	67 – 63.8%
	Not sure	0	Not Sure	5 – 4.7%
	No Answer	4 – 3.8%		
		split		Strength - teach

Table 7: Church Health

Under Church Environment, Q#3 is intended to identify whether work is shared or if the work of the church performed by the same people. Q#4 is intended to identify whether people of the church are asked to help with the work of the church or is it controlled by the same people who do not ask for help.

Observation: The church is split on who works in the church but the majority said everyone is asked to help with the work in the church.

Total people who responded to this question	Q#3 Who does the work of the church?	Response	Q#4 Is everyone asked to help with the work of the church or is it controlled by the same people?	Response
105	Most people work	53 – 50.4%	Everyone is asked to help	67 – 63.8%
	Same people work	52 – 49.5%	Controlled by the same people	33 – 31.4%
	Not sure	0	Not sure	5 – 4.7%
		split		Strength - go

Appendix F: Figures from Compiled Returns of Survey Questionnaires

Strength VS Weakness

In other words, if the rural church is putting forth resources, time and effort into ministries that fulfill, support or promote activities relating to the Great Commission then it is strong because Jesus has promised to be with us. Likewise, if there is anything that the rural Baptist church is doing that does not fulfill, support or promotes the Great Commission then it may be weakness or growing weak.

Figures Questionnaire Topic and Questions

Figure 1 (Change)

Under Ministry Profile: Q#1

74.3% of the 78 participants who attend a rural Baptist church in the NNVA said they belong to a Ministry

25.7% of the 27 participants who attend a rural Baptist church in the NNVA said they do not belong to a Ministry

Observation: 3 out of 4 participants who attend a rural Baptist church belong to a Ministry. (strength - teach)

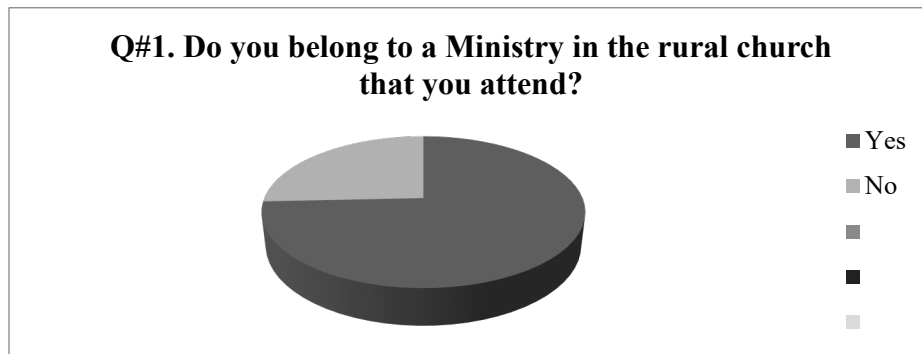


Figure 2 (Change)

Under Ministry Profile: Q#2

59% of the 78 participants who participate in Ministry would rather meet in church.

41% of the 78 participants who participate in Ministry are willing to meet in or out of the church.

Observation: The majority of participants who belong to a Ministry in the rural Baptist church would rather continue to meet in the church but almost half are willing to change. (strength - go)

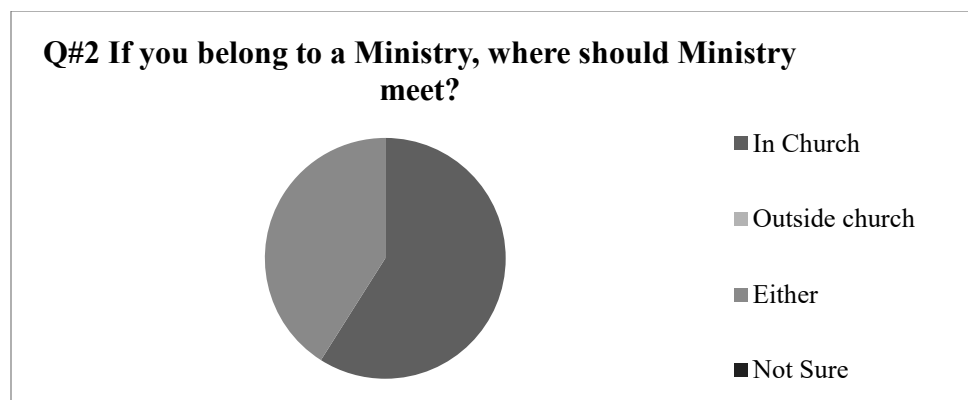


Figure 3: (Church Health)

Under Ministry Profile: Q#5, Q#6, Q#7

Q#5 - 90% of the 105 participants who have attended a church in the NNVA said that the church openly encourages recruitment and provides an opportunity for members to discover their gifts and talents

Q#6 – 89.5% of the 105 participants who have attended a church in the NNVA said they have personally been helped or by a ministry.

