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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT BEHAVIORS IN THE REVITALIZATION OF SMALL EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Bart Lee Denny

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

Church revitalization has received renewed interest in the last several years. Rainer (2014) says that a congregation's failure to develop and empower next-generation leaders is one of the leading contributors to church closure. Likewise, Clifton (2016) and Stetzer (2007) highlight the importance of developing next-generation leaders during church revitalization. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the leadership development behaviors of senior or solo pastors who successfully led revitalization in a small evangelical church. This study defined a small church as one averaging 65 or fewer in attendance at the beginning of the pastor participant's tenure (Rainer, 2022). Leadership development behaviors were defined as those intentional practices the pastor undertook to develop male leaders from within the congregation. The theories guiding this study were transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), authentic leadership (George, 2003), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), which encourage empowering and developing leaders and comport well with a biblical view of leadership. Further, a view of leadership development as discipleship espoused by Geiger and Peck (2016) informed the study.

This study involved semi-structured interviews with eleven small church revitalization pastors, developing overarching themes in revitalization leadership development for small evangelical churches. This study found that developing male next-generation leaders was critical to successfully revitalizing small, evangelical churches. In the early years of revitalization, pastors should be prepared to serve as the sole leader developer, undertaking development through deep and authentic personal relationships. Further, revitalization pastors must empower next-generation leaders to act in substantive roles.

Keywords: church revitalization, leadership development, pastoral leadership

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Jennifer. For nearly 30 years, she has put up with the rigors of a life married to a naval officer, a church revitalization pastor, and a graduate student who earned multiple degrees. She has raised three children to adulthood, endured months of separation, and the worry of a husband away in a combat zone. With grit and grace, she has lived up to the (often unreasonable) expectations placed on the wives of ship captains and church pastors. Moreover, she suffered my quirky personality with humor and love. I am deeply indebted to her patience and grace.

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I am thankful for friends in ministry, other pastors from many denominational backgrounds, and churches big and small. Karl House, David Oates, Michael Hester, Kevin Wells, and Tim Bateman have been brothers in arms, leading their congregations to deeper relationships with Christ while keeping my spirits up simultaneously. These co-laborers in Christ encouraged me in ministry and in writing this dissertation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA)

Christian Reformed Church (CRC)

Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19)

English Standard Version of the Holy Bible (ESV)

Faith Communities Today (FACT)

Full-Range Leadership Development (FRLD)

General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC)

In-Depth Interview (IDI)

Individualized Consideration (IC)

Individualized Influence (II)

Inspirational Motivation (IM)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Intellectual Stimulation (IS)

National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)

New International Version of the Holy Bible (NIV)

Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)

North American Mission Board (NAMB)

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

World Health Organization (WHO)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Both secular and Christian publications have sounded the alarm about the decline of Christian churches in the United States. While Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches seem in worse shape than evangelical churches, the declining attendance and closure rate in evangelical churches are alarming (Earls, 2019, 2021; Flatt et al., 2018; Jones, 2019, 2021; Pew, 2019a). Most evangelical churches are declining, and most declining churches are small (Earls, 2019). Many small churches are in small towns, villages, and rural settings. Other small churches serve urban areas where people do not possess vehicles (Davis, 2020). The closure of a local church is not only a blow to the Body of Christ but also extinguishes a neighborhood gospel light.

This chapter provides a background on the extent of the problem of church decline, including the failure of churches to develop next-generation leaders as a factor contributing to church decline. After describing the purpose of the study, this chapter presents the research questions that guided the study, along with the assumptions and delimitations informing the study. The definition of key terms used in this study then follows, along with the significance of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the research design used in conducting the study.

Background to the Problem

Depending on which statistics one reads—and whether one considers all of Protestantism or only evangelicalism—65 to 80 percent of American churches are in a state of plateau or decline (Earls, 2019; Rainer, 2017). Once-vibrant churches, now on the brink of closing, dot the landscape. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant denomination in America, estimated that around nine hundred affiliated churches would close in 2019 (Clifton,

2019). While the SBC actively plants churches and existing churches regularly join the SBC, the denomination expected a net loss of over 250 churches annually (SBC, 2019). While reliable numbers are nearly impossible to come by, especially given the number of denominationally unaffiliated churches in the evangelical movement, it seems reasonable to extrapolate the SBC's figures across all of evangelicalism in the United States. If such estimates are close, this means that between 6,000 to 10,000 evangelical churches close their doors annually. The SBC and other denominations, parachurch ministries, and seminaries are committing increasingly significant resources to church revitalization to prevent church deaths.

Clifton (2016) argues that nothing about a dying church glorifies God. If the Church is to reach an increasingly unchurched American culture, new churches must be planted, and declining churches must be revitalized. If anywhere near as many churches are in decline as various studies state, then the very future of evangelicalism in America itself is at stake (mainline churches seem to be in even worse shape, but they are not the object of this student's intended study).

Even though many large, regional "commuter churches" do well in terms of large attendance and budgets, they will not reach those who are only foot-mobile nor those who harbor deep anxiety over attending a large church. Thus, the death of neighborhood churches in areas where people lack vehicular transportation threatens the possibility of permanently disenfranchising many people from the church. Several denominations, thriving local churches, and parachurch ministries invest resources in church revitalization. However, many other successful ministries may hesitate to follow suit because they sense it is a lost cause or poor stewardship of Kingdom resources. However, some declining churches manage to make a turnaround, returning to healthy, vibrant ministries (Clifton, 2016; Henard, 2021; Rainer, 2020).

Church revitalization sources consistently point to a failure to develop and pass on next-generation leadership as a significant factor in the death of neighborhood churches (Rainer, 2014). Most often, then, church revitalizing pastors enter situations where there are no willing or viable leaders in the congregation. Numerous researchers have demonstrated that leadership development is essential to church revitalization (Clifton, 2016; Newton, 2013; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007). Other church revitalization experts have enumerated several "best practices," such as the need for pastors to recruit and mentor young men and bring them into the leadership pipeline. (Clifton, 2016; Davis, 2017; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007).

Little empirical data correlates specific mentoring practices, methodologies, and attitudes with successful leadership development in a positive church revitalization outcome. This study seeks to identify the mentoring practices, leadership styles, recruiting methods, attitudes, and temperaments of church-revitalizing pastors who have successfully developed leaders, effecting a positive outcome in churches in dire need of a turnaround.

Statement of the Problem

As a particular facet of the discipleship process, the idea of church leadership development is well-worn territory in the literature. There is a broad consensus that church revitalization pastors must develop next-generation leaders if their churches are ever to see renewed health and vibrance. In a small church context, leadership development responsibilities fall almost entirely on the senior or sole pastor of the church (Clifton, 2016). However, very little empirical data shows specifically which leadership development practices church revitalization pastors have used to develop and empower next-generation leaders to aid in effective revitalization. A study of successful, evangelical, small church revitalization pastors' leadership development behaviors concerning next-generation leaders should yield valuable insights and best practices for other pastors in a similar context.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the leadership development behaviors of senior or solo pastors who have successfully led the revitalization of a small evangelical church. This study defined a small church as one averaging 65 or less in attendance at the beginning of the pastor participant's tenure (Barna Group, n.d.; Rainer, 2022). For this research, leadership development behaviors were generally defined as those intentional discipleship and mentoring practices the pastor undertakes to develop male leaders from within the congregation. The theories guiding this study were transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), authentic leadership (George, 2003), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), as these leadership theories encourage the empowerment and development of leaders and comport well with a biblical view of leadership—particularly the leadership style of Jesus Christ. Further, a view of leadership development as discipleship espoused by Geiger and Peck (2016) informed the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalizations describe their leadership development mentoring behaviors, and are these behaviors separate from a discipleship continuum?

RQ2. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization perceive their own practice of intentionality in leadership development mentoring, and how significant is intentionality?

RQ3. To what extent do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive they have empowered next-generation leaders, and what importance has this empowerment been in the revitalization?

RQ4. What role do the pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive their tenure contributed to their success in developing next-generation leaders?

RQ5. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive that their leadership development practices towards next-generation leaders have contributed to their church's revitalization success?

These questions sought to understand how pastors perceive the importance of developing next-generation leaders for church revitalization. Further, the questions sought to understand how pastors viewed their success in developing next-generation leaders and their perceptions of best practices for developing next-generation leaders.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Numerous assumptions informed this study. Furthermore, several delimitations bound the problem set.

Research Assumptions

The study assumed that contemporary leadership and organizational theories apply to the local church. This study assumed that the leadership development practices of the senior or solo pastor are crucial for the successful revitalization of a struggling church. Moreover, with Geiger and Peck (2016), the study assumed that leadership development in a church is intractable from discipleship. This study further assumed that a phenomenological study of several successful church revitalization pastors would yield valuable perspectives that apply to the broader church revitalization pastor community. The study also assumed that participants (successful church revitalization pastors) would be truthful in their answers during the study's interviews.

Delimitations of the Research Design

Indeed, many pastoral behaviors factor into successful church revitalization. However, this study examined the leadership development practices of senior or solo pastors in small evangelical churches (under 65 in average attendance). The specific focus is likely generalizable to similar-sized churches across the evangelical spectrum and may be generalizable to larger churches with multiple staff pastors.

The delimitations of the study included the following:

1. This research was delimited to examining the leadership development practices of the senior or solo pastor only. The study did not examine the leadership development practices of staff pastors or lay leaders, if any.

2. This research was delimited to pastors of any age serving evangelical churches only, without regard to specific denominational affiliation.

3. This research was delimited to pastors serving churches with an average attendance of 65 or less at the beginning of the three-year revitalization period.

4. This research was delimited to pastors whose churches have experienced successful church revitalization. As the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted churches so thoroughly from 2020 onward as to make it challenging to determine which churches experienced revitalization, this study was explicitly delimited to the three years from January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2019.

5. This research was delimited to participants in the continental United States.

6. This research was delimited to pastors who had led for at least the three years included in the revitalization. No pastor who had served the church experiencing revitalization for less than the three years bounding the study (specifically, the three years from January 1, 2017, to December 31, 2019) was a candidate for this study.

Definition of Terms

Although all the terms below are in widespread use, their meanings are a matter of some subjectivity. Therefore, it was necessary to define the terms for the purposes of this study:

1. *Church revitalization.* The process by which a plateaued or declining church moves to restore organizational and spiritual vitality (Clifton, 2016; Hallock, 2017). More radical revitalizations that involve a church restarting itself—either from within or with the health of another church or organization—are often called "church replanting" (Devine & Patrick, 2014). For the purposes of this study, replanting was included under the overarching rubric of revitalization.

2. *Bi-vocational pastor* or *co-vocational pastor*. The terms "bi-vocational pastor" and "co-vocational pastor" have slightly different meanings in other settings. However, for this study, they were considered synonymous. A bi-vocational or co-vocational pastor is any member of the clergy who holds a position of secular employment (part or full-time) in addition to their responsibilities ministering at the church. The church may or may not provide financial compensation for the pastor's service (Clifton, 2016).

3. *Evangelical* or *Evangelical Protestant*. Evangelical Protestants are a trans-denominational movement—broadly known as evangelicalism—generally descended

from the denominations arising out of the Protestant Reformation. Evangelicals hold a high view of Scripture as God's inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word. In addition to the beliefs generally mirroring the historic creeds and confessions of Christianity, evangelicals emphasize the need for a conversion experience, salvation by grace through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ alone. Additionally, evangelicals emphasize missionary and gospel preaching efforts (NAE, n.d.).

4. *Revitalized Church* or *Successful Revitalization.* A revitalized church has shifted from a plateau or decline to a state of health and growth. Many indicators serve as metrics for revitalization. However, increased worship service attendance is the single most visible metric. For this study, a "revitalized church" (synonymous with "successful revitalization") is a church that has experienced numerical growth in worship service attendance for three years (Rainer, 2022).

5. *Next-Generation Leader.* This term is subjective. However, this study defined a next-generation leader as a man under 40 with significant leadership responsibilities in a congregation. This age was chosen because it represents a widely accepted definition of the onset of middle age (Britannica, 2007). A next-generation leader may be an elder, deacon, worship leader, or teacher who exercises influence throughout the church.

6. *Senior Pastor.* A senior pastor, in many churches known as a lead pastor, is the clergy member in overall charge of the ministries of a church. A senior pastor may be bi-vocational or co-vocational or may serve the church full-time with no supplemental employment. One or more assistant or associate pastors also may be in the church's employ, but all are under the senior pastor's direction (Law Insider, n.d.).

7. *Small church.* In everyday usage, the term "small church" is somewhat subjective. However, this study defined a small church as having 65 or fewer in average attendance at the beginning of the revitalization pastor's tenure (Rainer, 2022).

8. *Solo Pastor.* A solo pastor is the only paid clergy member on a church staff. While administrative or custodial personnel may be part of the church staff, no other ordained ministers are in the church's employ. The solo pastor may also be bi-vocational or co-vocational (Mathieu, 2018).

9. *Staff Pastor.* This is an umbrella term for any clergy member in a church subordinate to a church's senior pastor. Numerous titles fall under the rubric of "staff pastor." Typical titles include but are not limited to: assistant pastor, associate pastor, executive pastor, youth pastor, or worship pastor (Law Insider, n.d.). This study did not examine the leadership development behaviors of staff pastors. However, a male staff pastor under 40 who came from within the congregation with no previous professional ministry experience counted as a next-generation leader for the purposes of this study. For this study, a staff pastor hired from outside the congregation (or already employed by the church at the beginning of the senior pastor's tenure) would not count as a next-generation leader developed and empowered by the revitalizing senior pastor.

10. *Mentoring behaviors.* This study borrowed from Lawless (2017), who defined mentoring as "a God-given relationship in which one growing Christian encourages and equips another believer to reach his or her potential as a disciple of Christ" (p. 10). In this study, the mentoring behaviors examined were those of a small church revitalization pastor directed toward emerging next-generation leaders. Mentoring could include a variety of behaviors including, but not limited to: instructing, modeling pastoral behaviors, spiritual formation, and a variety of other practices designed to equip next-generation leaders for service in the congregation.

Significance of the Study

Many sources point to the problem of church decline in American evangelicalism and the difficulty of leading a church to renewed health, vitality, and evangelistic focus (Clifton, 2016; Henard, 2021; Rainer, 2014). In short, the work of church revitalizing pastors is difficult. Many factors come into play in leading a declined or plateaued church through revitalization, and several authors have provided in-depth examinations of many of these issues. However, while Stetzer and Dodson (2007), Rainer (2014), Clifton (2016), and Davis (2017) have all addressed the failure of dying churches to develop and empower next-generation leaders and the need for church revitalization pastors to develop next-generation leaders if the church is to flourish, none of the existing literature addresses the leadership development best practices of successful church revitalization pastors. It is possible that if an empirical description of the most common leadership development practices of successful church revitalization pastors existed, the success rate of other church revitalization efforts could be improved.

Summary of the Design

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the leadership development mentoring behaviors for senior or solo church revitalization pastors serving in evangelical churches with an average attendance under 65 that have moved from declining to thriving. The study examined church revitalization pastors' perception of their own mentoring behaviors, including identifying and recruiting next-generation leadership candidates, formal training of

emerging leaders, and discipleship processes. The study also examined how revitalization pastors perceive they empower and provide meaningful feedback to emerging next-generation leaders. Mentoring behaviors also included the degree to which revitalization pastors empowered and provided meaningful feedback to emerging leaders. The theory guiding this study was the transformational leadership model proposed by Kouzes and Posner (2002). The model proposed by Kouzes and Posner includes the five practices of exemplary leaders: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.

The study examined the leadership development mentoring practices of solo pastors of evangelical churches in the continental United States, with an average attendance of 65 or fewer beginning on January 1, 2017. Further, these pastors led a sustained period (at least three years) of revitalization as measured by an increase in annual average attendance of at least five percent per year for the three years inclusive of January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2019.

Research Sample(s) and Sampling Technique

The researcher utilized his contacts within church revitalization networks to identify potential church pastors across the United States. The researcher then contacted these pastors via email, inviting them to participate in a web-based screening for the study. The screening determined whether the revitalization pastor meets the criteria for the study based on the pastors' answers. The screening determined whether, during his tenure, the pastor had seen the turnaround of a period of plateaued or declining attendance to a sustained (three-year) period of growth in average attendance of a minimum of five percent per year.

Where possible, the researcher hoped to find (and, in a few cases, found) participants whose churches had significantly higher percentages of attendance growth. Presumably, pastors whose churches experienced such a pronounced turnaround would have provided the highest

quality data. The pastors participating in the study also self-certified that the average attendance of their congregation was 65 or less at the beginning of their tenure. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic's drastic impact on the attendance of all churches, it would have been challenging to measure revitalization after March 2020. Therefore, this study bounded the three years from January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2019.

Additionally, the screening asked potential participants whether they agreed with broad statements that identified them as evangelical for this study. Further, potential participants certified that their leadership development and personal discipleship efforts had seen at least one male next-generation leader step into a position of churchwide influence (e.g., staff pastor, elder, deacon, worship leader). Finally, the screening tool ascertained whether potential participants had access to technology such as webcam-equipped computers or smartphones to make a video interview possible.

Methodological Design

As is common in qualitative phenomenological research, the study utilized interviews for data collection. Having recruited participants meeting the screening criteria, completed informed consent, and collected demographic information, the researcher interviewed participants using the widely available Microsoft Teams video conferencing software. The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview format and open-ended questions to solicit the views and opinions of the participants concerning pastoral leadership development practices in small evangelical churches that experienced sustained revitalization.

Data Analysis

With the aid of the *Atlas.ti* qualitative analysis software, the researcher utilized the method of phenomenological analysis proposed by Moustakas (1994) to synthesize the major themes of small evangelical church revitalization pastors' lived experiences.

The researcher hoped that these findings would prove helpful to the church revitalization community of interest in enhancing the prospects for further revitalizing struggling and dying churches in America.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to provide the reader with an in-depth overview of relevant studies related to leadership development in a church revitalization setting. A literature review found that many studies have examined leadership theory, the problem of church decline, and successful practices in church revitalization. However, empirically based research in leadership development seems far more scarce. The prevailing voices view leadership development as "more caught than taught," and material on developing leaders seems much more oriented to management training than actual leadership development. Further, while voices in the church revitalization community express a need for revitalizing pastors to develop other leaders, none of the literature reviewed provided empirical evidence for successful leadership development practices in the small church revitalization context.

Overview

Churches, denominations, and seminaries are increasingly investing time and energy in the field of church revitalization. The need for revitalizing pastors to develop leaders in a church undergoing revitalization is a consistent theme in the church revitalization community. This researcher focused his study on church decline and revitalization factors and the practice and development of transformational leadership behaviors. This researcher divided this chapter into five parts as follows: 1) Theological Framework for the Study, 2) Theoretical Framework for the Study, 3) Related Literature,4) Rationale for the Study and the Gap in the Literature, and 5) Profile of the Current Study.

Theological Framework

The Bible provides the inspiration, mandate, and framework for church revitalization and leadership development. Theologically, a church needing revitalization is not simply a church whose attendance and offerings have declined. Instead, declining worship turnout, dwindling

tithes, and negative momentum are quantifiable symptoms of profound spiritual illness within the body that include a lack of corporate prayer and a loss of the love of the gospel (Rainer, 2014). Indeed, the size of a congregation and its numerical growth often have little to do with the spiritual health of a particular body of believers (Croft, 2016). Thousands of small American congregations are spiritually vibrant and doctrinally sound. Conversely, some of the largest, fastest-growing churches in America of late are spiritually and doctrinally unsound—with so-called "prosperity gospel"-peddling churches as perhaps the most glaring examples.

According to Davis (2017, p. 20), revitalization is "the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God." As Rainer (2014) argues, a church in need of revitalization has, at its heart, failed to prioritize the Great Commandment (Matt 22:35-40; Mk 12:28-31; Lk10:25-28, English Standard Version, 2011) and the Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20; Mk 15:14-16; Lk 24:44-29; Jn 20:21-22; Acts 1:8, ESV). Members of a church are internally focused and more concerned about the members' comforts than bringing the gospel to the neighborhood (Henard, 2021). Tradition takes precedence over evangelism and discipleship. As a result, the church body looks nothing like the neighborhood's demographics (the "nations" of Lk 22:47, ESV) (Rainer, 2014). Indeed, dying churches often blame the community for this shift (Clifton, 2016, p. 26). Divisiveness has replaced the unity of the church body repeatedly called for in the New Testament (Jn 17:21; 1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:1-3; Phil 2:2; 1 Pt 3:8, ESV).

This study recognized the biblical mandate for both leadership development and church revitalization. Further, interviews with former members of local churches that have closed reveal a consistent failure to pass the mantle of leadership to younger generations (Rainer, 2016, p. 68). Such neglect is at odds with the New Testament example—particularly of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Thus, biblical leadership development is a church revitalization imperative (Henard, 2021,

p. 197; Clifton, 2016, pp. 68-72). Hence, this study sought to identify the mentoring practices, leadership styles, recruiting methods, attitudes, and temperaments of revitalizing pastors of small churches who have successfully developed leaders, effecting a positive outcome in churches in dire need of a turnaround.

Biblical Imperatives for Church Revitalization

The church of Jesus Christ is His bride. Thus, He desires its beauty, health, and vibrancy. The pages of Scripture provide both imperatives for renewal amongst God's people. First, this theological framework includes the example of Ezekiel 37, which speaks of God's people (Israel) as spiritually dead but shows the Holy Spirit's power to make them live again. Second, and more specific to the Church, is the admonitions of Christ contained in five of the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor.

The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37)

Ezekiel was a captive of the Babylonians, deported from his native Judah to Babylon. It was from exile in Babylon that Ezekiel prophesied. While interpretations of Ezekiel 37 vary, depending upon one's eschatological views, Henard (2021, p. 9) sees in the vision of the valley of dry bones a stark illustration of spiritual death and God's power to bring new life to those presumably beyond hope. As Dowden (2015, p. 191) observes, God shows Ezekiel these "very dry" bones (Ezk 37:2, ESV) because "He wants Ezekiel to see that Israel is not near death but totally dead."

The dry bones are sun-bleached. The decay process has long ago completed. God asks Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" Perhaps Ezekiel gives the best answer possible when he replies, "O Lord God, You know." (Ezk 37:3, ESV). God instructs Ezekiel to perform a seemingly ridiculous task: prophesy over the dry bones (v. 4). As Cooper (1994, p. 321) notes, "When God told him (Ezekiel) to preach to the dead, dry bones, he obeyed despite its apparent absurdity."

Ezekiel prophesies to the dry bones, and flesh re-forms upon the bones as he preaches. Nevertheless, these restored bodies are not alive yet—not until the breath, the four winds come upon them. The Hebrew word used here for "breath" and "wind" is *ruah,* and says Block (1994, p. 378) carries with it the further connotation of "spirit."

God explains the vision to Ezekiel in verses 11-4. The spirit of God himself will restore His people Israel, even when they are beyond hope by any earthly measure. While recognizing that Ezekiel 37 is a prophecy of Israel, church revitalizers such as Henard (2021, p. 10) see a superb illustration of the power of an omnipotent God to restore His people. If God is powerful enough to raise a valley of dry bones—and to resurrect Jesus Christ—then He certainly has the power to prevent a struggling church from dying. Moreover, as the Holy Spirit of God breathed life into the valley of dry bones, it is His Holy Spirit that, as DeVries (2014, p. 2) argues, citing Acts 1:8, is the primary agent in the revitalization of churches.

The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia-Minor (Revelation 2-3)

Most scholars agree with Osborne (2002, p. 104) that the letters to the seven churches "are addressed both to individual churches and to all of Asia Minor." Patterson (2012, p. 75) rebuts a popular theory that says the seven churches represent the universal Church through various historical periods (e.g., the early church, medieval times, the Reformation, and the Tribulation). Instead, Patterson writes, "(A)ny church—even a contemporary congregation—has more in common with one of these historic congregations than with the others." Sadly, only two of the seven churches—Smyrna and Philadelphia—are without fault in the eyes of Christ (Osborne, 2002, p. 129). The churches of North American modernity can also find a glimpse in the mirror through Christ's description of each of the seven churches of Asia Minor. The five letters presenting a rebuke from the Savior provide insight into the cause of modern church decline.

In dying churches today, it is possible to see most (if not all) of the negative traits of the seven churches of Asia Minor. As Jamieson (2011, p.22) states, Jesus is the one to reform the churches. “He speaks to those churches in order to set right what is broken, to heal what is sick, to rebuke what is false, and to give new life to what is dying.”

Doctrinally pure, the church in Ephesus has “abandoned the love you had at first” (Rev. 2:4, ESV). Jesus’ call is to “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first” (Rev. 2:5, ESV). Christ demands the church once again obey the Great Commandment to love God and love others. Otherwise, the church is doomed. For Mounce (1998, p. 71), the judgment of Christ is immediate and not eschatological, writing, “Without love the congregation ceases to be a church. Its lampstand is removed.” As Clifton (2016, pp. 13-14) says, “Whether it’s Israel in the sixth century B.C. or twenty-first-century North America, spiritually dead institutions of faith die for one reason and one reason only: they stop loving what they once loved and stopped doing what they once did.”

As Jesus says, Pergamum is the place of Satan’s throne. Rather than face persecution, the church at Pergamum seeks to compromise and accommodate pagan practices (Mounce, 1998, p. 81). The church in Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17) tolerates false teaching and sexual immorality among its members. Christ calls the church to repent and promises to remove this stain from the church “with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16). Likewise, the church in Thyatira also tolerates false teaching, drawing Christ’s demand for repentance (Rev. 2:20-23). Just as Jamieson (2011, p. 21) says of the church at Corinth, churches that tolerate false teaching and sexual immorality are in danger of death.

Jamieson (2011, p. 22) calls Rev. 3:2 “a one-verse proof text for church revitalization.” Indeed, Jesus tells the church at Sardis that they are dead and calls on them to “strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die.” (Rev. 3:1-2, New American Standard Bible, 1996).

As Mounce (1998, p. 94) writes, “Although Sardis could be pronounced dead, it still had the possibility of restoration to life.” Like many churches in America today, the church at Sardis seems to be on “life support.” The situation at Sardis is still reversible. Christ exhorts the church at Sardis, “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.” (Rev. 3:3, ESV). Some hope remains for the church at Sardis, though it will depend upon God’s supernatural power for this church to make a comeback.

The church at Laodicea matches its disgusting and undrinkable water supply. It is neither hot nor cold. Instead, it is lukewarm. Physically, cold water brings refreshment, and hot water brings healing, while lukewarm water has no properties to commend. Spiritually, the church at Laodicea brings neither refreshment (as in the case of a cool drink) nor the healing of hot spring water (Osborne, 2002, p. 205). There is simply nothing about the Laodicean church that is praiseworthy. Laodicea was a materially wealthy city, and its church was deadly in its apathy and self-sufficiency (Mounce, 1998, p. 112). Much as the city of Laodicea had refused Roman aid in rebuilding following a deadly earthquake in A.D. 60, the church there seemed to feel it needed nothing from God (Osborne, 2002, p. 206). There is a strong parallel to the American church here. Largely awash in the material prosperity of the United States, large swaths of the modern American church evince the same apathy and unhealthy self-reliance that was apparent in first-century Laodicea.

Nevertheless, like the church at Laodicea, there is still hope for the affluent, apathetic, and disinterested American church. It is a hope found in Jesus’ words, “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see” (Rev. 3:18, ESV). Again, there is a compelling parallel here between the Laodicean church and struggling churches in America. Declining churches in America today

must recognize their dire spiritual condition and depend on the riches of Christ rather than on their own material prosperity.

The letters to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor demonstrate a Christ who desires His church to be spiritually healthy, demonstrating love for God and others, with sound biblical teaching, moral purity, and a fervor for the gospel. Tolerating (or even promoting) false teaching, refusing to stand against immorality, and manifesting gospel apathy are all signs of a spiritually ill church. Jesus calls the spiritually decaying church to repentance and revitalization.

Biblical Models for Ministry Renewal

Both the Old and New Testaments present principles applicable to church revitalization. While Nehemiah seems often used as sermon material for pastors wishing to launch a capital campaign, the story is more about revitalization than building something new. Moreover, the Apostle Paul's concern for sound doctrine and holiness in Christian behavior represents a concern to address numerous endemic problems throughout churches needing revitalization. Further, Paul's concern for developing and empowering young leaders in the church represents a discipleship model for church-revitalizing pastors who need to develop leaders for their congregations.

Nehemiah: Change Leader for Renewal. In Nehemiah, Harrell (2014) sees the example of change leadership in situations that seem beyond repair, with particular applicability to churches near death. Churches nearing death must typically undergo a more radical form of revitalization known as "replanting." Replanting involves several scenarios for a necessary church restart (Clifton, 2016, pp. 41-48). Most of these scenarios involve outside help, and all involve hard work.