Q#7 – 77.1% of the 105 participants who have attended a church in the NNVA said members and non-members are given an opportunity to express their needs.

Observation: Participants who have attended (member or visitor) a church in the NNVA have experience openness to discover gifts and talent (strength - teach), they have personally been helped by a ministry (strength - go) and they experienced openness to expressed needs which may lead to ministry (strength - go).

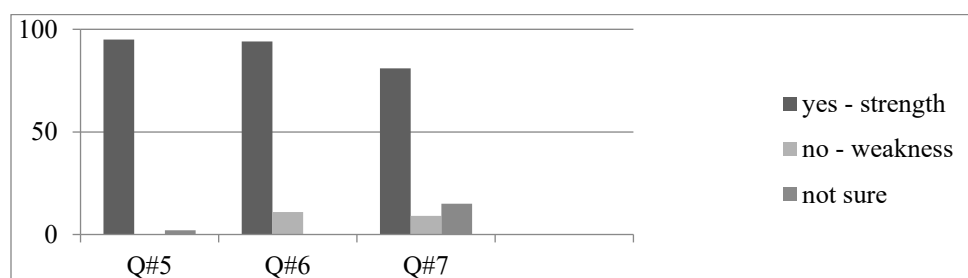


Figure 4: (Church Health)

Under Instrument or Institution: Q#1, Q#2, Q#3 & Q#4

Q#1 – 86.6% of the 105 participants said non-members are openly invited and welcomed to join fellowship, group conversations, and socialize within the church. (Inner beliefs)

Q#2 – 45.7% of the 105 participants said the church is open to change, while 40.9% said the church is slow to change. (Traditions or Change)

Q#3 – 81.9% of the 105 participants said the church promotes unnecessary traditions that have nothing to do with church growth or evangelism. (Traditions events)

Q#4 – 50.4% of the 105 participants said the church has not changed traditional views about social issues such as homosexuality, marriage, drug and alcohol use but 36% said yes or they are not sure. (Traditional view / church doctrine)

Observation: The majority of participants said their church is open to having non-members in fellowship, conversations and socialism (strength – go), their church is split on accepting change (weakness), their church promotes unnecessary traditions that do not promote growth or evangelism (weakness) and there is a relaxing of traditional views / church doctrine (weakness).

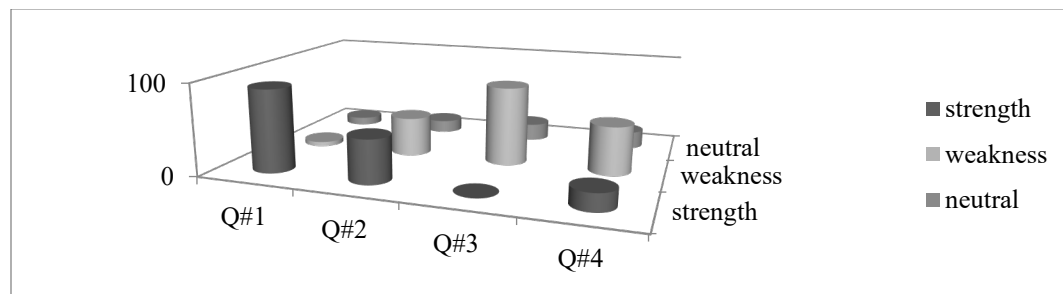


Figure 5: (Vision)

Under Reform: Q#1, Q#3 & Q#4

Q#1 – 90.4% of the 105 participants said traditional programs or activities are promoted on a regular basis.

Q#3 – 80.90% of the 105 participants said that there are not programs or activities that have little to do with church growth or evangelism.

Q#4 – 62.8% of the 105 participants said that evening church-sponsored services and evening programs that have either poor attendance or are only attended by the “core” members.

Observation: Most participants said the church regularly promotes traditional programs (weakness) that do support church growth (strength) and evening services / programs that have poor attendance (weakness). This poor attendance may be because of the evening programs being offered, even though they may support growth, do not attract new members or visitors because they are seen as the same traditional programs.