Nehemiah takes place in the face of a desperate need for renewal. Years after the Babylonians destroyed them, and after the Babylonians were themselves conquered by the

Medo-Persians, the walls of Jerusalem remained in ruins, and the city remained unprotected. As a result, the Jewish remnant in Judah was "in great distress." (Neh 1:3, ESV). Nehemiah's actions show many critical traits of a church replanter. First, he spent time in fervent fasting and prayer (Neh. 1:4). Nehemiah cared deeply about the situation, and it was in his prayer and his love for the city that God used in calling him to rebuild the walls (Harrell, 2014)

Nehemiah sought God's direction (2:12) and cast a clear, God-given vision for building the wall. Nehemiah engaged in team-building, planned carefully, and responded to opposition from the likes of Sanballat and Tobiah. Harrell (2014) observes Nehemiah's patient intentionality in dealing with people at all levels—from workers to high government officials to critics. Nehemiah exemplifies the same sort of "tactical patience" that Clifton (2016, p. 131-133) calls an essential characteristic of a church revitalizer or replanter. Further, and perhaps most pertinent to this study, Nehemiah first inspected the rubble of Jerusalem's walls and then gathered leaders underneath him to lead the charge of rebuilding (Davis, 2017, p. 175). These men, in whom Nehemiah imbued a vision of renewal, were, in turn, instrumental in rebuilding the wall—a herculean task that Nehemiah could not have accomplished as the sole bearer of the leadership burden.

The Apostle Paul: A Minister of Revitalization. The Apostle Paul receives wide recognition as a church planter and missionary—the Apostle to the Gentiles. However, at least one observer sees in Paul a passion for revitalization. Jamieson (2011) sees an apostolic priority upon church revitalization in First Corinthians. The Corinthian church suffered from factionalism (1 Cor 1:10-17) and tolerated sexual immorality (5:1-13). To Paul's horror, church members at Corinth engaged in lawsuits against fellow Christians (6:1-8).

Moreover, the church remained confused over issues of marriage and sexuality (7:1-40), did not comprehend the limits of Christian liberty, argued over matters of worship (chs. 11-14),

and entertained false teachings (ch. 15). Jamieson argues that many of these problems exist in present-day churches in decline to one degree or another. He observes that Paul did not simply plant churches and move on. Instead, Paul followed up with the churches he planted, and, in this case, he exhorted them to repentance (Jamieson, 2011, p. 22).

Moreover, Paul returned to churches where he had previously preached (Acts 15:36) and, with Silas, Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:41, ESV). A survey of numerous scholarly commentaries on Acts 15 reveals a concentration on the split between Barnabas and Paul, apparently seeing no direct connection to church revitalization (Fee, 2014; Taylor, 2014; Ciampa & Rosner, 2010; Garland, 2003). However, Jamieson (2011, p. 22) sees a burden for revitalization and reform that the modern-day church should continue to feel in Paul's actions. It is incumbent upon the church-revitalizing pastor to engage in sound preaching, encouragement, and exhortation to see God strengthen struggling churches and revitalize them.

Biblical Basis of Leadership Development

Clifton (2014, p. 24) says that one characteristic common among dying churches is a failure to develop and empower young leaders. For Boyer (2019, p. 9), discipleship encompasses leadership development, and leaders result from discipleship. Not all discipleship is necessarily leadership development, although all discipleship feeds into leadership. Regardless of leadership desire or potential, new believers still require discipleship that grounds them in the Christian faith. This author utilizes two exemplars of the New Testament. The first is Jesus himself, and the second is the Apostle Paul.

Jesus Christ: Builder of Leaders. Blanchard and Hodges (2003, p. 62) believe that Jesus modeled a form of Situational Leadership, much like Blanchard and Hersey first described in the 1970s. Jesus Christ personally called and poured into twelve men for around three years. These men, whom He appointed as apostles, would form the backbone of the nascent church.

Jesus recruited enthusiastic followers and developed them into men that would lead Christianity from a fringe Jewish sect to a significant religious movement that reached beyond the Roman Empire—within the lifetimes of many of them. These men learned side-by-side with Jesus and ministered with Him before ministering independently. Perhaps more indicative of the investment required to develop leaders, the Gospels portray Jesus as pouring particularly into an inner circle of future leaders of the church—Peter, James, and John. These men would feature prominently in the early church's leadership, as depicted in the Book of Acts. Indeed, Peter, in particular, seems to have inherited from Christ himself the position of de facto leader of the church in its earliest days.

Jesus varied his leadership style, first modeling desired leadership ("Follow me," Matt. 4:19, ESV) behaviors and then coaching, supporting, and ultimately delegating them to the Great Commission to make disciples of the nations. Even as He taught followers, Jesus took more time with the Twelve to explain the meanings of His parables. Jesus would spend even more time pouring into the lives of three of the Twelve—Peter, James, and John—who appear to have been his innermost circle (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004).

The Apostle Paul as Maker of Leaders. Paul appears to have poured into various men, discipling them for leadership positions. His protégé, Timothy, would take over the pastorate at Ephesus while he left Titus to be in charge at Crete. More than building these men up into leadership, Paul taught them to develop leaders themselves. Paul tells Titus to "appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." (Ti 1:5, New International Version, 2011), giving his disciple direction on the type of men to select to be overseers of the church (Ti 1:6-9, NIV). Paul expects Timothy to develop leaders, saying, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." (2 Tim 2:2, NIV).

The Bible demonstrates a theological framework for church revitalization and leadership development and connects the two. Moreover, current secular leadership research underscores the need for leadership development. Indeed, if an organization is to stay healthy—or to restore health and well-being after a period of unhealthiness and decline—it must develop new leaders as a matter of routine.

Theoretical Framework

In order to restore a church spiraling towards death to health and vitality, it is crucial to describe the organizational pathologies leading to church decline. This understanding reveals a need for leadership and, more specifically, leadership development in the corporate context of church revitalization. This literature review then examines two popular leadership theories that the literature shows as contributing to follower development: transformational leadership and servant leadership. This literature review has addressed transformational and servant leadership models and now turns to leadership development theories within transformational and servant leadership contexts.

The Pathologies of Organizational Decline

An examination of the literature shows that local church decline and death share many commonalities with other organizations' demise. Samuel (2012) compares all organizations with living organisms. Like living organisms, an organization's life cycle includes stages of conception, birth, growth (sometimes exponential), maturity, decline, and death. Experts in church growth, decay, and revitalization show that the local church has a bell-shaped life cycle that matches secular organizations (McIntosh, 2009, pp. 181-193; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007, pp 17-18). Samuel (2012, p. 12) shows a "spiral" of organizational decline. An organization starts healthy, lean, enthusiastic, and growing but notes that, over time, organizational pathologies set in. As an organization grows, it becomes more bureaucratic and less agile. The bureaucratic

inertia eventually inhibits the organization from responding and adapting to changing circumstances. Finally, the organization collapses and disintegrates (Samuel, 2012, p. 12).

Non-profit organizations such as trade unions, political parties, or voluntary associations possess the near-universal potential for organizational collapse (Samuel, 2012, p. 13). Though the church is more, one may undoubtedly describe the local church as a voluntary association. For non-profits, collapse always manifests itself in declining membership and budgets. Like many other non-profit organizations, the death, and closure of a local church, often after a protracted period of stagnation and decay, finds its basis in similar reasons—the lack of members and money, along with a "country club" mentality that sees one's tithes as payment rendered for expected services (Rainer, 2014).

In secular non-profit organizations, Samuel (2012, pp. 13-14) sees reasons for losses in membership and funding that certainly have parallels in the church world. Samuel notes that, in the case of non-profits, the need to recruit to make up for losses is constant. Members leave because of relocation, disillusionment, weariness of the time and energy involved, and a change of interest. Often, some internal or external crisis precipitates a critical membership drain. Though the church is a spiritual organization, it is, nevertheless, not immune from such dangers.

Since many of these non-profit organizations rely principally on membership dues, death becomes imminent (Samuel, 2012, p. 14). Church members cite similar reasons for leaving a local church as do member of non-profits choosing to depart from their organizations. The church fails to empower potential emerging younger leaders, so these depart for churches where their giftings will find use and appreciation (Clifton, 2016, p. 24). People move away, and older members die or become homebound. Others become weary in ministry or feel the church no longer meets their spiritual needs or the needs of their children. As the church turns inward, neglecting the community around it, and caters to the members' preferences, it stops bringing in

new people. As the congregation ages, even births to church members cease (because members are beyond their child-bearing years), leaders age out or leave, the church no longer has a vision, and the decline accelerates (Henard, 2021).

In dying organizations, Samuel (2012, pp.16-18) sees a failure to carry out the purpose for which its founders originally started the organization. A for-profit business will gauge its success in meeting its original goals through client relationships and profit goals. As clients disappear, profits vanish, and layoffs occur. Likewise, non-profit organizations define success by measures particular to their distinct purposes. In the non-profit sector, members leave, donations dry up, and the organization provides none of the services its founders originally conceived (Samuel, 2012, p. 17). Like their secular non-profit counterparts, failed churches have invariably ceased carrying out their original purposes. This cessation of the very activity for which the organization exists shows itself in churches that have lost an evangelistic focus and a desire to have any other positive impact in their communities (Rainer, 2014). Often, the remaining church members blame the community for the church's decline (Clifton, 2016, pp. 26-27).

Kotter (2013, pp. 3-14) cites several reasons for organizational failure. These include the inability to challenge the status quo or create a coalition to guide change. Further, failed organizations lack vision or do not communicate their vision in a meaningful way. They allow obstacles to undermine change. They create no short-term wins. Moreover, failed organizations do not anchor changes in their culture. There is no recognition of a need for change, let alone any urgency to implement it. Many notable voices in the church revitalization community see identical, if not stronger, tendencies to change resistance in the context of the local church (Clifton, 2016; Devine & Patrick, 2014; Henard, 2021; McIntosh, 2009; Rainer, 2014; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns (1978) first described leadership as either transactional or transformational. Transactional leadership depends upon the principle of social exchange: the leader and the follower give something to get something. Transformational leadership seeks to lead on a higher level than a simple social exchange. It appeals to the followers' sense of self-actualization. Transformational leadership seeks to inspire and motivate followers to achieve and grow as leaders in their own right (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 2). Transformational leadership seeks genuine engagement with followers rather than providing a system of rewards and punishment (or at least withholding rewards). Transformational leadership aims to engender sincere commitment and individual followers' personal involvement as part of a team. Genuine transformational leadership seeks to motivate followers to higher achievements than they initially envisioned or even believed possible (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 3).

Transformational leadership expects to produce followers who feel personally satisfied and empowered. Rather than relying upon a system of contingent rewards such as bonuses (though transactional leaders may still employ such incentives), transformational leaders emphasize followers' potential and need for personal growth and satisfaction (Lerogy, 2012, p. 6). Transactional leaders inspire buy-in to a shared vision. They challenge followers to innovation and higher levels of problem-solving. Of great interest to the arena of church revitalization, transformational leaders build leadership capacity in their followers by supportive mentoring and coaching while providing opportunities to develop and utilize these skills (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4; Leroy, 2012, p. 7).

Transformational Leadership's Core Tenets

Bass and Riggio (2006, pp. 5-8) describe four leadership behaviors as uniquely transformational. These core behaviors or components of transformational leadership are

Individualized Influence (II), Inspirational Motivation (IM), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC). Transformational leaders demonstrate Idealized Influence (II). In other words, they can serve as role models for followers. They inspire and motivate their followers by providing a challenge and a compelling sense of shared vision. As a result, their followers respect and admire them, seeing their leaders as people of competence and integrity.

Further, while transformational leaders are ethical, tenacious, and consistent, they are also willing to take risks that other non-transformational leaders would likely avoid (Bass & Riggio, p. 6). Transformational leaders further exhibit the quality of inspirational motivation. They project optimism, and a team spirit flourishes under their leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 6).

The third component of transformational leadership is Intellectual Stimulation (IS). Transformational leaders encourage creativity and innovation by challenging old assumptions and questioning established procedures and approaches to problems. Finally, transformational leaders demonstrate Individualized Consideration (IC). In other words, transformational leaders are capable mentors. They understand that individual followers need achievement and growth and seek to support this development. Transformational leaders encourage two-way communication and provide learning opportunities in a supportive atmosphere (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

As Burns (2003) notes, transformational leaders are all charismatic in their own right. However, a transformational leader need not be tremendously outgoing. Instead, transformational leaders exercise socialized charisma to vision-cast a preferred future, demonstrate their command of the facts, and concern followers. While charisma is necessary, the encouraging truth is that emerging leaders can develop social charisma. Transformational leaders empower others. They convey a clear purpose for the organization. In short, transformational

leadership leverages the human need for purpose, meaning, and fulfillment (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leaders seem well suited to disciple and develop the new leaders needed for successful church revitalization. The transformational leader is both competent and capable. People will not readily volunteer to follow a leader whose abilities they doubt. Further, the transformational leader is a visionary (East, 2019, p. 37). He or she focuses on the future and can "attract followers more readily. Transformational leaders induce more effort and intrinsic motivation from group members, promote group identification, mobilize collective action, and ultimately achieve better performance on measures of both individual and organizational outcome." (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 104).

Pseudo-transformational leadership

It is worth noting that many observers of transformational leadership seek to dispel an abiding misunderstanding that sees any competent, charismatic leader who enjoys a high degree of follower loyalty as "transformational." For example, Bass and Riggio (2006, p. 6-7) describe Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation as "charismatic-inspirational leadership," which some leadership theorists describe as a separate leadership theory (Bass & Aviolo, 1993). By that definition, leaders such as Adolph Hitler, Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin, Reverend Jim Jones, and even the leadership of the scandalous Enron Corporation were transformational (Tourish, 2013, p. 22). On the other hand, Burns (2003) calls these leaders not transformational but "pseudo-transformational" leaders.

Tourish (2013) observes that too many cases exist where so-called transformational leaders combine their dynamic personalities with coercive persuasion, ideology (perhaps especially religious ideology), and power relationships. Pseudo-transformational leaders rely on personalized charisma, whereas transformational leaders utilize socialized charisma (Bass &

Avolio, 1993). They use this advantage to mandate a toxic level of conformity that leads followers to remain silent when, in fact, the situation demands they speak out.

Transformational leadership is more than just personal charisma; it requires the authentic leader to demonstrate moral values and ethical behaviors that are good and unselfish. Indeed, according to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders are morally uplifting to their followers. The transformational leader uses socialized charisma; the pseudo-transformational leader relies upon personalized charisma (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The transformational leader is altruistic and utilizes legitimately established authority bases. The pseudo-transformational leader relies upon threat, manipulation, and punishment, with little regard for established institutional norms or procedures or, for that matter, for the rights and feelings of others. The pseudo-transformational leader is narcissistic, impetuous, and aggressive (Barling, Christie & Turner, 2008).

Individualized Consideration also suffers under pseudo-transformational leaders, with followers regarded as merely a means or an end, with their unique interests or dignity often unrespected (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In the realm of idealized influence, the pseudo-transformational leader demonstrates egoism and readily manipulates followers. In the area of Inspirational Motivation, the pseudo-transformational leader cares little about truly empowering subordinates or providing them with opportunities for self-actualization. As for Intellectual Stimulation, the pseudo-transformational leader does not engage in open discussion or exchange of ideas. Instead, he or she insists that followers repeat propaganda or hold to an official (even if never explicitly stated) “line.”

The idea of pseudo-transformational leadership bears mention in the context of churches and local church revitalization. Indeed, church leaders—not just cult leaders but theologically orthodox pastors—have shown themselves to be pseudo-transformational leaders. It is most

likely impossible to measure the number of little-known church leaders who have abused their power in pseudo-transformational ways. However, the number of well-known cases of personally charming evangelical pastors and Christian leaders abusing their power is staggering (Buckley, 2019; Burke, 2020; Smith, 2012; Tibbs, 2014). Thus, pseudo-transformational leaders seem unlikely to develop leaders with the qualities needed for biblical church revitalization.

Full-Range Leadership

Bass and Riggio (2006) recognized that not all followers are necessarily at a readiness level that allows effective transformational leadership. Indeed, Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson (2008), in their discussion of Situational Leadership, explain the need to adapt leadership styles to the readiness levels of followers. In answer to this need to address the complete spectrum of follower readiness, Full Range Leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) combines the elements of transformational leadership—individualized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—and combines it with the contingent rewards of transactional leadership, which can be a valuable and positive leadership tool, especially for followers less ready for transformational leadership. The Full Range Leadership model also addresses (without encouraging) ineffective leadership styles that were merely corrective, such as management-by-exception, and laisses-fare leadership, which is, at its heart, abdication (Sosik & Jung, 2018, p. 8).

Leadership Development in the Context of Transformational Leadership

Day (2000, p. 582) defines leadership development as “expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes.” He notes that interest in leadership development has remained strong for decades. However, as much as theorists have examined the myriad leadership theories, little research seems to focus on the process of developing leaders. Indeed, Uhl-Bien (2003, p. 130) laments the relative paucity of

research on leadership development. Moreover, describing transformational leadership is not the same as explaining how to develop transformational leaders. Uh-Bien (2003, p. 130) writes, "Whereas leader development focuses on developing the formal leader, primarily through training individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles, leadership development focuses on building and using interpersonal competence." Relationships, then, are at the heart of leadership development. For Cox, Pearce, & Sims (2003), those relationships involve modeling transformational leadership behaviors and empowering emergent leaders to act through the exercise of shared leadership.

Sosik and Jung (2018) advocate for a "Full Range Leadership Development" (FRLD) model that is itself based on the Full Range Leadership model expounded by Bass and Riggio (2006). Because of rapid demographic (including both age and ethnicity) and societal and technological shifts, Sosik and Jung (2018, pp. 3-4) see a need for FRLD at every leadership level. However, they admit that in conditions where the status quo is sacrosanct, it is unlikely that "transformational leadership with its change-oriented nature will flourish under these environments" (Sosik & Jung, 2018, p. 46).

Still, FRLD offers the prospect that transformational leadership behaviors are something that leaders can develop in themselves and their followers. Sosik and Jung (2018) present an intensive program designed to develop each area of transformational leadership and the positive aspects of transactional leadership while minimizing such negative or avoidant behaviors as laisse-fair or passive management by exception.

Sosik and Jung (2018) view relationships as a cornerstone for leadership development. Leaders relate to and model transformational leadership behaviors. However, their approach is more intentional and comprehensive and challenges leadership mentees to dig deep into their values. Likewise, Day (2000, p. 582) sees extensive management education and training

programs across various disciplines. However, he notes that management development teaches students to acquire specific knowledge and skills and apply proven solutions to problems. Leadership development is far more about cognitive and behavioral adaptability in a complex interpersonal environment fraught with unforeseen circumstances than specific skillsets applied to known problems (Day, 2000, p. 582-583).

Both Day (2000) and Sosik and Jung (2018) seem confident that the self-awareness, self-motivation, and self-regulation required to develop interpersonal skills such as empathy, mutual respect and trust, and team-building are teachable qualities.

Transformational leadership can bring about committed, loyal, and satisfied followers (Bass & Riggo, 2006, p. 3). Moreover, many successful organizations see the value of investing in their future leaders (Cox, Pearce & Sims, 2003). In addition, while some people seem naturally inclined toward leadership, it is possible to develop leadership potential in most people (Avolio, 2004, p. 2-4). Further, transformational leadership and relationship-driven leadership development seem entirely compatible with the practice of biblical discipleship (Cooper, 2005). This study, then, seeks to describe to what degree successful small-church revitalizing pastors display relational transformational leadership development practices in the context of intentional discipleship.

Related Literature

This portion of the literature review provides the reader with a critical review of related and relevant subtopics on leadership development in a church revitalization context. Several relevant fields of interest frame and inform this researcher's study. This part of the literature review is divided into five sections. These are 1) The Decline of Christianity in the United States and the Rise of the "Nones," 2) External Factors Contributing to the Decline of Local Churches, 3) Internal Factors Common to Severely Declined Churches, 4) Successful Church Revitalization

Strategies and Methodology, and 5) Leadership Development as a Function of Discipleship. These areas constitute the milieu in which the church-revitalizing pastor operates and grows leaders. Therefore, a brief description of the available literature concerning these fields provides background for understanding pastoral leadership development behaviors in a church revitalization context.

The Decline of Christianity in the United States

Across Christian traditions and denominations, the death of local churches is a reality and a worsening problem in the United States. In 2008, Dart argued that alarmists overstated the problem of church closure and that the annual U.S. church closure rate was one percent per year (Dart, 2008, pp. 14-15). Either Dart was grossly misinformed, or the problem has worsened exponentially in the years since he wrote. In 2017, a study of 1,000 randomly selected Southern Baptist churches concluded that 56 percent were declining, nine percent were plateaued, and a mere 35 percent of Southern Baptist Churches were growing (Rainer, 2017). In 2019, LifeWay and Exponential found that 30 percent of Protestant churches had grown additively during the preceding three years, while only seven percent were sending missionaries and church planters. During the same timeframe, 35 percent of all Protestant churches declined in attendance, budgets, and staffing (Earls, 2019). The research also found that the smaller the church, the greater the decline problem (Earls, 2019). The decline problem is likely more pronounced in smaller churches than in larger churches because the smaller congregations lack the financial reserves or volunteer base to minister effectively.

Burge (2021) shows a decline in participation across the range of Protestant Christian groups in America. The most precipitous decline has been among mainline Protestant denominations. From 1972 to 1983, mainline Protestantism was the most prominent religious tradition in the United States, with 30.8 percent of Americans identifying with the tradition at its

peak. By 2016, mainline Protestants had fallen to just 9.9 percent of the American population (Burge, 2021, p. 19). Historically black Protestant groups saw a severe decline from the mid-1980s to 2018. Black Protestant groups once accounted for ten percent of Americans. However, by 2018, only six percent of Americans identified as such, even as African Americans maintained a relatively constant share of the total U.S. population (Burge, 2021, p. 21). This dissertation did not examine revitalization in mainline or historically black Protestant churches but concentrated on evangelical Protestantism. However, in part, the mainline and historically black numbers show the extensive nature of Protestant decline.

Burge (2021) studied the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal groups, Free Methodists, the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), non-denominational churches, and the Southern Baptist Convention. Evangelical Protestant churches, this researcher's primary interest group, faired better than their mainline counterparts—not that the news was heartening. Since the mid-1970s, evangelicalism has grown as a percentage of Americans—up from 17 percent to 21.5 percent in 2018 (Burge, 2021, p. 15). However, the percentage of Americans identifying as evangelical is down almost eight points from 29.9 percent who identified as evangelical in 1993. The trend continues in a worrisome direction (Burge, 2021, p. 16).

In 2016, Clifton reported an annual rate of 900 church closures in the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. (Clifton, 2016). Even with its emphasis on church planting, missions, and church revitalization, the SBC reported that in 2019, its churches' membership had fallen by 288,000 people (two percent of its membership—the most significant drop in a century), with the lowest rate of baptism since World War II (Shellnutt, 2020).

Further, church planting is not keeping up with the decline in congregations. As recently as 2014, church planting barely outpaced closures, with 4,000 churches opening and 3,700

congregations closing. However, by 2019, Protestant groups closed more churches (about 4,500) than the estimated 3,000 churches they opened (Earls, 2021).

Protestantism was not the only faith group to see a decline over the past several decades. Roman Catholicism still commands a dominating position in the American religious landscape, but Americans identifying as Catholic declined from 27.3 percent in 1973 to 23.1 percent in 2018. Although statistically insignificant, the Jewish share of the population went from three to 1.7 percent in the same period (Burge, 2021, pp. 22-24). The one sector of the American religious landscape to see exponential growth in the same timeframe is the religiously unaffiliated, who rose to 23.7 percent of the population—up from 5.1 percent in 1972 (Burge, 2021, p. 27).

In 2014, Pew Research examined the trends in the religiously unaffiliated, often referred to as "the nones." Perhaps predictably, the percentage of religiously unaffiliated adults increase is most significant among younger adults. In 2014, only 9 percent of those 65 and older identified with no religious affiliation, while 19 percent of those aged 50 to 60 said they had no religious affiliation. Pew also found that 37 percent of those 30 to 49 years of age claimed no religious affiliation. For those aged 18 to 29, over a third—35 percent—reported having no religious affiliation (Pew Research, 2014).

According to Gallup, from 1937 to 1976, congregation membership held steady, with about 70 percent belonging to a Christian church or Jewish synagogue. By 2020, Gallup reported that, for the first time, less than half of Americans—47 percent—were members of a church or synagogue (Jones, 2021). Gallup's data reflected a decline across all racial, geographic, political, and religious groups in the United States, with the steepest rise amongst the youngest (Jones, 2021).

COVID-19: An As-Yet Unquantified Impact

By 2020, the downward trajectory in church participation was already alarming. However, in 2020, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant disruption in the routines of nearly the entirety of human civilization. In the early stages of the pandemic, especially in the spring of 2020, most churches in America ceased in-person worship services for several months—either voluntarily or compulsorily. Worship moved to online services, typically available on YouTube, Facebook Live, Vimeo, and other platforms. By mid-2021, with the wide availability of vaccinations, most churches edged back to a sense of normalcy, with the vast majority (76 percent) of American church-goers confident about safely returning to in-person gatherings (Pew, 2021). However, after a lengthy period of "social distancing," many wondered whether churches would ever return to their pre-pandemic attendance levels. Although, according to Earls (2021c), most church-goers surveyed said they intended to return to in-person attendance, the early indications are not entirely promising (Sharp, 2021).

Little quantitative data yet exists regarding the fallout to churches from the pandemic. Anecdotally, this researcher served as campus development pastor at a medium-large church (pre-pandemic attendance of approximately 550). As campus development pastor, he served, concurrent with duties at his sending church, as the pastor of a smaller, struggling church not far from his sending church. While the large sending church had not regained its average pre-pandemic attendance as of this writing, its financial situation was solid. However, had the smaller church not already agreed to become a satellite campus of the sending church, the giving (especially with an older congregation unused to and untrusting of online giving) diminished to a point where its finances would have forced permanent closure.

Again, data is just becoming available as the repercussions of the pandemic have not yet played out. However, Gallup (Jones, 2021) reported that less than half of Americans reported

being a church member for the first time in U.S. history. After one of its worse years in 2019, the Southern Baptist Convention reported devastating numbers for 2020. According to statistics that the denomination attributed largely to COVID-19, SBC churches lost approximately 436,000 members (a record), and baptisms in 2020 were half of the already dismal numbers seen in 2019 (Shellnutt, 2021). If SBC trends hold for most evangelical Protestant churches, it seems likely that COVID-19 will have been the death knell of many churches already struggling beforehand. It seems unlikely that future church planting will keep pace with church death. Therefore, if the downward trends in church attendance and church closure across evangelicalism are to be reversed, it will require more than church planting. Indeed, more churches will need revitalization, rescue, and renewal.

External Factors Contributing to Local Church Decline

This literature review has thus far briefly examined the idea that an increasingly post-Christian America is leading to a decline in church attendance and donations, resulting in the decline—even the death of some churches. A growing percentage of the American populace is unlikely to darken the doors of any church, let alone a struggling one with poor quality music, dirty children's areas, and an unwelcoming attitude—often the case in dying churches. There is little the revitalizing pastor can do about a nationwide cultural trend. However, every revitalization pastor, if he is to understand the context in which he ministers, must be aware of the myriad reasons for the decline of Christianity—or at least the organized Church—in America.

Rapid Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Shifts

Racially and ethnically, the American population is shifting rapidly. Burge examined the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Presbyterian Church of the USA, the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Church, the Disciples of Christ, and the

United Church of Christ. He found that the average mainline Protestant in 2018 was white, 60 years old, and aging rapidly (Burge, 2021, pp. 17-18). Demographers not only expect whites to be a racial minority by 2045 but also note that the white population is experiencing accelerated aging as the large baby-boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964, reaches retirement age (Frey, 2018, p. 132). Indeed, this trend will contribute to an accelerating decline in mainline denominations. Moreover, this demographic shift has implications for local churches of all Christian traditions: declining and dying local churches are typically unable or unwilling to make the demographic shift with the neighborhoods surrounding them (Rainer, 2014, pp. 19-21).

The collapse of cultural Christianity in America

Omerod (2018) traces a shift away from Christendom, which took place in Europe before finding its way into Canada and, shortly after that, the United States. Since the beginning of human society, people could not have conceived of a compartmentalized life that separated faith from cultural, social, and ethnic identities. However, according to Omerod (2018, p. 90), Western Christianity "moved to split one's religious commitment and one's cultural and social identity." Ormrod sees such compartmentalization in the lives of early Christians who had to live and work amongst their pagan neighbors as subjects of the pagan Roman Empire. As Christianity became the "official" religion of the Roman Empire—an empire that Christendom would outlive and, to an extent, succeed—people would have naturally seen their religion as inseparable from the rest of their lives.

According to Omerod (2018, p. 91), the teachings of Western Christianity likely planted the seeds that gave rise to a society that compartmentalizes its religious, cultural, and social identities. However, as the Apostles Peter (1 Peter 2:13-17) and Paul (Rom 13:1-7, Ti 3:1) and, indeed, Christ (Mk 12:17) himself taught, believers were subject to the rulers of the land, even if they did not share the same faith as the authorities. In the Christian faith, then, were the seeds

that would see the undoing of Christendom, including the eventual rise of ideas separating church and state. Moreover, Americans are not simply switching religions. Instead, they increasingly identify as either agnostic or affiliated with "no religion in particular" (Pew, 2022). Indeed, according to Pew Research (2022), in 1972, over 90 percent of Americans identified as Christian and around five percent as religiously unaffiliated. In the 1990s, religious disaffiliation began to increase rapidly, and, as of 2022, the religiously unaffiliated account for 29 percent of the American population, while 63 percent of the population identifies as Christian. Pew Research (2022) projects that by 2070 if current trends hold (including the trend that disaffiliating Christians do not switch to other religions), 54 percent of Americans will identify as religiously unaffiliated, while 35 percent will identify as Christian.