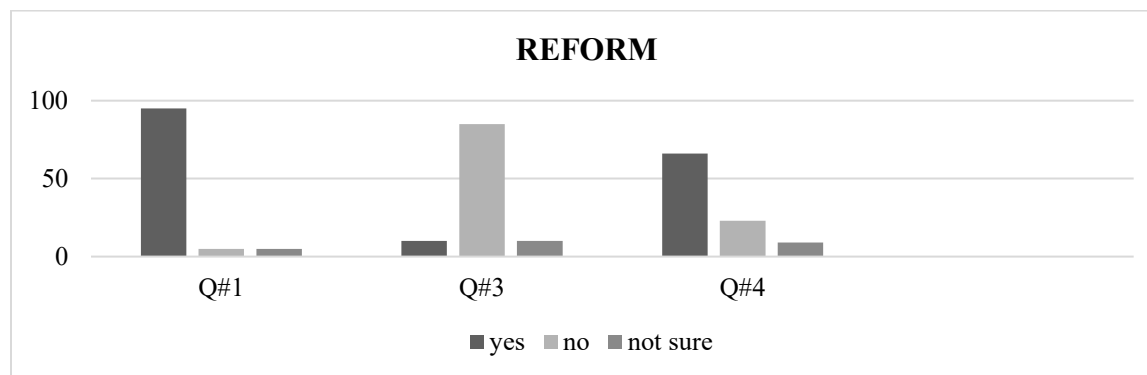


Figure 6: (Vision)

Under Functioning as an Instrument or Institution, Q#1 is intended to identify whether the church is open to allowing members input toward improvements or controlled by the leadership. Q#2 is intended to identify whether church members know about the financial position or accumulated

possessions of the church. Q#3 is intended to identify whether the church is open to visitor's participation in ministry. Q#4 is intended to identify whether the church is open to visitors being involved in the decision-making process of the church.

Observation: NNVA churches function as institutions (weakness) in some cases and as instruments (strength) in other cases. For example, 57 out of the 105 participants said their church allowing members input on improvements (instrument - strength), 53 out of the 105 participants said most churches do not have a surplus of savings and most members do not know about the financial position of the church (institution - weakness), 67 out of the 105 participants said visitors can help with the work (instrument - strength), and 43 out of the 105 participants said visitors are not allowed in church decision-making (institution - weakness).

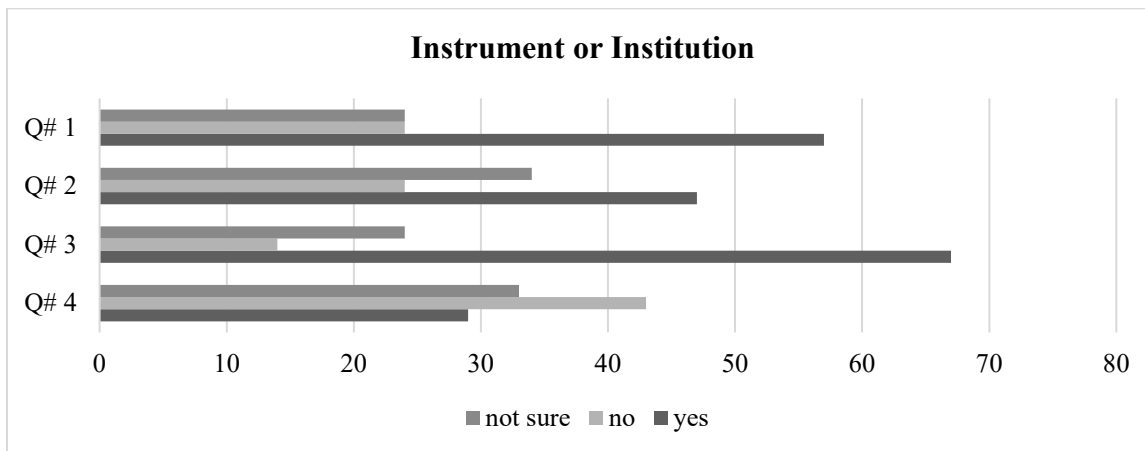


Figure 7: (Change)

Under Connectivity, Q#1 is intended to predict future growth. Q#2 is intended to predict future leadership within the church when the youth are involved in worship and church functions. 62.8% or 66 of the 105 participants said that they have a growing and healthy youth ministry that is allowed to participate in worship and church functions.