In whatever way it occurred, as many authors write, cultural Christianity has all but disappeared in America, and gone with it is the expectation that "respectable" people go to church on Sundays. With a plethora of other Sunday morning activities that can meet the needs of people for a relational community and no societal expectations to the contrary, church attendance will be low on the list for the disinterested. In one sense, the church regains gospel purity. After all, it is undoubtedly better to have a membership of only the truly regenerated. Genuinely saved, believing disciples of Jesus Christ will serve in the leadership of congregations. It seems likely that a lean, gospel-focused, energized, and doctrinally pure church, full of regenerate members and leaders, could become a powerful force for Christ, reminiscent of the early church in Acts. However, in the short term, the death of cultural Christianity does bring the potential for lowered attendance and tithing (Walker, 2021).

Postmodernism as the Predominant Worldview in America

The rise of postmodernism as the prevailing worldview amongst most Americans is associated with the collapse of cultural Christianity. Several characteristics attendant to

postmodernism mediate against the established church. While pre-modernism would have said objective truth exists in the church, modernism said objective truth exists in science (Groothuis, 2009, p. 38). Postmodernism says there is no objective truth or, if there is, it is unknowable. In postmodernist thinking, the failures of both the church and science demonstrate the validity of this idea of unknowable truth. In postmodernism, there is only subjective, experiential truth. One person's truth is not the truth for another, but rather multiple "truths" exist, separate and disconnected (Groothuis, 2009, pp. 18-24). The institutions and organizations attached to modernism and pre-modernism are suspect. Opinions count for more than knowledge (Erickson, 2002, p. 17-22).

Most likely, postmodernism does not play out in the conscious thinking of most Americans. Most people have probably never heard of postmodernist philosophers like Foucault or Derrida. Undoubtedly, few Americans could probably elucidate the thinking of Nietzsche or Altizer and their "death of God" writings. Most have likely never heard of Lyotard, or "metanarratives," or, for that matter, postmodernism itself. Nonetheless, much of the American culture—particularly "pop culture"—holds to a "folk" postmodernist philosophy promoted by television, the internet, and other media outlets (Smith, 2006).

This kind of thinking sees the greatest good in whatever advances the individual's aims or happiness. Conservative churches run afoul of such thinking, not only because they claim objective truth for the Bible, but especially in decrying as sin such behaviors as sexual immorality (including homosexuality), abortion, and transgenderism (Groothuis, 2009, p. 112-116). Says Davis (2017, p. 15), "Christian views on salvation, the exclusivity of Christ, sexual morality, the sanctity of human life, the nature and permanence of marriage, and the like, are less and less accepted."

Perceptions of unchurched people toward Christianity

American folk postmodernism helps shape many current perceptions toward Christianity and the church, of which every pastor must be aware. Revitalizing pastors, who rely heavily on personally engaging with and building relationships throughout the surrounding community, must be particularly cognizant of these prevailing views. Kinnaman and Lyons (2012) found that outsiders perceived Christians as hypocritical, judgmental, sheltered, anti-homosexual, and too political. If anything, the presidential political campaigns of 2016 and 2020 have served to intensify accusations of over-politicization made against evangelical churches (Silk, 2021).

Internal Factors Common to Severely Declined Churches

These internal factors describe the environment of church revitalization, particularly near the beginning of the undertaking. Pastors must develop other leaders in this atmosphere, and the church's attitude has almost certainly ensured that a minimum of potential leaders are in the church when the revitalization begins. Externally, culture and demographics may shift wildly in the local church's neighborhood. Internally, declining churches fail to respond to this change. They neglect the development and empowerment of church leaders generationally and ethnically representative of the surrounding community (Clifton, 2016, p. 68). People who do not feel that they have a say in the direction and future of a church will have little desire to be a part of that church. No matter how much lip service the congregation pays to their desire for younger people and people of every race to be part of the congregation, people who are not allowed to have a stake will not stay in the church long.

Beyond their failure to look like the neighborhood (Rainer, 2014, pp. 19-20) or empower next-generation leaders, several other common factors amongst churches had closed their doors. In most deceased churches, the decline was initially slow (Rainer, 2014, pp. 12-13). Dying churches idolize the past—they try with all their might (to no avail) to preserve the memory of

"glory days" gone by (Rainer, 2014, pp. 15-17). They become inwardly focused, with budgetary resources moving away from reaching the community and towards member preferences, needs, and comforts (Rainer, 2014, pp. 22-24). Dying churches make little or no effort at evangelistic outreach (Rainer, 2014, pp. 26-28). Moreover, dying churches are driven by stylistic preferences. Such preferences include décor, Bible translations, and order of service. However, music is chief among stylistic preferences (Rainer, 2014, pp. 30-32).

Dying churches obsess over their facilities. This obsession did not necessarily mean the churches executed proper preventative maintenance. Indeed, the facilities of dying churches are often in disrepair, with significant deferred maintenance. Rather than caring for the church's facility maintenance needs, dying church members are often obsessed over relatively narrow facility concerns, including stained glass windows, the paint or carpet color of memorial plaques, seating choices (usually a preference for pews over chairs), and plastic flowers. In the dying church, proposals for even minor room remodeling are often a source of significant opposition (Rainer, 2014, pp. 46-48).

Unsurprisingly, dying churches also lack a clear purpose or vision (Rainer, 2014, pp. 42-44). Further, dying churches rarely engage in corporate prayer (Rainer, 2014, pp. 38-40). Worse, Rainer (2014, pp. 34-36) found that churches that died had become "pastor eaters" in their final years, with pastoral tenures becoming progressively shorter. In short, Rainer finds that churches that died were change-resistant to the extreme.

Clifton (2016, pp. 22-28) makes observations similar to Rainer's but adds several other characteristics of a dying church. First, he notes, declining churches value process more than outcomes. In other words, Clifton (p. 22) says, "Dying churches love to discuss, debate, define, and describe. They live for business meetings—even if few people attend them." Like Rainer, Clifton (pp. 29-30) found dying churches have an obsession over facilities—an obsession that

often translated into the church's mistaken idea that, by caring for the building (or at least obsessing over it), it was caring for the community. Perhaps counterintuitively, Clifton (pp. 28-29) found that dying churches are often a flurry of (inwardly focused) activity. However, he sees such activity as "anesthetizing the pain of death" (Clifton, 2016, p. 28). Further, Clifton (pp. 26-27) says that not only have they become irrelevant in the fabric of their communities, but dying churches tend to blame and resent the community for no longer responding to the church as it once did.

For his part, Henard (2021) sees most of the same factors as Rainer (2014) and Clifton (2016). To these, he adds that dying churches do not recognize the need for revitalization (Henard, 2021, pp. 57-65) nor desire to endure the pain of change required by growth and revitalization. Indeed, many members may even desire that the church not grow at all (pp. 67-82). Added to all of the above factors, Henard observes that dying churches often lack adequate structures, processes of ministry, and governance mechanisms needed for effective ministry (pp. 188-206). Additionally, dying churches tend to show deficiencies in several other areas. These shortcomings include a lack of clarity on who is in charge (or supposed to be in charge), unbiblical leadership or polity models, minimal biblical knowledge, a dearth of sacrificial love between members of the body, a lack of gospel clarity, and an absence of meaningful church membership (Croft, 2016).

Successful Church Revitalization Strategies

This literature review has discussed the church revitalization environment. It now shifts to examining strategies that have proven effective in revitalizing churches. This analysis will inform the reader of the skills and capacities a church-revitalizing pastor must develop in emerging, next-generation church leadership. At this juncture, the reader should understand a few relevant terms that fall under the rubric of church revitalization. The terms "church

revitalization" and "church replanting" are often used interchangeably. While they are similar (actually, church replanting is a more extreme form of revitalization), the two terms represent essential distinctions.

Church Revitalization

As Davis (2017, p. 16-17) notes, some criteria must qualify a church as needing revitalization. He points to Stetzer and Dodson (2007). Their study of "comeback churches" whose worship attendance had been flat or in decline for five years but followed that plateau or decline with an increase in worship attendance of at least ten percent per year over two to five years. The comeback churches had also seen a membership-to-baptism ratio of 35:1, or one baptism for every 35 members for the same two to five years (Stetzer & Dodson, 2007, p. 26). However, as Davis (2017, p. 16) argues, numerical growth alone cannot account for spiritual health. He points to the false doctrine, prosperity gospel, and toxic church politics, attitudes, and practices among some of the most well-attended churches to show that church health is not entirely in numbers.

Davis (2017, p. 16) defines church revitalization as "the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God." While healthy churches demonstrate a high level of spiritual maturity, toxic forces run rampant in an unhealthy church. Unchecked, these toxic forces will eventually kill the church (p. 16).

Church Replanting

Church replanting is not synonymous with church revitalization. As Hallock (2017) says, "Church replanting is a very unique ministry. In church replanting, the focus is on congregations that are not simply declining but dying" (p. 35). Unlike a simple revitalization, a church needing replanting does not have the time, finances, or people left to take a more subtle but sustained set

of course changes needed over several years to return to health. A replanted church recognizes the severity of its situation and is willing to ask for help, even if it does not realize just how much help it needs. Like Hallock, DeVine and Patrick (2014) see replanting as a situation where a healthy church brings resources such as finances and a volunteer base to restart the church from a healthy new beginning. The church often restarts under a new name, the existing church dissolves as an entity, and new leadership steps in. Such has been this researcher's personal experience in replanting. Clifton (2016) sees the replanting endeavor as a restart and acknowledges the validity of the approach mentioned above. However, he also considers it possible, if extremely difficult, to "replant from within" with the church rebooting with its existing facility, resources, leadership, and (often) with the same name (Clifton, 2016, pp. 46-51). Unless otherwise specified, this dissertation will include replanting under the aegis of revitalization because replanting is a more intense version of revitalization.

The Tasks of Restoring a Church to Health

The literature suggests several important overarching tasks face the church revitalization pastor and church leaders. The task of restoring a church to health is monumental. Facilities are often in poor repair, children's ministry in tatters, and outreach non-existent. The church likely has either no reputation or a poor reputation in the community (Clifton, 2016). Conflict or apathy may be the prevailing attitudes in the church (Davis, 2017). The church is in survival mode, clinging to a past that will never return (Rainer, 2014). Returning the church to a healthy state will require hard work from the revitalization pastor and a move of the Holy Spirit of God. What follows is a brief description of the primary tasks of church revitalization.

Determining challenges ahead and setting clear expectations. Henard (2021, pp. 32-36) believes that, before accepting a call to serve as pastor of a church needing revitalization, a prospective pastor must understand the church leaders' expectations (especially those of the

pastor search committee). Before stepping into the pastorate, he should determine who, in reality, leads the church and understand where "sacred cows" exist that will stand in the way of revitalization. Henard (2021, p. 35) encourages potential revitalizing pastors, having first shared their spiritual journey, to ask members of the search committee about personal periods of spiritual growth—especially their present walk and journey towards spiritual growth. Moreover, Henard (p. 36) encourages the prospective pastor to ask the current leadership or pastoral search team about their dreams or visions for the church, including what they would like to see in evangelism, missions, discipleship, and worship. These questions often reveal a church that is unaware of its need for revitalization. This need will often be evident to the prospective revitalizing pastor whose job it is to help the congregation see its circumstances as the dire situation it is.

Casting a compelling vision for the future of the church. Henard (2021, p. 175) observes that declining churches—especially those that experience extensive conflict—have lost their vision. They have no picture in their minds of what the church should be biblically or of what the church could look like in the future. According to Henard (p. 177), this must change if the church is to pull out of its death spiral. Not only must the pastor see the vision for himself, but he must also communicate that vision to the congregation. For Patterson (pp. 29-30), a genuinely compelling vision exists in the space where the church's gifting, local context, and clarity of calling to repentance and renewal intersect. As Patterson (2020, p. 28) says, "The revitalization pastor needs a clear vision of God of how to lead the current generation of a local church in evangelistically making disciples in their unique community context."

As Stetzer and Dodson (2007, pp. 29-31) advise, a revitalizing pastor cannot simply cast a compelling vision without first gaining church member buy-in. Standing against congregational involvement is a consumer mindset amongst the membership. The consumerist church member

believes (whether or not he or she admits it) that the church exists to meet his or her needs and the needs of his or her family (Stetzer & Dodson, 2007, p. 29). Church members hold this mindset despite Christ's Great Commission to make disciples. Against that backdrop, the revitalizing pastor must gain buy-in for a compelling vision of a renewed future. Henard (2021, pp. 175-176) emphasizes the importance of communicating the church's Great Commission purposes in casting vision for the church; the church must understand why it exists in the first place—not simply to be a comfortable community of likeminded people, unchallenged by others' beliefs, but to reach their neighborhood and beyond with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Returning an external focus to the church. The revitalizing (or replanting) exegetes the community and the church. As Stetzer and Dodson (2007, p. 41) say, church revitalization pastors must model a passion for evangelism. They must understand both the dysfunction of the church and the nuances of the neighborhood surrounding the church (DeVine & Patrick, 2014; Clifton, 2016). Through personal example, the revitalization pastor must seek to restore the church to an evangelistic focus—with a first step of first leading the church to pray for the surrounding community. Further, the revitalizing pastor must teach the church to expect guests to show up and respond to visitors with a truly welcoming attitude (Rainer, 2019). At the same time, Clifton (2016, pp. 56-61) cautions the revitalizing pastor to continue loving the remaining congregation members.

Focus on making disciple-making disciples. As Clifton (2016, pp. 72-76) argues, the revitalizing pastor will first need to strategically focus on those he can personally mentor and teach to become disciple-makers themselves. By reproducing himself, the revitalizing pastor will multiply his disciple-making impact. Clifton (2016, pp. 68-69) encourages pastors to reach young men in the community and make disciples of them as potential future leaders. However, as a note of caution, Croft (2016) advises the revitalizing pastor to be very strategic and

intentional about those he chooses to disciple personally. Stetzer and Dodson (2007, p. 183) also emphasize the need to develop disciples before implementing significant changes in the church. For Stetzer and Dodson, discipleship brings spiritual maturity, and with spiritual maturity comes an understanding on the part of the church—and especially the church's leader—of the reasons change is necessary. Spiritually immature church members will tend to view themselves as paying for a service the church provides. Disciples will understand their responsibilities to make new disciples.

Intentionality in personal and corporate prayer. Almost all church revitalization and replanting voices pointed to the importance of a vibrant personal prayer life (Clifton, 2016; Croft, 2016; Herrington, Bonem & Furr, 2020; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007). For Stuart (2016, p. 214), church revitalization is spiritual warfare, and it is the pastor's job to prepare the church for battle through corporate prayer. For Reeder and Swavely (2008), prayer is the top priority in church revitalization. Reeder and Swavely point to the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts, the early church devotes much of its time to prayer—often to the exclusion of anything else. Prayer is the first and ongoing action accompanying any great move of God.

McDonald (2020, pp. 21-22) insists that the church revitalization pastor must develop a prayer strategy that is both pastor-led and mobilizes church members to join in prayer. McDonald (p. 24) recommends not only saturating every worship service and Bible study with prayer, but he encourages the revitalization pastor to meet with church men for prayer at "non-traditional" times.

The Characteristics of a Revitalizing Pastor

To succeed, indeed, to survive, a pastor will need to possess certain qualities and develop leaders who have the same characteristics in a church-revitalizing role. With the SBC's North American Mission Board (NAMB), Croft (2016) sees the following as essential characteristics of

a revitalizing pastor: 1) A visionary shepherd, 2) High tolerance for pain, 3) Respect and passion for the church's legacy, 4) Passion for multi-generational ministry, 5) A resourceful generalist, 6) Tactical awareness, and 7) Spousal perseverance. The remainder of the church revitalization voices generally agree that these are the essential qualities in a revitalization or replanting pastor (Bickford & Hallock, 2017; Cheyney, 2016; Clifton, 2016; Stuart, 2016).

The Church Revitalization Pastor as Leader Developer

The literature reveals little about leadership development or discipleship practices specific to the context of church revitalization. However, Malphurs and Mancini (2004) emphasize the importance of pastors developing leaders within their churches. They define leadership development as "the intentional process of helping established and emerging leaders at every level of ministry to assess and develop their Christian character and to acquire, reinforce, and refine their ministry knowledge and skills" (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004, p. 4). Jesus modeled leadership development by pouring into the Twelve, showing the inseparability of leadership development and discipleship (Boyer, 2019, pp. 4-5). Boyer (2019, pp. 6-8) argues that leadership development is weak in many American churches because discipleship is superficial.

Malphurs and Mancini (2004, pp. 45-48) propose that Jesus used a three-phase leadership development process: 1) Seekers-to-Believers, 2) Believers-to-Followers, and 3) Followers-to-Leaders. Seeking a process for church leaders to emulate, Malphurs and Mancini (2004, pp. 50-53) more helpfully see Jesus' program of leadership development for the Twelve as taking place in four steps: 1) Recruitment, 2) Selection, 3) Training, and 4) Deployment. This study understands these phases and steps as applicable in developing leaders.

The Need to Develop and Empower Next-Generation Leaders

Further, many prominent voices in the church revitalization community of interest have spoken about the necessity of developing next-generation leaders for church revitalization. Davis (2017) admits that, in his experience, church revitalization would have been impossible without God sending men whom he could develop and empower within the church. For his part, Clifton (2016) sees a failure to pass leadership on to the next generation as one of the top reasons churches ultimately die. Uninvested with responsibilities or a voice in the direction of the church, younger generations leave the congregation for places where they can exercise their God-given gifts. Younger people who visit the church leave quickly because they soon find they will have no meaningful opportunity to lead. With no new, younger, and committed members, the congregation ages out as members either become shut-ins or pass away.

If the church is to arrest and (ultimately) reverse the decline, the revitalization pastor must reach, disciple, and develop young men as future church leaders. For his part, Mohler (2015) sees a unified plurality of leaders as an indicator of effective church revitalization. Likewise, Stetzer and Dodson (2017) see it as imperative that the revitalization pastor reproduce himself by developing new leaders who will serve with the pastor as needed change agents in the church. Indeed, their research found that, in an overwhelming majority of cases, successful church turnaround occurred with a change of leadership in ministry areas, including pastoral leadership (60 percent), youth ministry (37 percent), worship/music (25.4 percent), children's ministry (13.8 percent), and administration (12 percent) (Stetzer & Dodson, 2017).

In 1 Timothy 3:1 (ESV), Paul writes, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." Reflecting on this passage of Scripture, Davis (2017, p. 184) says, "If it is true that it is a godly ambition for a man to be an elder, then by extension it must be a healthy thing for a church to develop a pipeline of godly men in training to be leaders at some point."

However, Davis continues, “a church in the early stages of revitalization will not have anything like this up and running.”

Recruiting, Equipping, and Empowering Leaders

Howerton (2020) places the responsibility for leadership development—including finding, recruiting, and equipping prospective leaders—squarely on the revitalization pastor. To be sure, in revitalization, there are likely to be few other leader developers in the congregation at the beginning of the revitalization. Howerton (pp. 61-62) encourages the revitalization to recruit leaders who meet the qualifications to serve as elders and deacons outlined in 1 Timothy 3. Potential leaders do not meet these qualifications the instant they become followers of Christ. Instead, as Howerton explains, it is the revitalization pastor’s charge to disciple these leaders to spiritual maturity while casting a vision for the church’s future. Howerton (p. 63) sees humility, influence, wisdom, teachability, and a gift for communication as key character traits of future leaders. Howerton (pp. 65-66) advocates highly personal mentorship, with the revitalization pastor leading by example.

More specifically, Howerton (p. 64) advises revitalization pastors to look for and develop in potential leaders a strong sense of character, good chemistry with the leadership team, superior competence, and high capacity. Finally, Howerton (p. 66) tells revitalization pastors to empower leaders. First, he says, empowerment should come ceremonially, with the congregation participating in the installation of new leaders. Second, and equally importantly, Howerton (p. 67) exhorts revitalization pastors to consistently, privately, and ongoingly encourage and affirm the leaders they have empowered.

Rationale for the Study and Gap in the Literature

The purpose of this literature review thus far was to provide the reader with the researcher’s insights into the field of church revitalization, including the particular subset of

church revitalization known as church replanting. This researcher provides and further develops his rationale for the study and the gap in the literature below.

Rationale for the Study

The literature base speaks extensively to church revitalization and replanting based on spiritual, biblical-theological, and practical perspectives. In particular, Southern Baptists, such as Croft (2016), Clifton (2016), Cheyney (2016), Davis (2018), Bickford and Hallock (2017), Rainer (2014), Stetzer (2007) have produced myriad "how-to" books that provide advice from perspectives that are both biblically and theoretically sound. Further, their observations and advice fit well with this researcher's anecdotal experience.

Little empirical evidence exists regarding the success of various revitalization strategies and practices. While case studies in revitalization and replanting are plentiful, most occur in popular literature and lack scientific rigor. In particular, a lack of evidence-based research speaks to the importance of recruiting, developing, and empowering next-generation leaders in revitalizing small, evangelical churches. Understanding the leadership development best practices of church revitalization pastors could provide valuable lessons for pastors and other church leaders engaged in revitalization, as well as for denominational leaders, church networks, seminaries, and other organizations tasked with providing ministry training for church revitalization.

Gap in the Literature

Little empirical (qualitative or quantitative) evidence explicitly demonstrates the church revitalization strategies' efficacy. In particular, several voices in the church revitalization community have addressed the necessity of developing younger leaders in a church revitalization context. However, the extant literature contains a paucity of evidence regarding the importance of next-generation leaders in church revitalization or the best practices of revitalization pastors in

developing next-generation leaders. Therefore, this study provides empirical evidence regarding the criticality of next-generation leaders to church revitalization and the leadership development best practices of church revitalization pastors. When added to the body of church revitalization literature, this study has the potential to contribute significantly to church revitalization leaders' knowledge base, improving the likelihood of successful church revitalization outcomes.

Profile of the Current Study

Chapters One and Two of this dissertation describe the concerns of this researcher's study and provide a review of the literature relevant to leadership development in the revitalization of declining and dying local churches. Chapter Three explains the research methodology utilized in the current study. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data collected by interviewing eleven successful church revitalization pastors. Finally, Chapter Five presents conclusions, including potential applications in contemporary small church revitalization and suggestions for future study.

In summary, this study examined the theological and theoretical principles at work in the leadership development behaviors of small church pastors who have led their churches to move from declining to spiritual vibrance and renewed growth. This study fills, at least in part, the research gap concerning developing next-generation leaders in a small, evangelical church revitalization context.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The decline and resultant net loss of neighborhood churches mean a diminished Gospel presence in communities where churches should be a positive witness to the life-transforming power of Jesus Christ. Churches with minimal Gospel influence in communities that desperately need Christ will soon permanently cease to exist as outposts for the kingdom of God. Before the coronavirus pandemic, Rainer (2020) estimated that twenty churches in the United States were closing their doors daily. While some disagreement exists as to the extent of the problem, local churches in America are in steep decline (Clifton, 2016; Earls, 2021; Jones, 2021; Pew, 2019; SBC, 2019; Smietana, 2021; Smith, 2021). Smaller churches with under 100 in attendance lead the way in closure (Earls, 2019).

Cheney (2020) defines church revitalization as "a movement within Protestant evangelicalism which emphasizes the missional work of turning a plateau or declining church around and moving it back towards growth" (p. 16). Influential voices in the church revitalization community have stated that if individual churches are to arrest their decline and return to health, the lead (or, more often, only) pastor of the church to disciple and develop new leaders.

Individual pastors, healthy local churches, denominations, and parachurch ministries increasingly invest in biblical church revitalization. Thus, it may help these individuals and entities more effectively revitalize churches by first equipping revitalizing pastors with the skills and behaviors needed to develop other leaders in a revitalizing context. However, little empirical data exists to determine the most effective church revitalization leadership development practices. This study examined pastors' specific leadership development behaviors in successful small church revitalization settings to identify specific lessons learned applicable to the broader church revitalization community of interest.

The following sections of this chapter first provide a synopsis of the research design, describing the research problem, purpose statement, and research questions guiding the study. This chapter then describes the qualitative, phenomenological methodology the researcher used in this study. Next, this chapter explains the study setting, purposive sampling criteria for participant selection, the role of the researcher, and the ethical considerations that informed the research. Following this is a discussion of data collection processes, including interview methodology and data analysis. Finally, this chapter describes the data collection process, including in-depth interviews and the questions that served as the instrument for the dialogical responses of participants.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

By every available accounting, the American church is undergoing a precipitous decline. Church revitalization sources consistently point to a failure to develop and pass on next-generation leadership as a significant factor in the death of neighborhood churches. (Rainer, 2014). Numerous researchers have demonstrated that leadership development is essential to church revitalization (Newton, 2013; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007). Other church revitalization experts have enumerated several “best practices,” such as the need for pastors to recruit and mentor young men and bring them into the leadership development pipeline (Clifton, 2016; Davis, 2017; Stetzer & Dodson, 2007).

Indeed, myriad sources point to the importance of—and methodology for—leadership development in a church setting (Boyer, 2015; Geiger & Peck, 2016; MacArthur, 2004; Malphurs & Mancini, 2004, to name a few). However, little concrete data demonstrate which specific mentoring practices, methodologies, and behaviors are most closely associated with successful leadership development in a positive church revitalization outcome.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the leadership development behaviors of senior or solo pastors who had successfully led the revitalization of a small evangelical church. This study defined revitalization as an increase in worship attendance sustained for at least three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic officially began on March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the disease a worldwide pandemic. Therefore, for convenience, this study bounds the three years to those three full calendar years untouched by COVID's effects. Specifically, the timeframe studied included from January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2019. This study defined a small church as one averaging 65 or less in attendance at the beginning of the pastor participant's tenure (Barna Group, n.d.; Rainer, 2022). Leadership development behaviors were generally defined as those intentional discipleship and mentoring practices that the senior or solo pastor undertakes to develop next-generation (under 40 years old) male leaders from within the congregation.

The theories guiding this study were transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), authentic leadership (George, 2003), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), as these leadership theories encourage the empowerment and development of leaders and comport well with a biblical view of leadership—particularly the leadership style of Christ. Further, a view of leadership development as discipleship espoused by Geiger and Peck (2016) informed the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalizations describe their leadership development mentoring behaviors, and are these behaviors separate from a discipleship continuum?

RQ2. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization perceive their own practice of intentionality in leadership development mentoring, and how significant is intentionality?

RQ3. To what extent do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive they have empowered next-generation leaders, and what importance has this empowerment been in the revitalization?

RQ4. What role do the pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive their tenure contributed to their success in developing next-generation leaders?

RQ5. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive that their leadership development practices towards next-generation leaders have contributed to their church's revitalization success?

Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative methods utilizing the phenomenological framework are well-suited to leadership studies (Klenke, 2016). Accordingly, this student's research utilized a phenomenological inquiry frame, which examined the leadership development behaviors of revitalization pastors in small, evangelical churches. There is no formulaic approach to developing leaders or revitalizing churches. This lack of a specific method is unsurprising given the unique contextual setting of each church revitalization situation. The wide variety of pastoral and mentee personalities, values, and experiences, coupled with unique church contexts, including demographics and rural, suburban, or urban settings, frustrate attempts to meaningfully quantify "success" in developing leaders for revitalization. Demographic information gathered considered the community context regarding the growth or decline of the surrounding community. Churches growing at a rate equal to or greater than the surrounding community or, even better, growing while the surrounding community declines will presumably provide better data than churches that meet the five percent annual growth rate.

The dizzying array of church situations mediates in favor of qualitative methods. Falling within the qualitative rubric, a phenomenological study "attempts to understand people's

perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 233). This researcher desired to understand better the circumstances of those pastors who have developed next-generation leaders in a church revitalization setting. A phenomenological study is best suited to gaining the perspectives of those who have lived this experience.

As in other phenomenological studies (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 233), interviews served as the primary means of data collection for this study. Phenomenological interviews have previously described pastors' as-lived experiences in various church leadership-related phenomena. For example, in a phenomenological study of ten long-tenured pastors, Strunk (2015) used interviews to determine participants' perspectives on the role tenure played in the efficacy of their ministries. Similarly, Bond (2014) uses interviews within the phenomenological frame of inquiry to describe the expectations of Protestant church planters compared to their lived experiences in ministry.

The researcher conducted video interviews using the Microsoft Teams web conferencing application. Per Creswell and Creswell (2018, pp. 186-187), these interviews used semi-structured and open-ended questions to elicit the participants' views about leadership development practices in successful church revitalization. The researcher generally conducted in-depth interviews (or "IDIs"). As Roller and Lavrakas (2015, p. 51) state, an IDI approach seeks "to gain a rich, nuanced understanding of the 'thinking' (i.e., motivation) that drives behavior and attitude formation or otherwise leads to other consequences of research interest."

Setting

This study occurred in the context of a successfully revitalized small, evangelical church. There is much room for subjectivity in this definition and no broad consensus on what defines a small church or revitalization itself. Barna Group (2003), a well-respected church research organization, defines a small church as having an average attendance of 100 or fewer. In reply to

this researcher, Rainer (2022) recommends defining a small church as having an average attendance of 65 or fewer at the beginning of revitalization. Rainer recommends this attendance because it aligns well with research by Faith Communities Today (FACT, 2020), which found that the median size of a U.S. congregation of all faith traditions is 65. Therefore, considering both Barna Group (2003) and the more recent FACT (2020) data, this study defines a small church as a congregation with an average worship attendance of 65 or under as of January 1, 2017. Since FACT provides an overarching view of the health of over 15,000 congregations in its 2020 study, it should be a helpful resource for comparing study churches with a larger body of median-sized churches (Rainer, 2022).

Earlier studies of "breakout" (Rainer, 2005) or "turnaround" (Stetzer & Dodson, 2007) churches defined a successful revitalization as a sustained (2-5 years) trend of yearly increases in worship attendance of over 10 percent and a member-to-baptism (conversion) ratio of 35:1—all under the same pastor. Given the extent of church decline in the past decade, such a definition is probably too ambitious. Even Rainer (2022) recommends that the "definition of a revitalized small church would be a church under 65 in attendance with attendance growth for three years." To analyze the fewest variables and account for the accelerating decline of small churches, this study defined a revitalized small church as having fewer than 65 attendees on average weekend services (at the beginning of the three years under study) but experiencing attendance growth for three years.

This study specifically defined attendance growth as a minimum of five percent per year, with the three years of concern including January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2019 (the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, and as of this writing, the disruptive effects of the pandemic are still playing out in churches and society at large). The researcher gave selection preference to participants whose churches have seen higher growth percentages than the

minimum required for inclusion in the study, as the researcher assumed that these cases would provide a better view of "best practices" in church revitalization.

This study defined a next-generation leader as a male congregation member under 40 who is qualified and competent to serve in leadership (pastor, deacon, elder, or other visible leadership position with churchwide influence, such as a worship leader). Additionally, the participants self-identified as having discipled and mentored at least one next-generation leader. As the study sought to understand the practices of pastors who succeed in developing next-generation leaders, the age of 40 represents a widely accepted, if somewhat arguable, definition for the onset of middle age (Britannica, 2007; Feider, 2021).

The term "evangelical" is not well-defined, and to use the word is often to paint with rather broad brushstrokes. For this study, an evangelical church holds to basic theological tenets of evangelicalism, including 1) salvation by grace through faith in the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross, 2) inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the 66 books of the Bible, and the Bible only, 3) the divinity of Christ in a Trinitarian view, 4) the virgin birth of Christ, 5) the bodily resurrection of Christ, and 6) the eventual return to earth of Jesus Christ. The researcher chose the setting to reflect churches that are 1) broadly aligned with the tenets of evangelicalism and 2) representative of the problem of small, struggling churches across the United States.

The churches studied needed not to belong to an organized denomination or association, but participants must have self-identified as evangelical. Regardless of denominational affiliation, the participants' church needed to hold high views of Scripture and a polity strong on local church autonomy. The churches could have been either charismatic or non-charismatic in their pneumatology. Adherence to a Calvinistic or Arminian (or "Reformed" or "non-Reformed") soteriology was not a factor in participation. The researcher's interest was

examining the leadership development practices of male pastors who develop next-generation male leaders. Therefore, the researcher preferred the churches and participants to hold a complementarian theology of church leadership that interprets 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as requiring men to hold the offices of elder (pastor, bishop, overseer). However, if the pastor was male and had developed male leaders for his church, and if required to reach a meaningful sample size, participants from evangelical, egalitarian churches, which permit women to serve as elder (pastor, bishop, overseer) or deacon (Belleville, 2005), were included as expected themes should be similar. Indeed, one senior pastor of a charismatic-leaning church interviewed for the study held an egalitarian view of church leadership but had developed male leaders of churchwide influence.

Geographically, the churches studied could be located anywhere in the United States, in any setting (rural, suburban, or urban). Indeed, the researcher preferred that participants represent a broad range of U.S. geographic regions and urban, suburban, and rural contexts. While the researcher's ideal was a study where churches and participants reflected diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, race and ethnicity were not determining factors in selecting a revitalization pastor for in-depth interviews.

The study collected demographic information on the pastor-participant and the church involved. The study collected the pastor's age group (up to 29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, and 70 and up), ethnicity, and tenure. Church demographic information included context (rural, suburban, urban), average weekly worship attendance during the study period, ethnic majority, denominational affiliation (if any), and location, based on U.S. Census Bureau (2010) geographical regions (e.g., Northeast, Midwest, South). While the study collected the above demographic information, none of these factors determined whether the researcher selected a potential participant.

Participants

Phenomenological studies rely on interviews with carefully selected participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 233). As Orcher (2017, p. 113) recommends, this study used clear-cut selection criteria. For this study, the participants included male solo or senior pastors who had successfully led revitalization in a small, evangelical church. A solo pastor is the only minister in a church and provides pastoral leadership. A senior pastor has one or more associate or assistant ministers. Some churches may refer to the senior pastor as the "lead pastor." Solo or senior pastors may be employed full-time by the church or serve as bi-vocational ministers, working at a secular job and serving the church. Again, the idea of a "small" church is somewhat subjective. This study defined a small church as having an average attendance of 65 or fewer (Rainer, 2022) when the senior or solo pastor's tenure began. For this study, participants were present for the duration of the church turnaround (Rainer, 2005).

The researcher was interested in the success of male pastors in developing male leaders from the congregation who can serve in the offices of elder (bishop, pastor, overseer) and deacon. Thus, the researcher preferred participants who, along with their churches, hold to complementarian theology (Blomberg, 2005). However, if required to reach a meaningful sample size, the researcher could select ministers from egalitarian churches (churches that believe women can and should serve as pastors, elders, and deacons). The researcher assumed that if the participant holds an egalitarian view of church leadership, the results would be comparable to those of a complementarian participant if both the pastor-participant and the leader he mentors were male.

There is no single, accepted definition of what constitutes a revitalized church other than to say that a church once in a state of decline in attendance, finances, and overall vitality has reversed these trends. In their study of 300 "comeback" churches, Stetzer and Dodson (2007)

defined a comeback as a two-to-five-year attendance growth following at least five years of plateau or decline. Stetzer and Dodson defined growth as a member-to-baptism (conversion) ratio of 35:1 and a minimum 10 percent yearly increase in attendance. Rainer (2005) defined a "breakout" church as one that experienced a historical period of decline before arresting the deterioration and undergoing five years of growth in worship service attendance under the same pastor. Rarely had a pastor begun a revitalization after more than a decade of tenure. Clifton (2016) believes five years of tenure is typical for a revitalization pastor to gain traction. Given the changing realities since his 2005 study, Rainer (2022) recommended defining a revitalized church as one under 65 in attendance that has gained attendees for the preceding three years.

This study follows the recommendations of Rainer (2022) and defines a revitalized church as having started with an attendance of under 65 at the beginning of the pastor's tenure and experiencing attendance growth for the preceding three years. Notably, the study intends to describe pastors' practices in developing next-generation leaders to take the mantle of leadership from older generations. Therefore, participating pastors self-identified as having discipled and mentored at least one male member of the congregation under the age of 40 to the point where the mentee was qualified and competent to serve in leadership (pastor, deacon, elder, or other visible leadership position with churchwide influence, such as a worship leader). The rationale for the mentee's age was simply a widely accepted definition of middle age beginning at 40 (Britannica, 2007).

This study utilized purposive sampling, the most common sampling method used in qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 242). Purposive sampling involves "handpicked" participants chosen because the researcher anticipates they will yield good information on the topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Orcher, 2017). As Leedy & Ormrod (2019, p. 233) note, participants should have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (in this case,

leadership development in a church revitalization context) and can consist of 5 to 25 individuals. However, Guest et al. (2006) demonstrate that, with exhaustive probing, it is possible to produce a rich explanation of a phenomenon, reaching thematic saturation (the idea that no new significant themes emerge above a given sample size) with as few as ten participants. Thus, while this researcher hoped to recruit as many as 12 to 15 participants, he believed ten participants would be adequate to produce a rich explanation of pastoral leadership development in small, evangelical churches. Ultimately, this researcher was able to recruit eleven participants. However, the researcher found that these eleven produced a rich description of the phenomenon, with no new themes emerging after seven interviews.

The study provided results across age, ethnic, contextual, and geographical demographics to the extent the data supported it. However, the primary focus of the study was on successful revitalizations, and the researcher believes themes will be consistent across demographics and contexts; thus, demographics did not play a primary role in selecting participants.

The researcher worked with contacts within the broader church revitalization community of interest, including online forums and Facebook groups in which he participated to identify potential participants and invite them to participate in the study. Those invited to participate first completed an online screening questionnaire to determine whether they (and the church they revitalized) met the above criteria. Moreover, the questionnaire gathered demographic, context, and contact information. The researcher also used “snowball” sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), asking those contacted for referrals to other pastors who may have met the criteria for the study. Purposive sampling, including snowball sampling, does introduce the possibility of bias in that people tend to choose or refer potential participants who are most like themselves (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). However, the nature of church revitalization and its specific content is a highly specialized context, with relatively few pastors having succeeded in revitalization.

Therefore, the quality of participants identified as familiar with church revitalization would mitigate the potential effects of any sampling bias.

The study sought to find church revitalization pastors whose churches have experienced a minimum growth rate in average attendance of five percent per year. However, if faced with numerous respondents, the researcher would have preferred selecting participants whose churches experienced the highest growth rate among potential participants screened. Preferring such participants would most likely provide the highest quality data regarding leadership development in a church revitalization context. In the event, recruiting participants that met the basic requirements for the study proved exceedingly tricky, and some participants did lead their churches through significantly more significant attendance increases than the minimum required five percent annually.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher must not allow his biases about successful church revitalization methodology to come into play in the study. The researcher served for over four years as a church revitalization pastor who led a dying church to be "adopted" as a campus of a larger, nearby church where he served as a staff member. The student leveraged existing relationships in the larger church to obtain assistance with outreach efforts, children's and youth programming, facilities remodeling, music, and media, while developing next-generation leaders for the church. The student is deeply concerned about the state of decline in American churches and is passionate about seeing dying churches gain a state of renewed vitality. He hopes to serve again as a revitalizing pastor.

Further, the researcher identifies as evangelical. However, the term "evangelical" is rather broad and does not fully describe the student's church background—just as it would not fully describe any evangelical. The researcher would describe himself as "Baptist," though he

happily worships in non-denominational churches within the range of evangelical faith and practice. The researcher affirms the local church's autonomy and believes there are only two offices in the church, namely elder (also known as pastor, bishop, or overseer) and deacon. He further holds to a complementarian theology that sees men as the exclusive holders of these offices. He believes in two church ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper, and holds to a memorial view (rather than sacramental) of the ordinances. While not a strict cessationist, the researcher would not describe himself as charismatic in his pneumatology. He would describe himself as neither Calvinistic nor Arminian in his soteriology. Instead, he affirms the doctrines of election and predestination and the sovereignty of God in salvation while, at the same time, believing at the same time that God extends the offer of the Gospel to all of humanity, calling each person to repent and choose Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior freely. The researcher has already explained the theological bounds placed on participants in the study, allowing for a broader range of views within the broader evangelical community. However, he recognizes that his views represented a potential bias in the study.

Qualitative research has its strengths in the researcher as an instrument of the study, bringing the researcher closer to the participants rather than relying on remote and inferential methods (Klenke, 2016, p. 11). Close personal interaction with informants is not only encouraged but a necessary part of qualitative methods (Orcher, 2017, p. 55). The researcher is often, if not usually, the primary instrument in a qualitative study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 356). The researcher's role is to conduct the interviews personally. This researcher assumes that he will not personally know the participants. However, he will not eliminate a potential participant if he identifies one personally known to him.

Further, the dialogical nature of phenomenological interviews places the researcher close to participants, generating the potential for tainting the research (Klenke, 2016). Through semi-

structured interviews, the researcher will refrain from leading dialogical interviews in a direction that leads to the researcher's preconceived notions. While conducting data analysis, the research will remove personal bias by utilizing the "bracketing" methods described by Moustakis (1994).

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations informed this study. The researcher undertook research for this study only after receiving IRB approval (see Appendix A). This study interviewed only voluntary adult participants. All participants participated with informed consent and had the opportunity to terminate their participation at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality are fundamental tenets of ethical research. The researcher knew which participants provided certain information but did not divulge that information in the dissertation. Instead, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and their churches were referred to only by broad denominational affiliation. While pseudonyms identify individuals, these are not necessarily enough to protect from the possibility that readers may deduce the name of the pastor or church based on other information. From personal experience, this researcher has found that when people describe a particular church situation, it is not very difficult for others in the same region to correctly surmise precisely the church to which the speaker is referring.

Therefore, pseudonymous references to any particular individual or church will never provide enough information to identify the person or congregation. The study describes individual church locations in terms of their U.S. Census-designated region (e.g., Northeast, Southwest) and context (rural, urban, and suburban), never giving the participant's town, county, or state name. The study includes demographic information such as ethnicity, pastor's age group (within five years), and denominational affiliation. If the researcher had utilized the services of a transcriptionist, he would have required the transcriptionist to sign a non-disclosure agreement. However, the researcher quickly found that transcription features on the Microsoft Teams

software were accurate enough to forgo the services of a transcriptionist. Finally, the researcher kept all data collected secure and locked away, with all electronic data backed up in a secure, password-protected location.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience. According to Adams and Van Manen (2008, p. 615), phenomenology "is the study of the lifeworld as we immediately experience it, pre-reflectively, rather than as we conceptualize, theorize, categorize, or reflect on it." Phenomenological research has its basis in psychology and philosophy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). A phenomenological study aims to understand an as-lived experience from the participants' points of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 236). This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological frame, thus relying principally on participants' in-depth interviews. This study relied solely on in-depth interviews to gain a rich understanding of leadership development in a church revitalization context.

Phenomenological research is descriptive, interpretive-oriented, and reflexive of lifeworld experiences (Vagle, 2018). It seeks to understand people's perceptions of what it is like to experience a given phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 232). Thus, phenomenological research describes a particular phenomenon in terms of participants' lived experiences. According to Vagle (2018, p. 11), "Phenomenology is not concerned with generalizing, quantifying, and finding." Phenomenology does not seek precise, objective measures but aims to understand the deeper meanings of everyday phenomena. Phenomenological studies rely primarily on interviews for data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). A description of the specific interview methods and procedures this study will follow.

Collection Methods

In-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted by the interviewer served as the principal means of data collection for this study. Roller and Levrakis (2015, p. 54) find great merit in semi-structured interviews, which allow the interviewer flexibility to modify questions responsively, allowing participants' unique perspectives a voice while still covering all of the issues relevant to the study. The researcher used already-acquired information in semi-structured interviews to formulate more focused questions (Klenke, 2016; Roller & Levrakis, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are instrumental in the later stages of research (Olson, 2015, p. 36).

Instruments and Protocols

Based on the knowledge literature review findings in leadership development, discipleship, and church revitalization, the researcher developed a flexible, consistently used, IRB-approved interview guide (Appendix F). All interview questions were formulated prior to seeking IRB approval. No data collection took place until after the researcher had gained IRB approval. The researcher recruited potential participants from online church revitalization communities of interest (see Appendix C) and personal contacts. Potential participants received an email to determine their interest and eligibility (see Appendix B). The email also asked recipients to refer the researcher to others who might be potential study participants. The researcher contacted those referred in the same email fashion. Potential participants completed a questionnaire determining their eligibility for participation (Appendix E). Once determined eligible for the study, participants signed an informed consent affidavit and provided demographic information. Appendix D shows the informed consent affidavit that study participants agreed to by their electronic signature in the screening survey. After collecting this documentation, the researcher scheduled interviews with the participants.

Interviews

The researcher then conducted semi-structured interviews to gain sufficient data for a richly detailed description of the phenomenon. The researcher anticipated that the conduct of each interview might require up to two hours (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Jamshed, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 233). However, in actuality, only two interviews took that long. All interviews took place from July 26, 2022, to August 19, 2022. While the researcher planned for the possibility of short follow-up interviews for clarification or amplification, none were required.

Geographical distances rendered in-person interviews impractical. Nonetheless, the researcher desired to see non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, the researcher conducted video interviews using the Microsoft Teams web conferencing software, which allowed for recording and automated transcription of the interviews. In the event, the researcher took no written notes during the interviews. The researcher securely stored all electronic and written materials as described in the ethical considerations above.

Interview questions correlated directly with the research questions. The researcher developed several questions based on the knowledge base provided in the above literature review on church revitalization, leadership, discipleship, and leadership development (see Appendix F for questions in the interview guide). The researcher sought input from an expert panel from the church revitalization community of interest in refining the questions (see Appendix G for panel composition). Questions sought to have participants describe their experiences as church revitalization pastors, especially regarding recruiting, discipling, developing, and empowering next-generation leaders from within the congregation.

The researcher utilized a semistructured interview format. As Peoples (2021, p. 52) notes, semistructured interview formats allow researchers to develop research questions relevant to the phenomenon, ensuring coverage of all critical aspects of the study while allowing participants to discuss other information that could wind up being relevant to the study. After developing the questions, the researcher field tested the questions using peers and colleagues in a mock interview format.

Procedures

Before beginning the study, the researcher presented all proposed procedures, instruments, and ethical precautions to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The study began after the researcher received IRB approval (see Appendix A). The student began the study by recruiting from his contacts in the church revitalization community of interest. These include several Facebook Groups, the online community at ChurchAnswers.com (an online church leadership community with a heavy focus on revitalization), and several personal contacts. Recruiting solicitations included online posts to these communities and personal e-mails to contacts known to this researcher.

The solicitation asked whether readers had revitalized a small evangelical church and would be willing to participate in the study or whether they could refer potential participants who had led a similar church in revitalization. The solicitation referred potential participants to an online eligibility questionnaire (see Appendix B). The researcher used this tool, powered by SurveyMonkey.com, to determine potential participants' eligibility for this study and gathered contact information and key demographics. Key demographics include the pastor's race and ethnicity, age group, tenure, context (rural, suburban, or urban), and congregational median age. The participants represented small churches, where a few very young children can skew the congregation's average age such that a rather geriatric congregation can appear middle-aged or

younger. Thus, the median age presents a better picture of a representative age for a small congregation.

Having recruited eleven participants who met the study criteria, the researcher personally contacted each via phone or email (depending on the participants' contact preferences) to schedule interviews using the Microsoft Teams video-conferencing software. Before the interviews began, the student obtained informed consent from each participant (Appendix C). The researcher personally conducted each interview using a semi-structured format, following the questions provided in the interview guide (Appendix F). The researcher developed the questions in the interview guide based on the knowledge base demonstrated in the literature review (see Chapter Two), with input from an expert panel (see Appendix G). Semistructured interviews provide a disciplined format that ensures complete coverage of the researcher's needs for information while providing the opportunity for unexpected but potentially relevant information to emerge during the study (Klenke, 2016; Peoples, 2021). Semistructured interviews are well-suited for collecting phenomenological data (Olson, 2015).

As geographical distance made in-person interviews impractical, the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing software on webcam-equipped computers, tablets, or smartphones allowed the interviewer to see facial expressions and other non-verbal cues, such as during an in-person interview. The researcher recorded all interviews as digital files using the recording function of Microsoft Teams. The researcher transcribed all interviews with the assistance of the transcription function of Microsoft Teams. The researcher was prepared to lock away any physical data. However, the interviews produced no physical data. All digital data files were password protected and kept on a separate, external USB drive locked away in a lockbox. The researcher was prepared to hire a professional transcriptionist whom he would have required to sign a non-disclosure agreement protecting the content of the research. However, the

transcription services of Microsoft Teams were adequate for this research, with the researcher manually correcting transcripts as he reviewed the audio-visual recordings of the interviews. In the event, the researcher utilized no human transcriptionists other than himself in the research.

Transcripts and all data referred to the participant by pseudonyms that remained constant for each participant. The study avoided using church names at all, referencing only their denominational affiliation and the U.S. Census Bureau Region in which they were located. A password-protected Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which is not part of the final report, was utilized to assign pseudonyms to participants. When participants referred to other people by names, such as congregants or staff members, pseudonymity was also attached to these third parties. The only exception to this rule was when participants referred to the researcher by name. In this case, as there was no need, the researcher did not attach pseudonymity to the transcript.

The researcher formulated the questions in the interview guide (Appendix D) utilizing the body of knowledge contained in the literature review and an expert panel. The expert panel revealed that the researcher had generally formulated a comprehensive interview guide that was well-suited to gathering the needed information. One of the most significant contributions of the expert panel was the introduction of questions allowing participants to reflect on what they might have done differently with the benefit of hindsight. The researcher utilized peer review by field-testing the interview guide in mock interviews with sitting and former pastors. This peer review revealed that the expert panel helped the researcher develop an interview guide that allowed the semistructured interviews to flow well.

Data Analysis

As Leedy and Ormrod (2019, p. 344) warn, data analysis in any qualitative study is complex. The following describes the methodology for the researcher's data analysis in the study. The researcher digitally recorded all participants' interviews using Microsoft Teams and

then transcribed these interviews in their entirety, assisted by Teams' transcription feature. The researcher did not utilize the services of a professional transcriptionist but was prepared to do so and to have the transcriptionist sign a non-disclosure agreement. The researcher compared the transcripts to the digitally recorded interviews to verify their accuracy. The researcher removed the names of the participants and their churches, replacing them with pseudonyms. Finally, the participants had an opportunity to read the transcripts, checking them for accuracy and allowing them to provide feedback if they so desired.

Analysis Methods

The researcher began the analysis process using interview transcripts, the researcher's field notes taken during the interviews, and the demographic information collected. The researcher used the software program *Atlas.ti* to assist in qualitative data analysis. The researcher first analyzed each interview on its own. The researcher utilized the four-step data analysis procedure for phenomenological data proposed by Moustakas (1994). These steps included epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variance, and the synthesis of texture and structure. These steps allowed themes to emerge naturally from data collected during the study. A description of each step follows.

Epoche

Epoche, Greek for staying away or abstaining, involves the human instrument (in this case, the researcher) taking the precautions needed to avoid tainting the data with the researcher's personal bias and preconceptions (Moustakis, 1994). In epoch, the researcher "brackets" the natural assumptions typically made in everyday life that distort or filter information or meanings gathered from participants (Eberle, 2014; Moustakis, 1994). Due to his personal experiences with the phenomenon under investigation and his relational proximity to the participants, the researcher engaged in considerable reflection, facilitated by frequent

journaling before and after every data analysis session (Peoples, 2021). This deliberative process aided the researcher in continuously putting aside the assumptions and preconceptions he holds (born of his personal experience) concerning church revitalization, leadership, and leadership development.

Phenomenological Reduction

Phenomenological reduction involves the researcher's efforts to describe the experience as reflected by the data in its entirety. Phenomenological reduction utilizes a horizontalization technique. Horizontalization assigns an equal value to each statement about a given phenomenon. Typically, researchers attach a code to each statement to keep the data's essential character and prevent researcher bias from affecting the data (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher utilized Tesche's eight-step coding process described by Creswell and Creswell (2017, p. 194). These codes fell into three general categories (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). "Expected codes: will describe topics the researcher expected based on literature and an intuitive sense of the phenomenon. "Surprising codes" will describe unexpected topics. Surprising codes result from topics the researcher cannot anticipate before the study begins. The researcher assigned "codes of unusual or conceptual interest" to conceptual themes that arrived out of the study. The researcher utilized the *Atlas.ti* software program to assist in the coding process.

Table 1

Tesch's Eight-Step Coding Process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 196)

Step	Coding Process
1.	Read all the transcriptions carefully. Get a sense of the whole. Jot down ideas as they come to mind during reading.
2.	Pick one document (i.e., one interview)—the most interesting one, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it asking, "What is this about?" Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3.	After completing this task for several participants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major, unique, and leftover topics.
4.	Now take this list and go back to the data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories and codes emerge.
5.	Find the most descriptive wording for topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing the entire list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
6.	Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7.	Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8.	If necessary, recode existing data.

Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation seeks to find the phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994; Eberle, 2014). In other words, imaginative variation looks for the universal properties of a phenomenon and requires that the researcher use his imagination to get at the phenomenon for what it is. Imaginative variation requires that the researcher discover what is needed for a phenomenon to remain what it is while separating those things from the data that are not part of the phenomenon.

Eberle (2014, p.185) likens imaginative variation to describing a cube. An object is still a cube, regardless of the material that composes it or its color, provided it has six square sides. The researcher accomplished imaginative variation by separating non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (or invariant horizon statements) before examining the data as a whole. The researcher then utilized all repetitive statements to establish themes (Moustakas, 1994).

Synthesis of Texture and Structure

This step involves "the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Generating this statement involves producing a detailed, narrative description of the phenomenon from the researcher's vantage in place and time (Eberle, 2014, p. 185; Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The researcher accomplished the synthesis of texture and structure in two steps. First, the researcher completed a textual and structural synthesis for each participant. Second, the researcher produced a narrative description representing a composite of all participant data. Textual descriptions utilized direct, verbatim references from the participants to illustrate, compare, and contrast participants' varying and individual experiences of the phenomenon. As a result, the researcher produced a synthesis of the texture and structure of the data that is a composite of the participants, and that provided a holistic depiction of the essence and meaning of the lived experience of male pastors' next-generation leadership development practices in the context of small church revitalization.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness (or validity) requires qualitative researchers to show they have accurately, consistently, and comprehensively conducted data analysis. Trustworthy studies are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participant, and reader alike (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 199). According to Weaver-Hightower (2019, p. 185), trustworthiness "in its

simplest form, means that you measured what you say you measured." Trustworthy data analysis requires that the researcher disclose their data recording, systematizing, and analysis in enough detail for the reader to determine that the researcher used a credible process (Klenke, 2015).

Trustworthiness is an umbrella term for such concepts as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (and synonymous words used to describe the validity of the research (Sensing, 2011). Leedy and Ormrod (2019, p. 356) concede that complete objectivity is impossible in any phenomenological study. Therefore, qualitative researchers must take measures designed to enhance the trustworthiness of their study findings.

Credibility

Credibility speaks to the study's overall quality, as judged by other scholars. Credibility accounts for the appropriateness of research design and methodology. Credibility parallels the internal validity of quantitative studies (Klenke, 2016). Credible studies present believable findings and plausible interpretations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 413). To ensure credibility, the researcher utilized member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 199) to ensure that participants viewed specific descriptions or themes in the final report as accurate. The researcher also utilized data triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 199) to ensure that several sources of evidence, especially evidence from several participants, justified the themes that emerged from the study.

One way to achieve triangulation is for the researcher, if possible, to ask colleagues to assist by analyzing the same data, utilizing the same data analysis protocols as the researcher. If others arrive at the same or similar themes as the researcher, then the data can be said to have been triangulated (Peoples, 2021, p. 69). As Peoples (2021, p. 69) admits, this type of triangulation was too tricky for a doctoral student to achieve in a dissertation. Therefore, the student also structured the questions so that, in some cases, the same questions were being asked

differently. The researcher will utilize bracketing of his personal biases (Moustakas, 1994) and employ peer debriefings to provide an objective assessment of the research and its conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 200).

Dependability

Dependability is the extent to which other independent investigators can obtain the same results as the researcher using the same methodology (Klenke, 2016). The researcher checked transcripts for glaring errors and allowed the participants to do the same. The researcher continuously compared data with codes and clearly defined codes to ensure their meanings did not shift (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researcher used *Atlas.ti*, a qualitative analysis software package, to assist in code administration and data analysis. The researcher consistently followed data collection procedures, participant selection criteria, and the logic conceptualizing the study (Klenke, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which other researchers can corroborate the study's findings (Klenke, 2016). The researcher ensured confirmability by utilizing a detailed, auditable trail from data collection through analysis, recording other researchers' decision-making processes for reproduction. Throughout the study, the researcher included reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices to provide a rich audit trail, allowing others to understand the researcher's decision-making logic (Peoples, 2021).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the study's results may apply to other settings (Klenke, 2015). The student attempted transferability through thick, richly detailed descriptions of the phenomenon. Readers can determine whether the study data connects with their contexts based on the detailed descriptions. For example, the revitalization pastor of a declining church

with a larger average attendance than the small church criteria of this study might read this study and find that it applies to his context. Likewise, though the study examined only evangelical churches, the pastor of a small, mainline Protestant church may find the study results transferable to his or her context. While leadership development is essential in any organizational context, it seems likely that the information gleaned from this study is of such a specialized nature that it is probably not directly transferrable to organizations—even non-profit organizations—outside of Christian churches.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a methodological framework for studying the leadership development behaviors of male church revitalization pastors in small evangelical churches. The researcher defined the study's terms, including the definition of a small church, an evangelical church, a revitalized church, and the criteria for next-generation leaders the pastor develops. The researcher provided a study problem, along with the research purpose statement. The researcher then outlined the means of conducting and recording phenomenological interviews and ethical considerations governing the research. The researcher made the case that qualitative, phenomenological studies serve well for studies of pastoral leadership.