Observation: Most NNVA churches said that they have a growing and healthy youth ministry that is involved in worship or church functions which will help promote future growth. (Strength - baptize) The rural Baptist church has generations of family members supporting the church because family members encourage their youth to be involved.

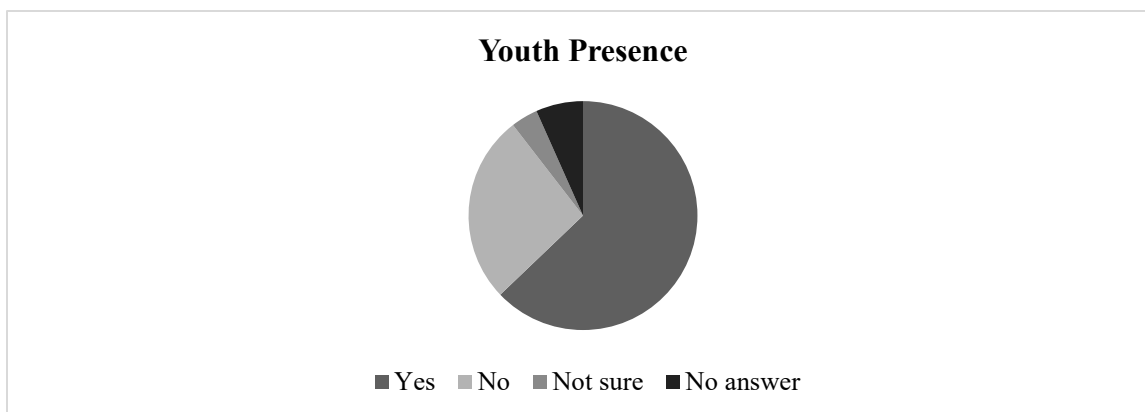


Figure 8: (Change)

Under Small Groups: Q#1, Q#2, Q#3 & Q#4

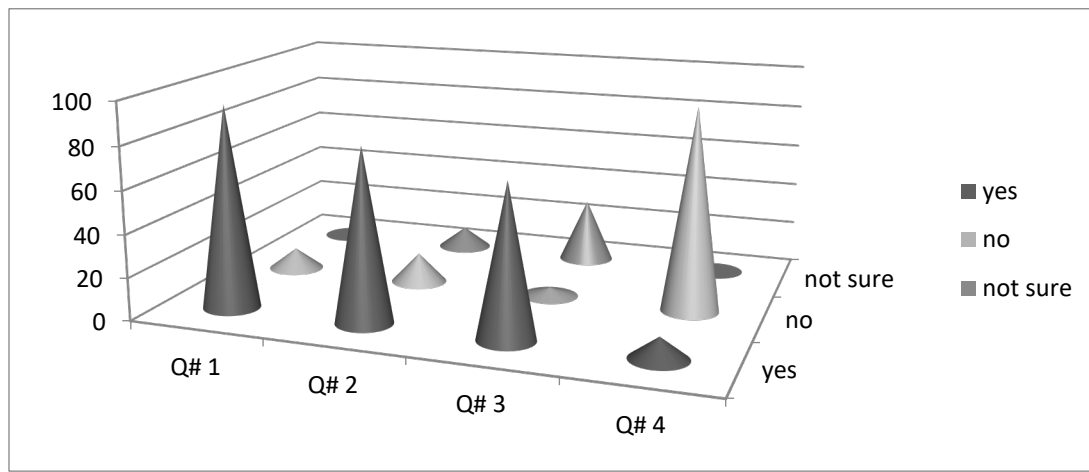
Q#1 – 90.4% or 95 out of 105 participants said they have attended a small group meeting at church (note: they may see this as Bible study, Sunday school, Business meeting, etc.)

Q# 2 – 77.1% or 81 out of 105 participants said they knew small religious groups exist.

Q# 3 – 67.6% or 71 out of 105 participants said if they were in a small group they prefer meeting at church instead of in the home.

Q# 4 – 90.4% or 95 out of 105 participants said they could study, worship and serve God inside or outside of the church.

Observation: Most participants said they knew small groups exist and have attended a small group setting in the church (strength). Most participants also said they would prefer meeting as a small group in the church instead of in the home (weakness). But, almost all participants said they could study, worship and serve inside or outside of the church (strength). This area presents an opportunity for the shift in paradigm of the understanding, function and purpose of small groups in the rural church.



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