Having explained the means of data collection for the study, the researcher outlined the four-step data analysis process to draw thematic conclusions from the study. Finally, the researcher outlined how he intended to ensure the trustworthiness of his research.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the leadership development behaviors of senior or solo pastors who have successfully led the revitalization of a small evangelical church. This study defined a small church as one averaging 65 or less in attendance at the beginning of the pastor participant's tenure. For this research, leadership development behaviors were generally defined as those intentional discipleship and mentoring practices the pastor undertakes to develop male leaders from within the congregation. Successful church revitalization includes many factors. However, for this study, a successful revitalization was defined as an average annual increase in attendance of at least five percent per year for three years. Further, all study participants had to have self-identified as having developed one male leader with church-wide influence under the age of 40 at the beginning of the study period. The study sought to examine a timeframe as recent as possible but recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic drastically impacted physical church attendance from March 2020 onward.

The study utilized qualitative, phenomenological interviews in which participants described their lived experiences in developing next-generation (under 40) male leaders while serving as the senior or solo pastor of a small church in revitalization. The researcher believed that interviews with pastors who had succeeded in developing next-generation leaders and seeing a church revived, at least in numerical attendance, would provide insights into this vital aspect of church revitalization.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalizations describe their leadership development mentoring behaviors, and are these behaviors separate from a discipleship continuum?

RQ2. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization perceive their own practice of intentionality in leadership development mentoring, and how significant is intentionality?

RQ3. To what extent do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive they have empowered next-generation leaders, and what importance has this empowerment been in the revitalization?

RQ4. What role do the pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive their tenure contributed to their success in developing next-generation leaders?

RQ5. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive that their leadership development practices towards next-generation leaders have contributed to their church's revitalization success?

This chapter will give details of the compilation protocol and measures, the demographic and sample data gathered, analysis, and findings. Further, this chapter will evaluate the research design.

Compilation Protocols and Measures

This section of Chapter Four will describe the compilation protocol and measures describing the research process followed in conducting the study. Below are described the interview, transcription, and qualitative coding protocols.

Interview Protocol

The in-depth interviews took place via the Microsoft Teams web conferencing software, following the interview guide shown in Appendix F. The Microsoft Teams web conferencing solution worked well for the interviews. The researcher personally conducted all the interviews and recorded them into digital (MP4) files for later review. The researcher stored all digital recordings on a password-protected USB drive. Before continuing with interview questions, the researcher reminded each participant of the basic provisions of informed consent. The researcher ensured that no other persons were present in the room where he conducted his interviews and asked that participants do the same.

The first seven questions of the interview guide served as opening questions to situate the participant in terms of church context, personal and educational background, ministry experience, and sense of calling to revitalization, separate from the primary issue of next-generation leadership development. As the interviews followed a semi-structured format, the researcher allowed participants to continue trains of thought, meaning that, at times, the interview skipped over questions as an answer naturally led into a train of thought addressed by later questions. The researcher then circled back to questions initially passed over to complete all questions on the interview guide. Interviews typically took one to two hours to complete, with most interviews lasting approximately an hour and a half.

Transcription Protocol

The interviewer utilized the transcription function of Microsoft Teams. Since the interviews took place over a webcam, using Microsoft Teams, the author could make a digital audio-visual recording of each interview and compare it to the transcript produced by Microsoft Teams. The researcher then allowed participants to independently review their transcript outside the researcher's physical or virtual presence. While the researcher was prepared to secure the services of a professional transcriptionist, whom he would have required to sign an NDA, the transcription services of Microsoft Teams were suitable when the researcher reviewed each interview and corrected the transcripts in the process. The transcripts then underwent the qualitative coding protocol.

Qualitative Coding Protocol

The researcher utilized a purposive sampling design. Utilizing personal contacts, the Church Answers Central online forum, and church revitalization Facebook groups, the researcher used e-mail and social media invitations to complete a screening survey through SurveyMonkey.com. Through information provided by the potential participants, the survey

identified whether a church revitalizing pastor completing the survey met the criteria for the study. As described in Chapter Three, the survey also provided informed consent information and obtained consent from potential participants. The screening survey identified and recruited eleven participants who met the criteria for the study. These were enough to achieve data saturation, where the researcher expected no new themes to emerge with an increasing number of participants.

The researcher interviewed each participant for an average of an hour and a half using Microsoft Teams, an audio-video conferencing software that features recording and transcription features. The researcher reviewed each interview for transcription accuracy and allowed each participant to review the transcript independently. Microsoft Teams appeared to have better than 95 percent accuracy in transcription, and the researcher corrected the transcripts as he listened to the interviews. The researcher securely stored research data and safeguarded pseudonymously protected anonymity and confidentiality as described in Chapter Three of this dissertation. As described in Chapter Three, the researcher used a qualitative analysis software called *Atlas.ti* to assist in identifying overarching themes and coding data.

Demographic and Sample Data

Table 2 (below) provides a quick summary of demographic information for the eleven participants who took part in this study. Following Table 2 is a more in-depth discussion of the participant demographics.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Data

Pastor	Pastor Age*	Pastor Tenure*	State / Context	Church Affiliation	Previous Career	Ministry Training	Bi/Co-Vocational?
Dale	45-49	1 year	Northeast Rural	SBC	Military	Seminary	Yes
Norman	40-44	<1 year	Midwest Rural	GARBC	Postal Service	Bible College	No
Phil	40-44	3 years	South Suburban	Baptist (unaffiliated)	Military	Seminary	No
Ben	50-54	< 1 year	South Suburban	Baptist (unaffiliated)	Military	Seminary	Yes
Steven	35-39	1 year	South Suburban	SBC	None	Seminary	No
Alan	45-49	2 years	Northeast Suburban	SBC	Military	Bible College	No
Trent	45-49	3 years	Northeast Urban	SBC	Military	Seminary	No
Doug	30-34	1 year	South Suburban	SBC	None	Seminary	No
Randy	50-54	<1 year	South Suburban	SBC	Military	Seminary	Yes
Kevin	45-49	5 years	South Urban	Pentecostal (unaffiliated)	Military	Vocational Training	Yes
Gene	35-39	3 years	South Rural	SBC	Educator	Seminary	Yes

*As of January 1, 2017

Eleven church revitalization pastors participated in interviews for this study. Eight of the eleven were still pastoring the church they led from January 1, 2017, to December 31, 2019—the period under study. All pastors identified as evangelical. However, ten of the eleven identified as being part of the Baptist tradition. One pastor was part of the GARBC, two were denominationally unaffiliated Baptists, and seven were Southern Baptists. Nine of eleven pastors had extensive experience in the secular workforce before entering the ministry. Seven were military veterans (one Army, one Air Force, two Marines, and three Navy). Five of the eleven

served the churches under revitalization while employed outside the church. Three pastors served in rural contexts, five in suburban and three in urban contexts. All eleven pastors had previously served on church staffs. Eight of the pastors had either had experience with church planting or initially felt that their calling was to church planting.

Two pastors' highest formal education was baccalaureate degrees from Bible colleges. One pastor held a secular baccalaureate degree with non-credit ministry training. Eight held master's level degrees from seminaries. Five of these eight possessed earned doctoral degrees (one Ph.D., two Ed.D., and two D.Min.), while two of the other three pastors with seminary degrees had completed substantial doctoral-level work. Seven pastors were in the South, three in the Northeast, and one in the Midwest. All eleven pastors were white and, at the beginning of their tenures as senior or solo pastors, led what they described as predominantly white, elderly congregations. Eight of 11 pastors were over 40 years old when they began as pastors at the churches undergoing revitalization. Two of these participants were over 50.

Participant 1. Pastor Dale leads a Southern Baptist church in the rural Northeast. He began leading the church about a year before the study period. During the study period, Pastor Dale saw Sunday worship attendance grow from an average of 6 to 35. He is a military veteran and possesses a seminary degree. For his whole tenure as pastor, he has held a secular job in addition to his employment as the church's pastor. Pastor Dale reported having a great interest in church planting before being called to revitalize a church. He remains pastor at the same church he led during the study period.

Participant 2. Pastor Norman leads a church belonging to the GARBC in a rural Midwest community. At the start of the study period, he had served the church as its solo pastor for under a year. During his tenure, Pastor Norman saw an average attendance increase from 20 to 60 in Sunday worship. Before entering the ministry, he possessed over ten years of experience

with the U.S. Postal Service. Pastor Norman reported feeling called to a church more than to revitalization. However, he recognized from the outset that the church required revitalization. He remains at the same church.

Participant 3. Pastor Phil led a suburban, independent Baptist church in the South and had served the church for three years at the start of the study period. Before entering the ministry, he served for over a decade in the military. During the study period, Pastor Phil saw attendance increase from an average of 65 to 175 in Sunday worship. Before beginning at the church he revitalized, he possessed a seminary degree. Phil earned a Doctor of Ministry during the study period. Pastor Phil reported that he once had a strong interest in church planting but now feels called to revitalization. After the study period, Pastor Phil moved to another state to lead his second church revitalization.

Participant 4. Pastor Ben led a Southern, suburban, independent Baptist church in revitalization. He had been the pastor for less than a year when the study period began. During his entire tenure as pastor, Pastor Ben served bi-vocationally. Before entering vocational ministry, he served for over a decade in the military. He possessed a seminary degree before beginning revitalization and completed some doctoral-level work during his tenure at the church. During the study period, Pastor Ben saw the church's average Sunday worship attendance increase from 25 to 60. He reported feeling called specifically to revitalization. After the study period and a six-month sabbatical, Pastor Ben accepted a calling to lead another struggling (Southern Baptist) church in revitalization.

Participant 5. Pastor Steven leads a suburban Southern Baptist Church in the South. He had been the pastor for less than a year when the study period began. Before beginning as pastor at the church he led through revitalization, Pastor Steven possessed seminary master's and doctoral degrees. At the start of the study period, Pastor Steven was in his mid-thirties—one of the youngest participants and one of only two participants with no career prior to entering the

ministry. He reported feeling called specifically to revitalization. Pastor Steven continues as senior pastor of the same church he led through revitalization.

Participant 6. Pastor Alan began leading a declining suburban church in suburban Northeast two years before the beginning of the study period. During the study period, Pastor Alan led the church to affiliate with the SBC. Having spent nearly a decade in the military, he earned a bachelor's degree from a Bible college before entering the ministry. During the study period, attendance at Pastor Alan's church increased from 25 to 45. He reported feeling called to specific assignments at specific times rather than a particular call to revitalization. Pastor Alan has long had a particular interest in church planting and recently left the church he led through revitalization to plant a church in another state.

Participant 7. Pastor Trent leads an urban Southern Baptist church in the Northeast. Before the study, he earned seminary master's and doctoral degrees. Pastor Trent had been the church's pastor for three years before the study period. He spent several years in the military before entering the ministry. During the study period, Pastor Trent saw his church's attendance increase from 55 to 97. He reported that he believed God called Him to church revitalization. Pastor Trent continues as pastor of the church he led through revitalization.

Participant 8. Pastor Doug leads a suburban Southern Baptist church in the South. Before the study period, he had earned a seminary-level master's degree. Further, Pastor Doug completed a doctoral degree during the study period. He has been in vocational ministry for his entire adult life and was one of three participants under 40 at the beginning of the study period. Pastor Doug had been pastor of the church for less than a year before the study period. During the study period, he saw the average Sunday worship service increase from 35 to 65. Much less than a specific call to revitalization, Pastor Doug reported feeling a call to a specific church that, like most churches, needed revitalization. Pastor Doug continues as senior pastor of the same church he led through revitalization.

Participant 9. Pastor Randy led a suburban Southern Baptist church in the South. Before the study period, he possessed seminary-level master's and doctoral degrees. Before entering the ministry, Pastor Randy spent four years in the military. During the study period, Pastor Randy saw an average Sunday attendance increase from 50 to 100. He reported feeling a specific call to revitalization, though his ministry experience included several roles, including church planting contexts. During the study period—as throughout his ministry career—Pastor Randy served as a bi-vocational pastor. Pastor Randy reported that, despite revitalizing on several fronts, the church's financial situation during the COVID-19 pandemic forced it to close.

Participant 10. Pastor Kevin leads a Pentecostal church in the urban South. He had been pastor of the church for over five years when the study period began, leading the church through significant conflict, a split from a denomination, and a replant from within. While Pastor Kevin possesses a baccalaureate degree from a secular institution, his formal ministry training is from a non-credit training program. He is a veteran of the military with nearly a decade of service. Pastor Kevin has worked bi-vocationally throughout his ministry. During the study period, he saw the church's average Sunday attendance increase from 36 to 57. Pastor Kevin reported feeling God had given him a specific call to his present location. He continues to serve the same church as its pastor.

Participant 11. Pastor Gene leads a rural Southern Baptist church in the South. He had been the church's pastor for about three years at the beginning of the study period. Before entering the ministry, Pastor Gene served as a public school teacher for over a decade. Before coming to the church, he possessed a seminary master's degree and had completed substantial doctoral-level work. At the beginning of the study period, he had been the church's pastor for about three years. The church was his second senior pastorate. During the study period, he saw the church's attendance increase from about 30 to approximately 150. Pastor Gene reported

feeling God had called him to his church specifically, not to be a revitalizer per se, but that his church needed revitalization. He continues to serve the same church as its senior pastor.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section describes the researcher's method for analyzing the transcripts and presents the findings of this analysis. Table 3 (below) shows the correspondence between the study's research questions and the interview questions the researcher asked participants.

Table 3

Research Questions (RQs) with Corresponding Interview Questions (IQs)

RQ1. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalizations describe their leadership development mentoring behaviors, and are these behaviors separate from a discipleship continuum?
IQ9. Have you been the primary developer of male leaders under 40? IQ10. Please describe your methods for developing leaders. IQ15. How do you believe leadership development fits with the concept of discipleship? Are the two the same? Are they two different things? Do you view leadership development as part of a continuum of discipleship? IQ14. Were there older congregational leaders who also helped develop young leaders?
RQ2. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization perceive their own practice of intentionality in leadership development mentoring, and how significant is intentionality?
IQ11. How did you identify potential next-generation leaders? IQ13. Were there key "gatekeepers" in your church who helped identify younger leaders? IQ16. Do you believe intentionality has been necessary for developing your next-generation leaders? IQ17. Please describe how you have been intentional in developing next-generation leaders
RQ3. To what extent do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive they have empowered next-generation leaders, and what importance has this empowerment been in the revitalization?
IQ18. How have you empowered your next-generation leaders? IQ19. What latitude do you give next-generation leaders in decision-making? IQ20. What part do next-generation leaders play in your own decision-making? IQ21. What impact do you believe developing and empowering next-generation leaders has had on the success of your revitalization efforts?
RQ4. What role do the pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive their tenure contributed to their success in developing next-generation leaders?
IQ25. Were there elements of your leadership development process that you would have done differently? What were they? IQ26. How did your leadership development behaviors change with increasing tenure? Do you believe your effectiveness in leadership development improve with increasing tenure? IQ27. If you had been able to afford different or additional leadership development resources, what might you have done differently? IQ28. Have you established ongoing practices to continue developing and strengthening leaders in your church?
RQ5. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive that their leadership development practices towards next-generation leaders have contributed to their church's revitalization success?
IQ8. What role do you believe the development of next-generation (under 40) male leaders played in your church's success in revitalization? IQ12. In what roles do next-generation leaders serve your church? IQ24. What were the key obstacles you encountered in your leadership development process? How did you overcome the obstacles?

Codes and Code Groups

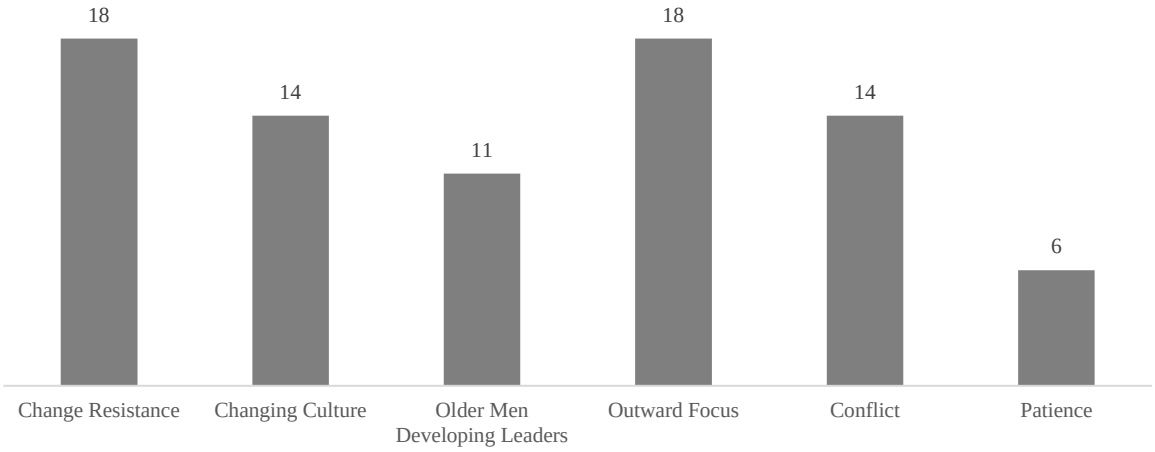
Eighty-eight (88) codes emerged from an analysis of the transcripts. These codes were distributed across seven code groups, with some codes shared across two or more code groups. The code groups, which represent overarching themes discovered in the interview transcripts, are as follows: Change Leadership, Character, Culture, Relationship, Capability Development, Discipleship, and Empowerment. A discussion of each code group and the six most frequently occurring codes within each code group follows.

Change Leadership Code Group

At its heart, church revitalization is an exercise in change leadership. As Rainer (2016) demonstrates, leading a church in a change from an unhealthy, inwardly focused culture to a healthy, outwardly focused culture is a multifaceted endeavor. Leadership development in a church revitalization context takes place within a broader effort to shift the church culture from retreat and decline to a renewed focus on reaching the neighborhood with the Gospel. Codes within the change leadership group address leadership development within the wider context of leading change in a church. Figure 1 (below) shows the relative weight of the six most frequently occurring codes in the change leadership group. A description of the six codes and their place in the participants' lived experiences (with representative participant comments) follows.

Figure 1

Top Six Change Leadership Codes



Change Resistance. (18 occurrences). The change resistance code speaks to the idea of a congregation's unwillingness to alter almost anything about the church. Unsurprisingly, the interviews revealed resistance to changing music, décor and furniture, facility use, order of worship, dress codes, use of facilities, time of worship, small group format, church bulletins, outreach methods, and favored Bible translations. As Pastor Ben shared, "When they [the congregation] first call you, they tell you, 'Pastor, we need you to get younger people in here.' But what they don't tell you—and they really mean—is, 'But don't change anything!'"

Rainer (2016, pp. 17-24) sees change resistance in five types of "unmovable church members." First, there are the "deniers" (p. 17) who believe—despite readily visible contrary evidence—that the church is not in decline and that nothing is wrong. Thus, nothing needs to change. The second group of change resisters is the "entitled" (p. 18). These church members see the church as akin to a "country club," and because they make a financial contribution, they expect the church to serve them according to their preferences. The entitled tend to resist any change that is contrary to their preferences.

Third are the “blamers” (p. 20). Blamers point to the previous pastor, the neighborhood, or society at large—and never themselves—for the church’s state of decline. Fourth, Rainer (2016, pp. 21-22) identifies “critics” as another form of change-resister. Critics are much like the blamers but typically direct their ire toward the pastor or other church leaders, emotionally draining these leaders simultaneously. Several of the participants admitted to having critics. Fifth, the “confused” often mean well but want to hold on to a tradition because it gives them security and comfort (Rainer, 2016, pp. 22-23). The confused often hold onto traditions or preferences as having equal value with doctrine. For example, in this study, Pastors Ben and Randy both spoke of people who held the King James Version as the only acceptable Bible version—not because they had ever personally done any research, but because that was what people they respected had always told them.

A congregation’s resistance to following the leadership of younger leaders is relevant to developing next-generation leaders. Pastors expressed frustration—and understanding—that members who have been in a church for decades have difficulty following younger leaders with less life experience or time in the church. As Pastor Steven said of his new, younger worship leader, “He wasn’t doing it like an 80-year-old would do it. So, they didn’t like it. And it was the same people that didn’t like what I was doing because I wasn’t doing it like an 80-year-old would do it. And so, they didn’t like it.”

Changing Culture. (14 occurrences). This code speaks to a church’s attitude and the things it values as a body. Interviewees resoundingly entered a church culture that directly precipitated the church’s decline and mediated against the church returning to health in its present context. In short, participants identified their church’s culture—at least at the outset of their pastorates—as unhealthy. As Pastor Phil observed:

> "When you go into a church that has a preexisting culture and DNA, that is what the battle is all about. It's about leading that change to lead that church away from a culture that is killing them. And they don't realize it. They hold on to it like idols, you know, and all these traditions and all these things. And they're literally hanging on to what they think is their savior. But it's actually what's killing them."

Interview participants spoke of their church valuing traditions or worship styles that were unappealing or awkward to people visiting the church. Pastor Randy recounted how his church's long-term members insisted every Sunday on having a gentleman, who by the time Randy arrived, could barely see or stand, come up and sing an old gospel song accompanied by his personal portable stereo ("boom box"). If privately asked, Randy (and most guests) found the weekly ritual utterly cringe-worthy.

The unhealthy culture described by participants included an inward focus and legalistic adherence to practices not mandated by Scripture. Pastor Phil spoke, for instance, of church members who were upset when women wore pants (instead of dresses) to church. Several pastors described older members' preference for hymns expressed to them as an appeal to traditional music as the only scripturally acceptable form of worship. Many participants complained of congregations largely unwilling to volunteer or assist in any capacity around the church. Confirming Rainer's (2020) study of dying churches, the participants' congregants often viewed the pastor as responsible for facilities maintenance, member care, evangelism, administration, and preparing a high-quality sermon.

Older Men Developing Leaders. (11 occurrences). This code spoke to the extent that revitalization pastors had older gentlemen in the congregation who were both qualified and capable of assisting the pastor in developing younger leaders. Ideally, with the benefit of years of growing and living as Christ followers, older men in a church's membership would be accomplished disciple-makers, focused on the church's Great Commission mandate within the context of the local community.

However, the participants revealed that this ideal does not occur in a church needing revitalization. Instead, the interviews described most older men in the church at the beginning of the pastor's tenure as either unwilling or incapable of making disciples, let alone developing leaders. Alternatively, as Pastor Doug feared, older men in the church membership at the outset of his pastorate would likely have passed on the same unhealthy church culture that Doug was trying to change. Pastor Doug related that, as the revitalization progressed, spiritually mature men of middle age and older did arrive at the church and become members. These men, who bought into the vision Doug articulated, were able to assist in next-generation leadership development.

Pastor Dale reported that one senior adult leader in the church was at least able to help him identify potential next-generation leaders. Pastor Steven was fortunate that his church membership included a few retired pastors who could help him identify potential leaders. Only Pastor Kevin said that a senior adult male in leadership at his church was able—from the outset of the revitalization—to help him develop leaders by pouring into the lives of young men.

Outward Focus. (18 occurrences). This code speaks of the church revitalization pastor's efforts to move the church from an inwardly focused culture to an outwardly focused culture. It also and the extent to which the revitalization pastor intentionally develops an outwardly focused mentality in new leaders. The code also speaks to the extent to which next-generation leaders helped the entire congregation move towards an outward focus. Here, participants spoke primarily of modeling outward focus in their daily practice and providing opportunities for church members to interact with the surrounding community in an organic way rather than in a contrived, programmatic fashion.

Pastor Trent spoke of using the pulpit to create an urgency for outward focus. He reminded his church of the Gospel mandate to make disciples of the nations and reiterated this

urgency in leadership development relationships. Reflecting on this experience, Pastor Trent related the following:

> "We've got to, you know, mobilize and move. And so getting people to have that urgency, and to be broken over the people that they love the most—that was crucial for them to step into the ability to lead, and to invest and invite others to come and follow Christ just like them. Because I would teach them the greatest act of hate is when we know the truth, but we don't share it. We know that Jesus is the answer, but we don't give the answer. We give other answers, but not the answer. And I said, 'that's probably the greatest act of hate for a Christian. We cannot live our lives like that things have got to change.'"

For his part, Pastor Randy sought to lead his church to a culture of outward focus by serving himself as a model of the outward focus he desired to see his congregation as a whole and in emerging leaders in particular. For Pastor Dale, changing the culture to an outward focus meant hosting cookouts for the neighborhood that gave church members—including emerging leaders—an opportunity to better know the community in a way that was fun and non-threatening. Thanks to the initiative of emerging leaders, Dale's church had another opportunity to better know its neighbors by opening its facilities to homeschooling families on the weekdays.

Conflict. (14 occurrences). Church revitalization regularly occasions conflict. Indeed, conflict often precipitates a church's decline in the first place (Rainer, 2014), and any attempt to revitalize will occasion renewed conflict (Bickford and Hallock, 2017). When trying to move a church away from a culture that is killing it, Pastor Phil related, "You're gonna end up with a knock-down-drag-out fight as soon as you try to lead change because you're confronting their fleshly issues. You're confronting their false notions, spiritual notions." Putting it more simply, Phil said, "It's been bloody." Church-revitalizing pastors must be able to handle conflict and develop leaders who can do the same. A pastor must model healthy conflict resolution, even when he is naturally very conflict avoidant.

At its best, conflict prevents revitalization and necessary change; at its worst, conflict results in more members leaving the church. This exodus of members accelerates the decline in finances and attendance. The drain brought about by conflict ultimately hastens the day the church closes its doors.

Of existing members, Pastor Kevin related, “You know, we spent years casting vision (of a changed church), and they were fine with that. But once we actually started doing it, that’s when the wheels came off, and it got ugly.” However, some participants found conflict also resulted in the ability to move forward—sadly, not because the pastors won over their critics, but rather because they outlasted them. For Pastor Ben, the departure of two of his greatest critics (and the 20 percent of his church’s budget the two accounted for) finally allowed the church the freedom to move forward with change. For Pastor Kevin, a contentious church split that cost the church half its already dwindling membership finally allowed Kevin and the remaining members to move forward to a healthier state.

Patience. (6 occurrences). Church revitalization is a long-term prospect, often taking years before producing any noticeable turnaround. Bickford and Hallock (2017, p. 68) write, “progress and pace are unique in church replanting. Some things can be addressed immediately; others have to wait—either for the congregation to be ready to move or for the resources to be present.” The church may need facility modernization, bylaw updates, a new website, and many other changes. However, changing everything at once is impossible and inadvisable (Clifton, 2016). All the participants appeared to understand the need to be patient in change leadership.

The participants recognized that in their context, leading change means a willingness to slowly and incrementally develop an eager coalition of church members eager for change rather than forcing changes for which the church is unready. At the same time, with the threat that the church will continue to decline (or decline even more rapidly) in attendance and financial means,

the revitalizing pastor must not lead change so slowly that new people do not begin to take part in the life of the church—including the financial life of the church. In expressing a desire to have gone at a slower pace, Pastor Ben said he would have liked to have led change more incrementally, but "We didn't have much runway to get the thing off the ground and back to sustainability." Moreover, as newer people arrive eager to see change, they can become frustrated if the pace of change is slower than they believe is appropriate. Pastor Randy noted, "one of the things I think young leaders bring to the table is, they're not going to let you get away with *not* revitalizing," but they can also become frustrated when change does not happen as rapidly as they would like.

Character Code Group

Participants repeatedly referred to the character traits they seek to identify and develop in potential next-generation leaders. Figure 2 (below) depicts the participants' top six character traits as essential for next-generation leaders in the small church revitalization context. A description of these six character traits and the importance pastor participants placed on them (with representative comments) follows.

Figure 2

Top Six Character Codes

Resilience. (19 occurrences). All the participants described their own personal resilience, which they credited to the Holy Spirit and previous experiences God had used to equip them, as the single most critical factor in their success in church revitalization. Each desired to see the same resilience demonstrated and further developed in potential next-generation leaders.

Addressing the need for resilience in leading church revitalization, Pastor Phil remarked, "I knew coming into this assignment, it was going to be Mission Impossible. And you know, every one of my friends has said, '(If I were you), I'd get out of there. I would pack it up. You've gone through too much.' And I don't (leave)." Speaking of his church's leadership development program and efforts to help leaders revitalize other struggling churches, Pastor Phil said he advises potential church revitalizers to enter ministry situations with a comprehension of the problems inherent in church revitalization. He hopes to equip them with coping mechanisms, including coaching, designed to aid them in remaining resilient.

Pastor Ben felt his ability "to take a beating" was pivotal in his church revitalization leadership experience. He observed that, unfortunately, "I don't see too many younger guys just coming out of Bible college or seminary (with no other life experience) as willing to take the grind and abuse of church revitalization…I look for guys willing to take on the hard and inglorious tasks." Pastor Alan said of next-generation leaders that "they have to have the ability to deal with the adversity that comes with church revitalization… to have mental toughness."

While many of the participants credited their military experience as a formative experience in resilience—an experience they could not fully duplicate in a church setting—they believed they could model for next-generation leaders the tenacity and focus on the mission they had first learned in the armed forces.

Biblically Grounded. (15 occurrences). Revitalization pastors spoke of the need to ensure that next-generation leaders are biblically grounded, also expressing the sentiment that a

church leader who does not possess a robust biblical knowledge base—firmly applied in his own life and practice of leadership—is a liability. Participants understood, not only from the biblical text but often from hard-earned experience, that they must be completely comfortable with a potential next-generation leader's doctrinal competence before empowering them with spiritual leadership. Several participants expressed their desire that next-generation leaders' perspectives on leadership were not merely contemporary leadership theories with a veneer of Scripture over them but that the Bible should saturate all aspects of emerging leaders' thoughts on leadership.

Further, as several pastors pointed out, next-generation leaders in the small church revitalization context included potential future elders, deacons, and other men who had begun to feel a calling to preach or teach. Participants viewed biblical grounding as a scriptural prerequisite for leadership specifically called out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Of an elder, Paul says, "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." (Titus 1:9, ESV). Of deacons, Paul writes, "They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." (1 Tim. 3:9, ESV), another reference to biblical grounding as a requirement for leadership.

Integrity or Character. (10 occurrences). Most participants spoke of the general character and integrity that potential next-generation leaders must possess. They most frequently referred to the Scripture passages found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, which refer to the biblical qualifications of an elder or deacon. While not all next-generation leaders are bound to rise to these church offices, the pastor participants viewed the characteristics in these passages as referring to the traits desired in all leaders.

Participants were concerned about how potential next-generation leaders respond to pressure and how men who might potentially serve as leaders shepherded their families and stewarded other resources. Participants generally agreed with the notion that it takes time,

proximity, and relationship to reveal the true nature of a potential leader's character. Participants expressed a belief that demonstrated character percolates upward in the discipleship process.

Pastor Gene's comments were representative of the participants when he stated:

> "It (leadership development) starts with character because somebody's abilities will only go as far as their character can sustain them. And so the first thing I look for is character. What kind of an individual are they? What are they believe? How do they behave? How do they act, and how do they present themselves? So, if they have the character, we develop leaders. I take every individual as an opportunity to develop them into some sort of a leadership capacity."

For several participants, the demand for a demonstrated strength of character emerged when from lessons learned by empowering leaders without having thoroughly, personally vetted their character. Pastor Ben had brought another leader from another church whom he considered a potential deacon. Ben described a gentleman in his sixties who seemed eager to serve and had even served as a small group leader and choir member at the church where Ben had served on staff. While that larger church did not accept divorce men to serve as deacons, the man had previously been a deacon at another church. Ben felt this man, with an ostensibly long walk as a Christian, would be able to assist with leadership development in the revitalization context. Ben related:

> "It turns out he was living a secret life. He had been married four times and concealed that. I thought it was twice. Then one day in the first year of our revitalization, he up and ran off after 20 years of being married to his fourth wife. He'd been having an affair with his former wife, the third wife. I'd known this guy for years—or thought I did. But, I guess I would do deeper background checks—and ask harder, uncomfortable questions about some personal matters. It certainly couldn't have helped my credibility as pastor and leader."

Ben resolved that were he to enter church revitalization anew, he would at least do more to personally vet potential leaders' character to ensure they were the men he believed them to be. Pastor Kevin spoke of a similar occurrence, this time with an emerging, potential next-generation leader whom Kevin found to have been carrying out a long-term extra-marital affair. Pastor Alan

spoke of emerging leaders who, before coming to Christ, had lived through addiction and sinful lifestyles. For Pastor Alan, seeing men redeemed from addiction to a life of service to Christ is a powerful testimony to the gospel's transformative power. "We believe in the power of the Gospel to change people," he insisted. However, he cautioned that a pastor should never assume that the temptations of a former life will never again surface and recommended that pastors mentoring next-generation leaders continue to put safeguards and accountability with potential leaders—especially in areas where these men have struggled, such as alcohol, drugs, or sexual sin.

Pastors Alan and Trent spoke of a strong work ethic as a character trait they look for in a potential next-generation leader. "Are they hungry? Are they hustling? That's what I look for in a future leader," Pastor Trent related. Using a phrase the researcher understood from his mutual background in U.S. Navy submarines, Pastor Alan said he was looking for "hard-chargers"—ambitious young men with a solid work ethic.

Humility. (8 occurrences). Several participants spoke of the importance of humility in potential leaders. Participants desired to see this humility displayed over time in discipleship and leadership. Several participants expressly referred, in this context, to 1 Timothy 3:6 (ESV), which says of elders, "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil."

Several participants expressed that they were leery of potential leaders who desired titles or influence and were, in a genuine sense, campaigning for the position. Pastor Trent looked for humility in emerging leaders and a "hungry, hustling" work ethic. Trent explicitly expressed that humble people are teachable people. He and other participants stressed the importance of teachability in emerging leaders. Participants frequently referred to other traits of humble people, including a willingness to accept correction and to place themselves under spiritual authority, as

necessary traits of potential leaders. Potential leaders who demonstrated humility were willing to follow and do what needed to be done rather than insist on performing only those tasks they perceived as being more highly esteemed or visible in the church.

Initiative. (8 occurrences). Participants identified potential leaders by recognizing men who were already, in a tangible sense, already leading in the church. The participants also took note of men whose secular jobs had given them leadership experience, though work leadership experience was in no sense what any participant looked at as a sole qualifier. However, the participants often spoke of men already showing themselves as leaders in the church, even (or perhaps particularly) in ways some might see as mundane. Pastor Randy took notice of men he saw, even on their first visit to the church, picking up litter or straightening up chairs. To Randy, such displays of initiative indicate a potential leader.

Moreover, several participants spoke of initiative in terms of young men actively seeking a discipleship relationship. The participants viewed those young men as eager to increase their biblical knowledge and hoped to use their newly gained knowledge and skills in the church's service as potential leaders. Further, when the participants invited these potential leaders into discipleship and mentoring relationships, the young men demonstrated the ability to follow through on these commitments. These young men were actively seeking a discipleship relationship. Participants rewarded initiative with affirmation, relationship, and, ultimately, responsibility.

Maturity. (5 occurrences). Participants spoke of looking for emotional and spiritual maturity in emerging leaders. Pastor Phil was emphatic that not all the immaturity of youth needs to have disappeared from emerging leaders. Like many other participants, especially those who had served as youth pastors, he was emphatic that teenagers are the ideal age group from which to begin drawing and developing potential future leaders. Indeed, several participants expressed

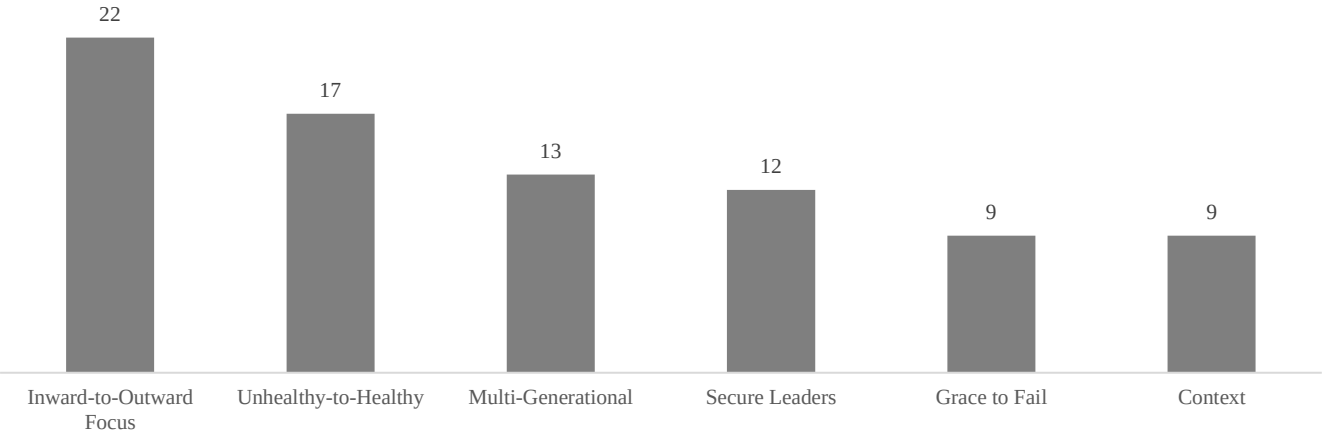
that revitalization would have been impossible without having drawn from teens to serve in and, in some cases (particularly in computer technology), lead church ministries. Other participants expressed disappointment at the emotional or spiritual immaturity they sometimes discovered in potential leaders far older than this study's 40-year-old cutoff for "next-generation" leaders. Participants accepted that while potential next-generation leaders will demonstrate relatively high levels of emotional and spiritual maturity, there would be imperfect moments and occasional lapses into immaturity. Participants viewed such lapses as opportunities for discipleship.

Culture Code Group

In a small church context, culture is "the values, typical practices, and goals of a business or other organization" (Dictionary.com, 2022). Leading cultural transformation is part of the overarching rubric of change leadership in the church revitalization context. However, it is essential for church revitalizing pastors to understand the unhealthy aspects of the church culture they inherent while possessing a solid vision of the traits of healthy culture they desire to see expressed in their churches. Participants frequently spoke of the unhealthy culture from which they had strived to lead their churches away and the healthy culture to which they had tried to lead their churches. Therefore, it was necessary to create codes describing the cultures. Figure 3 (below) depicts the relative weight of the top six culture codes participants described as part of the church revitalization process and the "DNA" with which they hoped to imbue next-generation leaders. A description of these six cultural codes and the importance pastor participants placed on them (with representative comments) follows.

Figure 3

Top Six Culture Codes



Inward-to-Outward Focus. (22 occurrences). Multiple voices in the church revitalization community of interest report that one of the most substantial factors driving church decline—and a natural tendency in an established church—is a congregation's shift away from an evangelistic focus on the community to an inward focus on the needs, wants, and preferences of the membership (Clifton, 2016; Davis, 2017; Rainer, 2014). Every participant reported assuming the pastorate of an inwardly focused, preference-driven church. Each participant further reported working diligently to change this unhealthy aspect of the church's culture and instill an outward focus in new leaders.

Most participants related that their vision casting—both from the pulpit and during more personal meetings—had attracted people of all ages who bought into the idea of becoming more outwardly focused. The church's culture mainly changed because new people who bought into the vision began to outnumber those who valued the inward focus. Pastor Doug referred to the "berry bucket principle," an adage he had heard often, where the church begins to reach more people who identify with the pastor's vision of renewal, and a few of those who identify with the old culture leave.

As for instilling an outward focus in new leaders, participants understood that they needed to do more than select from next-generation leaders who buy into the new vision. Participants believed it was up to them to model evangelistic and outwardly focused behaviors for emerging leaders. As Pastor Randy said:

> "You can't teach something you're not. And so, you have to be the guy that goes and gets them. And you never go alone. You always take a person with you. You take two or three of your leaders. You say, 'Hey, we're gonna go down to the park. We're gonna play some basketball, and we're gonna talk to some guys about Christ. Come on. Let's go. Hey, we're gonna go have a burrito. And then after that, we're going to have 10 or 12 guys in the Taco restaurant. Once we're done with our burritos or while we're doing it, we're going to recruit two or three people sitting around us, and we're going to have a conversation."

Unhealthy-to-healthy. (17 occurrences). Participants frequently spoke of leadership actions—particularly in mentoring and developing new leaders—meant to transform church culture from "unhealthy" to "healthy" in several ways. Each participant desired that his church develop a culture that enabled the congregation to reverse its decline and reach the surrounding community with the Gospel. Participants generally described stepping into the pastorate of a church plagued not only by inward focus but by conflict, apathy, and a preference-driven model of ministry. It was essential to the participants that prospective next-generation leaders do not become proliferators of the unhealthy culture.

Participants typically described a relationally-driven approach to changing culture in the church. They developed relationships and trust with existing members while casting vision and demonstrating a sense of that urgency—not only for the church's future but from a perspective of Great Commission obedience. The participants used the same relationship-driven model for prospective leaders. Not only did they develop personal relationships and vision casting with prospective next-generation leaders, but the participants described modeling healthy behaviors and having conversations about the "whys" of church revitalization practice. They sought to

develop, by personal relationship and leading by example, a group of future leaders who were accustomed to praying for each other and the church, eager for accountability, and enthusiastic about shared ministry.

Multi-Generational. (13 occurrences). Participants frequently spoke of building a church culture that embraced multi-generational ministry. Most participants assumed the pastorate of a predominantly elderly church. Participants expressed that they had experienced a challenge in navigating the disconnect between their congregations' stated desire to bring young people into the church and the congregational willingness to make changes necessary to actualize that desire. Participants reported spending a great deal of relationship capital to make the changes needed to reach younger people, including potential next-generation leaders and their families.

Most of the participants saw the importance of teens serving as volunteers. Several participants said teens served their congregations in crucial, church-wide roles such as worship music, multimedia, and children's ministry. Indeed, these participants believed they could not effectively do ministry to the same level of quality without teen participation. Moreover, these participants saw teens as a logical pool from which to develop leaders and expressed that they had empowered teens and early-twenties adults in small but meaningful leadership roles—especially in teams composed primarily of teens.

For his part, Pastor Trent was adamant that teens and young adults—among other emerging next-generation leaders—should serve in leadership roles on the "platform" (stage) during Sunday worship. Trent was adamant that visible next-generation leaders fill a crucial role in attracting next-generation congregants when he said:

> "By the time they're 14 and 15 years old, they (teens) are running the main ministries of the church. They're running the social media. They're running the sound; they're running, the lighting, production, all of that stuff, greeting, parking team. And so,

> they have a voice to be heard. That also means putting them on the platform. Because what is on your stage is what's in your seats. And so, if you want multiculturalism in the seats, they better be on the stage. And if you want young people in the seats? You need to have young people on the stage."

At the same time as they worked to build the credibility of younger leaders in the eyes of older congregants, several participants expressed that they needed to work to overcome a mentality among next-generation leaders that saw senior adults as a hindrance. Pastor Doug said, "I always tell our folks we're not just trying to reach young people. We are trying to reach all people. So senior adults are welcome here, as well. Yeah, we're not only senior adults, but we certainly welcome them here."

Participants worked diligently to develop mutual respect amongst the generations and modeled this mindset for the congregation. Several participants noted that, even as they had had to advocate with senior adults for empowering next-generation leaders, so too had there been a requirement to disabuse next-generation leaders of the idea that senior adults have nothing to offer in the way of building a vibrant, relationally healthy church. For his part, Pastor Kevin expressed some frustration at the mentality some next-generation leaders displayed toward senior adult leaders:

> "I think one of the most frustrating things for me is that Millennials seem to think that their opinion is just as valid as anybody else's and that they're just as qualified to speak on an issue as somebody who's (been there for years). You know, they come to church one Sunday and have never been in church before, and they think they should have an equal say, an equal position and standing with somebody who's been serving Jesus in that capacity for 50 years, and it's just, it's insanity."

Overall, the participants revealed the complex balance required to move from a church from a gerontocracy to a congregation where all generations respectfully cooperate in leading a healthy, multigenerational ministry.

Secure leaders. (12 occurrences). The participants were all secure in their own identities as pastors of their churches and were comfortable sharing the spotlight with and building up the

credibility of younger leaders in the church. None expressed a need to impress his particular "brand" on the church. Several participants reported having worked on a church staff or observed the workings of churches where, in the participants' opinion, the senior or solo pastor had an insecure personality. Invariably, the participants believed that cases of pastoral insecurity had stifled the development of next-generation leaders and created an additional, self-inflicted burden upon the insecure pastor.

Pastor Dale's remarks were representative of the participants. "They (the congregation) were used to the old pastor doing everything like it was his show," he said. "I've even said it on Sundays from the pulpit. I do not want this to be, you know, the Pastor Dale show. I think (there are) too many churches I have seen where the pastor has its hands on everything." In Dale's estimation, such behavior on the pastor's part prevented others from stepping up. He believes his insistence that everything need not perform every task precisely as he would have done himself has resulted in people, including next-generation men, stepping up to assume leadership responsibilities.

Participants who had served in the military seemed particularly concerned that the church would be able to go on if something happened to them. "In the Navy, they taught you to train your replacement," said Pastor Alan. For his part, Pastor Dale, an Army veteran, said, "What if something happened to me? Could the church go on without me? It has to. That's a mark of successful revitalization, of developing leaders. You have to be able to give things up." Having served in the Marines, Pastor Randy and Pastor Trent both remarked on a mentality they learned in the infantry: If the unit leader falls in combat, the next man down the chain of command must be able to assume unit leadership in the heat of battle seamlessly.

Grace to fail. (9 occurrences). This code is shared with the empowerment code group because "grace to fail" has implications for culture and the ability to develop leaders who are not

afraid to fail. Most participants described a tolerance for failure and grace in dealing with failure as essential. Many described having part of a church staff where senior pastors did not tolerate mistakes. In the view of the participants, the "zero defects" mentality prevented growth in emerging leaders. All of the participants expressed a desire to do ministry with excellence. However, in the view of the participants, an unwillingness to tolerate mistakes robs new leaders of an opportunity to learn new skills and builds risk aversion.

The "grace to fail" code occurs not only in the cultural code group, describing the type of church culture revitalizing pastors sought to build, but also in the empowerment code group. Participants strongly believed that leaders afraid to fail were unempowered leaders. Several participants saw grace to fail as building a culture of accountability, where leaders feel free to report their mistakes to the pastor without fear.

Participants recognized that because they had to make things work with the limited number of people whom God had sent, they must resist the urge to try to assemble an "A-Team." Instead, participants concentrated on building a deeper pool of people who could carry out ministry tasks. Typical of participants' remarks was this by Pastor Alan, "I' m big on letting people make mistakes."

Said Pastor Ben:

> "You just don't have the option of—look, I've worked for a senior pastor of a big church, and he could afford to bench people who weren't perfect. Or, if I'm super honest, weren't as pretty. And he did that because God blessed him with a deep bench. I can't do that—and I'm glad for it. For me, you get who you get, and you work with who God sends. So what if the worship service didn't go as smoothly as I would have liked? You debrief, figure out where the problems were, and everybody learns."

Pastor Kevin related that in the naval aviation community, he had been part of a culture of "fixing the problem instead of fixing the blame." It was a mentality he desired to build among the leaders of his church. In thinking about what he learned from his early days in leading

revitalization, Pastor Steven remarked, “So that’s what I’d say I do different is, be less afraid of it not working. And not feel like I have to play it totally safe.”

Context. (9 occurrences). Analysis of the transcripts provided a valuable reminder of what several prominent voices in the church revitalization community of interest have often said: Every church exists within its unique context. To say that every church is unique in its context is not to say that principles gleaned in this study would vary significantly across contexts, but rather that several variables go into church revitalization. Thus, there are no secret formulas for church revitalization that, if followed to the letter, will result in a revitalized church.

Participants recognized that they needed to understand their congregations’ cultural contexts if they were to lead change and develop relationships with potential or emerging next-generation leaders in the congregation. Pastor Norman provided a perfect example. Having come from a church where people desired deep, personal relationships with the pastor and pastoral staff, he arrived at a church that not only needed revitalization but, as a cultural matter, held the pastor at arm’s length. “People here are loving and gracious and kind,” Norman related. “However, they are not personal, a lot of them, with me. It’s a different mentality. The pastor isn’t our friend. And that was something I wasn’t used to.” Norman recognized that, in his cultural context, he would need to take much more initiative in inviting potential leaders into a leadership development relationship.

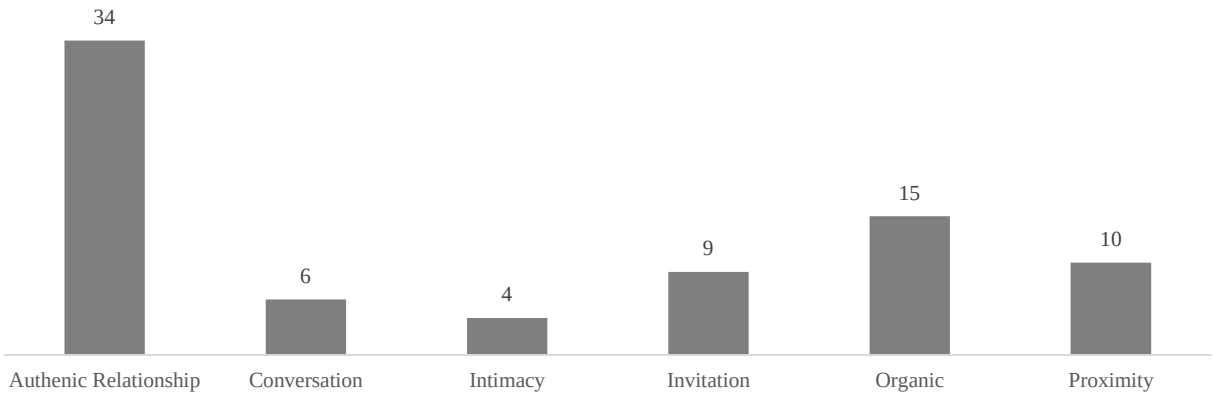
As Pastor Alan said, only somewhat jokingly, “I think the only region of the country that I would work as a revitalizer is in New England, where people are a little harder, and people are a little tougher. And so, my not-super-strong pastoral care skills look better than most people’s. So they’re like, ‘Well, he’s nicer than we are. So, you must really care about us.’ So, I think this is the only region that I would ever work as a revitalizer.” Participants recognized that much as leading the church would depend on the cultural context, so too would developing leaders.

Relationship Code Group

Relationships emerged as one of the overarching themes across the interviews. As Pastor Randy opined, “To have influence, you need to have a relationship.” All participants stated that leadership development occurs in authentic, organic, and close relationships. A description of the top six codes and the importance pastor participants placed on them (with representative comments) follows.

Figure 4

Top Six Relationship Codes



Authentic relationship. (34 occurrences). Authentic relationship was the single most occurring code in the entire study. In terms of relationship, authentic is defined as “not false or copied; genuine; real” and “representing one’s true nature or beliefs; true to oneself or to the person identified” (Dictionary.com, 2022). It was clear to the researcher that leadership development in church revitalization occurs primarily in a close, authentic relationship between the church’s senior (or solo) pastor and potential next-generation leaders. Such a relationship was not necessarily one of teacher-student as occurring in an academic setting. Instead, the authentic relationships between the pastor participants and those they mentored—the emerging leaders—occurred much more in the context of living life and doing ministry together. The relationships

grew in conversations, over meals, and while sharing the ministry's (sometimes mundane) work. Here again, participants often referred to the relationship between Paul and Timothy or, especially, the relationship between Jesus and His apostles as biblical exemplars of authentic relationships.

For Pastor Norman, one meaningful leadership development relationship began as a conversation with a next-generation man who, for several months, had been attending the church where Norman served as pastor. The young man wanted to understand Norman's theological positions better. Those conversations about theology, which both Norman and the younger man enjoyed, led to a meaningful, authentic relationship from which greater discipleship and leadership development opportunities emerged. Pastor Ben shared that his church's facilities needed help with modernization and deferred maintenance. Ben enjoyed the opportunity to build relationships while working with younger men to revamp the building.

Several participants described their desire for a relationship with next-generation leaders that showed a genuine concern about the personal growth, family concerns, and spiritual development of potential next-generation leaders. The participants desired to demonstrate that they valued potential next-generation leaders as people and friends—not just for what these individuals could do to advance the participants' church revitalization agendas.

Conversation. (6 occurrences). The idea of conversation is closely related to authentic relationships, modeling, mentoring, and intimacy. Participants' leadership development behaviors seemed to center heavily around conversations, with six participants extensively discussing this aspect of their leadership development processes. Participants' conversations with potential next-generation leaders began even before there was a decision on the part of either the participants or the mentees to begin a leadership development relationship.

In these conversations, participants sought to gauge the interest, sense of calling,

aptitudes, and readiness of these young men to begin a leadership development relationship. Once a mentor-mentee relationship had begun, participants' single most significant leadership development behavior—outside of, perhaps, modeling leadership behaviors—was conversations. Conversations were wide-ranging, and participants described a dialogue much more than a lecture. Topics of conversation included philosophy of ministry, vision, theology, and practical pastoral skills.

Intimacy. (4 occurrences). Closely related to authentic relationships, conversation, and proximity in the interviews was a notion of intimacy between the participants and the next-generation leaders they mentored. In terms of relationship, intimacy is "a close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship with another person or group." Participants reported that leadership development took place in a small setting—either in a small group or one-on-one. None of the pastors reported developing more than four leaders at any time. As Pastor Gene said, "you can only intentionally develop a handful of leaders at a time."

Invitation. (9 occurrences). Most participants described the on-ramp to leadership development as one of invitation. After extensive conversations and discipleship in intimate settings with potential next-generation leaders, most participants invited young men into whatever leadership development process existed at that point. Representative of the invitation to leadership development was Randy, who said: "It was a small church, so I was involved in every aspect—the selection of those men. Then what that process looked like was an invitation. Hey, you know, I like for you guys to spend some time with me around this book of the Bible. You know, let's go through Nehemiah. We'll start there and do a study about what leadership looks like."

Organic. (15 occurrences). In the context of leadership development relationships in church revitalization, the word organic best fits the Dictionary.com (2022) definition:

"developing in a manner analogous to the natural growth and evolution characteristic of living organisms; arising as a natural outgrowth." Participants described leadership development processes were neither forced nor contrived. Participants described their leadership development processes as organic. At the same time, some participants spoke of having a leadership development "pipeline," but all described processes that were not programmatic but had developed naturally. Pastor Steven related this sentiment: "Yeah, so there was definitely an organic part of it, on the one hand, where things just would happen. And a lot of the organic stuff was not spontaneous, but it wasn't programmed."

Pastor Doug described how some older men in the church who arrived after Doug's tenure began took on mentoring relationships with emerging, next-generation leaders. These relationships were also organic. Likewise, Pastor Kevin, who was among the few participants to arrive in revitalization with at least a few older adults other than himself capable of developing leaders, described leadership development mentoring relationships within the congregation as falling into place naturally.

Proximity. (10 occurrences). Participants described leadership development mentoring relationships with close personal proximity between the participants and emerging next-generation leaders. Participants described no sense of keeping potential leaders at arm's length or limiting interactions to those occurring at church. Instead, participants described relationships that involved sharing all aspects of life, including relationships that extended between the participants' families and those of the emerging leaders. Whether it was outreach, pastoral care, or planning and executing worship services, participants described doing ministry as a team, serving alongside emerging leaders.

Pastor Ben's sentiment was representative. He related, "I think proximity is key. I had to be really hands-on with things in the church. I mean, we needed all hands on deck. So yeah, I

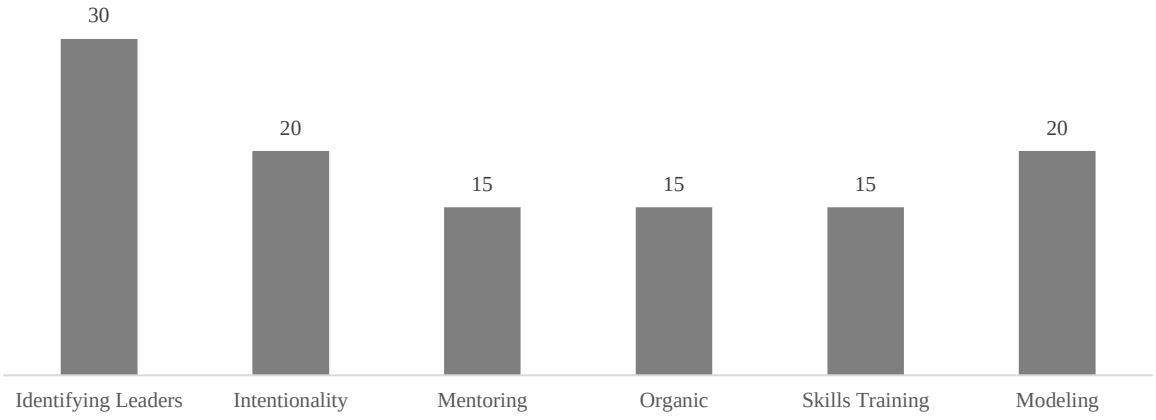
drywalled, did evangelism visitation, cleaned toilets, cooked, painted, and did yard work. I invited guys along to help me. And that was a great time of building relationships."

Capability Development Code Group

The capability development code group contains those codes that spoke of behaviors and practices of church revitalizing pastors engaged in developing emerging leaders' ministry competencies. Most participants did not have the luxury of having staff members with formal Bible education, so they understood they would need to help emerging leaders develop the skills involved in ministry. Even participants like Pastor Phil, who had a next-generation Bible college graduate on staff, did not automatically assume that emerging leaders with formal ministry training were proficient in all ministry competencies. Figure 5 (below) shows the relative weight of the six most-occurring codes within the capability development code group. A description of the six most-occurring codes, including comments representative of participants' sentiments, follows.

Figure 5

Top Six Capability Development Codes



Identifying Leaders (30 occurrences). Participants spoke at length about their processes for identifying potential next-generation leaders. Many spoke of the difficulty of identifying

next-generation male leaders in the first few years of their pastorate because for an extended period—usually measured in years—there were no next-generation males in the congregation. The character codes above have already discussed the traits participants looked for in identifying potential leaders. These included a strong work ethic, integrity, humility, the desire to serve, and hunger for discipleship. Thus, in terms of identifying leaders, the codes involved in identifying leaders speak more to the recruiting behaviors of the participants themselves.

Participants were only able to identify potential leaders in terms of authentic relationships. Participants were on the ground and sought to get to know potential leaders and learn about their backgrounds. Participants described learning about the backgrounds and experiences of potential next-generation leaders. Generally, participants took note of potential leaders who had already demonstrated leadership ability in their professional lives and sought to engage in discipleship relationships with these young men. Participants also noted that, while they believed that God does not call all disciples to serve as leaders, those young men who naturally seemed to rise to the top in the discipleship process were among potential recruits for leadership development.

No participant eschewed the advice of others in identifying leaders. However, few participants benefitted early in the revitalization process from the advice of existing leaders. Pastor Steven was a notable exception because his congregation included retired ministers who bought into the revitalization vision. These men provided valuable input and spiritual discernment in identifying potential leaders. Pastor Dale was among the few who benefitted early from the advice of older men in the congregation. The single elder serving in his church was a 74-year-old man—a long-time member and ex-Marine. Dale expressed a deep appreciation for his relationship with this elder, whom he met weekly and often discussed the potential of particular young men for service in church leadership.

Intentionality. (20 occurrences). All of the participants described intentionality as a crucial component of leadership development. As Pastor Dale said, “If it’s not intentional, it doesn’t happen.” Pastor Gene described intentionality as necessary because intentionality helps desired behaviors become automatic. For Pastor Doug, “Intentionality is the remedy to my own nature. Because if I just went by my own nature, if I wasn’t intentional about it, I just wouldn’t develop leaders.”

While participants insisted that intentionality was a crucial component of leadership development, their answers did not show that leadership development was programmatic in church revitalization. Several Baptist participants (even two who were not part of SBC churches) reported using the NAMB “Pipeline” curriculum to assist in developing leaders, but nothing about the use of this material showed any inclination towards the programmatic. Instead, participants deliberately brought next-generation leaders along as they carried out their pastoral duties.

Mentoring. (15 occurrences). According to Dictionary.com (2022), a mentor is a teacher, guide, supporter, or counselor, while mentoring is the act of serving as a mentor. This definition speaks to a very one-on-one aspect of leadership development and one that comported well with the lived experience of the participants. Participants not only modeled the necessary ministry competencies for the participants but also provided guidance and constructive feedback for mentees when they undertook to demonstrate the ministry skills on their own.

Several participants remarked on the need, as a mentor, to provide affirmation to emerging next-generation leaders. For his part, Pastor Randy felt it essential to “celebrate the success” of emerging leaders. Pastor Dale placed great importance on affirming emerging leaders’ potential, especially when they make mistakes. Several participants admitted they had received very little affirmation in their development for ministry. Citing this lack of affirmation

in his formative period, Pastor Phil confessed that he believed his difficulty in expressing affirmation was a weakness in his leadership development practices. Pastor Dale felt that, early in his revitalization ministry, his lack of affirmation—his taking a ministry leader for granted—caused him to lose that leader. “It’s an old adage,” said Pastor Ben. “If you want to see a behavior repeated, you had better praise it.”

Organic. (15 occurrences). The capability development code group shares this code with the relationship code group. Participants described their capability development practices as taking place within authentic relationships in the process of actual ministry. Participants often assigned books for emerging leaders to read. These books covered such ministry skills as counseling, preaching, outreach, or youth ministry, but no formalized classroom training took place. Instead, participants provided on-the-job training, with a discussion of readings and an opportunity to apply the skills covered in the reading or discussions. One example of such training is the pulpit ministry. Typically, when participants allowed next-generation leaders to preach, they provided training and assigned reading as their mentees prepared for the sermon. However, no participant held a formal preaching class because there was typically only one emerging next-generation leader far enough along in development to hold a class.

Skills Training. (15 occurrences). Participants frequently spoke of particular skills they desired of mentees—skills including preaching, teaching, administrative tasks, and pastoral care. The skills training code was closely related to modeling, mentoring, and providing opportunities. Skills training included reading assignments, one-on-one discussions, small group training, and constructive feedback. Participants expressed a very hands-on model of skills training, with the participant sometimes demonstrating something as mundane as how to use presentation software in a worship service.

While participants spoke at length about skills development, the interviews revealed that participants seemed to view this as a relatively easy portion of leadership development compared to character development. Participants believed that a person of teachable character could learn the skills necessary for ministry. As Pastor Trent said, “You know, we can always train in competency, but we want to make sure that character is there.”

Modeling. (20 occurrences). Beyond the initial effort to identify potential leaders in the first place, participants described modeling behaviors as their most common skills development practice. Hospital visits were a typical example of modeled behaviors. The participants brought next-generation leaders along for hospital visits, first modeling the pastors’ duties in a hospital visit. Participants reported eventually accompanying the next-generation leader to the hospital and allowing them to take the lead in the hospital visit. Finally, several participants reported allowing next-generation leaders to make hospital visits unaccompanied by the participant.

Participants saw modeling as not only an opportunity to demonstrate skills but to help develop desired character traits in next-generation leaders. As previously discussed, participants believed their resilience had helped them succeed in revitalization. Therefore, resilience was a character trait they strongly desired in emerging, next-generation leaders. Many participants believed their military experience imbued them with personal resilience but that the ways the military did this were largely ill-suited to a ministry context. For Pastor Phil, who encountered much opposition to change in leading a church revitalization, the opportunity for next-generation leaders to see Phil leading through conflict and opposition was an opportunity for next-generation leaders to learn to persevere in difficult leadership situations.

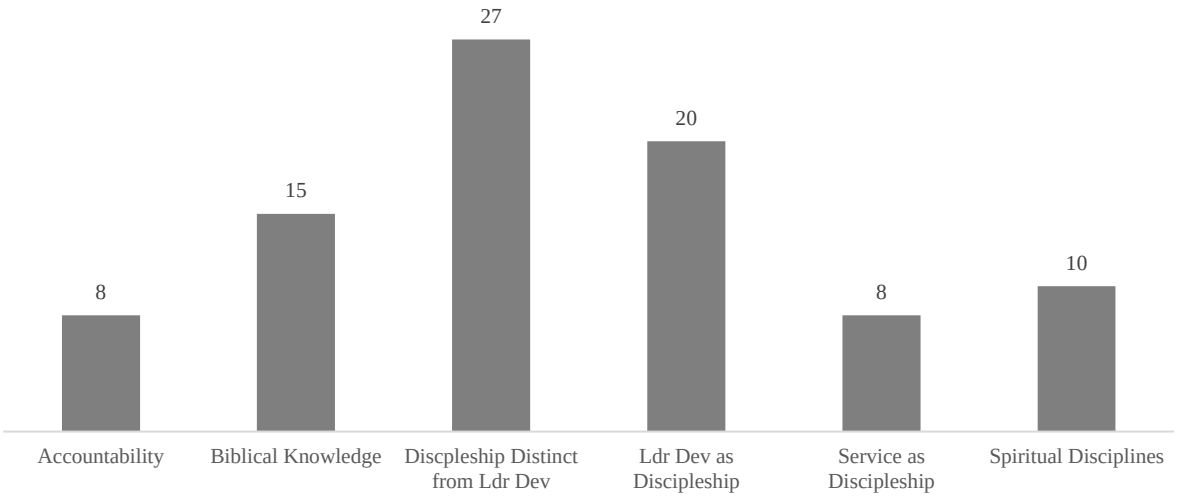
Discipleship Code Group

Participants differed substantially on their views of the relationship between discipleship and leadership development, with some seeing the two as entirely separate, while others viewed

leadership development as part of a larger continuum of discipleship. However, every participant expressed their belief that empowering leaders to act or to positions of higher responsibility required at least some minimum demonstrated spiritual maturity brought about by discipleship. Further, each participant saw all Christ-followers as called to discipleship, while not every believer is a person whom God has called to leadership. Discipleship codes in this study describe how the participants viewed discipleship as related to its role in leadership development. A description of these six most frequently occurring codes and the importance pastor participants placed on them (with representative comments) follows.

Figure 6

Top Six Discipleship Codes



Accountability (8 occurrences). Participants viewed accountability as an essential trait of a disciple and, in particular, of a leader. Participants sought to recruit potential next-generation leaders willing to be held accountable, with whom they could continue developing a sense of accountability. Indeed, Pastor Dale summarized his selection criteria for emerging leaders as those who were “faithful, accountable, and teachable.”

While Pastor Alan believed strongly in extending grace for failure, his sentiments on accountability were typical of those participants—all military veterans—who addressed accountability as a critical outcome of discipleship and as a necessary trait in leaders:

> "But yeah, this idea of ownership and lack of excuses is—I thought it was critical. As leaders, it's basically like, you're responsible for everything, and there are just no excuses. No excuses. If you screwed up, you screwed up. There's no, 'Oh, I got caught in traffic. Sorry, I'm late.' Well, no, that's an invalid excuse. What you should have done was you should have gotten up, checked your GPS, and seeing, 'Oh, man, traffic's really bad, so I need to leave a little earlier than I intended. So, there's no reason that I'm late.'"

Further, participants welcomed to opportunity to be accountable to the same emerging leaders from whom they demanded accountability. Participants who spoke at length of accountability also saw openness and trust as conducive to accountability. To promote such mutual accountability, Pastor Kevin described instituting in his church small discipleship groups known as "quads." Each quad had an assigned leader, but the idea behind them was discipleship and mutual accountability—including the leader's accountability to others in the group. Believing firmly in the concept, Kevin himself participated in a quad.

Biblical Knowledge. (15 occurrences). The discipleship code group and character code group share the biblical knowledge code. In the context of personal character, participants expressed a desire to empower and release leaders only after they had demonstrated a sufficient level of biblical knowledge, applied in an orthodox manner. However, the participants recognized that even potential next-generation leaders could arrive at the church with theological baggage.

Representative comments included those by Randy, who said, "The average Christian—and I'm not talking about the average non-churchgoer—the average churchgoer doesn't understand the basic tenants of the gospel. That's a leadership problem. That is a big problem." Pastor Dale expressed a concern that many people come into a church with theology gained from

popular televangelists. “They (potential leaders) know the Bible,” Dales says. He continues, expressing concern that prospective leaders use their Bible knowledge out of context thanks to the folk theology of some popular television preachers. He believes many potential next-generation leaders arrive at his church poorly grounded in biblically sound theology. Neither Dale nor the other participants desired to empower theologically ungrounded leaders; Dale sees it as his responsibility to provide the solid theological underpinnings next-generation leaders need for ministry.

All the participants recognized a need to determine where potential next-generation leaders are in their present biblical knowledge and to build that knowledge up in a discipleship relationship. For the participants, developing sound doctrine in emerging leaders largely preceded leadership development, and sound doctrine and a biblical framework continued to undergird leadership development in both formal and more organic constructs.

Discipleship Distinct from Leadership Development. (27 occurrences). This code was the second most occurring in the entire study. Participants varied in their views of the relationship between discipleship and leadership development. Some considered the two to be separate. Others believed leadership development is discipleship but part of a progression that not all disciples will make. Every participant believed that each potential leader should demonstrate proficiency as a disciple before being given leadership responsibilities. Several were critical of what they perceived to be, in American evangelicalism, a popular notion that every person who undertakes to become a disciple must also develop into a leader—an idea every participant flatly rejected. As Pastor Doug said, “Miss Ruthie, an elderly lady in my church, is a disciple through and through. She displays every trait we expect from a disciple.
I’d say she’s an influencer. But she certainly feels no call to be a leader—and that’s okay.”

Leadership Development as Discipleship. (20 occurrences). While participants expressed it differently, they generally expressed a sentiment that a certain basic level of discipleship, a spiritual maturity—as defined by the church leadership—was a necessary prerequisite to leadership development. As Pastor Gene said:

> "I think they (discipleship and leadership development) start out the same… the process begins the same, and that (discipleship) is where you examine character, develop character, get to know them…and then some people just begin to exhibit the characteristics of leadership that they have learned or developed. Then you (the pastor) move from a discipleship role to a mentoring role."

Again, participants expressed it differently, but all of them explained a leadership development process that was biblically informed, seeking to lead as Christ led. In that the goal of leadership development was to lead in a Christ-like fashion, many participants seemed to explain a leadership development model that was, in essence, a discipleship process. Thus, leadership development could be said to be a subset of discipleship or, perhaps, discipleship at a higher level.

Service as Discipleship. (8 occurrences). To quote Pastor Gene, "the cream that rises to the top" in the discipleship process is a leadership prospect. Participants saw service as an essential component of discipleship that—along with spiritual disciplines—also identified leadership prospects. The participants generally desired that people serve in the church and felt service was a form of discipleship. Participants knew that a man's faithful service—even leadership—in one ministry role (for example, a parking lot greeting ministry) did not necessarily mean that God had called him to a church-wide role such as an elder or deacon. However, participants desired to see potential leaders succeed in lower degrees of responsibility before developing for future leadership, including such roles as teacher, small group leader, and even deacon or elder.

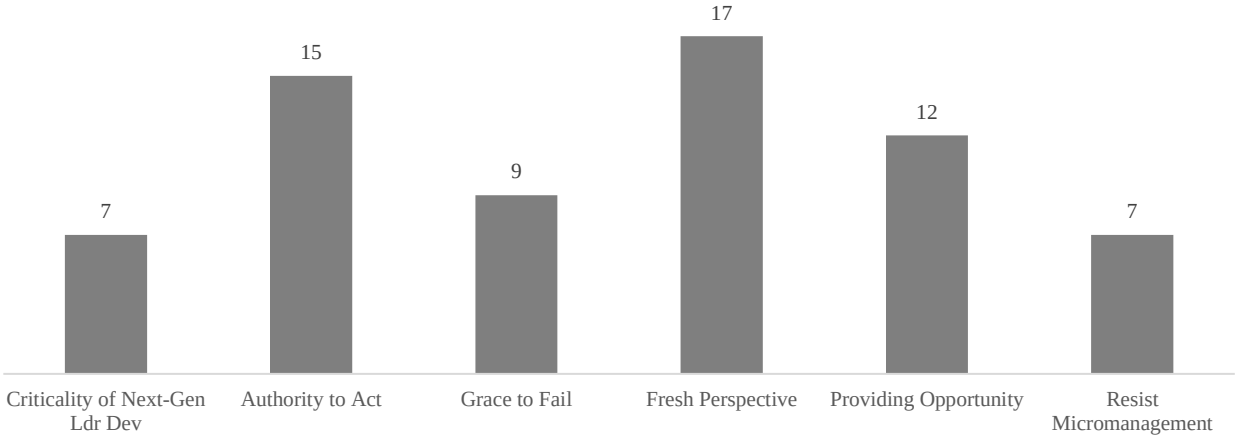
Spiritual Disciplines. (10 occurrences). Participants expressed deep concern that every disciple, every Christ-follower, be engaged in the spiritual disciplines—namely prayer, Scripture reading, fasting, and personal reflection. While participants believed emerging leaders had already demonstrated the spiritual disciplines, several expressed the idea that leadership development must continue to reinforce the spiritual disciplines in emerging leaders. Several participants attempted to continue modeling the disciplines, encouraged emerging leaders to read books on spiritual formation, and engaged with mentees in discussions about the books they had read and their ongoing practice of the spiritual disciplines. The continued exercise of the spiritual disciplines was closely related to the notion of leaders' mutual accountability as disciples.

Empowerment Code Group

Empowerment codes in this study described how the participants viewed empowering leaders as playing into their churches' revitalization success. The participants confirmed that empowering next-generation leaders to act was essential to restoring church health in a revitalization context. Participants reported that empowered next-generation leaders relieved the pastor of duties that took up time better spent on tasks such as vision-casting and sermon preparation. Several participants reported that they viewed empowering next-generation leaders as the key to retaining those individuals in the church and attracting more next-generation leaders. Figure 7 (below) shows the relative weight of the six most frequently occurring empowerment codes. A description of these top six empowerment codes and the importance pastor participants placed on them (with representative comments) follows.

Figure 7

Top Six Empowerment Codes



Criticality of Next Generation Leader Development. (7 occurrences). Every participant believed that the ability to develop at least one next-generation leader of church-wide influence was instrumental in successful church revitalization. Pastor Trent believes, "A church that does not have the next generation (in leadership) is already extinct. If the church is not reaching down, it tells me, biblically, that the church is not practicing the book of Titus, which says that the older should be mentoring the younger; you have silos going on. And it's a matter of time before the church closes its doors."

Next-generation leaders were more than simply additional hands to lighten the pastor's workload. They further served as more than the aspirational distant-future senior leaders of the church. Participants expressed the value of next-generation leaders in bringing energy to churches that had grown tired and apathetic. Participants saw next-generation leaders as bringing optimism and excitement to the congregation that drastically served to bring about the change in church culture the participants saw as necessary. Also important, several participants also reported that after years of leading a struggling church with an unhealthy culture, next-generation

leaders brought them personal encouragement, hope, and a renewed strength to carry on the church's ministry.

Authority to Act. (15 occurrences). Closely related to the concept of authority to act are the ideas of resisting micromanagement while allowing grace to fail. Participants desired to empower next-generation leaders with the authority to act within their areas without asking permission. Some pastors granted a vast latitude—budgetary actions, team-building decisions—to leaders they had developed. Pastor Kevin saw granting authority to act as, first, ensuring that next-generation leaders knew the Bible well enough and knew Kevin well enough to know how he would act in a given situation. Kevin also wanted to encourage a climate and culture where next-generation leaders were not afraid to ask questions, seek Kevin's help, or rapidly inform him when they made a mistake. Several participants expressed that if they had done their job as a developer of leaders, no next-generation leader would make a mistake so critical that the pastor could not deal with the aftermath. Several participants related the idea that they desire to have talked about their philosophy of ministry so well that potential leaders can be trusted to lead because they understand the culture, vision, and desired outcomes.

Grace to Fail. (9 occurrences). This code also appears in the culture code group. Participants not only identified grace to fail as a culture they sought to develop in their churches but spoke of this quality as essential to empowering new leaders to act and giving them the confidence to learn and exercise new skills. Pastor Trent believes that dealing with failure helps people learn to lead. He said, "You can't lead well if you don't fail well. And so, you learn by failing; not everything's going to be perfect." To the participants, grace to fail encouraged emerging leaders to try new things and to push themselves out of their comfort zones unhindered by the fear of the consequences (in particular, earning their pastor's ire) of failure.

Fresh Perspective. (17 occurrences). Each participant credited next-generation leaders with providing a perspective he did not possess. Each believed these perspectives, tempered with the participants' experience and a biblical worldview, made the church more effective at reaching younger adults and younger families to become part of the church. Prospective congregants could see themselves in the church.

Pastor Alan said that next-generation leaders' perspectives had challenged his own priorities and perspectives. He said, "Some things that I overlook, or I see as being less important—to them, they see as those being more important." He admits that next-generation leaders have caused him to rethink some of his positions and even the direction he should take the church. Sometimes, he says, next-generation leaders have forced him to concede, "you know, that's something I didn't really even think about. That's a solid, good point. Maybe we should, you know, think about kind of moving in that direction." Alan also believes such times are valuable as he often allows next-generation leaders to run with their ideas, increasing their sense of investment in the church's ministry without placing additional responsibilities on Alan.

Pastor Dale also saw next-generation leaders as a fountain of ideas. Next-generation leaders brought creativity and solutions that had not occurred to Dale. More than that, next-generation leaders have also convinced him to move forward on ministry initiatives he supported but believed the church was not yet capable of doing. "And so, if anything, it's showing me that not only am I developing the leaders but that God's using them to say to me, 'Hey, no. Now's the time. Not tomorrow, not next year. Now's the time to do this. So that's been huge."

Providing Opportunity. (12 occurrences). Participants overwhelmingly saw it as their duty to provide meaningful leadership opportunities for next-generation leaders commensurate with the individuals' level of leadership ability, ministry skills development, and spiritual maturity. Participants also saw providing meaningful opportunities to lead as essential to leader

retention. Pastor Randy said, “If you have good people that come in, if you have people that have skill sets, you must identify them, and you must use them, or they’ll be gone. They’ll go somewhere else where God will use their skill sets.” Randy’s observation comports well with what Clifton (2016, p. 24) said: “If you don’t provide young leaders the opportunity to lead in your church, they will eventually go somewhere else where they *can* lead. You can’t attract and maintain young people if you don’t afford them the chance to lead.”

Resist Micromanagement. (7 occurrences). Participants recognized the need to allow next-generation leaders a degree of freedom in the planning and how the latter executed their leadership responsibilities. The participants often related that their experiences as a leader and pastor would have led them to execute a task or responsibility differently than the next-generation leader to whom they had delegated a task. However, it seems that participants viewed their demonstration of trust in emerging leaders as far more important than the precise manner in which next-generation leaders executed a task. “If something has to be done my way, maybe I shouldn’t delegate it,” said Pastor Ben.

Participants generally recognized that they demonstrated trust in emerging leaders by resisting the urge to micromanage. Participants perceived that the display of trust by a pastor who resisted micromanaging helped build confidence in the next-generation leaders and built the credibility of the next-generation leaders in the eyes of the congregation.

Summary in Terms of the Research Questions

Summary of Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalizations describe their leadership development mentoring behaviors, and are these behaviors separate from a discipleship continuum?”

As this study defined the revitalization phenomenon, all participants led a successful small church revitalization. The participants described their leadership development behaviors as intensely, organically, and authentically relational. As nearly every participant was, at least at the outset of his revitalization experience, the sole developer of leaders, it was incumbent upon the participants to invite prospective leaders into a relationship. Participants likened their relationships with potential next-generation leaders to the New Testament description of the relationship between the Apostle Paul and Timothy. Participants described these as mentor relationships, but much more than the pastor doing all the talking and teaching. These authentic relationships carried a "doing life together" theme rather than a strict teacher-student relationship.

Participants, especially those who had been in the military, described a mentorship model of 1.) discuss, 2.) mentor modeling, mentee watch, 3.) mentee perform under close mentor supervision, 4.) mentee repeat until demonstrating proficiency, and then 5.) mentee performing tasks unsupervised. Participants spoke of preaching, teaching, and hospital visitation as among the most common ministry functions to take place in this manner.

Summary of Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization perceive their own practice of intentionality in leadership development mentoring, and how significant is intentionality?"

Participants described intentionality in leadership development as critical, though many believed they could have been more intentional. Participants described themselves not as programmatically intentional but in a way that might be termed "organically intentional." Whether pastors perceived themselves as intentional, they described acting intentionally in their exercise of leadership development behaviors. Most participants had few capable helpers,

especially at the beginning of their church's revitalization—and several needed to engage in outside employment. Therefore, most participants expressed a lack of personal capacity to establish leadership development as a program. As a necessity, participants described undertaking leadership development as they went about their daily ministry work. Participants described their leadership development practices as an apprenticeship model consistent with that demonstrated in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul and Jesus Christ.

Summary of Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "To what extent do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive they have empowered next-generation leaders, and what importance has this empowerment been in the revitalization?"

Successful revitalization pastors perceive that they have eschewed micromanaging next-generation leaders to a greater extent than their peers outside of revitalization contexts. They believed in demonstrating trust and in getting the church to a place where it could function without them. It was not that they were necessarily looking to identify a successor, but they wanted to know that the church would survive while the process of looking for a successor took place. They believed the church would necessarily look like its leaders. Therefore, the participants saw empowering younger leaders as essential to attracting younger church-goers and their families. The participants also recognized that empowering younger leaders would, in turn, free them up to concentrate on areas where their time as senior/solo pastors would produce more effective results.

Summary of Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, "What role do the pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive their tenure contributed to their success in developing next-generation leaders?"

Participants largely perceived that their tenure, per se, had little effect on their efficacy as developers of leaders. Often the most challenging part of finding potential next-generation male leaders is that there are no next-generation males in the church when the pastor arrives. It takes a long time to find them, let alone build them. Therefore, participants expressed their belief that their tenure proved helpful to the extent that the longer participants were at the church, the more potential next-generation leaders they could find, disciple, and equip for leadership. In general, the participants entered church revitalization with very high levels of education and leadership experience (both secular and ministry). It seems likely that most successful church revitalization pastors enter their ministries with excellent, well-established leadership development practices.

Summary of Research Question 5

Research Question 5 asked, "How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive that their leadership development practices towards next-generation leaders have contributed to their church's revitalization success?"

The participants came off as a humble group and gave God credit for their churches' successful revitalization. However, it was clear that they all believed that the ability to evangelize, equip, and empower next-generation leaders played a pivotal role in the church's success in revitalizing. Participants said that next-generation leaders played a critical role in attracting people closer to their age and providing needed peer relationships for younger people and families coming into the church. Next-generation leaders brought optimism, enthusiasm, and energy that helped turn around churches' culture of apathy and inward focus.

Researcher's Additional Findings

The researcher was intrigued, if not entirely surprised, by the participants' backgrounds. Although most (but not all) of them were in their first senior or solo pastorate, none lacked experience on a church staff. That seven pastors were military veterans—and credited the

experience as essential to their success—was particularly striking. The military veterans credited their service in the armed forces as giving them the resilience to endure difficult situations without quitting. Pastor Alan stated, “In the military, you learn to ‘embrace the suck,’ if you will. There is plenty of ‘suck’ in church revitalization.” Pastor Phil echoed the sentiments of military veteran participants when he said, “In the Air Force, I learned a sense of mission, and accomplishing that mission, no matter how hard it got.”

All the veterans recognized that they could not utilize such traumatic training techniques as they endured in the armed forces’ various ascension training programs. However, they believed they could model resilience for emerging leaders. They also credited the armed forces with providing a model of hands-on mentorship that served them well in developing leaders for revitalization (Pastor Kevin: “I’ve just seen that kind of training work too well, too many times, to not believe in it.”). Further, the veterans all seemed to have learned to be secure with training their replacements, as it were (Pastor Dale: “What if something happened to me? The church needs to go on.”). Each trusted those they trained to act. While none of the veterans expressed a desire to set up for failure those they trained and empowered, they all embraced mistakes as an eventuality, an opportunity to be open, and a learning experience—not something to be avoided at all costs. As Pastor Ben quipped, “If no one was injured and nothing was destroyed, in my book, that’s a failure I can live with.”

While the non-veterans among the participants were in the minority, they were exceptionally well-educated. Indeed, three of the four possessed seminary master’s degrees, and all three had also earned a doctorate. Moreover, two of the four had served in the secular civilian workforce for at least a decade before entering the vocational ministry. None of the non-veteran participants became pastors of the church they led in revitalization with less than ten years of experience either in the ministry or the secular workforce.

Evaluation of the Research Design

At the very least, this study provides empirical validation to longstanding claims of experienced church-revitalizing pastors, such as Clifton, Bickford, Hallock, and Rainer. The semi-structured interview format proved well-suited to understanding the phenomenon of pastoral leadership development behaviors towards next-generation male leaders in small evangelical churches. Participants provided valuable insights from their lived experiences as thriving church-revitalizing pastors.

Interviews lasted from one to two hours, with the most common length at about one hour and fifteen minutes. Some participants were more conversational and offered more thoughtful and quotable answers than others. Nevertheless, each participant presented as a pastor passionate about the local church and the notion of seeing churches become renewed Gospel lighthouses to their surrounding communities. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked what questions he should have asked but did not or whether the participant had additional insights that he wished to add. This final question often yielded a few more insights, though a few participants did respond that they had nothing further to add to the interview.

The expert panel—all holders of doctoral degrees—are recognized voices in the church revitalization community. Every panel member was also a Southern Baptist and a relatively influential figure in the denomination. While it may have been desirable to have evangelical voices outside the SBC serve on the panel, the researcher does not know of any notable non-SBC experts in church revitalization. The researcher further believes the input to the interview guide provided by the expert panel was constructive and helped produce a quality structure that gained rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

The researcher desired to interview 12 to 15 participants. Ultimately, however, the study included only 11 participants due to time constraints and the difficulty in identifying participants

who met the study criteria. Although the study did not recruit the desired number of participants, after seven participants, the study reached saturation, the point where no new data was obtained (Peoples, 2021). Denominational affiliation was not a recruiting criterion for the study, and ten of the 11 participants identified as Baptist. While no new themes emerged from the single participant who was not a Baptist, it seems likely that a larger sample size with a broader mix of evangelical faith traditions may have yielded at least some additional findings or insights, if not any new themes.

Further, while there was no required mix of racial or ethnic identities for the study, all participants were white and pastored predominantly white people. The researcher believes non-white participants serving in a majority non-white context would have yielded additional insights into the phenomenon of next-generation leadership development in church revitalization. The study did not require a specific mix of participant geographical locations, and the researcher could not recruit any participants from west of the Mississippi River. The researcher believes most themes gathered from participants in the western part of the United States would likely have been similar to those already gained in this study. However, having some participants from the western half of America would have served a further confirmatory function, and possibly, new themes or subthemes would have emerged.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This chapter concludes the dissertation by restating the study's purpose statement and research questions and presenting the research conclusions, implications, and applications. This chapter will discuss the research limitations before proposing further research that might be conducted based on the research presented in this study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the leadership development behaviors of senior or solo pastors who have successfully led the revitalization of a small evangelical church.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalizations describe their leadership development mentoring behaviors, and are these behaviors separate from a discipleship continuum?

RQ2. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization perceive their own practice of intentionality in leadership development mentoring, and how significant is intentionality?

RQ3. To what extent do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive they have empowered next-generation leaders, and what importance has this empowerment been in the revitalization?

RQ4. What role do the pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive their tenure contributed to their success in developing next-generation leaders?

RQ5. How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive that their leadership development practices towards next-generation leaders have contributed to their church's revitalization success?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

The research provided by this study offers several research conclusions, implications, and applications.

Research Conclusions

Several notable conclusions emerged from the research. The conclusions, as they relate to each research question, follow below.

Conclusions Related to Research Question 1.

"How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalizations describe their leadership development mentoring behaviors, and are these behaviors separate from a discipleship continuum?"

Discipleship mechanisms seem to serve as the fountain spring from which pastors draw potential next-generation leaders. Pastors of successfully revitalized churches perceived themselves as highly relational in developing next-generation leaders. Over time, these authentic relationships progressed from pastors' observations and initial conversations with prospective leaders. Those who expressed interest in leadership most often volunteered to serve in a ministry area for which they felt a calling and passion, receiving mentorship primarily from the senior or solo pastor. As previously discussed, participants held differing views on whether discipleship and leadership development were part of a spectrum or two completely different undertakings. Whatever way each participant viewed the interrelationship between discipleship and leadership development, all participants agreed that God has not called all disciples as leaders and that all leaders must first be disciples.

Successful church revitalization pastors believed discipleship to be an ongoing, lifelong process and saw discipleship as the source from which to draw prospective leaders. Interestingly, Barna (2015) found among church leaders in America a prevailing attitude that churches in the

U.S. (including their own) are failing at discipleship. If the churches can strengthen discipleship, especially among (but not limited to) younger generations—starting with teens or younger—churches may find themselves with more potential next-generation leaders to sustain revitalization or prevent the decline necessitating revitalization in the first place.

Conclusions Related to Research Question 2

"How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization perceive their own practice of intentionality in leadership development mentoring, and how significant is intentionality?"

Most participants were highly critical of their own practice of intentionality in leadership development, although every participant viewed intentionality as critical to developing those leaders. Nevertheless, the research revealed that, despite their self-criticism, participants described personal leadership development habits that were, in fact, highly intentional. Participants largely seemed concerned that they were neglecting to exercise intentionality in leadership development because the demands on their time—particularly in their revitalization setting—were exceptionally high. Indeed, several participants worked secular jobs while dealing with demands that included facilities needing updating and repair, heavy pastoral care needs, sermon preparation, and church administration functions. At the same time, several participants report, at least at the beginning of their ministries, leading a congregation content to let their pastor do all the work of ministry.

If teams could undertake church revitalization, assisting the lead or solo pastor with the physical and administrative needs of the church, it seems likely that pastors could devote more time to casting vision, sermon preparation, discipleship, and leadership development. If church revitalization networks or other sources of support or sponsorship for the revitalizing pastor

could negate the need for outside employment, it may allow the pastor more time to identify, discipling, and equip potential next-generation leaders.

Conclusions Related to Research Question 3

"To what extent do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive they have empowered next-generation leaders, and what importance has this empowerment been in the revitalization?"

Overall, participants were satisfied that they had successfully empowered next-generation leaders—at least to the extent there were next-generation leaders to empower and to the extent that older members allowed them to empower those younger leaders. Participants demonstrated a high degree of trust in next-generation leaders and sought to build up new leaders' credibility publicly. Participants demonstrated an openness to new ideas from emerging leaders. Participants were also willing to take risks that emerging next-generation leaders might make mistakes and accepted the potential "clean up" that might need to occur in the aftermath of such missteps. Participants demonstrated tremendous personal security, unworried about being outshone by younger, emerging leaders. They spent extensive time developing leaders and found that the energy and desire to serve exhibited by younger leaders far outweighed the potential mistakes of inexperience. Participants generally expressed gratitude that emerging next-generation leaders had taken much of the ministry's work off them, allowing them to concentrate on preaching, teaching, outreach, strategy, and vision-casting.

It is reasonable to conclude that pastors entering revitalization work must be able to trust other people to do meaningful work in ministry. It appears, both from the literature and the testimony of the participants, that pastors who led churches into periods of protracted decline failed to trust other leaders and did not delegate essential tasks.

Further, if healthy, prosperous churches, denominations, or other networks could undertake church revitalization with leadership teams—including next-generation leaders already trusted and empowered by the senior pastor—church revitalization efforts may gain traction more quickly in individual churches. Such practices have already been successfully demonstrated in numerous church planting situations. However, the researcher knows from firsthand experience that churches in need of revitalization likely will not be easy to convince to undertake such a revitalization effort from the outset of a new pastor's ministry.

Conclusions Related to Research Question 4

"What role do the pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive their tenure contributed to their success in developing next-generation leaders?"

The participants did not seem to perceive that their tenure contributed much to their practice as leader developers. Given each participant's prior ministry and secular leadership experience, it seems reasonable to assume that most successful church revitalization pastors enter the pastorate having already demonstrated strong competencies as leader developers. Therefore, church revitalization training efforts by seminaries, networks, denominations, and concerned local churches should equip potential revitalizers with the skills necessary to lead change, navigate conflict, and develop leaders under challenging circumstances.

Conclusions Related to Research Question 5

"How do pastors who have led successful small church revitalization efforts perceive that their leadership development practices towards next-generation leaders have contributed to their church's revitalization success?"

Pastors perceived as essential to church revitalization the ability to develop next-generation leaders. No pastor interviewed believed his church would have seen revitalization without identifying, developing, and empowering younger leaders. The minority of revitalizing

pastors will be fortunate enough to have older leaders assisting in developing next-generation leaders from the outset of the revitalization. However, most small church revitalization pastors should expect to be the sole developer of next-generation leaders for up to the first several years of the revitalization. Further, revitalization pastors must work with intentionality to establish intimate discipleship relationships with young men and to identify potential leaders from those demonstrating leadership potential in the discipleship process.

If older, spiritually mature men come along to help in leadership development, it seems likely they will have arrived on the scene only after the pastor's tenure has begun, with the former having bought into the pastor's vision. Many churches will not even have any adult males in attendance at the beginning of the pastor's tenure. Thus, the development will include efforts to reach young adults outside of the church and bring them into a relational community. It seems possible that organizations devoted to church revitalization could assist pastors by sending spiritually mature men over 50 years of age, proficient as disciple-makers and in line with the vision of revitalization, to become part of a struggling congregation's membership. Men from the "Generation X" and "Baby Boomer" generations may seem less threatening to an older congregation. They may have the patience and maturity to deal with the traditionalism and seeming lack of progress in a struggling church while making meaningful connections with potential next-generation leaders whom they can mentor and disciple.

Implications

Pastors who undertake church revitalization are capable developers of leaders, but they often enter revitalization situations as "lone warriors." Denominations, networks, and more prosperous churches interested in seeing churches revitalized could do many things to assist these pastors. Participants spoke of the significant investment of their time in raising leaders—and building up trust within the congregation—before revitalization could begin. Clifton (2016)

has often said that gaining traction in church revitalization may take five years or longer. Some churches do not have that long left. Sadly, because of finances or the congregation's age, it is entirely possible that many churches that might otherwise have seen a successful revitalization, if they had long enough time available to build up next-generation leaders, will close their doors when no longer able to pay their bills.

If churches and denominations could formalize a program of replanting and revitalizing in teams, a method often seen in church plants, it seems possible that next-generation leaders could be in place very early in the revitalization. Under the leadership of a revitalizing senior pastor, these teams may be able to spread the burden of pastoral care, outreach, and facilities management. At the same time, these next-generation leaders—and their families—could bring needed energy, enthusiasm, and relational connections to younger generations.

Applications

Despite being heavily comprised of Baptist participants, the researcher believes this study has application across various denominational traditions and polity types in small evangelical churches. Indeed, although Pastor Kevin was the only participant from outside the Baptist tradition, the overarching themes emerging from his interview did not deviate significantly or meaningfully from the other participants. The researcher also believes that, had the study included participants from slightly larger evangelical churches—perhaps as large as 150 to 200 in average attendance and with a pastoral staff as large as two or three—the results would not have differed substantially. Thus, this study's principles should apply to churches of those sizes. Likewise, it seems probable that themes in larger churches (with bigger staff) would have differed from those encountered in this study.

The researcher does not believe the study's results would necessarily apply to small, struggling churches outside evangelicalism. The researcher does not intend to paint with a brush

unnecessarily broad or engage in polemics. However, the researcher believes cumulative differences in polity and theology between mainline and evangelical churches may be too great to make meaningful, reliable inferences about mainline churches from this study's findings. Further, while the study likely includes findings that will apply to developing female leaders, the researcher makes no claims that the study results would reliably apply to complementarian churches led by women pastors and elders.

Research Limitations

Several limitations accompany this study, which looked only at the role of a tiny facet of church revitalization. First, the researcher's contacts and networks may have unduly limited the study participants to an overwhelming Baptist majority. The researcher did reach out to the headquarters of the Christian Reformed Church, Assemblies of God, and Christian and Missionary Alliance denominations, with no interview prospects materializing from those efforts. It is, therefore, possible that Baptist denominations, especially the Southern Baptist Convention, place a higher priority on church revitalization as a core mission than other denominations. However, it seems possible that other themes may have arisen had the researcher recruited a broader range of evangelicals. The study did not mandate specific geographical regions of the United States for churches undergoing revitalization. In recruiting for the study, the researcher could not find revitalization pastors in the Mountain or Pacific Western regions. Given the size of the population of the western United States, other themes may have arisen from interviewing revitalization pastors in the western half of the United States.

Further, the study was delimited to the United States. Possibly, study findings would apply in Western nations, mainly English-speaking nations. However, the decline of Christianity in Western countries outside the U.S.—even in neighboring Canada—seems to provide an even more post-Christian culture than this study. Therefore, it is difficult to say whether all this study's conclusions would reliably apply outside the U.S.

Another limitation of the research—as the researcher recognized going into the study—is that increasing attendance is only one critical metric of church revitalization. One notable measure of revitalization not addressed by this study is the financial state of a church. Churches undergoing revitalization often face extreme financial pressure, and even as attendance increases, new attendees may not be able or spiritually ready to give substantially enough to counter the church's financial woes. Indeed, even as they reported increased attendance during the study period, three pastors reported that finances forced their churches to cease to exist as independent congregations. These churches and their facilities merged into growing church plants or were "adopted" by larger, more financially stable congregations. Almost all the pastors interviewed said their congregations had declined in attendance and finances during the COVID-19 pandemic. These pandemic losses, from which several churches had not fully recovered, erased nearly all of the gains of 2017 through 2019. Further, several participants reported that congregants unhappy with changes in the revitalization weaponized their financial offerings to pressure the revitalizing pastor.

Other metrics of successful church revitalization include the congregation looking increasingly like the surrounding community in age and ethnicity. Almost invariably, the congregation's average age will decrease, and, in multiethnic communities, churches will become multiethnic (usually, but not always, meaning less white). Such a progression indicates that the church has become more outwardly focused and successful in reaching its neighborhood (Henard, 2021). Ideally, emerging leaders will also more closely reflect the age and ethnic makeup of the community (Clifton, 2016).

This study revealed that pastors view discipleship as either (or both) a vital component of leadership development or a prerequisite to it. Each pastor reiterated his conviction that the Bible shows that Christ calls all believers—leaders or not—to discipleship. The discipleship efforts of

a successful church revitalization will see substantial gains in the spiritual maturity of the congregation at large, not just the leaders. It seems reasonable to infer that, in churches where well-discipled, younger leaders emerged, the state of discipleship in the entire congregation also improved. However, this study did not address the success of discipleship efforts in the whole of a church's membership.

Further Research

The phenomenon of next-generation leadership development by pastors in small, evangelical church revitalization contexts requires further study. It is unlikely that the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has fully worked its way through American congregations. An additional study similar to the present study, focusing on 2023 through 2025, would reflect the realities of church revitalization in the post-COVID era. It seems likely that many effective pastoral leadership development behaviors observed in the present study would remain valid. However, COVID may have shifted many churches from a state of decline to the final stages of death, with closing as an imminent prospect.

Further, the study managed only to find white pastors and congregations that, at least at the beginning of the revitalization process, were predominantly white. It seems likely that church decline and the need for revitalization in predominantly non-white congregations led by non-white pastors struggle with many of the same issues seen in predominantly white congregations. However, this study cannot confirm this or provide any insight into problems peculiar to predominantly non-white congregations as distinct from their predominantly white counterparts. Combined with the results of this study, research similar to this study but conducted with predominantly non-white—mainly black and Hispanic—congregations would help better understand church revitalization best practices across the broader American population.

In the researcher's view, the most surprising aspect of this study was that most of the revitalizing pastors interviewed (7 of 11) were military veterans. It is possible that a study of U.S. military leadership development programs and philosophies—especially in high-risk or dangerous settings—could yield valuable insight that could apply to church revitalization research. The connection between pastors with military backgrounds and church revitalization seems especially poignant, given that so many leading voices in the church revitalization community of interest see church revitalization as principally an exercise in spiritual warfare, a battle the Bible often couches compared with physical battle (Lawless, 2021). Previous successful military service may also indicate the types of personalities or experiences that would help a potential revitalizing pastor excel in such a demanding role.

A study on the relationship between pastoral education and successful church revitalization seems a topic worthy of undertaking. The researcher was also surprised by the high level of formal education on the part of the recipients (eight seminary degrees, with five of the eight holding doctorates and two more still in the process of earning their doctorates). The researcher believes that this level of education may see pastors better prepared for successful revitalization or may speak to the personality types and skillsets of pastors who will succeed in church revitalization.

Additionally, the researcher found that the number of Baptist pastors (not all of whom were Southern Baptists) who mentioned utilizing the NAMB Pipeline training program as a resource in developing leaders during revitalization was worth noting. Perhaps it is unsurprising that the SBC would be at the forefront of church revitalization as the largest Protestant denomination in North America. From the researcher's experience, it is clear that NAMB is passionate about revitalizing North American churches, not just SBC churches. Admittedly, the level of commitment to revitalization within the SBC seems highly dependent upon state

conventions and local associations. The researcher encountered little in the way of other denominations' efforts to assist churches in revitalization. However, it was clear that some evangelical denominations the researcher contacted, such as the GARBC, CMA, and CRC, were beginning to address the issue of decline and revitalization. The best practices of denominations, parachurch ministries, or other networks in church revitalization, perhaps in a case study format, would make for a worthwhile study.

The study also revealed that nearly every participant expressed an interest in church planting, and most considered, before coming into revitalization, God might be calling them into church planting. A few participants had previously been involved in church planting, while one was moving on from revitalization to a church planting assignment and others remained open to the thought that church planting might be a future ministry assignment. This attraction to church planting was a sentiment with which the researcher, having served in church revitalization and received church planting training before the call to revitalize, could relate. Those participants who had served in church planting and revitalization—such as Pastors Phil and Randy—expressed that, while both were hard work, church revitalization was the more difficult. Clifton (2016) expresses the same sentiment as Pastor Phil, who remarked, "You know, I've been involved in church planting and church revitalization now, and hands down, revitalization is the toughest assignment."

Several participants, including Ben, Alan, Randy, and Phil, expressed the thought that, as far as their church's culture, they felt they had almost planted a second church within the church. As previously discussed, the church revitalization community of interest often refers to radical revitalization as "replanting." Some declining churches even choose to disband but gift their facilities to church plants. Church planting and church revitalization seem, in many ways, more directly linked to each other than simply serving as ways to stabilize and, ultimately, increase the

number of congregations. Indeed, church planting and revitalization seem to draw entrepreneurial pastors with excellent relational skills, personal resilience, and team-building skills. Therefore, church planting and church revitalization seem inextricably linked.

Additional study may prove that church planting training and support structures offered by denominations and church planting networks could readily adapt to the church revitalization context. To give church plants the best success, denominations and church planting networks invest heavily in church planting, including funding, training, and developing planting teams. Admittedly, church planting does not come with change-resistant congregations stuck in a long decline and possessing an unhealthy culture. Indeed, the outwardly focused, evangelistic culture of church plants is often the polar opposite of the inwardly focused, preference-driven culture of a church needing revitalization. However, despite the additional baggage included in church revitalization, perhaps it is possible to develop substantial training, teams, and resources for churches willing to receive a completely new leadership team.

The present study approached leadership development from a complementarian perspective, examining the place in church revitalization of male pastors developing next-generation leaders. This narrow focus primarily served to bound the study to a manageable problem set. However, this researcher recognizes that not all small, evangelical church pastors operate within a complementarian framework, where the offices of elder (including pastors) and deacon are seen as biblically limited to men. Evangelicalism encompasses a much broader range of polity and leadership structures. Evangelical churches operating with an egalitarian leadership structure, which views the offices of elder and deacon as open to women, also struggle with decline and the need for revitalization. In struggling egalitarian churches—just as in their complementarian counterparts—women pastors still confront the need to develop next-generation leaders in aging congregations. A study similar to the present could produce

additional insights and best practices for egalitarian evangelicals undertaking church revitalization.

This researcher further recognizes that, even within complementarian contexts, where men are the exclusive holders of the offices of elder and deacon, women hold many prominent leadership roles. Indeed, several complementarian pastors participating in this study cited as a positive factor the influence exercised by women in the congregation. Churches that view themselves as complementarian often allow women in other leadership roles outside of eldership or the diaconate. Women provide critical leadership in complementarian churches, serving as worship leaders, teachers, committee chairs, and ministry leaders. The wives of pastors, elders, and deacons often serve alongside their husbands and, whether formally or informally, exercise tremendous leadership influence within the congregation.

Additionally, many churches—complementarian and egalitarian—empower married couples of all ages for ministry leadership. Church revitalization leaders in any evangelical church ignore at their own peril the importance of female or couple leadership to successful revitalization. The role of women leaders in church revitalization—either in a complementarian or egalitarian setting—is a subject worthy of further examination. Moreover, the church revitalization pastor's efforts to develop and empower married couples as leadership teams within the church may be worth additional scholarly exploration.

The ability to develop next-generation leaders is an essential component of church revitalization. If churches are to survive, older generations must pass the mantle of leadership on to younger people. However, the ability to develop next-generation leaders is no cure-all for struggling churches. Indeed, as later happened to one participant in this study, pastors may develop capable next-generation leaders only to have other insurmountable obstacles arrive, forcing the church's closure. Church revitalization is an all-hands effort, best undertaken with all

members of the congregation contributing the best of their time, talent, and treasure. Further, men and women over 40 years old still have much lifespan (often several decades) left to serve the church, and many years of life experience to offer as leaders of the church. However, for any number of reasons (such as their newness to the faith or lack of earlier opportunity or readiness) they may not have had the opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity. It seems only reasonable that church revitalizing pastors would develop these leaders concurrently with next generation leaders.

Further, leadership development is an ongoing process and even long-established church leaders seem likely to benefit from further honing of leadership skills. Several of this study's participants said that at least one older adult leader was a positive contributor to their church's revitalization efforts. Further studies in church revitalization might well examine the development of middle-aged or senior adult leaders and their contributions to successful church revitalization.

Summary

Church revitalization is a uniquely challenging pastoral ministry assignment. Successful church revitalization requires that the pastor—often the sole leader developer—be able to identify, recruit, disciple, train, and empower next-generation leaders for service in the church. Such efforts often occur in congregations where few, if any, next-generation congregants attend, let alone show readiness for leadership. There are no shortcuts to developing next-generation leaders.

This study provides empirical validation to what many influential voices in the church revitalization community have long said: leadership development takes place in authentic relationships and intentional discipleship. Such development takes time and patience. Further, church-revitalizing pastors must undertake a complicated balancing act of empowering next-

generation leaders with genuine leadership opportunities while building the acceptance of long-term congregation members.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 24, 2022

Bart Denny
Gary Bredfeldt

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-978 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT BEHAVIORS IN THE REVITALIZATION OF SMALL EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

Dear Bart Denny, Gary Bredfeldt,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study 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 the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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

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

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether

possible modifications 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
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: RECRUITING E-MAIL

Dear Pastor [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Christian Leadership. The purpose of my research is to better understand the perspectives on leadership development mentoring practices of senior or solo pastors in a small, evangelical churches that have seen significant revitalization after protracted plateau or decline. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be males 18 years of age or older (if applicable), and must have served as pastor of a small, evangelical church from January 1, 2017 to December 1, 2019 (participants need not be currently serving as pastor of the same church). The church must have had 65 or less in average attendance as of January 1, 2017. The church must have seen three consecutive years of at least 5 percent annual increase in attendance during this period. Further, participants must have successfully developed at least one male leader with churchwide influence, who was under 40 years of age as of December 31, 2019. Periods after this date are not included because church attendance during the years 2020 through 2022 have been severely affected by COVID-19.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview of approximately two hours. After the interview, I will provide transcripts of your interview for you to review for accuracy, and you will have the opportunity to provide feedback. This should take approximately half an hour. In addition, your interview will be qualitatively analyzed for overarching themes, and you will be given the chance to provide feedback on this analysis. Reading and replying to the interview analysis may take approximately 30 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click here [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6XBNGZM] and complete an online eligibility questionnaire and contact information form. I will reach out to you to schedule a time for an interview.

A consent document is provided as the first page of this online eligibility questionnaire. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please type your full name in the box provided and click the link provided to proceed to the screening questionnaire. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to complete the screening questionnaire.

I deeply appreciate your time and passion for church revitalization. If you know of other pastors or former pastors who may be a candidate for this study, I would be grateful if you would you provide me with their email address or forward this email to them.

Sincerely,
Bart L. Denny, Th.M.
Doctoral (Ph.D.) Candidate
Cell: [redacted]
E-Mail: [redacted]

APPENDIX C: RECRUITING SOCIAL MEDIA POST

The student posted the following on Church Answers Central and in Facebook Church Revitalization Groups of which he is a member.

ATTENTION CHURCH REVITALIZING PASTORS I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Christian Leadership at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to understand the leadership development behaviors of church revitalizing pastors. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older (if applicable), led the revitalization of a small (under 65 as of January 1, 2017) evangelical church between January 1, 2017 and December 31, 2019 (time period chosen to avoid calendar years where COVID-19 has influenced attendance). You must have also developed one male leader with churchwide influence who had not reached his 40th birthday by December 31, 2019. Participants will be asked to complete and in-depth interview (about 2 hours), then review the transcript and data analysis of their interview, which should take about an additional hour to complete. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click here (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6XBNGZM) to reach the eligibility questionnaire. Please direct message me or contact me at [redacted] for more information. A consent document will be provided at the beginning of the eligibility questionnaire.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Pastoral Leadership Development Behaviors in the Revitalization of Small Evangelical Churches

Principal Investigator: Bart L. Denny, Th.M., Doctoral (Ph.D.) Candidate, Liberty University, School of Divinity

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be (or have been) the male senior or solo (only) pastor of a small evangelical church that, during the entire period of January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019. Your average church attendance must have been 65 or under as of January 1, 2017. Your church must have experienced revitalization, which, for this study, is defined as an annual increase in average attendance of at least five percent. Further, you must have developed and empowered at least one male leader with churchwide influence (e.g., deacon, elder, worship leader, or teacher/leader of a major ministry or group, such as *the* adult Sunday School class, the youth group, or a Celebrate Recovery group). This leader (or leaders) must not have reached their fortieth birthday by December 31, 2019.

Please note that an externally hired pastoral staff member would not count as such a leader, while an internal candidate raised up from within the congregational laity would count as such a leader. The study selected the January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019 time period because these were the last three full years where COVID-19 was not a factor in church attendance.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is determine the leadership development mentoring behaviors of senior or solo male pastors who have led the successful revitalization of small evangelical churches. Many experts in church revitalization consider leadership development, especially the ability to develop and empower young men as leaders, as essential component of revitalization. This study hopes to capture the best leadership development mentoring practices for church revitalization.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. You will first be asked to complete an online screening form, which will directly follow this informed consent form. This screening form should take 10 minutes or less to complete, and will determine whether you meet the criteria for the study (small church, evangelical, male pastor, developed a leader or leaders, church successfully revitalized).

2. If you agree to participate in the study and meet the criteria, I will contact you to set up a time for an interview. Given that we are probably separated by a great geographical

distance, but that my desire is to meet face-to-face, I will ask to meet with you via the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing software. I prefer to use videoconferencing because it allows us to see each other's facial expressions and body language. Microsoft Teams is free and works on Mac or Windows computers with webcams or with mobile devices, such as smartphones. Microsoft teams will allow me to record our interview for transcription. You should set aside up to two hours to complete this interview.

3. I will afford you the opportunity to review for accuracy a written transcript of your interview. I estimate that reviewing the transcript should take half an hour.

4. I will provide you with the chance to review the overarching themes to emerge from an analysis of data provided by your interview. You will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the results of the analysis. I estimate that this review will take approximately half an hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include a possible benefit to the broader evangelical church revitalization community of interest, identifying best practices for developing next-generation leaders essential to successful church revitalization.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes. Video interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Any physical notes will be scanned and stored and paper copies shredded. Data will be stored digitally on an external hard drive, with appropriate files password protected and the entire drive physically stored in a locked filing cabinet. Data will be retained for three years upon completion of the study, after which it will be deleted using "digital shredding" utilizing seven-pass deletion methods.
- Audiovisual recordings of interviews will be stored digitally, as will written transcripts of these interviews. These digital files will be stored on the physically locked, password-protected external hard drive and deleted using seven-pass methods after three years. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings. If printed to paper, transcripts will be stored for a short duration in a locked file cabinet and will be run through a shredder after use.

- Your interview answers are completely confidential. If time constraints require me to hire a transcriptionist, I will require the transcriptionist to sign a legally binding non-disclosure agreement prior to transcribing interviews.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

Only your time is required for the study. You will need a webcam-equipped computer (Mac or PC) or smartphone, with free Microsoft Teams software downloaded and installed.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Bart L. Denny, Th.M., a doctoral (Ph.D.) candidate at Liberty University's Rawlings School of Divinity. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [redacted] and/or email [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gary J. Bredfeldt, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

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

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you the only pastor of your church, and if not, are you the lead or senior pastor of your church?

2. How long have you served as the senior or only pastor of your church?

3. What was the approximate average attendance of your church at weekend worship services at the beginning of your tenure as pastor of the church?

4. What has been the average attendance for weekend worship services for each of the past three years? As of January 1, 2017_____, As of December 31, 2017_____; As of December 31, 2018_____; As of December 31, 2019.

5. Do you affirm the following statements?

    a. Jesus Christ is the divine, incarnate Son of God, coequal and coeternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Yes / No.

    b. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. Yes / No.

    c. The 66 books of the Holy Bible are the inerrant and authoritative Word of God written by human authors, as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Yes / No.

    d. Eternal salvation is by the Grace of God, through the faith of those who believe in Jesus Christ and his atoning substitutionary death on the cross. Yes / No.

    e. Good works play no part in eternal salvation. Yes / No.

    f. Christ rose again from the dead on the third day following his crucifixion. Yes / No.

    g. Christ will one day return to establish His kingdom on earth. Yes / No.

6. Christians should share the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the good news of His death for sin, His burial, and resurrection—with others. Yes / No.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Would you mind telling me about yourself? Where were you born and raised? If you grew up in church, would you briefly describe that church and pastor?

2. Please tell me about your call to ministry.

3. Did you have a different career before ministry? If so, what was your career?

4. If you had a career prior to ministry, how do you feel it informed your leadership development practices?

5. Did you have seminary or Bible college training? If so, where?

6. Do you believe the Lord specifically called you to do revitalization? If so, how did He do that?"

7. What were your ministry experiences before revitalization?

8. What role do you believe the development of next-generation (under 40) male leaders played in your church's success in revitalization?

9. Have you been the primary developer of male leaders under 40?

10. Please describe your methods for developing leaders.

11. How did you identify potential next-generation leaders?

12. In what roles do next-generation leaders serve your church?

13. Were there key "gatekeepers" in your church who helped identify younger leaders?

14. Were there older congregational leaders who also helped develop young leaders?

15. How do you believe leadership development fits with the concept of discipleship? Are the two the same? Are they two different things? Do you view leadership development as part of a continuum of discipleship?

16. Do you believe intentionality has been necessary for developing your next-generation leaders?

17. Please describe how you have been intentional in developing next-generation leaders.

18. How have you empowered your next-generation leaders?

19. What latitude do you give next-generation leaders in decision-making?

20. What part do next-generation leaders play in your own decision-making?

21. What impact do you believe developing and empowering next-generation leaders has had on the success of your revitalization efforts?

22. Did you utilize outside resources for your leadership development process? If so, which ones were most helpful?

23. Did your leadership development process emphasize keeping your church outwardly focused and mission-focused or equip leaders for greater evangelistic impact?

24. What were the key obstacles you encountered in your leadership development process? How did you overcome the obstacles?

25. Were there elements of your leadership development process that you would have done differently? What were they?

26. How did your leadership development behaviors change with increasing tenure? Do you believe your effectiveness in leadership development improve with increasing tenure?

27. If you had been able to afford different or additional leadership development resources, what might you have done differently?

28. Have you established ongoing practices to continue developing and strengthening leaders in your church?

APPENDIX G: EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

The following subject matter experts assisted the researcher in developing the questions used in the interview guide.

- Michael Kevin Ezell (D.Min., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), President, North American Mission Board
- Charles E. Lawless, Jr. (Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), Dean of Doctoral Studies and Vice President for Spiritual Formation and Ministry Centers, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Samuel S. Rainer III (Ph.D., Dallas Baptist University), Lead Pastor, West Bradenton Baptist Church, Bradenton, South, and President, Church Answers
- Thom S. Rainer (Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Church Answers, and Distinguished Professor of Church Revitalization and Leadership, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary