

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Older Adults and Digital Technology for Worship Service During a Pandemic
at Saint Paul's Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the church to move from in-person worship to digital, online, and virtual worship services. This thesis project aims to determine if going to an alternative worship platform has presented problems for the elderly and senior Saint Paul's Baptist Church members. Because of the large number of seniors at Saint Paul's, the church's leadership must be ready to help in any way to ensure that all members can participate in worship services during these unprecedented times. Since there is no projected timetable for when and if the church will return to worship services as we know them. This project will help identify if elderly church members are comfortable using this technology to participate in worship service. The participants will complete a survey about digital, virtual, and online platforms for church worship services. The project manager will also conduct individual interviews following the survey to gain more insight into the responses. The study hopes to determine if the church can assist members who are uncomfortable using technology. There will be a follow-up survey at the end of the study to gauge the project's effectiveness. The information gathered in this study might help other churches confronted with the same issue. The anticipated length of the study is four to six weeks.

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Abbreviations (if needed)

CDC	<i>Center for Disease Control</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
SPBC	<i>Saint Paul's Baptist Church</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic has caused various changes in how people enjoy normal activities throughout the world, from going out shopping or eating, enjoying a sporting event, going for medical care, just the simple everyday actions that people have taken for granted. Like other churches, the pandemic has also affected church worship service at Saint Paul's Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia. The pandemic dramatically affects going to church for worship service on Sundays or Bible study on Wednesdays, and other church programs. With a pre-pandemic membership of over ten thousand people, Saint Paul's Baptist Church's leadership changed how the worship service is done, like many other churches. The church leadership did not want to risk keeping the doors of the church open and possibly becoming a super spreader of the COVID-19 virus. The senior pastor decided to follow the recommendations of the CDC to determine what would be best for the congregation. Health and safety were of the utmost importance when considering how the church would proceed.

Saint Paul's Baptist Church leadership has had to develop alternative ways of communicating and ministering to its congregation and the community. As a result, the senior pastor and church leaders agreed to use digital platforms and virtual methods to provide worship service, Bible study, and communicate with church members. In all likelihood, this form of communication and worship services would not present a problem for the younger generation who grew up with digital devices and the internet. However, the church leadership did not consider its effect on the older population, those sixty-eight years old and older.

There are over 750 seniors in Saint Paul's membership, and many of them enjoy activities like attending in-person Bible study. The church has a weekly Bible study program in which the seniors meet on Thursday morning, after which they have lunch provided by the church. They also have certain other activities they enjoy, like the vegetable garden. This activity allows them to meet regularly to plant and maintain a vegetable garden that provides fresh vegetables for needy families. However, the pandemic changed how seniors interacted with others and the community. Because they could not meet in person, this study looks at the church's older adult members' understanding of how digital and virtual technology can work to connect them with regular church worship and programs. It also looks at how comfortable the senior members are using these forms of communication at Saint Paul's Baptist Church and other ways of providing worship services specifically for older church members.

The use of digital and virtual technology is not new to the business world. However, the use of this technology is unique for many churches worldwide. Larger churches use a form of technology regularly. For many years, churches have recorded their services on cassettes and, more recently, compact discs to give to the sick and shut in. However, this pandemic presented problems for member participation, even for some larger church congregations. Saint Paul's is uniquely positioned to create other ways to communicate worship service to its membership because it had established weekly television broadcasts before the pandemic. The preaching portion of the service is recorded and shown on television one to two weeks later. Retooling the process to stream live on Facebook, YouTube, and the newly launched Saint Paul's Baptist Church TV channel (MYSPBC TV) has not created too much of an issue for most church members. However, some Saint Paul's elders are left out participating in weekly worship and Bible study because of the restraints on face-to-face interaction. The elderly church members

should have the same opportunity to enjoy and participate in worship service as all other members. Exploring this issue to see if there is a need to address it is what this study is attempting. The church elders have provided help from financial support to being a resource for questions regarding the church's history. For this reason alone, the church needs to be sure the elders of the membership can access the weekly worship service and that they are comfortable doing so. Staying connected to the church's biblical teachings and the elder's spiritual growth is paramount in keeping all members connected. Online worship and other digital and virtual technology forms are becoming the new church building. COVID-19 has shown even more that you do not need to be within the four walls of the church to receive the message of salvation.¹

Ministry Context

Saint Paul's Baptist Church is a 111-year-old forward-looking large multisite African American church in Richmond, Virginia. Saint Paul's is a church for "People on the Grow"² and provides spiritual guidance to its congregation and helps with other basic needs of the membership and persons living in the surrounding communities. As it grows in faith, Saint Paul's Baptist Church recognizes the value of prayer to discern God's vision, leadership, and plan for the church. Therefore, prayer is primary in everything the church does.³ In addition, Saint Paul believes that Jesus Christ gave the church its purpose in Matthew 28:19-20, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything I have commanded you (NIV). Therefore, in

¹ Yiran Ge, Mayra Sainz, Janelle Gore, Fayron Epps, "Everything is Either Sent by God or Used by God": An Exploratory Study on the Impact of COVID-19 Upon the Religious Lives of Black Families Living with Dementia. *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, (2021): 3193-3208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01332-4>

² Saint Paul's Baptist Church, "Welcome," 2020, myspbc.org/about/saint-pauls-baptist-church/welcome.

³ Ibid.

obedience to the scripture mentioned above, the church's purpose is to lead people to a life of faith in Christ and empower them to grow into everything God created them to be.⁴

The age range of the congregation is from infancy to seniors over the age of sixty-five. There has been consistent church growth for the last thirty years, and there are currently over ten thousand persons who hold membership at Saint Paul's. Of this number, approximately seven hundred seniors aged seventy and up.

Saint Paul's has four worship services every Sunday split between three sites. There is a 9 o'clock and 11 o'clock service on the main campus of Saint Paul's Baptist Church in north Richmond and a 10 o'clock service at the south Richmond location and the Petersburg, Virginia location. These worship services consist of in-person fellowship, ministry classes, and spoken words from the senior pastor and the various campus pastors. Throughout the history of Saint Paul's Baptist Church, in-person worship services have been vital to the church's existence and growth. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift in how Saint Paul's Baptist Church presents its weekly worship services. Change is inevitable, and Saint Paul recognizes and embraces the reality of change and seeks to respond creatively, redemptively, and proactively to the pandemic's changes. Alternative measures of church worship have now become the norm. As circumstances arise, Saint Paul's will continue to be creative in its ministry while maintaining the message of Jesus Christ.⁵

Most churches have moved to provide worship services using different communication platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and other online avenues to minister to congregations and communities. Many Saint Paul's members can connect and communicate with the church

⁴ Saint Paul's Baptist Church, "Mission, Vision and Values," 2020, myspbc.org/saint-pauls-baptist-church/mission-vision-values.

⁵ Ibid.

using social media platforms like Facebook, live streaming, YouTube, Zoom, and video conferencing. Unfortunately, this new normal has come about so rapidly that many of Saint Paul's senior citizens may be unable to keep up with or learn to use these platforms. Even though these communication platforms are new for many churches, Saint Paul frequently uses various digital communication platforms. For example, Saint Paul's Baptist Church has recorded its weekly worship services titled "Positive Power" for years to be shown later on television. Older members are comfortable with this because it is on television, and they only have to tune in to the correct station.

Saint Paul's Baptist Church is a multisite church. Measures taken to provide alternative worship through digital means seemed the best way to continue ministering to the congregation during this time of uncertainty. Because this came about quickly, there was not much research on how this would affect the church's senior population. They are left figuring out how to participate in the church's worship services and other activities. While most seniors may be in the habit of using electronic and digital devices like cell phones, they may not be as comfortable watching worship services on Facebook or YouTube. Research has proven that young people are more comfortable with this digital technology than older adults.⁶

This research project will look at how comfortable Saint Paul's Baptist Church's older population is with this alternative worship style. The research project will also address what the church leadership can do to help the senior members of the congregation who are not comfortable with this change in worship presentation. Presently, Saint Paul's Baptist Church uses the small group concept called 'Life Stages' to connect members of the church who are in

⁶ Philip R. Meadows, "Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture" *Mission Studies* 29, no. 2 (2012): 163-182.

the same age range. The Life Stage group for seniors aged seventy and up is called the Refiners. The size of the groups these life stage groups vary in size. There are seven hundred and fifty members in the Refiner's life stage. An associate pastor of the church oversees each of the life-stage groups of the church. These groups enable the members to come together to study the scriptures and celebrate their members' accomplishments. The groups also provide care for one another in a time of need. The strength of small groups lies in the fact that there is in-person contact. With the onset of the global pandemic, meeting in person was no longer acceptable because of the virus's possible spread. Because of social distancing and wearing face masks and other personal protection equipment, meeting in person is not advisable. Not meeting in person can affect individuals' emotional and mental balance, especially among older adults. To provide technology learning opportunities to the seventy-plus age group, the church must stay connected with them. Many of their contact numbers are no longer in service. The Saint Paul's Refiners Life Stage group pastor and leadership need to reconnect and restart the monthly group gathering for the elders. Many times, meetings at the church were motivating enough, with the promise of lunch or dinner and fellowship, to get the members to attend. Recently, a group reaching out by making phone calls has become a ministry, but this still does not match the numbers which would show up in person. The social-psychological benefits are many, and those taking part did not feel alone or cut off from the church. Having this opportunity to record/correct contact information is invaluable. Our current method of utilizing the data when they first joined the church and provided it has proven outdated. The church is losing contact with many older adults in the seventy-plus age group.

The church's mission is to connect to every member, especially those in our most vulnerable age group. The current small group structure comprises a lead pastor and core group

leaders who each set up a small group to divide the work. There are seven core group leaders to cover the seven areas of each Life Stage that make up the ministry of care for its members. The Refiners small group pastor and the core group leaders for these seventy-plus members are working on strategies to reconnect with members.

Human beings are social by nature and depend on others for various types of support. A group can be two or more people. God provided the first example of a group by creating two individuals to be each other's support. To hunt and gather, to provide companionship and conversation. Even today, this is still important; stimulating people's minds and being with like-minded individuals leads to stimulating conversation. Small groups provide a safe space for discussions and support.⁷ Here there is an opportunity to agree or disagree without malice.

Howard Hendricks states, "Spiritual growth is best nurtured and promoted in small groups."⁸ Small groups at Saint Paul's have begun to use Zoom technology to meet. However, Zoom technology challenges many Life Stage groups at Saint Paul's Baptist Church.

Saint Paul's leadership knows the many problems the members will have with these changes. There is considerable concern about how well the church's older adults handle the changes in ministry practices during these unprecedented times. The leadership of Saint Paul's has long been intentional in caring for the more aging church population. The church regularly provides services such as transportation to services and other church-related events. Providing food and other personal necessities helps the church's senior members. However, the pandemic interrupted many of the church activities for older members. There is a significant concern that

⁷ Mariet Mikaelian. "The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2016.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1844988596?parentSessionId=MgjZmj3MWPIg%2FR06RTGi%2F6wX8pdLvzBuo4%2Fd%2FSax0s%3D&accountid=13479>.

⁸ Paul Petitt, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation, A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Kregel Publications, 2008), 12.

the more senior church members could be isolated and feel left out during this time. Now is the time that the church leadership needs to step up to provide care for the more senior church members. The issue is whether the church's older members have access to and can use the technology available to stay connected with the church. It is essential that this age group feels the church's support and spiritual leadership. The use of social media can give a sense of connectedness and support from the church.⁹ This research project hopes to address how well the older adults of Saint Paul's Baptist Church can adapt to the different technologies.

During this pandemic, the leadership of the church is crucial. Continuing to be able to connect and minister to the whole church is imperative. However, leading the church in a pandemic has presented many challenges for the congregation and leadership. Because there is no in-person worship, there are no Sunday school classes, no Bible study classes, and no other services that include being in-person. The leadership rethinking how to provide ministry to the congregation resulted in using virtual technology. Learning how to proceed with this created a learning curve for the church leadership. Educating the ministry leaders became a priority in being prepared to use alternative ways of reaching and caring for the church membership. Facebook was the first platform the church used to connect with the membership. Figuring that many church members are familiar with this platform seemed to be the most logical. From that, the church went to creating a streaming platform on YouTube. YouTube worked well for many, but everyone did not have this application. The church then created its streaming channel, MYSPBC TV. Church members could access this platform by visiting the church website and clicking on live worship. The church's streaming channel works well, but there was a problem if

⁹ Sonya McMillan, "The Impact of Societal Changes on a Traditional Church." Order No. 28418513, Drew University, 2021. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fimpact-societal-changes-on-traditional-church%2Fdocview%2F2524861026%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>. 53.

the congregant did not have a computer or other ways to log into the website. Herein lies the issue many seniors have with staying connected to the church. The leadership then came up with the idea of having a call-in phone number that those members who could not join in the services otherwise could use to participate in worship services. The senior members who did not have virtual capabilities could now be part of the services by dialing in and listening to the programming. This way of connecting the membership works well, except that the church member could only hear the service and not see the preacher or presenter.

Saint Paul's also utilizes Microsoft Teams and Zoom communication for church and small group meetings. These platforms allow more control over who's involved in the discussions and presentations. These platforms have proven to work great for Bible study and Sunday school. Both Microsoft Teams and Zoom allow participants to see one another or hide their screens. Given how the pandemic progressed, these alternative measures work well until Saint Paul can resume in-person worship. Saint Paul is ahead of many church churches in the area regarding providing alternative ways of providing spiritual care through technology.

Problem Presented

Saint Paul's Baptist Church went to an alternative worship service like many other churches due to the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic. The church continued holding worship services and Bible study using electronic, virtual, and online technology. Using this form of worship was sudden and has caused the congregation at Saint Paul's to adjust how they participate in church service. Not all of the church congregation members could make this adjustment easily. There is concern regarding the older church members and how they are adapting to this change. Going to church worship service each week gave them a sense of independence and enabled them to fellowship with others. "Historically and traditionally, from

an African American perspective, gathering in corporate worship and ministry has always played a pivotal role in the life of the black church.”¹⁰ While most of Saint Paul’s senior members use digital technology like cell phones and tablets, not all are familiar with or know how to use other internet technologies such as social media, video streaming, and other online meeting applications.

During a meeting with the church ministry leadership, a group member brought to the leadership’s attention that some older adults were having problems participating in worship. When the church went to this alternate worship service, the leadership team had not considered the church’s older and senior members’ difficulties using technology. Most are retired on fixed incomes and do not have access to or cannot afford the added expense of getting the right technology to view and be a part of worship. Also, many of them may not understand or can use the technology. The problem is, what can the church do to alleviate the technology-accessibility imbalance that prevents seniors’ participation in alternate forms of worship?

Purpose Statement

This DMin research action thesis aims to determine if the more senior adult members of Saint Paul's Baptist Church are comfortable using digital technology and if they have access to online or the various virtual styles of worship. The hope is to show how providing virtual worship services through social media, Facebook, YouTube, and other digital platforms can present problems for the older members of Saint Paul's Baptist Church. Changing to a virtual worship format is due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Because of social distancing, there has been a need to have virtual worship services, Bible study, and other church programs on

¹⁰ Sonya McMillan, “The Impact of Societal Changes on a Traditional Church.” Order No. 28418513, Drew University, 2021. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fimpact-societal-changes-on-traditional-church%2Fdocview%2F2524861026%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>. 52.

various digital and social media platforms. In the haste to create an alternative way to provide the worship and Bible study experience, the church leadership neglected to see how it would affect those with little or no knowledge of the digital information world, particularly the seniors. At this time, Saint Paul's Baptist Church is cautiously returning to in-person regular worship service with options to close down again should the circumstances warrant it. According to the church's senior pastor, digital and virtual technology will continue to be how the church has worship services even when the pandemic subsides.

Basic Assumptions

Saint Paul's Baptist has provided in-person spiritual enrichment and encouragement for its members and the community for over one hundred years. The older population of the church could depend on having a place to gather for spiritual conversation and reflection. They looked forward to the weekly worship services, Bible study, and other church activities. Unfortunately, lives changed immensely with the onslaught of COVID-19. Because of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, they could no longer continue to meet in the way they had grown accustomed to in the past. Churches canceled in-person worship services and all other in-person activities due to this highly contagious virus. Governments across the globe issued stay-at-home mandates for fear of spreading the virus. Like all churches, Saint Paul did not want to put the congregation members at risk, so the doors of the physical church were closed. Being confined to the home created a form of isolation for many persons, especially the elderly. For many, the church was their only interaction with other people. Of course, family members would check on elderly relatives through phone calls, but that physical, in-person contact was not there.

Realizing the harm this was doing to the church members, especially the seniors, the Saint Paul leadership moved to provide a way of staying connected through digital and virtual

means. The use of the internet provided the initial way to communicate with members who had email addresses. Contacting members who did not have email was done by phone. The church continued to evolve to connect with the membership by going to social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. These two media platforms enabled the church to again begin to provide weekly worship services and Bible study. However, not everyone could participate because of the technology used. The assumption was that many of the older congregation members would not be able to participate. This assumption assumes that many older adults may not be familiar with the technology. There were many conversations on how the church could help the more senior congregation members use this technology. The difficulty in knowing how the church could help was not knowing who needed to be supported. Since it was virtually impossible to connect in person, the only way to know was if the seniors somehow made known they were having difficulties. The church was not saying that all senior members had an issue, but many were.

For the more senior population of the church, the technology now being used may not be understanding it as much as having access to it. In addition, most retired African American senior adults live on a fixed income. Therefore, having Wi-Fi or an internet connection is not an essential need in most cases. Basic needs such as food, shelter, and taking care of their health are considerably more important than being able to get on Facebook. So, then the question is not do the seniors know how to access the technology but whether they can afford to have the technology.

Providing worship services through live streaming using the various digital platforms created a way for the church to have a more far-reaching means of spreading the gospel. Many churches have long audiotaped their services to distribute to seniors who could no longer attend

church and the sick and shut-in. However, live streaming for worship is entirely new for Saint Paul's and the congregation.

It is the assumption by the leadership at Saint Paul's Baptist Church that all older adult members of the congregation are not technology challenged. Over eighty percent of the church members over age 70 have an email address, and it seems they are comfortable using email. However, the premise is most older adults are uncomfortable using various digital devices for church service and ministry. Another thing is the more senior the individual is, the more they prefer printed materials to digital devices, which may also be assumed.¹¹ SPBC considered doing away with printed weekly church bulletins, but the church's senior members balked at the idea. So, SPBC continued with the paper weekly church bulletins for in-person worship services. Finally, the assumption is that most older adults do not like change, especially rapid change. These assumptions may or may not be accurate. The only way to know if these assumptions are correct is to research the issue to determine the validity of this thought. If the more senior members of the congregation were to be instructed and given a basic knowledge of using social media as a communication tool, this would provide an alternative way to connect with others when face-to-face communication is impossible. Adapting to digital technology and social media platforms may not be easy for the seniors at Saint Paul's Baptist Church.¹² The leadership cannot assume that seniors not using digital technology and social media will want to learn to use the technology. This change to a virtual presentation in church worship programming and how the church cares for the members is sudden. The leadership's assumption that everyone is

¹¹ Stephen Smith, "The Sermon in the Twenty-first Century," *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 7 (2019): 107.

¹² Sonya McMillan, "The Impact of Societal Changes on a Traditional Church." Order No. 28418513, Drew University, 2021. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fimpact-societal-changes-on-traditional-church%2Fdocview%2F2524861026%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>. 56.

comfortable with this change may be inaccurate, especially for senior members. Even though change is inevitable, it can be difficult for many people. Life is constantly evolving and adjusting to the changes COVID-19 presents can be complicated for many people. The leadership of SPBC cannot assume that the church's senior members will adapt to the changes in how the church now has to provide ministry programming. It takes time for older people to embrace sudden change.

Definitions

CDC: Center for Disease Control

Older Adults (Seniors): They are sixty-five and more aged individuals who are less likely to have grown up using the internet and digital technology.¹³

Internet: This global network allows computers and people worldwide to exchange information.¹⁴

SPBC: Saint Paul's Baptist Church

Technology: As used in this study, it refers to any social media network such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or other online services.

Digital Technology: This term in the study refers to cell phones, smartphones, tablets, and e-readers.

NIV: New International Version Bible

NLT: New Living Translation Bible

Virtual Technology: as used in this study, refers to an interaction that is not physically in-person.

¹³ Philip B. Stafford, *Social Media, and the Age-Friendly Community*. In *Aging and the Digital Life Course*, edited by Prendergast David and Garattini Chiara (New York: Oxford Berghahn Books, 2017), 26.

¹⁴ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google* First edition. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009).

Zoom Communication: video conferencing service used to meet with people virtually without being at the exact location.

Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project's location will be in a virtual environment using various technologies. Therefore, using an external site is not currently feasible. In addition, the restraints imposed because of the pandemic caused a change in the research. There is a fear of exposure to the virus because of the participants' possible medical conditions. Therefore, all gatherings for worship services or programs at Saint Paul's Baptist Church are limited during this pandemic. For the services still provided, wearing facemasks and social distancing at least six feet apart is required. Because of the limits of personal contact imposed by the CDC during this research, meeting with the participants is not an option.

Delimitations

This research project is limited to the older Saint Paul's Baptist Church members aged sixty-five and more. There will be no more than twenty participants in the study. The members involved in the project are not obligated to continue until the completion of the research; they are free to withdraw at any time. There is no personal in-person contact with the participants other than phone and virtual contact conversations.

Thesis Statement

If using digital and online technology for worship is becoming the new normal in the world, then all church members, including the senior population of the church, must be taught how to use the technology and, where possible, be provided with the proper equipment to participate in worship. In addition, the church leadership must ensure that they are comfortable using this technology. Providing for the elderly unfamiliar with social media and other

information technology must be the church's goal if this way of doing church continues.

Providing spiritual care and leadership for the church congregation includes making the worship platform available to all persons. Enabling older adults to use and feel comfortable using various digital and virtual technology can be challenging. The church uses multiple technology platforms to minister to the congregation during this pandemic. The church leadership must ensure that all members know how to access that platform. Part of Saint Paul's Baptist Church's vision statement is to find needs and meet them and find problems and solve them, and this might be both a need and a problem for the older adults and senior members of the church, which the leadership must address.

Finding out if and where the church has a disconnect in providing worship service through virtual and digital technology for older adults will enable the church to help those in need. The senior population must have access to and the ability to participate in service. The use of virtual technology through Facebook Live, YouTube, and Zoom can provide this avenue of participation. The issue then becomes, do older church members have access to this technology?

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The use of the internet and social media has become an everyday occurrence for most households and businesses worldwide. It has come to the point where most churches are using internet technology for regular worship every week. The literature used in this research looks at older adults and their use of technology. The literature also compares the usage between age groups. Some literature indicates other issues regarding the use of technology by older adults beyond just age.

Using social media technology to deliver worship services is the norm for most churches. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, churches have gone to doing worship services virtually. However, social media and other forms of virtual technology are not the primary way the church delivers its programming and worship services. In-person worship is and has always been the direct way the church communicates with its congregations. The use of these different ways to communicate with the church membership created problems for some members. Because of this change, some members, especially older adults, do not have access to or can use virtual technology or social media. The church did not anticipate that the pandemic would cause this significant change in ministering to its members. Taking care of all the members of the congregation is one of the obligations of the church leaders. The church's responsibility is to those, including older adults, not having access to or not knowing how to use virtual technology to provide the help they need.

Scripture has much to say regarding the elderly and gives instructions on how to care for them. Caring and helping others is a significant theme throughout the Bible and the elderly require a great deal of help. God says in Isaiah 46:4, "Even in your old age and gray hairs I am

he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.” Addressing the age disparity between young and older adults using social media and virtual technology in the church is a priority. The following Scripture means the church must provide for its more senior members’ instruction on accessing and using social media. Matthew 25:35 says, “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you invited me in.” The reference here is that man should not neglect the needs of others, including the elderly. Today, this scripture can refer to helping and ensuring that those seniors who want to participate in the church through virtual means are a must for the leadership at Saint Paul’s. The scripture, in this instance, is especially true of helping the elderly during this pandemic.

SPBC has significantly changed how the church now ministers to its members. However, going from in-person worship to virtual worship was no small feat. First, the church had to update its existing technology to broadcast worship programming and services over the available technological platforms. Contacting the membership also proved to be somewhat of a challenge because of the size of the congregation. Early in the pandemic, participation in worship services was low due to people not knowing to access the church's technology platforms. In addition, social distancing limited how the church could prepare the membership to use the technology. The church notified the members with email accounts listed in their contact information. For those with no email accounts, the church contacted them by phone.

Realizing the issue of going to an alternate form of worship, the church developed other ways for members to participate in other church programming and worship. For example, SPBC developed a dial-in phone line for church members who did not have social media accounts. To access this means of church worship, the church member would dial the phone number provided

by the church, enter the access code, and instantly hear the worship service. Using dial-in phone service proved to be a good alternative for members who did not have or use computers, social media, or virtual technology. However, using this form of technology to participate in church worship limited the member's participation. They could only hear the service and not actively contribute to the service. Virtual technology in the form of Facebook Live and the church website enabled involvement by the members in chat boxes. Members could make comments in reply to the pastor's requests and talk with one another via the chat boxes provided by the technology. The chat feature provided a way of being more connected with one another during worship services. It also allowed the pastor's leadership team to dialog with the membership during worship service.

Until now, the focus on church worship services and programs has been in-person worship. The use of social media and virtual technology for church worship services was something some churches experimented with, but it was not their primary objective. Therefore, not much research on using this technology during a pandemic as a direct way to minister to a church congregation is available. SPBC provided taped recordings to those who requested them for the seniors who could not attend worship services. The church also sent deacons and ministers to minister to those older members who were shut-in and in nursing homes. However, the pandemic put a stop to the visits. The recording of the weekly worship messages also halted to focus more on providing visual presentations for the church members. Creating an acceptable way to reach all of the church's membership became the primary objective of the senior pastor and leadership. The creation of a technology team guided how the church could better reach its members without creating too much confusion in the process during this pandemic. The video equipment the church already had was updated, and staff trained in the use of the newly updated

technology. Doing this provided the technology needed to broadcast programs and worship services to the membership. They prepared the people on the production side of the broadcast but failed to consider those not familiar with using this technology on the receiving end. Many of the older, more senior members of the church were not well versed in today's technology and would not be able to participate in the service broadcasts. Not knowing if the church's senior membership would be able to participate in the services soon became something that concerned the church leadership. Whether the elderly population of the church would be comfortable with knowing how or even wanted to use this technology soon became the issue. Are they comfortable using digital and virtual technology for church programs and services if the problem is what this researcher addresses in this study?

The pandemic created obstacles other than church participation for the elderly. Isolation has become a significant problem for the elderly. Most older adults opted to stay in their homes because of the pandemic and the fear of becoming infected with the virus. Isolation can have many psychological effects on the mind. Being in this age group and speaking from experience, not being able to fellowship and visit friends and relatives causes depression. Having the ability to connect with others using technology is one of the ways to stay connected. But, for the elderly, this may not be as easy as it may seem. Learning to use the different technology available may be difficult for a senior adult because the mind may not retain as much information as someone younger. Again, speaking as someone from that age group, learning and using something new can be extremely difficult. The mental pressure placed on the elderly to suddenly learn to use technology like Facebook Live, YouTube, and Zoom as forms of communication can depress them even more. Before the pandemic, learning the use of these forms of technology was optional, not the necessity it has become, especially for church services. As previously stated,

little research is available on how the elderly have adapted to this form of technology in the church. This research hopes to examine if the elder members of Saint Baptist Church accept this technology for worship services and if they are comfortable with its use. The seniors used in this research will come from the church membership, hoping they know something about social media and virtual technology. It is difficult to gauge how the elderly will respond to change. As people age, they get used to having things a certain way, like going to church worship on Sundays and Bible study on Wednesdays. Interruptions in their routine can cause confusion or even illness. Knowing how comfortable the elderly membership of Saint Paul Baptist Church is using social media and virtual technology can provide the church leadership with the changes they need to make to serve this church population better.

Literature Review

Internet/Technology

Digital and information technology have become the standard way of communication today. Technology such as the Internet, Twitter, texting, and other communication methods has changed how today's people correspond.¹⁵ Because of this somewhat new communication method, older adults try to understand and adapt to this technology. Internet technology presents a new reality that could challenge life's existence; it is not apparent but subtle.¹⁶ Digitalization is speeding up almost every aspect of life. People are becoming more impatient with having to wait

¹⁵ Stephen Smith, "The Sermon in the Twenty-first Century," *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 7 (2019): 105-107.

¹⁶ Paul K. McClure, "Tinkering with Technology and Religion in the Digital Age: The Effects of Internet Use on Religious Belief, Behavior, and Belonging," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 3 (2017): 481-497.

for anything because of the rapidness of technology.¹⁷ For the most part, older adults like to move slower and precisely digest and internalize information. With the onslaught of technology, the church has also succumbed to this changing communication. Many churches have moved to digital technology in most, if not all, their worship platforms. Larger church congregations are leading the way in the use of this technology. Because digital technology is advantageous for communicating with church members, it would be irresponsible for the church's leadership not to take advantage of it.¹⁸

Jared Wilson asks, “Are we heading to the day when a worship service is simply someone pressing a play on the worship band avatars and the sermon video while the congregation “attends” via hologram?”¹⁹ Balzer is concerned that churches are moving “from “faith and technology to faith in technology.”²⁰ It has come to the point that churches now have pastors whose primary function is to oversee chat rooms that allow online worshippers to chat with one another during service.²¹ These statements should concern all churches; digital technology is becoming the standard in worship services. Balzer offers no solution to the concern of faith in technology. However, Bobby Gruenewald states, “Technology is not vital to the church, but an amazing tool for encouraging vitality.”²² The recent issues in the world today,

¹⁷ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2011), 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 197.

¹⁹ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 119.

²⁰ David Balzer, “Young Adults, Communication Technologies and the Church,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 19, no. 2 (2018): 56-64.

²¹ Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmutt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 267-285.

²² Chris Norton, “Virtual Vitality: Bobby Gruenewald Links Technology and the Church,” *Christianity Today* 55, no.11 (2011): 104.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001865586&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

regarding the pandemic sweeping across the globe, having faith in technology has become standard in all aspects of digital communication. Digital and virtual meetings have become a standard in the business world and even in homes. Online platforms provide the church with ways to “pursue worship, discussions, friendships, teaching, support, proselytization, and other key religious goals through computer-mediated communication.”²³ Families are turning to alternative forms of communication, such as Zoom and Facebook. Churches have also turned this form of worship to keep their congregations meeting together. According to Albert Mohler, just about every church has information about their church on some digital platform.²⁴

This new way of churches doing ministry and worship has taken away from the pastor’s one-on-one contact with the congregation, which most older adults seek. Many older adults might not be comfortable doing this, moving to a different kind of worship service in the church. Most older adults have become comfortable using cell phones and smartphones. For many older adults, this is where the comfortability ends. Older adults need to be instructed and trained in using digital technology if they expect to embrace it. Doing this can significantly enhance their quality of life and play a vast role in reducing their dependence on others.²⁵ Various forms of training can help older adults learn and become more comfortable with technology, from computer-based training to computer-assisted training, from interactive video systems to virtual

²³ Tim Hutchings, “Online Christian Churches: Three Case Studies,” *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 23, no. 3 (2010): 346–69.

²⁴ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 177.

²⁵ Leela Damodaran, Wendy Olphert, and Jatinder Sandhu, *Fit for Purpose. In the New Dynamics of Ageing*, Vol. 1, edited by Walker Alan (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018), 169-192.

reality training.²⁶ Technology is radio, TV, and computers for older adults and Baby Boomers. According to Pamela Roberts, older adults connect with these devices better.²⁷

Age Difference in Technology Use

The age of an individual has a lot to do with their use of technology. Research and studies have shown that the so-called MTV generation is more adapted to learning visual technology.²⁸ Social media is becoming the information highway by which all age groups are traveling. Many older adults have no problem using social media like Facebook and Twitter, but that is as far as it goes. The use of other digital communication forms like YouTube is entirely different. Older adults use digital devices like e-readers and tablets, but not to a great extent. In discussing the faith-based use of new scroll digital devices, Richardson and Pardun report that, according to a survey conducted in January 2014 by the Pew Research Center, age is the difference that reveals who owned different digital devices. Older adults were less likely to have digital devices like tablets and e-readers. The survey revealed that only about 25% of adults 65 and older had a tablet, and 22% had an e-reader. There is a much more significant percentage of ownership of these digital devices by people 18 to 49.²⁹ The use of digital devices like smartphones has increased over the last few years for older adults, but that does not mean they are comfortable with other forms of digital communications.

²⁶ Natalie E. Wolfson, Thomas M. Cavanagh, and Kurt Kraiger, "Older Adults and Technology-Based Instruction: Optimizing Learning Outcomes and Transfer," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 13, no. 1 (2014): 26-44.

²⁷ Pamela Roberts, "Electronic Media and Ties that Bind," *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 25, no. 2 (2001): 96-98.

²⁸ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 112.

²⁹ Kathy Brittain Richardson and Carol J. Pardun, "The New Scroll Digital Devices, Bible Study and Worship," *Journal of Media and Religion* 14, (2015): 16-28.

The younger generation has a much more significant relationship with digital technology than persons born in the 1950s and 1960s. The first generation of people who grew up using the online platform was born in the late 1980s. The watchdog industry that studied how TV viewership was trending noticed that people watched a screen other than TV. They noticed that more people migrated from the TV screen to the cell phone and the internet.³⁰ The young people embraced the technology wholeheartedly and adapted to it with ease, whereas the older population was not as enthusiastic about the new way of communicating. Jobling contends that the individual is not defined as an older adult or has a disability when online. They are just a person.³¹ While older adults are more likely to prefer printed material for media communication, the younger they are, the more likely they want instant internet communication.³² The more senior adults come from an era in time when technology was beginning to take hold. Because of the lack of electricity in some areas, the use of any technology was not available. Being digitally engaged is a priority for older adults to become comfortable with technology. Research has shown that access to technology is not always accessible globally, and older people are less likely to use technology such as the internet than young people.³³

The age disparity between older and younger adults in the use of digital technology is shifting. Older adults are becoming more comfortable with the help of digital technology and, as a result, are adapting to the constant changes within the industry. Facebook and Twitter are

³⁰ Dave Browning, *The Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 115.

³¹ Marie Jobling, "To Boldly Go Online: Empowering Elders to Connect Socially with Technology," *Journal of the American Society on Aging* 38, no. 1 (2014): 48-50.

³² Stephen Smith, "The Sermon in the Twenty-First Century," *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 7 (2019): 105-107.

³³ Leela Damodaran, Wendy Olphert and Jatinder Sandhu, "*Fit for Purpose. The New Dynamics of Ageing*" Vol. 1, edited by Walker Alan (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018), 169-192.

becoming a means of communication many older adults find necessary daily to stay in touch with family and friends.³⁴ There is little disagreement among authors because older adults now use the internet and digital technology. Because of the pandemic, this is true. More older adults are now using the internet and virtual technology as a way to stay connected with the outside world.

Usefulness

The use of digital technology has made it easier to communicate with a greater audience worldwide. Digital technology allows the church to be “no longer confined by geography, space, or time.”³⁵ The church has embraced this technology because of the far-reaching advantage of attracting more people to virtually view and participate in worship services. Many churches are tapping into digital internet technology to grow their congregations.³⁶ Churches with multiple campuses use digital technology more than those with only one location.³⁷ The use of digital technology for church worship services and other events has allowed people seeking a church home to preview what churches have to offer without going to the church. Blackaby and Blackaby have noted that because digital technology is global, embracing and using it has provided "Christians with unprecedented opportunities to extend God's kingdom."³⁸

³⁴ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles of Leadership that Matters* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 179.

³⁵ Jennifer L. Phelps, “God’s Infinite Imagination: Worship at Trinity Lutheran Church, Perkasie, PA,” *Cross Accent* 28, no. 2 (2020): 41–49.

³⁶ Paul K. McClure, “Tinkering with Technology and Religion in the Digital Age: The Effects of Internet Use on Religious Belief, Behavior, and Belonging,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 3 (2017): 481-497.

³⁷ Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmatt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 267-285.

³⁸ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2011), 373.

Digital technology also allows the church to reach the congregation's sick and shut-in members and older members who cannot attend worship services in person. Through email, chat rooms, and electronic bulletin boards, online services can provide the viewer with better interaction in the worship experience.³⁹ While older adults may not be comfortable operating these digital technology formats, it is becoming routine for many churches to present worship services and programs in this manner. Research has shown that older adults have differing attitudes toward technology.

On the one hand, there is evidence that is considerable use of computers by older adults, which positively affects their attitudes toward technology.⁴⁰ In 2012, a Pew Study noted a pattern of online service use by older adults as trending positively through a national survey. Stafford indicates that "Overall, 8.2 percent of all adult internet users go online daily, and among those 65 and over, 70 percent use the internet daily. The study suggests that, once seniors are connected, they become avid users of the technology."⁴¹ Literature reveals that once older adults accept what digital and online technology offers, they readily adapt to this communication format. There is a certain amount of sadness for all church members because of not meeting in person during this pandemic. Still, because many churches have learned to use and embraced virtual technology platforms like Zoom and Facebook Live, this has allowed some visual

³⁹ Pamela Roberts, "Electronic Media and the Ties," *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 25, no. 2 (2001): 96-98.

⁴⁰ Natalie E. Wolfson, Thomas M. Cavanagh, and Kurt Kraiger, "Older Adults and Technology-Based Instruction: Optimizing Learning Outcomes and Transfers," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 13, no. 1 (2014): 26-44.

⁴¹ Philip B. Stafford, *Social Media, and the Age-Friendly Community*. In *Aging and the Digital Life Course*, edited by Prendergast David and Garattini Chiara (New York: Oxford Berghahn Books, 2017), 26.

connectedness.⁴² The use of digital technology at Saint Paul’s has allowed its members to access those sermons they may have previously missed.

The use of digital technology today as a tool for communication is essential in all aspects of life throughout the world. Not only is this technology used in the business world, but it has become an effective tool for everyday communication for people from all walks of life. For example, during the pandemic, digital technology, social media, and other forms of communication are becoming valuable assets for the church.⁴³ Before the pandemic, some churches' idea of digital communication was to have a large screen mounted in the sanctuary and other rooms in the church to project worship services and programs. However, according to Dave Browning, we now have delivery mechanisms for more of everything in the digital world.⁴⁴ Because of these delivery mechanisms, the church can remain connected with the congregation and the community in which it resides.

Communication

Literature reveals that digital and online technology gives people the means to communicate globally. “People in and out of the church are doing amazingly caring things for one another online and in-person as necessary and possible.”⁴⁵ Even though some authors like Jobling see some obstacles regarding the use of digital technology, there is no doubt that it is the fastest and most convenient to communicate with friends, neighbors, and relatives and connect with and, in many cases, participate in activities. She writes, “the most fundamental obstacle to

⁴² Rhonda Miska, “The Earth, Our Altar,” *U.S. Catholic* 85, no. 7 (2020): 25–26.

⁴³ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles of Leadership that Matters* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 124-125.

⁴⁴ Dave Browning, *The Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 27.

⁴⁵ Paul Westermeyer, “Pandemic as Paradox,” *Cross Accent* 28, no. 2 (2020): 7–8.

older adults and people with disabilities using technology is access.”⁴⁶ Connectedness and communication are vital elements in an age-friendly community. In most senior communities, digital information technology is available and accessible to assist older adults, meet their needs, and engage in activities offered by the community.⁴⁷

How people communicate with one another is changing, and digital technology has a great deal to do with that change. Word of mouth and face-to-face communication was once the usual way people communicated. Email, texting, instant messaging, and different communication methods take away from that one-on-one personal sharing aspect. Even in the church, communication is giving way to digital and online formats. In some online and virtual worship services, pastors and ministers oversee chatrooms, allowing their online members to interact with each other during the service.⁴⁸ Because of today’s world’s climate, churches are becoming more acquainted with digital and online communication systems and developing a means for their congregations to access those systems through the use of personal online and digital devices. Because things are changing so rapidly, more churches use the internet to communicate with their congregations and members.⁴⁹ Whether a church embraces the use of digital and online technology depends heavily on the pastor and leadership. The church’s leadership must strategically and skillfully communicate the idea of using digital technology to enhance the worship experience, and they must be intentional.

⁴⁶ Marie Jobling, “To Boldly Go Online,” *Generation: Journal of the Americas Society on Aging* 38, no. 1 (2014): 48-50.

⁴⁷ Philip B. Stafford, *Social Media, and the Age-Friendly Community. In Aging and the Digital Life Course*, edited by Prendergast David and Garattini Chiara (New York: Oxford Berghahn Books, 2017), 21.

⁴⁸ Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmatt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 267-285.

⁴⁹ Keith L. Smith, “How Congregations Can and Do use the Internet, with Special Reference to Social Action,” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 4, no. 1 (2001): 25-45.

People communicate in a variety of ways offered by digital devices. Many devices used for communication are in the palm of people's hands or in the bags they carry, cell or smartphones, netbooks, palmtops, digital pads, and now intelligent clothes. These devices keep people connected, informed, and communicating with the world while they are mobile.⁵⁰ The world seems to agree that digital communication online and virtual technology are the ways people will be sharing. According to *Christianity Today*, social media, a computer-mediated communication method, "enhances the human accessibility and the speed of communication between people and groups."⁵¹ In other words, communication using social media can mobilize people and help the church connect with more community members. At this time, social media is the primary way Saint Paul's Baptist Church communicates with the membership. However, because of the concern for the church's senior members, Saint Paul still uses phones to connect with this age group. Because not all seniors have the means to communicate with the church using social media, the church tries to make accommodations for them.

Social Media

Social media has now become the standard way people communicate with one another. This concept of communication has also become real in the church. Social media has become an essential tool in ministry and the gospel's spread in the church.⁵² Because of the COVID 19 worldwide pandemic that caused countries to shut down and practice social distancing, social media has become the way people stay connected with family and friends. According to Esther

⁵⁰ Philip R. Meadows, "Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture," *Mission Studies* 29, no. 2 (2012): 163-182.

⁵¹ Matthew Lee Anderson, Brandon Vogt, and Douglas R. Groothuis, "Virtual Fellowship: What Are We to Make of Social Networking in the Churches?" *Christianity Today* 55, no. 12: 54-55.

⁵² Sonya McMillan, "The Impact of Societal Changes on a Traditional Church." Order No. 28418513, Drew University, 2021. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fimpact-societal-changes-on-traditional-church%2Fdocview%2F2524861026%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

McIntosh, social networking media may do more to integrate megachurch members into a community than gathering in the physical building.⁵³ Social media has proven this to be true for Saint Paul. Because of using social media platforms to deliver its weekly sermons, Saint Paul has people joining the membership from across the country. Ministering outside the church walls through social media is valuable in leading more people to receive salvation.

Social media was not something everyone adapted to quickly. Older adults often need to learn this new way of communicating. Since the church has been the source of bringing people together to worship and lift praises to God, social media has become crucial in staying connected with the congregation. Today, there is more extensive use of video preaching and live streaming of worship services found on social media to maintain normalcy. Wilson did not think using social media would be a good thing for the church.⁵⁴ Using social media as a ministry tool has become a concern for churches, especially concerning the congregation's older members. Not all the senior members are technology savvy or have access to the technology needed to stream the worship services. Most churches are still adapting to how technology shapes religious culture and its effect on older members and all the congregation members.⁵⁵ The use of social media during this pandemic has become a substitute for in-person church worship. It has dramatically affected how ministry is done, especially with congregational or community prayer and financial support for the various ministries. As a means of communication, social media can have a devastating effect on the church's older members because of the lack of in-person fellowship with other church members regularly and consistently.

⁵³ Esther McIntosh, "Belonging without Believing: Church as Community in an Age of Digital Media," *International Journal of Public Theology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 131–55.

⁵⁴ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 115.

⁵⁵ Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmatt, "Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 267-285.

Social media cannot take the place of being together face to face in community worship, but it is a great way to reach those who are not in the pews.⁵⁶ Because older adults are more comfortable with in-person worship, there has arisen the need to train them on computer use, digital and virtual technology, and navigating social media to ensure that they can be a part of this communication.⁵⁷ Wolfson, Cavanagh, and Kraiger agree that there is a need for more technology-based training for the older adult population in today's information age.⁵⁸ The most significant setback they are encountering is access to technology. Most older adults are on a fixed income with limited funds for anything other than the necessities such as food, housing, and medical bills. Computers and online services can be costly for older adults with limited financial resources. Also, learning to use this technology can be complicated and not easy for older adults.⁵⁹

Older adults are vulnerable to the various social distancing mandates this pandemic presents. The church leadership's responsibility is to help the more aging adult population adjust to this new way of church ministry in their congregations. Once exposed to and trained in this technology, they will feel a part of the church again. When they get the chance to see how using social media can enhance their interaction with other people and how they can continue to experience worship away from a church building, they will embrace the technology.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ David Driesch, "Preaching to a Wider Audience: Technological Tools Broaden the Scope of Sharing Homilies," *The Priest* 75, no. 8 (2019): 33.

⁵⁷ Marie Jobling, "To Boldly Go Online," *Generation: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 38, no. 1 (2014): 48-50.

⁵⁸ Natalie E. Wolfson, Thomas M. Cavanagh, and Kurt Kraiger, "Older Adults and Technology-Based Instruction: Optimizing Learning Outcomes and Transfers," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 13, no. 1 (2014): 26-44.

⁵⁹ Pamela Roberts, "Electronic Media and the Ties," *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 25, no. 2 (2001): 96-98.

⁶⁰ Marie Jobling, "To Boldly Go Online," *Generation: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 38, no. 1 (2014): 48-50.

An article in *Christianity Today* by Anderson, Vogt, and Groothuis says that social media and social networking transcend and connect the world geographically. Social media used as a ministering tool will get the message projected, heard, and seen worldwide. They refer to how social networking allows churches to go outside the building walls.⁶¹ Phil Towne says, “As American culture becomes more and more of a networked culture, it leaves behind some of what was previously accepted as normal. Many people no longer attend church on Sunday mornings in the United States. Instead, a larger and larger percentage of people claim no attraction to a specific religious tradition.”⁶² Older adults like the feeling of belonging; doing church or worship digitally or virtually takes away from this feeling because they are, for the most part, alone at home for the worship experience. However, using the internet or social media does not prevent individuals from regularly attending religious services or participating in religious programs.

Information technology and social media enhance traditional worship service practices for a church like Saint Paul’s with multiple locations.⁶³ Social media is becoming the norm for churches to reach a more extensive and diverse audience worldwide. According to Anderson, Vogt, and Groothuis, “social networking can enhance the fellowship of the church by providing congregants a window into each other's lives. It can mobilize congregants to serve their neighbors and enhance the church's mission by embedding the community of church relationships in the broader community.”⁶⁴ Social media also allows the congregants to still participate in giving and tithing. It can provide information on how to donate financially to the

⁶¹ Matthew Lee Anderson, Brandon Vogt, and Douglas R. Groothuis, “Virtual Fellowship: What Are We to Make of Social Networking in the Churches?” *Christianity Today* 55, no. 12: 54-55.

⁶² Phil Towne, “Spirituality in an Age of Technology,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 17, no. 2 (2014): 195-205.

⁶³ Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmutt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 267-285.

⁶⁴ Matthew Lee Anderson, Brandon Vogt, and Douglas R. Groothuis, “Virtual Fellowship: What Are We to Make of Social Networking in the Churches?” *Christianity Today* 55, no. 12: 54-55.

church and where there are opportunities to help and volunteer throughout the community. Social media is a great way to keep the church's membership engaged in ministry. Saint Paul is unique because the senior pastor saw the value of social media early in his ministry. However, he did not foresee the effects of the pandemic on the church, primarily how it affected the senior members of the congregation and their participation in the church's programs.

Church Attendance and Growth

The use of social media, virtual technology, and other forms of electronic communication for church attendance and growth presents much discussion among church leaders. For example, growing the church membership usually entails persons attending a few services and then joining the church. Or church members sometimes go out into communities to evangelize and minister to people invited to attend services. Both are excellent ways to increase attendance and grow the membership. However, these two ways of increasing attendance and growth are no longer viable with the pandemic.

Authors on this subject have varying views on social media, virtual technology, and other forms of electronic communication for church attendance and growth. For example, before the pandemic, churches having websites on the internet and email addresses gave them a great way to reach people who otherwise may not have attended their services. According to Keith L. Smith, some churches say that “websites do reach out to people they would not otherwise be able to contact, and in many cases, their participation results in their becoming new members.”⁶⁵

The use of social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube gives its users the ability to share live streams with others. Thus, presenting worship services to reach more people

⁶⁵ Keith L. Smith, “How Congregations Can and Do use the Internet, with Special Reference to Social Action,” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 4, no. 1 (2001): 25-45.

who ordinarily would not be a part of the worship service if they were not at the actual location. These tools enable Saint Paul to “extend fellowship beyond the church walls and stretch it worldwide.”⁶⁶ As a result, these media platforms increase worship attendance and growth at Saint Paul. Still, it also carries out the Great Commission as written in Matthew chapter 28 in the Bible, “All authority in heaven and earth and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (vv.18-20). Saint Paul’s global reach through social media platforms for worship services is proving to be very effective in bringing in new members and keeping those who have moved to other parts of the world.

Over the years, Saint Paul Baptist Church lost some young adult attendance. However, this loss is not readily known because Saint Paul consistently provides new and innovative ways of presenting worship services that include the younger generation. However, young adult participation in worship services at Saint Paul increased when the church went to the social media platform during the pandemic. Most churches and religious organizations are now tapping into digital and social media technology to grow their congregations and memberships.⁶⁷ Like Saint Paul, most churches are finding out that just because the doors of the physical church building are closed, ministry can still reach people and be effective through digital and social media technology. The pandemic has shown the church a different way to minister to and connect with the congregation and others who are not church members. People who may not

⁶⁶ Matthew Lee Anderson, Brandon Vogt, and Douglas R. Groothuis, “Virtual Fellowship: What Are We to Make of Social Networking in the Churches?” *Christianity Today* 55, no. 12: 54-55.

⁶⁷ Paul K. McClure, “Tinkering with Technology and Religion in the Digital Age: The Effects of Internet Use on Religious Belief, Behavior, and Belonging,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 3 (2017): 481-497.

have taken the time to visit a physical church are now participating in church worship services digitally. The use of digital technology and social media is an invitation for church leaders “to trust the Spirit to guide local church members surprising, provocative, and creative missional engagement with a dynamic and complex world.”⁶⁸

Presentation is also important in using social media technology by the church. When the church presents its broadcast, it must be inviting and interactive for the viewers watching. Creating good quality broadcasts will spark interest in participation and possibly membership to increase the viewership and attendance to its virtual and online church services.⁶⁹ The use of social media and virtual technology is proving to be an excellent asset for Saint Paul Baptist Church because of its visibility over these platforms. Saint Paul is a megachurch, and with the use of social media platforms, the attendance is increasing, and the membership is growing, according to the leadership. In addition, people are viewing the church’s programming and services from around the world. Therefore, social media and virtual technology are becoming a vital necessity in church membership growth.⁷⁰

An important factor in all these changes is the pastor of Saint Paul’s. He has often stated that in the beginning he had to draw his energy to deliver his sermons from someplace other than the attendees. As time moved on, he became more animated, eventually he became as excited about the Word as if the church was full. He would clap, throw up his hands, turn around, to deliver his message. The pastor is in his sixties but no stranger to technology Having to find a way to effectively preach to a camera and camera was challenging. To keep the attendees’

⁶⁸ Dwight Zschelle, “Social Networking and Church Systems,” *Word & World* 30, no. 3 (2010): 247-255.

⁶⁹ Michael White, “Finding Positives in a Crisis: Will Online Broadcasts Introduce New People to Mass?” *The Priest* 76, no. 6 (2020): 33.

⁷⁰ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2011), 373.

attention, as a part of each Sunday morning broadcast, he would mix in choir selections from years ago. Many would tune in to see them and point out members who they recognize. The chat space would be full of comments. Two church leaders Alejandro Reyes and Haley Veturis discussed how pastors had to adapt and keep their content interesting and new in this podcast discussion *Digital Outreach in the Church*.⁷¹

Theological Foundations

The COVID-19 pandemic can be compared to the plagues of the Old Testament in the Bible. God made known His displeasure with His people by sending plagues, sicknesses, and other forms of pestilence to punish them for not being obedient to His word. Not to say this is the case in the pandemic, but the world today is likewise not being compliant or obedient to the Word of God. The book of Numbers gives an example of God sending plagues against His people when they complained about the lack of meat in Numbers 11:33. Likewise, when the twelve spies return from their exploration of Canaan and the people choose not to enter the country because ten of the spies report that the land is too difficult to conquer, God sends a plague against the ten and condemns those who agreed with their report (Numbers 14:37).⁷² Thus, throughout the Bible, God sends judgment on His people in the form of plagues, and, today, a pandemic. The coronavirus may not be a judgment sent by God, but it has, however, mirrored many of the afflictions of the Old Testament. Some theologians might say the total loss

⁷¹ Carey Nieuwhof, David Kinnaman, host, "Church Pulse Weekly, Digital Outreach in the Church," Church Pulse Weekly (Podcast), Barna Church Pulse Weekly, Oct. 2020, accessed July 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/cpw-reyes-veturis-online-church/>

⁷² Richard S. Hess, "The COVID-19 Virus, Illness, and Biblical Interpretation in Its Ancient Context," *Canon & Culture* 14, no. 2 (2020): 51-83.

of life this pandemic has taken today can be compared to the plagues sent by God in the Old Testament of the Bible. But no one can accurately make this claim. The loss of life is vast among the elderly, as they are more vulnerable to this virus than the young. According to the CDC, from February 2020 to September 2021, the percentage of deaths for persons aged 65 and over was 76.07%. While the rate for persons aged 50 to 64 was 17.31%. It is even lower for persons aged 18 to 49.⁷³ This model looked at deaths there were unrecognized and those that were not recorded on death certificates and thus never reported as a death related to Covid-19. The full report showing how the CDC arrived at the number of deaths is reported in the 2021 copy of *The Lancet Regional Health-Americas* journal.⁷⁴

The Bible has much to say regarding old age. There is much attention given to caring for and honoring the elderly. Care and respect for the elderly are two attributes God intended for man to fulfill. The Bible speaks of how valuable the elderly are and how God can still use them. The Old and New Testaments give insight into the importance of the elderly. Psalms 92 equates the elders to a palm tree and how the faithful can still be fruitful in God's kingdom in old age. The Bible says the elderly or older adults are persons of wisdom and knowledge. Leviticus 19 says, "Stand up for the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly..." (v. 32). People find it easy a lot of the time to ignore the opinions of older adults and take time with them. God's instructions to the Israelites regarding how serious it is to respect the elderly show how gaining knowledge from their experiences is essential. The wisdom that the elderly imparts can save

⁷³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Estimated COVID-19 Burden," <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/burden.html>. (accessed October 6, 2022).

⁷⁴ A. Danielle Iuliano, Howard H. Chang, Neha N. Patel, Ryan Threlkel, Krista Kniss, Jeremy Reich, Molly Steele, Aron j. Hall, Alicia M. Fry, Carrie Reed, "Estimating Under-Recognized COVID-19 Deaths, United States, March 2020-May 2021 Using An Excess Mortality Modelling Approach" *The Lancet Regional Health-Americas*, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanam/article/PIIS2667-193X\(21\)00011-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanam/article/PIIS2667-193X(21)00011-9/fulltext). (accessed November 14, 2022).

people from the many pitfalls of life. The elders are whom the believers in the Old Testament turned to God for knowledge and inspiration for living.

Caring for and loving others is a significant theme in the Bible. This theme directs all Christians to place the needs of others above those of their own. To paraphrase Philippians 2:4, do not focus so much on your individual needs, but do what you can to help others. When God created man, He did not make him selfish but to help others. Concerning the elderly, taking care of them is an obligation to be taken seriously. As people grow old, they cannot do the things they once could; seniors become more dependent on others and, in many cases, do not have the strength to do what they used to do. Therefore, the church is responsible for caring for the elders in their congregations. In an article titled "To Our Church Leaders During Coronavirus: We See You and Thank You,"⁷⁵ digital or virtual technology, a phone call to talk about Sunday's message or chat and pray with the church elders goes a long way in keeping them connected. Moreover, an email could make their day if they have just a basic knowledge of online communication.

Most older adults want to be valid and seek to find ways of being a help to others. Similarly, many older adults continue to learn new things to remain functional in today's society. The Bible has much to say concerning the elders being valuable in God's kingdom. James chapter 5 talks about the church calling for the elders to care for the sick by praying for them and anointing them with oil. Respect and trust in the knowledge of the church elders are evident in this situation. The elderly appeared to hold a more important place of honor in the world during biblical times. It would seem they were not left out or forgotten when things changed. Some

⁷⁵ "To Our Church Leaders During Coronavirus: We See You and Thank You," *America*, April 27, 2020, 9. *Gale In Context: Biography* (accessed December 17, 2020).

elders in the ancient church were teachers and authority figures. Acts 14:23 supports this premise when it refers to elders appointed as authority figures in each church in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Also, James 5:14 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.” These are just two scripture that references show the importance of the elders in the church. There are many scriptural references regarding elders of the church, which refer to honoring them and helping others. However, there are limited scriptural writings on teaching elders for this study.

Helping the elderly learn and become comfortable with the technology used by churches today has significant implications for how the church cares for older adults. The church ministry must address all its elders' needs according to the Bible's teachings. In John 21:15-18, Simon Peter expresses his love for Jesus, to which Jesus replies, “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep,” and “Feed my sheep.” In effect, Jesus says to care for everyone, including the elderly. It is not enough to honor and respect the elders and older adults in the church; providing for their needs is also required. Tim Dearborn writes,

If we live out our biblical faith, we'll engage in ministries that extend both hands of the gospel: the hand inviting individuals to repentance, faith, and external reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus – and the hand embracing others' physical and emotional well-being, the hand of social justice, mercy, and compassion, embodying the goodness of God's kingdom on earth. One is not a means to the other, for both are equally significant to life in the eternal kingdom as described by Scripture.⁷⁶

Advocating for social justice, feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, and providing for those in need is what Jesus mandates in His teachings. Matthew chapter 25, verses 35-45, talks about this very responsibility of Christians to care for those in need. When a need is present within the membership, the church must provide for that need. Likewise, providing guidance and training in

⁷⁶ Tim Dearborn, *Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, A Heart for Mission* (Federal Way: World Vision, 1997), 41.

technology for the elderly and other adults at Saint Paul's Baptist Church follows the instructions and mandates of Jesus. The "caring for my sheep" is what Jesus referred to in the Gospel of John, chapter 21. In this instance, the sheep are the church and, in the context of this thesis, the elderly.

Though the ground is level at the foot of the Cross, some people need help getting to that level ground. As such, some senior members of Saint Paul's need help learning the new technology used for the various services of the church due to the pandemic. In addition, the church's leadership cannot forget the sacrifices made by the elders in the congregation. Therefore, it now must provide the means for them to participate in services during the pandemic. For the leaders of Saint Paul's Baptist Church, providing for the elders involves instructing and teaching them about the various technologies the church will now use. In addition, in today's world, people should become comfortable using virtual technology and other forms of social media, including seniors.

Because everything changed during the pandemic, church leaders must assume different roles within the church community. Mohler says, "To be human is to communicate, but to be a leader is to communicate constantly, skillfully, intentionally, and strategically."⁷⁷ While preaching the word of God and providing pastoral care for its members are the primary functions of the pastors and ministry leaders at Saint Paul's, they also assumed the role of teaching members the use of the technology platforms that the church switched to using. In addition, teaching the elders and senior members of the church is vital to keeping them connected.

⁷⁷ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 91.

Church Leaders are Teachers

In the New Testament of the Bible, teaching and leadership went hand in hand. The ultimate teacher in the New Testament is Jesus Christ, who established the model for Christian leaders. It was not his methodology but rather his obedience to God's will.⁷⁸ His assignment here on earth was to teach those he chose to be his disciples and others who followed him as he spread the Word of God throughout the communities at that time. He was considered by those who followed his teachings to be their leader. "The key to Jesus' leadership was his relationship with his Father."⁷⁹ Jesus' leadership directly resulted from his teaching to those who followed him. To fully understand the transition between teaching and leadership, we must look at the meaning of the word leadership. Leadership is the "metaphor of travel or intentional and directed movement."⁸⁰ Helping those elders of the church who are not comfortable with or know the platforms now used for many of the church's services must be intentional and directed to connect with the church. Teaching is what Jesus does throughout the New Testament; as leaders of the church, to be more like Jesus is to teach. This thesis aims to examine older members' issues using the church's technology and what the leadership can do to help them. The ability to prepare this group for how they can participate is essential. Jesus gives many examples of how to teach.

Jesus starts his ministry by teaching and preaching in Galilee. From the beginning, Jesus was just as much a leader as a teacher. Matthew chapter 4 shows how Jesus goes through Galilee teaching in the synagogues, healing people, and large crowds following him. His leadership is evident in Matthew 4:25, where it says, "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem,

⁷⁸ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 47.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 43.

⁸⁰ Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "To Remember the Lord Jesus: Leadership and Memory in the New Testament," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (2009): 31-46. Accessed May 5, 2020.

Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him.” (NIV) During this time, Jesus chose certain people as his disciples or those he wanted to teach. This indicated his leadership because “disciples normally chose to become students of a particular rabbi, rather than a teacher calling his own disciples.”⁸¹ The disciple’s commitment to follow the leadership of his teacher lies at the heart of the transformational process of the teacher being a leader. Jesus’ work on earth was to teach people about God and His love for them and that they must trust that God will provide all that they need to live a whole life. He taught his disciples that “faith means to follow.”⁸² According to John Maxwell, as a teacher, Jesus taught parables of such profound truth that they have endured through the past two thousand years. Maxwell says of leadership that it is “the ability to move people, to change their minds and hearts and actions.”⁸³ This is undoubtedly evidence of Jesus’ leadership through parables in his teachings. Jesus was a servant of the people, and they considered him a leader because he served them.

John 13:3-4 states:

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had wrapped around him.

He did not just tell them what to do; he showed them by example, therefore further solidifying his status as a teacher and a leader. An example of Jesus' teaching about servant leadership is when he washed his disciple's feet. This account of Jesus’ washing of his disciple's feet shows

⁸¹ Craig S. Keener, *New Testament: The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 55.

⁸² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 24.

⁸³ John C. Maxwell, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge*, eds. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2004), 67.

how he practiced what he taught and how he was a servant as a leader.⁸⁴ After performing this act of servitude, Jesus explains why he had done this when he says,

You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him (John 13:13-16).

From these verses of Scripture, Jesus teaches how people in authority should serve. He teaches that leadership is rooted in having relationships with others and helping others develop good character.⁸⁵ Jesus continues to teach his disciples in this context and being a leader, showing them that to lead is to serve. During his life on earth, Jesus was a teacher and leader by being an example of the lessons he taught.

Because Jesus stands out as the Teacher of teachers, we see that in the early church, teaching was shared amongst a group of leaders and the aim of their work was to prepare others for a teaching ministry.⁸⁶ Teaching is, by all accounts, leading; Jesus demonstrates this as he taught, preached, and healed in the New Testament of the Bible. During this pandemic, those in leadership at Saint Paul's are becoming teachers, helping those not familiar with the technology church now uses. The ability to teach is something all leaders should be able to do. Jesus' ability as a teacher is shown throughout his leadership as he traveled the countryside. He is an example of how church leaders should equip and train everyone in the congregation. During the pandemic, the leaders at Saint Paul's demonstrated this quality of leading and teaching by

⁸⁴ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 225.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 226.

⁸⁶ Kevin Giles, "Teachers and Teaching in the Church." *Journal of Christian Education* 71 (1981): 52-62, Accessed May 4, 2020, <https://search-ebscohostcom.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=Isdar&AN=ATLA0000785978&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

reaching out to those who may not know how to navigate the technology used by the church, especially the senior members. For the leaders at Saint Paul, this can be difficult, given the circumstances presented by the pandemic. Instructing or teaching someone how to use the technology platforms is challenging without being there in person. Some people require hands-on, one-on-one instruction to learn. Although the New Testament, we see Jesus as a hands-on teacher.

While Jesus is the ultimate Teacher of teachers, many other teachers in the New Testament are leaders. For example, Michael Markowski writes, “The apostles taught, and they also preached, shepherded, admonished, served, carried out prophetic offices, and evangelized.”⁸⁷

For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Paul writes:

And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?

The New Testament begins with Jesus and the Apostles as teachers. Jesus teaches and leads this group, preparing them to become teachers and leaders of others eventually. Markowski further states, “While there was a variety of situations in the New Testament with teachers or teaching as prominent, it is clear that teachers had a significant place from the beginning of the church,”⁸⁸ an official ministerial leadership place in churches. The center of Jesus’ ministry was teaching, and after the Pentecost, the early teachers continued the teaching ministry. The position of the teacher

⁸⁷ Michael Markowski, “Teachers in Early Christianity,” *JRCE* 17, no. 2 (2008): 139, Accessed May 5, 2020, doi: 10.1080/10656210802433335.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 143.

was respected and required the teacher to take a leadership role within the church. The Apostles assumed the roles of teachers and leaders, traveled throughout the countryside teaching others and became leaders. At SPBC, many seniors are in leadership roles in the church. Because they are in these roles, they are the first to learn to use the technology they now use for worship. In turn, they can now help other seniors with issues with the use of technology.

New Testament Scriptures support the idea of teachers as leaders because of their status in their communities and the church. Because the Scriptures designates various persons for various duties according to their gifts, there could have been some questions regarding elders as leaders and teachers. The church elders in the New Testament were both leaders and teachers. 1 Timothy 5:17 states the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. According to George Knight, this passage of Scripture states, "among those that larger group of elders, all of whom rule, there are those who labor in Word and teaching."⁸⁹ In the New Testament, the word teacher refers to a specialized ministry of the pastors/elders.

In the New Testament, the idea of teachers as leaders is clear as Jesus chooses the disciples to follow him, teach them about God, and help others find God. "The word disciple means student or learner. It describes a protégé who learns and follows his teacher's precepts and instructions."⁹⁰ Teaching was an essential function during the time that Jesus walked the earth and still is today. The disciples learned of the goodness and love of God, and they also learned

⁸⁹ George W. Knight, "Two Offices (Elders or Bishops ad Deacons) and Two Orders of Elders (Preaching or Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders): A New Testament Study." *Presbyterian* 11, no. 1 (1985): 10. Accessed May 6, 2020, <https://search=ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=Isdar&AN=ATLA0000953965&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹⁰ Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 49.

how to be leaders. The Jewish leaders were concerned about what the disciples were learning from Jesus. They felt threatened because the disciples became more confident to go into the communities and spread the Word of God. In chapters 11-12 of the Gospel of Mark, “Jesus teaches in the Temple (in Jerusalem), and, one by one, the various groups of the Jewish religious establishment appear before him and are reduced to silence by his words.”⁹¹ The power of Jesus’ teaching shows his leadership when He speaks in the Temple. The authority of His teaching and the power of His leadership is evident before the crowds in the temple courts.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.’” The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. (Mark 11:15-18)

Verse 18 in this text says, “the crowd was amazed at his teaching,” this shows that the crowd had gathered and begun to listen to what was being said and began to follow Jesus as a teacher and leader. So as he was condemning what was happening within the temple courts, he was preaching and teaching and showing his ability to lead the face of what was happening.

Preaching in the New Testament is teaching the Word of God.⁹² The Word of God was what the disciples proclaimed through their teaching from Jesus. These teachers were leaders in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 2 (1989): 273. Accessed May 7, 2020. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=Isdar&AN=ATLA0000816363&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹² Douglas C. Mohrmann, “The Power of Proclamation in the New Testament.” *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 1 (2019): 29. Accessed May 7, 2020. <https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2179220798?accountid=12085>.

The Gospel of Mark chapter 1 has a three-step approach to teaching and leading. First, Jesus is presented as a traveling prophet-teacher who announces the kingdom of God with people responding to His instructions. Second, He encounters two men and tells them that he will make them ‘fishers of men if they follow Him.’ The third step is calling two more men to leave their jobs, family, and friends to follow Him.⁹³ In this chapter of Mark, there is a direct correlation between teaching and leading. Jesus is teaching and calling others to follow Him.

In some circles of the New Testament, Jesus is considered to be just another prophet. This would still present him as being a teacher and a leader. According to Ernest Best, inspired sayings transmitted by the prophets “were applications of the truth as already revealed in the life and teaching of the Lord.”⁹⁴ The prophetic ministry of Jesus continued beyond the days of the New Testament. His teachings continue today; as Christians, we still follow his leadership. For this thesis, following Jesus’ teaching involves educating the senior members of SPBC on the use of technology. The Scriptures not only teach spiritually but also teaches practically. The practicality here is educating those senior members at SPBC who have difficulty with technology. To genuinely lead and be like Jesus is to do what Jesus would, which is to teach.

Theoretical Foundations

There is an expectation of the church congregation that leaders will minister to all congregation members. The age of the members should not be a factor when it comes to caring

⁹³ Vernon K. Robbin, “Mark 1:14-20: An Interpretation at the Intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman Traditions.” *New Testament Studies* 28, no. 2 (1982): 222. Accessed May 7, 2020. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=Isdar&AN=ATLA0000792073&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹⁴ Ernest Best, “Prophets and Preachers.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 12, no. 2 (1959): 144. Accessed May 7, 2020, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=Isdar&AN=ATLA0000662757&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

for the membership. It is especially true when ministering to older adults in the church congregation. During these unprecedented times, the church must focus on older adults' needs in the assembly. Caring for the people of God is the mandate of the church. The senior pastor, associate pastors, and ministers of the Saint Paul's Baptist Church exhibit this care for all church members, especially the older senior members. The church has a responsibility to care for its members of the congregation both spiritually and physically. Because of the vulnerability and the varying needs of the older adults at Saint Paul's during this unprecedented pandemic, the leadership must be more vigilant regarding providing help. Jesus said in John 21:16, "Take care of my sheep." The pastor is the shepherd of his flock, the church members. Taking care of sheep is taking care of the members of the congregation. It is vitally important that this point is not lost. The older adults and elders of the church require more attention; providing for them is crucial.

The use of technology to deliver worship service has become standard today because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some churches have chosen to return to in-person worship, but this does not mean everything will be the way it was. The church must consider how in-person worship will affect the older adults, considering most have some underlying medical condition that would not be conducive to being in a large group. Reports by some news outlets show an increase in those churches' positivity rate returning to in-person worship. The church has to consider the well-being of older adults and not put them in harm's way. Meeting congregations at their point of need is how the church helps everyone, especially older adults. Creating pathways for the elderly of the church to experience and participate in worship service through technology helps them navigate this new normal. The church can never forget to respect the church's elders and honor the wisdom they have to impart.

Some authors, like Jared Wilson, do not agree with the use of technology for church worship. Wilson seems to think it takes away from the in-person fellowship among congregation members. Being highly individualistic and impersonal is the primary objection most people have to online Christian practices. Still, it can add to human interaction “because of the unique aspects of online communication.”⁹⁵ Because they are worshipping virtually at home or in the office, they become disconnected, which could lead to going “down the path of un-incarnation.”⁹⁶ Phil Towne echoes the same sentiment but goes a little further in agreeing with the disconnect and seeing a large percentage of people have no attachment to a specific religion.⁹⁷ However, more participation in worship service at Saint Paul’s Baptist Church increases new membership. The use of virtual technology and social media expands the church’s visibility worldwide. It does not matter whether proclaiming the Word of God in person or virtually; it is still God’s Word. Social media has become the fastest and quickest way to communicate with each other worldwide. This means of communication makes it easier for churches to minister to their congregations during today’s events, such as the COVID 19 pandemic. For some older adults, the use of social media is something they are not familiar with, and as a result, they may resist the changes that it brings to their normal daily activities, such as church worship. However, others are “utilizing social media in a way that substitutes for what they previously sort in church.”⁹⁸ This trend is how most churches now have worship services and provide for their various congregations’ needs.

Saint Paul’s Baptist Church finds social media the best way to reach all congregation members. With a membership of over 10,000 people, it would be impossible to connect

⁹⁵ Nancy J. Duff, “Praising God Online,” *Theology Today* 70, no. 1 (2013): 22–29.

⁹⁶ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 115.

⁹⁷ Phil Towne, “Spirituality in an Age of Technology,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 17, no. 2 (2014): 195-205.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

individually with each of them without using social media and virtual technology. Because Saint Paul's is a multisite church, it streamed the worship to the other two campuses before installing campus pastors at both locations. So, the use of virtual technology was not new to the congregation. This technology's use for seniors and older adults was not a problem for this age group of church members because the church provided everything. However, using this same technology in their homes could present an issue. Not everyone had the necessary equipment or technology readily available in their homes. This kind of technology is an added expense for many seniors, and most are on fixed incomes. The church does utilize a dial-in component for its worship services that some members use. This feature allows for the listening of the service using a phone. However, this participation method in worship by older adults can leave them somewhat disconnected from the actual worship experience.

The COVID 19 pandemic is causing the church to rethink how to safely have worship services and provide for their members and the community's needs. The pandemic will eventually be under control, and things will return to some normalcy. Churches will return to in-person worship, but virtual technology and social media will remain strong because they reach people worldwide. Virtual technology and social media prove to be more than entertainment; they are necessary tools that the church can use to communicate worldwide. The use of this technology is here to stay.⁹⁹

There is a lot of research and studies regarding how the church can better care for and serve its elder and senior members. However, not much research on the use of technology for the church by the elderly is apparent. The pandemic presented an issue on every level how the world

⁹⁹ Michael White, "Finding Positives in a Crisis: Will Online Broadcasts Introduce New People to Mass?" *The Priest* 76, no. 6 (2020): 33.

could continue to connect physically. The available research on social media and virtual technology for church worship services is minimal at this point and time. How the world, including the church, moves forward in communicating with people is a fluent situation, and changes are constant. Some literature suggests that too much use of some technology platforms in the church is not good. Wilson states, “I am afraid many churches have moved from leveraging technology to merely co-opting whatever they think the world finds appealing or slick.”¹⁰⁰ The validity of his opinion could be actual, except we are experiencing a global pandemic, and the use of technology is vital. The use of the various technological platforms available is far from just being appealing. During the pandemic, there is a greater need for the world to stay connected to ensure that everyone knows how the virus is spreading. Using the various forms of available technology in the church connects the members and prevents isolation and loneliness during the uncertainty of the pandemic. One of the positive aspects of using social media and digital platforms forms for church programming is the ability to access the presentation at any time. Usually, the program or worship service is saved for viewing at a later time.

Most churches relied on technology for in-person programs and worship services in the past. Doing audio and video recordings provided the sick, shut-in, and those unable to attend church with a sense of being in attendance. In addition, the church leaders and servants visited the church elder members who were not mobile enough to participate in in-person services. The technology the church used did not seem like a priority. The church's senior members did not need to know how to use social media platforms like Facebook Live, YouTube, or at Saint Paul, the church's internet TV platform.

¹⁰⁰ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 116.

Chapter 3

Methodology

There are two methods of research being considered for this thesis project, qualitative and quantitative. For example, is this research number or informational driven? The answer to this question will determine the research data to collect.¹⁰¹ For instance, this research hopes to determine how comfortable members of a specific age group are with technology to view the weekly church service. Or how many had difficulty figuring it out and eventually asked for help or gave up. This researcher also wanted to determine how many possessed smartphones, laptops, or computers before the pandemic. Were they comfortable going onto the internet?

In the nineteenth century, market research was becoming a way for large businesses to gauge if a product was worth producing or not. They also sort information on improving their product using quantitative analysis and measurable data. But psychology, sociology, and other disciplines needed a different research model. They were looking for answers that examined the thinking and feelings of their interviewees. Numbers were not as important as feelings; the research had to differ. The research needed for this thesis falls into this category; how did the members of this age group adapt to attending church?

While quantitative research relies on numbers or measurable data, this thesis concerns the feelings and attitudes of the elderly members of the SPBC. Therefore, the use of a qualitative approach is preferred. Researchers reveal some issues encountered when collecting data using the interview method. For example, there is always the possibility of the interviewee presenting

¹⁰¹ Mamun Habib, Bishwajit Banik Pathik, and Hafsa Maryam, *Research Methodology-Contemporary Practices: Guidelines for Academic Researchers* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 8-9.

exaggerated or false information to be more appealing to the interviewer. Or try to give the interviewer what they think the answers should be. It is suggested that qualitative research collects data using a survey paired with one or more focus groups. The focus group allows for interaction between the participants and the researcher. It can promote discussions and possible solutions to the issue.¹⁰² Using focus groups would have allowed the participants to talk about their experiences for the age group. Not being able to include this piece in addition to the surveys and phone interviews limited the data collected. If the use of focus groups had been an option for researching what issues the selected age group encountered when the church suddenly moved from in-person worship to online platforms, the research conducted by Anja Tausch, et. al., would have been considered. They discovered that participants preferred face-to-face recruitment, participants needed sufficient time to introduce themselves¹⁰³ because they did not want to be rushed. By doing these at the beginning of the focus group sessions would allow the participants to feel more ownership in the process and more willing to participate in the discussion.

There has been a concern at Saint Paul's Baptist Church regarding church worship service since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The church has shifted from in-person to virtual worship using social media and other technologies. The change in worship has implications for

¹⁰² Daniela Dal Forno Kinalski, Cristiane Cardoso de Paula, Stela Maris de Mello Padoin, Eliane Tatsch Neves, Raquel Einloft Kleinubing, and Laura Ferreira Cortes, "Focus Group on Qualitative Research: Experience Report." *Revista Brasileira De Enfermagem* 70, no. 2: (2017): 424-448. <https://ezproxy.regent.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/focus-group-on-qualitative-research-experience/docview/1912900312/se-2>.

¹⁰³Anja P. Tausch, Natalia Menold, "Methodological Aspects of Focus Groups in Health Research: Results of Qualitative Interviews with Focus Group Moderators," *Global Qualitative Nursing Research* (2016): Accessed May 20, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393616630466>.

how the congregation members can participate in service if they are not savvy in using social media or virtual technology.

The church's senior pastor and the life-stage pastor of this age group understood that they needed to stay connected to thrive. Many felt left without a way to remain spiritually connected during the pandemic. Just like in nature, nothing grows alone or without being connected to a source of nourishment. People also follow this ecological fact; they must remain spiritually connected. Stephen and Mary Lowe use the connectedness of nature and Spiritual formation, showing that all through the Bible, from God's creation of the garden to Jesus' use of seeds, vineyards, and olive groves in parables, to relate this to his followers.¹⁰⁴ Why should the church care so much about the welfare of the senior members? It is one of the reasons Jesus Christ came to earth. The fifth Commandment in the Old Testament tells us to honor our mother and father. The Great Commandment in the New Testament instructs us to love. First, love God and then love all others. This is justification enough to do everything possible to show the senior members that they are loved, honored, respected, and will receive care.

There is no better way to demonstrate to the younger generation the importance of our elders. The world is watching the church to observe how we treat the elderly population. Even during the pandemic, new members joined SPBC. Attendees from all life stages from birth up continued to join the church. The aging population is growing in the community and church, and many are still very active. They are necessary for the church community because of their history and experience. Their value should be demonstrated by the leadership's concern and actions toward them. The elderly have so much wisdom to share that the church itself would suffer if it

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Lowe, Mary Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age Spiritual Growth Through Online Education*, IVP Academics InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2018.

did not show them the care and love of Christ. There would not be any hope for the rest of the Church as we are all aging and living longer.

Determining their need became one of the first missions once the realization set in that the pandemic was not immediately going away. How to engage the members aged sixty-eight plus? First, a survey was needed to assess how many were already engaging on their own.

This research study will investigate how social media and virtual technology affect older adults at Saint Paul's. Because many older adults look forward to coming to church on Sundays, things have changed considerably since the pandemic. As a result, older adults now must consider alternative ways of church participation, and most of the alternatives revolve around the use of technology. Unfortunately, many older adults in the congregation are in the dark regarding using some of today's technology for communication. Some senior congregation members have contacted the church regarding not being able to participate in the church programming since going virtual. The research focuses on how comfortable this church population is with technology. The hope is to find any underlying conditions that might affect them using social media and other technology to communicate and participate. In addition, the aim is to determine if a lack of knowledge or understanding is the real reason for their lack of participation. Twelve church congregation members aged sixty-eight to seventy-three agreed to participate in this study. This small number of participants shines a light on the main problem of communicating with this age group. Over two hundred email invitations were sent but the response and ultimately the number who agreed to participate was low. Any number of factors may have played a part. Some of the invites may have gone to the spam folder. The invitee may not have opened the invitation for various reasons. Or not being familiar with the email address of the sender could have played a large part.

This study's research method will use surveys and one-on-one interviews to determine how the participants feel about using social media technology for church worship during a pandemic. The initial contact will be a letter sent to adults over sixty-eight inviting them to a virtual meeting to explain the project. The letter is sent electronically to the emails on file in the database. This database was established from information that was on file or from new individuals joining the church and completing an information form. This meeting will explain the reason for the study and how it can help get them involved in using social media and virtual technology. Once they agree to participate, the participants will receive a survey that is designed to determine if they use social media or virtual technology. The questions asked will also seek to reveal how comfortable they are using it as a tool for church worship or if they use it all? After the participants return the completed survey, individual one-on-one interviews with the respondents to answer any additional questions the researcher or the participant might have will commence. Finally, there will be a follow-up survey at the end of the study to address how the research findings can help older adults of the church going forward.

Research shows that several factors should be considered when selecting older adults as subjects. Isolation, loss of familiar support, social interaction, physical contact, and other conditions that could affect their ability to respond. These sudden changes caused depression, increased stress, and loneliness. And as friends and family members died from Covid 19, many suffered from increased fear and sadness. There were studies performed to assess the state of older adults. One study focused on how the general public perceived the status of older adults and adults with intellectual challenges. The results of this study show that the general public was not as aware of the profound effects this pandemic was having on the elderly and intellectually challenged. Many thought that there was not a dramatic change in their lives. They perceived

that their levels of activity, interactions, and quality of life were close to being the same as before the pandemic. Because of the perceived outcome of many of the participants who believed there was no change in the quality of life for the elderly or intellectually challenged, there was a need to educate the general public regarding the negative impact Covid 19 was having.¹⁰⁵ Any of the conditions described could be affecting the targeted age group causing them to not be able to respond or participate in the research. Awareness of these issues is vital because the targeted age group has experienced many months of limited or sporadic contact with family members and peers. This may be a factor in the number of responses to the initial letter invitation.

It cannot be assumed that the members of SPBC and the leadership are aware of the effects Covid 19 is having on the elderly and intellectually challenged members. It may be necessary to incorporate an educational segment regarding the adverse effects this whole experience had on the targeted age group. A plan of action and implementation of that plan should be a part of the solution along with attending to their lack of technical skills. Their overall health, physically, mentally, and spiritually, can be a barrier to their learning abilities.

Possible Barriers to the Methodology

For a long time, researchers summed up that people in the age group sixty-eight and older were more comfortable using conventional methods when participating in a study, like face-to-face questions or paper questionnaires to be completed with pencils or ink pens.¹⁰⁶ Not having access to specific information could explain the low response rate; therefore, a more thorough

¹⁰⁵ Maria R. Dekker, Noud Frielink, Alexander H. C. Hendriks, and Petri J. C. M. Embregts, "The General Public's Perceptions of How the COVID-19 Pandemic Has Impacted the Elderly and Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 5 (2022): 2855. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052855>. <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/5/2855#cite>.

¹⁰⁶ Kelly Quinn, "Methodological consideration in surveys of older adults: Technology matters," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies & Society*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2010): 114-133. <http://www.swin.edu.au/ijets>.

assessment is not available. For example, to have known how many of the two hundred and ten email invites were to members who were in a hospital or nursing home and no longer reachable. Or if any of the ones invited were deceased but not removed from the database. These two factors may have affected the response rate. Unfortunately, St. Paul's database does not keep these details which would have made it easier to target only reachable members.

As people age, physical and mental barriers may pose a problem in their ability to keep up with technology. There are biological and sociological aspects of aging discussions to support how individuals may be affected. We often think of someone who has been slowed by age, both physically and mentally. They may have trouble walking up steps, picking up heavy grocery bags, standing straight, or remembering recent events¹⁰⁷. Retention of everyday information familiar to elderly persons often gets more complicated the older they get. How much of what is believed about the physical and psychological changes among the elderly is accurate or a myth?¹⁰⁸

Hearing loss, muscle tone, and internal organs may not work as efficiently. After the age of seventy, learning and memory may decline. The number of brain cells decreases, as does brain mass overall. Depression and other mental and emotional disorders can set in, and dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, can occur. The truth is that not all older adults develop any or all of these symptoms. Many are still very active well into their eighties and nineties.¹⁰⁹ Other studies show these findings as possible barriers to using technology, such as computers and the

¹⁰⁷ M. M. Lee, Carpenter, B., & Meyers, L. S., Representations of older adults in television advertisements. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21, no. 1 (2007): 23–30.

¹⁰⁸ M. Novak, (2012). *Issues in aging* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

¹⁰⁹ J. W. Rowe, Berkman, L. F., Binstock, R., Boersch-Supan, A., Cacioppo, J., Carstensen, L., et al. "Policies and politics for an aging America," *Contexts*, 9, no. 1 (2010): 22–27.

internet, visual impairments, back pain, and hand tremor.¹¹⁰ And another study in the United States showed cognitive problems as the most critical barrier related to using cell/smartphones, computers, and tablets by older adults.¹¹¹

Not knowing how many of the members fell into any of these categories, no assumptions were made about the large numbers of church members at SPBC who fall into the Refiner's Life Stage. The same email requesting participation in this study was sent.

Another hindrance to the methodology's success was the lack of exposure to the requestor. The targeted members needed to connect to the person sending the email inviting them to participate in a survey. In retrospect, before sending the initial email, an email from the senior pastor or another pastor with whom they were more familiar may have made a difference. If circumstances were different and the requestor had attended an in-person meeting, a visual connection of the researcher's identity would be present. The age group's pastor would have introduced the requestor, who could have appealed to the persons present at the meeting. Then a better explanation of the project's scope and an opportunity for questions may have caused more participation. The trust factor and familiarity with their pastor cause more openness and the ability to ask questions added to the building of trust.

Time to have built a relationship with the targeted age group was not possible under the circumstances. As stated above, in-person meetings were no longer an option. If the requestor had attended several of their monthly meetings over a year, this might have caused more to participate.

¹¹⁰ NG Choi, Dinitto DM. The digital divide among low-income homebound older adults: Internet use patterns, eHealth literacy, and attitudes toward computer/Internet use. *J Med Internet Res* 2013;15:e93

¹¹¹ L. Gitlow. "Technology use by older adults and barriers to using technology," *Physical and Occupational Therapy in Geriatrics*, 32 (2014): 271-80.

The factors, having a familiar person make the initial introduction, building a relationship before recruitment efforts, and not being familiar with the requestor, were similar to barriers faced by researchers recruiting participants. Myra Sabir and Karl Pillemer¹¹² researched recruiting participants who were already suspicious of anyone asking them to participate in any research. Many asked to participate were aware of past experiments conducted on African Americans. "In a study of 179 adults in Detroit (91 of whom were African American), researchers found that 81% of the African Americans had knowledge of the Tuskegee Experiment and that knowledge of the experiment resulted in distrust of scientific research. Forty-six percent (46%) of the African Americans indicated that this knowledge directly influences their willingness to participate in scientific research."¹¹³ The community was apprehensive. Sabir and Pillemer understood the importance of gaining trust and finding common ground to put the potential participants at ease. They went to an organization that was already connected in the community and had the community's trust. Complete honesty regarding the research and disclosing what they hoped to gain from it was crucial. The most critical factor they realized was finding everyday experiences that united them. "Integrating the researcher's own story with that of the participants might reduce the sense of distance between them and help to create a deep and mutual sense of familiarity. This sense of familiarity provides a basis for trust between the researcher and participants that serve recruitment and retention efforts."¹¹⁴ The researcher is in

¹¹² Myra G. Sabir, Karl A. Pillemer, "An Intensely sympathetic Awareness: Experiential similarity and Cultural Norms as Means for Gaining Older African Americans' Trust of Scientific Research" *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol 29, (2014): 142-149.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S089040651400005X?via%3Dihub>.

¹¹³ Myra G. Sabir, Karl A. Pillemer, "An Intensely Sympathetic Awareness: Experiential Similarity and Cultural Norms as Means for Gaining Older African Americans' Trust of Scientific Research" *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol 29, (April 2014): 142.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S089040651400005X?via%3Dihub>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 148.

the selected age group and did have computer challenges at one time. One factor that was not possible to perform for this thesis was the face-to-face interview. The referenced research understood the importance of gaining the trust of the participants and meeting face-to-face was a factor that was very important in achieving that trust. At SPBC, this was not possible during any phase of this process.

Encouraging Factors for the Methodology

Studies show that the utilization of technology may potentially improve cognitive and sensory-motor functioning and independence among older adults.¹¹⁵ A study in the United States indicated that 41.6% of adults 65 years and older were using the Internet and 61.0% were using computers in 2012.¹¹⁶

The Pew Report reports in 2021 that the use of smartphones, social media, and tablet ownership is on a steady rise among adults in their sixties and older. In 2000, the gap between the oldest and youngest groups of adults in internet use was 56 percentage points; it now is 24 points.¹¹⁷

The Pew Report is encouraging because SPBC will continue to use all communication platforms for services and meetings. Many who attend our services are not from our local area, even those in the age group surveyed.

¹¹⁵ L. Wang, Rau PL, Salvendy G., "Older Adults' Acceptance of Information Technology," *Education Gerontology* 37 (2011): 1081-99.

¹¹⁶ Commerce USDOC. Exploring the Digital Nation Computer and Internet use at Home; 2011. Available from: https://www.ntia.doc.gov/files/ntia/publications/exploring_the_digital_nation_computer_and_internet_use_at_home_11092011.pdf. (Last retrieved on 2013 Sep 18).

¹¹⁷ Michelle Faverio, "Share of Those 65 and Older Who Are Tech Users Has Grown In the Past Decade," Jan 13, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/01/13/share-of-those-65-and-older-who-are-tech-users-has-grown-in-the-past-decade/>

The ones who responded to the email and were spoken to by phone reacted positively. There was a mixture of those who were comfortable with using technology and those who solicited help from a younger family member. Having observed the number who participate virtually in the monthly gathering, which is about forty Refiners, the response to this survey represented about forty-five percent.

Not all participants could answer the survey and return it online; they were allowed to call in their responses. The ones who called in their response fell into two categories: either they did not know how to complete and return it online or were uncomfortable returning the information online.

Intervention Design

This study aims to identify the problems older adults in the congregation of Saint Paul have regarding an alternative way of having worship services. Depending on the responses to the questions and interviews, it may not be a question of using technology. Instead, the problem could be different, such as accessibility or cost created by using this technology. Because most seniors and older adults are on a fixed income, the issue may be more financial than comfort using digital technology. If the research shows that the congregation members are not using digital technology because of not understanding it, training is needed. On the other hand, if the findings show that their financial situation is the issue, the church may provide another way to join the worship service.

The methodology for this study is simply the use of questions in the form of a survey requiring yes or no responses. There will be a more in-depth discussion on the individual

interviews. So, the methodology is data collection, presentation, and drawing conclusions from the data collected.¹¹⁸

Under the protocol of SPBC, the methodology utilized in this study is the best course. The church shut its doors early in the pandemic to prevent the spread of Covid-19 among the attendees. This happened to a church in the community, and the pastor died because he did not believe Covid-19 was as severe as predicted. The pastor of SPBC did not allow meetings or events to occur on the church grounds or in the building. This eliminated any face-to-face contact with the targeted age group. Even as the church reopened for services, no events were allowed except Sunday worship. Sunday service, for several months, was restricted to allowing less than 500 attendees who had to upload proof of vaccination before registering.

Further precautions were taken by allowing three seats between each person if not in the same household. The row of seats in front of and behind the occupied seats was not used. Attendees had to register for an assigned seat for the Sunday service each week. The seats were often filled within hours, making it very difficult for anyone unfamiliar with using the computer or the internet. The process was somewhat confusing even for those who were comfortable using computers. This process did not make it easy for the members in the target age group to return to in-person worship.

This study will commence by extending a written invitation to at least two hundred older adult members of Saint Paul's Baptist Church, ages sixty-eight and up. It will be sent by email

¹¹⁸ Gernaída K. R. Pakpahan, Fibry J. Nugroho, Priskila I. Benyamin, Frans Pantan, and Wiryohadi Wiryohadi. "Pandemic Ecclesiology: Church Re-Actualisation during the Pandemic." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022): Accessed May 20, 2021, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/pandemic-ecclesiology-church-re-actualisation/docview/2640198391/se-2>.

inviting them to participate in an informational meeting to discuss the study's involvement and how it will affect their participation. See Appendix A for a copy of the recruitment letter. This meeting may not be in-person due to social distancing requirements resulting from COVID-19 restrictions. An alternative to meeting in person will be to schedule a series of conference calls to relay the research information and answer questions. After selecting the research participants, the next phase is getting their consent by emailing a consent form to participate in the study.

The next step is to send a survey for the participants to complete. This initial survey has fifteen questions, six requiring a yes or no response and nine requiring a response of either agree, somewhat agree, or do not agree. The survey questions relate to using various technologies for church programs such as general worship services and Bible study. The hope is to ascertain if the subjects are technologically savvy or if they are not comfortable using technology at all.

Appendix B has the list of the initial survey questions.

Upon receiving the survey results, the next step is to conduct one-on-one interviews with the participants via phone, or video, using Zoom technology. The duration of the individual interview is 10 to 15 minutes. This research phase should take three to four weeks from start to finish, depending on how quickly the participants respond to the survey. After completing this portion of the study, an analysis of the information compiled will be the next step.

A summarization of the information provided will lead to recommendations, if needed, on how the church can effectively assist the congregation's older members with worship participation during the pandemic. All participants in the research will receive the results of the study.

The criteria for evaluating this research project is the specific age group used in the study. The outcome of this intervention would depend on the persons in this age group's understanding

and usage of social media and virtual technology as a tool for communicating and participating in church worship and other services offered. A successful outcome would be that the specific age group is comfortable using this technology. That age group is the seniors of the church sixty-eight and up. The current pandemic is causing church leaders to rethink how they minister to their congregations. The ones adversely affected are the older church members. Therefore, the approach used in this study will focus on a specific age group in the church and not the general assembly. In the past, the strategy would be to survey the entire church membership, not concentrate on any particular age group.

At the end of the study, the participants will receive a four-question follow-up survey to determine the study's usefulness and if they will seek to learn more about the use of social media and virtual technology. See Appendix C.

This project relies solely on the study's age group's knowledge and comfortability of using social media. Therefore, the time needed to evaluate this study's results should take about four to six weeks, depending on the survey's answers and individual interviews.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Two hundred and ten research participation invitations were emailed to this select group of seniors in the congregation. But unfortunately, the replies were less than expected.

The study began by sending research invitation letters in groups of 20 to potential participants via email. Potential participants were given ample time to respond to the invitations. Potential participants who had questions regarding the study were instructed to call the contact phone number contained in the invitation letter.

After receiving each response, a consent form for the potential participant to review, sign, and date will be sent by email. This consent form provides information regarding what to expect

as a participant in the study. It also provides information on the study's confidentiality and that any information they give is solely for use in this research. The consent form will also inform the participants that they may withdraw from the study without malice there will be no pressure to continue. Upon receiving the signed consent form, the initial survey is then sent for the participant to complete. The initial survey will be sent via email, virtual technology, or phone, depending on the participant's preference. Sending the surveys began in February 2021 and continued through the end of March 2021. Not knowing the potential participants' comfort level with virtual technology, using the phone will be a viable option for completing the survey. After receiving the completed surveys, the research portion of the study should take no longer than four to six weeks. However, this will depend on the scheduling of the individual follow-up interviews.

Next, there will be an individual follow-up interview with the participant to gain insight into the initial survey's answers. Unfortunately, the discussions are over the phone because of the restrictions still in place due to the pandemic. These restrictions include but are not limited to in-person contact outside the home. Using the phone will ensure that there will be no in-person contact during the research. The choice of virtual or non-virtual communication became the question for those participating in the study. They all seemed more comfortable with using the phone for the interviews. The participant's health and safety are of the utmost concern to this researcher. This researcher contends that the participants will feel more comfortable with this form of communication. The participants wanting to use the phone as a means of communication indicated this generation's comfort in using this technology over virtual technology. Because this age group comes from a time when telephones were the primary form of communication, naturally, they felt more comfortable using their cell phones or smartphones for the interviews.

The discussions with the participants during the individual follow-up will allow them to speak freely about their thoughts regarding the use of technology and if they think it is a good way for the church to continue providing services. In addition, the participants can share if they use the different technologies available and to what extent. Finally, the conversations with the participants will also provide information for the church leadership team regarding how seniors receive the use of technology for regular services offered by the church.

The difficulty with this part of the research is not being able to conduct the individual interviews in person. However, being face to face allows this researcher to see the expressions on the participant's faces which may lead to why they respond as they do. In addition, when one is in the presence of whom they are talking, facial expressions can give a much better picture of the individual's true thoughts.

The final step in the research portion of the study is a follow-up survey that allows the participants to express their thoughts regarding the continued use of virtual technology for church services. This survey shows whether these participants are open to the possibility of SPBC continuing to use virtual technology. Also, the answers to this survey will indicate if the participants are willing to receive training in using virtual technology if they are unfamiliar with it. Lastly, the survey asks participants if they think this study is worthwhile? The replies are encouraging. Most of the participants are open to being educated in the use of virtual technology. They also agree that this technology will continue to be used by SPBC for worship services and other programs. In addition, this study shows that the more senior members of SPBC are not opposed to using technology such as Facebook, YouTube, and Zoom. Unfortunately, it happened so fast that they were unprepared for this quick change.

The study anticipated more participants, but the lack of responses may indicate little interest in using specific technologies for church programs. The purpose for attempting to implement this design model is that it is less invasive for the participants during this pandemic. The data collected through surveys and interviews did not reveal why there is not more participation. The comfort of using various technologies by seniors for church interactions did not seem as important as how they would function in their day-to-day activities. Invitations sent to the older church members intended to spark a conversation about the different technologies used for communication and their opinions and comfort with this use. The lack of responses may also indicate no issues using technology for this age group. Without a more in-depth study, a definite answer cannot be determined.

As stated, the study's first phase is to collect data through an initial survey to discover the knowledge of virtual technology the potential participants possess and to what extent they use it. The initial survey is in two parts. The first part, questions one through six, requires yes or no responses regarding the participant's familiarity with virtual technology such as Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, and other related technologies. Therefore, this part of the survey will not show if the participants use technology such as Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, or other virtual technology but will show their familiarity with it.

In the second part of the initial survey, questions seven through fifteen require more than yes or no answers. These questions are more in-depth, asking the participants about their use of virtual technology and their comfort level using it for church programs and services. Because SPBC uses these forms of communications for the weekly church worship services and Bible study, the responses will show two things. One, if the study participants are using these forms of

contact to stay connected with the church; two, are they comfortable using this technology to stay connected with the church.

To identify the participant's responses, each had a number attached to their response to differentiate who they were. In addition, an initial survey results chart establishes who answered what question and if they agree or disagree with a specific statement in the survey. There are twelve participants, and the chart indicates when they are in 100% agreement.

After receiving the data from the initial survey, the next step is the individual interviews. The one-on-one interviews intend to allow the participants to express their feelings about virtual technology in the church using their words. Surprisingly, the participants agree that using virtual technology is suitable for SPBC during this pandemic. The disagreement comes from their wanting to use it, not their comfortability. From the discussions in the one-on-one interviews, it is not a question of using virtual technology in the church but not being in church. The discussions went from the comfort of using technology to missing in-person worship and the weekly interaction with friends and family at church. The participants seem knowledgeable about virtual technology and why it can be an added benefit to the church.

The participants receive a four-question follow-up survey after the one-on-one interviews are complete. This survey asks their thoughts on the study in the form of yes or no and likely or less likely responses, and if they would be open to learning more about virtual technology. The expectation is to see if the elderly population of SPBC will embrace and take part in the training of using virtual technology if offered at SPBC. The leadership at SPBC is open to helping members to acquire knowledge of how virtual technology works and will benefit the user. In addition, the SPBC technology team will also provide training for any church community members who want to learn the basics of using virtual technology. According to Henry and

Richard Blackaby, “With today’s technology, it is irresponsible for leaders to keep their people uninformed.”¹¹⁹ Therefore, SPBC’s leadership is trying to educate the congregation on the technology used for church programming and worship today. The hope is that everyone, including the senior members of SPBC, will want to join in the training so they can participate in and enjoy the church services and programs that are now in the form of digital and virtual technology. However, until the church re-opens fully, there is a problem providing training for those interested in learning about the use of digital and virtual technology. Senior members of the congregation remain reluctant to come out from the confines of their homes for anything, including taking advantage of training that will help them to communicate better with others during the pandemic. Suppose the follow-up survey results indicate seniors want to learn more about digital technologies. In that case, the church must look at all available options to provide this training.

With the limited methodology available to research the questions in this thesis, the received data did provide some insight. The research centered on the comfort level of the senior members of SPBC using technology and if they are using technology to watch the Sunday services.

The age group invited to participate in this research was sixty-eight and above. Two hundred and ten email invitations were sent, but only twelve agreed to participate. There were many reasons included in this section as to why the participation rate was so low. Many email recipients were uncomfortable opening an email from someone they did not know. The email attached to their data in the church’s database may have belonged to one of their children. Some

¹¹⁹ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 197.

recipients may have been under a doctor's care or in a facility. And a few may have passed, and the church had not received a notification to remove them from the database. These are a few reasons that could have accounted for the low response.

The twelve participants provided comprehensible answers regarding why they did or did not feel comfortable using technology. They were more responsive when contacted by telephone because of their comfort level and familiarity with using the phone. They each had smartphones and were comfortable using them, but four or five did not have a problem using a computer to watch the service live using one or more of the platforms. They all understood that the church would continue to use all of the platforms going forward because of the contacts and connections made with viewers across the United States and worldwide. They were all in favor of this decision.

The leadership has already made additions to how to communicate with those who find technology challenging or do not own the necessary items. Phone numbers have been added so those without cable or Wi-Fi can listen to these services. Volunteers call groups of members of all age groups each month as a check-in. At this time, they can verify the phone number and other information. The information gathered from the participants will enable the leadership team to plan a course of action regarding technology and the senior members of SPBC. Hopefully, gathering information from senior members will become easier. The buses are once again offering rides to participate in the worship services. There are fewer restrictions on attending services, and two locations are available for worship. Also, the monthly meetings for senior members in the near future should resume. They will once again be able to meet for Bible study and in-person lunches. This will allow for an open discussion regarding the effects of the pandemic on each of them. From these discussions, the seniors can make suggestions as to what

they would like to do to become proactive. Letting them decide what actions would be beneficial may cause a more significant number of participants in the discussions and solutions. If classes and speakers are requested, the majority will ultimately win the vote.

A lesson learned from the only methodology available during the pandemic was with this age group, sixty-eight and above, using an email as the initial contact was not very effective. From the research done, this age group has to be engaged face-to-face. They need to feel comfortable with the person asking them to participate. And they need to feel valued, and they need to trust the researcher. This generation has seen or heard about many atrocities against the African American people. Their fear of being taken advantage of is valid. As time passes, the opportunity to interact in person with the seniors will give many of the answers sort by the leadership to not allow this to happen again. One of the first questions is, what is the best way to contact you in case of another event like the pandemic, and is all their contact information correct?

Implementation of the Intervention Design includes comparing the answers given by the participants to reveal any similarities. The answers they give will show if they are using digital devices for daily interaction with others. The questions in the survey and interview portion of the study seek to see how the participant feels about using digital devices for church worship services during the pandemic. The participants are in a particular age group.

The most glaring issue is the more aged members of the church congregation's ability to stay connected with the church during the pandemic. It came to light that some older congregation members felt disconnected from the church. Yet, when connecting with the research participants, it seemed like they were happy to talk with anyone outside the immediate household. In trying to interview them regarding the use of technology and social media for

church, it became apparent that they just wanted to talk. The conversation with some of the participants was challenging to keep on track. During the interview sessions, this researcher had to be careful not to appear uncaring about people being lonely, and isolation was prominent because of the pandemic. Keeping the conversation going in the right direction was not easy. The most exciting thing about the interviews was that each participant wanted to stay connected with this researcher after the completion of the study.

The conversations with the participants ranged from family to the weather to the types of foods each other liked. However, there is a clear sign of hidden depression among the study participants because they cannot physically interact with their family and friends. Therefore, conducting this study gives them a sense of being needed and accomplishing something during the pandemic. Although, when performing the interviews, this researcher did not want to be insensitive to their situations, some of the time spent during the discussions centered around things they wanted to discuss. Doing this also made the participant feel more comfortable when the conversation shifted back to using remote technology for church worship during the pandemic. Senior citizens are likely to be more open when they feel comfortable talking with others. Therefore, trust is essential to consider in implementing this research design. The participant must feel they can trust the researcher not to fabricate any answers they give to the questions or what they say in the interviews. From the beginning of the interview, the participant understands that they may stop at any time and can also ask questions.

Once the interview starts, the participant is not limited to what they want to say regarding technology, social media, or other information-gathering platforms. The participants know from the signed consent forms that all answers to the surveys and interview responses are confidential and solely for use in this study. They also know their names remain confidential. Knowing this

adds to the level of trust they can feel participating in the study. The participants are also free to add anything to the conversation they think might not be brought up during the interview.

Though this researcher is focusing on the comfort of using technology for church worship, any other concerns can add to the eventual outcome. For example, most people are reluctant to discuss income or their financial situation, and seniors are very protective of this. However, this can shed light on why or why not they feel as they do about technology. Therefore, the interviewer will not ask about income or financial means but, depending on responses, could touch on if the cost of using available technology is a deterrent. Being able to afford the equipment to participate in virtual church worship services can be why some seniors do not take advantage of the available resources. The hope is that the data gathered from the surveys and interviews will provide answers to the comfortability of seniors using remote technology for church services and programs during the pandemic.

After compiling the data from the surveys and interviews, the anticipated hope is that the information will reveal the comfort level of using technology by seniors. A significant factor in this study is how the participant feels about using technology such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and other social media platforms. SPBC uses Facebook, YouTube, and the church streaming channel to present worship services weekly. Therefore, the discussions regarding the familiarity of these social media platforms will offer a more precise picture of why or why not the participant is comfortable using them for church programming. For example, suppose the data shows that participants are reluctant to use social media for fear of their personal information being made public. In that case, this could be one reason they are uncomfortable with the technology. Questions of this nature could arise in the interview phase of the study. For

seniors, keeping personal information from public view is extremely important because of how criminals around the world prey on the elderly.

There is a follow-up survey after the interview portion of the study. The follow-up survey is more of potential actions that may result from the interviews' responses. The first question on this survey asks if the participant is more or less likely to use virtual technology for church worship. The questions in this section seek to determine if there is interest in the church providing training on navigating and using social media technology. Also, if those who participate in the study think the study is worthwhile. The answers here could be a guiding factor in the church taking a more active stand in helping the church's seniors become more receptive to using social media. If there are positive responses, this could lead to a new ministry in the church. In addition, the participants would be encouraged to learn about the ever-changing technology in the world. As in everything in life, change is a constant. Finally, the participants are urged in the interviews to give their thoughts on how they think the church can better provide for members who have problems staying connected in worship services.

Undertaking this study of the senior members of Saint Paul's Baptist Church opened other ideas that needed to be explored to get a whole picture. More factors were discovered, along with the challenges of technology. Not being able to speak with many of them in person limits the scope of this study. But, since the start of the pandemic and the continuation of isolation even today, the questions continue to surface. Are we doing enough for the senior members of the church? Now that we have opened completely, can we do more to encourage more of them to return? The methodology of choice is still limited to making phone calls to reach most senior members. Looking at other studies of the elderly can give insight into what is being discovered and can be applied to this study.

For example, understanding sociology and its importance when studying humans can provide an additional lens for viewing the senior-aged membership. They cannot all be classified collectively as technically challenged, unwilling to learn, or afraid of new ideas. There are social issues that play a role in their use or non-use of technology.

Reading sections of Steven E. Barkan's book *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World* helped to shed light on understanding the elderly in chapter twelve and religion in chapter seventeen. Observing most of the elderly in our church, they seem to value the social aspect of church service. Those who study the elderly, Gerontologists, say that aging has at least four dimensions, chronological age (the number of years), biological aging (physical changes), psychological aging (mental functioning), and social aging (changes in roles and relationships).¹²⁰ Just by living life, the elderly change without suffering any diseases, accidents, dementia, or Alzheimer's; the body and mind change. Knowing this information adds to factors already discussed concerning reasons why many have issues with learning technology.

"A national survey of religious Americans in May 2020 included several questions about the COVID-19 pandemic. Asked why the pandemic occurred, 43% of respondents blamed foreign governments, 37% blamed the U.S. government, and 11% blamed human sinfulness, among other reasons. Nearly two-thirds of the sample agreed that the pandemic is "God telling humanity to change the way we are living," and more than half believed that God would protect them from being infected with the coronavirus"¹²¹ (Fowler 2020).

¹²⁰ Steven E. Barkan, *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World, Comprehensive Edition*. Edition 3, (Boston, MA: FlatWorld, 2021), Ch. 12.

¹²¹ Hayley Fowler. 2020. "God Will Protect Me. Here's How Religious Americans View the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Charlotte Observer*, (2020): Accessed June 2021, <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/coronavirus/article242784396.html>.

This was the sentiment of religious people in Charlotte, and speaking with elderly church members, they held fast to their beliefs. That is why it is vital that all churches, along with SPBC, see the importance of including the elderly by whatever means they have to connect with services and other activities. “Religious faith and practice can enhance psychological well-being by being a source of comfort to people in times of distress. Many studies find that people of all ages, not just the aging adults, are happier and more satisfied with their lives if they are religious.”¹²²

This study has revealed how a select group representing the sixty-eight and over felt about the pandemic and how the church shifted to online worship. It showed the frustration of some and the ability to change with little difficulty for others.

¹²² Steven E. Barkan, *Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World, Comprehensive Edition*. Edition 3, (Boston, MA: FlatWorld, 2021), Ch. 17.4

Chapter 4

Results

Initial Survey

The initial survey results indicate that while some older adults have an issue using technology for church service during this pandemic, they are getting used to this different method overall. The surveys find that most study participants know about the various technologies used for church services. However, there is some disparity in their feeling comfortable using social media and virtual technology like Facebook Live or YouTube for church service participation. The age of the participants ranged from 68 years old to 76 years old. The chart below (Figure 1) indicates that those surveyed know about social media and virtual technology. The results of this chart are in Appendix A and shown below in the individual interviews.

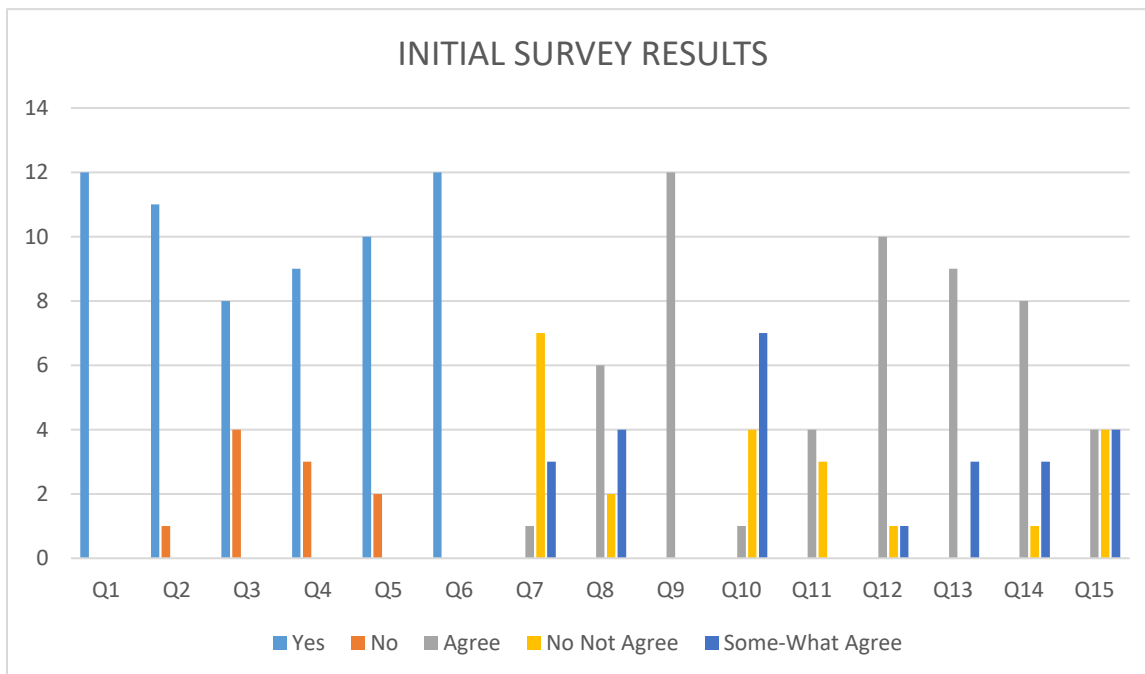


Figure 1. Initial Survey Results for Q1-Q15

Question 1, which assesses familiarity with social media and virtual technology, revealed that all participants know about these technologies. However, question 2 shows a vast difference when it comes to having access to this technology. However, from question 6, there has been full participation in church worship since beginning alternative delivery methods.

Questions 7 through 12 on the chart require more than yes or no replies, and as a result, there are still only two replies indicating 100% agreement. Question 9 asks about missing in-person church worship services. All of those surveyed do miss that in-person contact and fellowship. While they miss the in-person contact, they agree with question 12 that social media and virtual technology are excellent ways to communicate with others during a pandemic. The survey indicates there is no 100% agreement in question 13; most surveyed agree that virtual technology is suitable for weekly church Bible study. Saint Paul uses three communication forms for weekly worship service and weekly Bible study, Facebook Live and MYPBC.TV, and YouTube.

Interviews

After completing the initial surveys, the following one-on-one interviews supported the participants' answers to the surveys. The use of numbers instead of names provides confidentiality for the participants. The interview questions in the discussions give this researcher a more precise understanding of the participants' views regarding social media and other forms of communication technologies.

The one-on-one interviews show varying views from those who do not think social media or virtual technology platforms are suitable for church worship. These interviews revealed that most negative responses are not due to the individual not knowing how to navigate this technology but instead not using the technology. Having the necessary access and equipment was

not as hampering as not using the various platforms available. Education seems the key to the elder members of the congregation embracing this technology.

The following are transcripts of the interviews of the twelve participants.

Participant 1

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I am familiar with social media, but I do not use it.

Question: Why do you not use it?

Response: I think using social media sets you up for people getting into your business. As soon as you put yourself out there, it's no telling what people will say about you.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: I can see using social media as a way of keeping in touch with your family and friends. I prefer calling them on my phone.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: I do watch my church worship services on Facebook Live. At Saint Paul's, all of the services have been virtual since the pandemic hit. I watch either on Facebook Live or on the church website. Also, there is a Zoom men's Bible study each week in which I participate. Also, at my job, we use Zoom for our business meetings.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: Yes, I think it will continue because it gives you another option of participating in church worship without actually being in the church building. You might be able to come to church physically, but you will watch the service. I think it's here to stay.

Analysis: This individual said that he does not use social media is not valid. However, when he is on Facebook Live or the church website, he uses social media. Even when he is on Zoom for Bible study and business meetings, he uses social media. Therefore, it would seem that his understanding of the definition of social media is the issue.

Participant 2

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I think social media is a good thing. You can find all sorts of information on social media, but you have to be careful about what you read. There is a lot of false or misleading information.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: Yes.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: Social media can be both good and bad. People might say things on social media that they would not ordinarily say in person.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: I am on Facebook, and I do use text messaging on my phone. I see other things out there like Instagram and TikTok, but I let the young folks have at that.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: Yes. Once things return to normal as far as the church, virtual technology will continue when we can meet in person again because not everyone will feel comfortable being in crowds again. I think the church's leadership found that using social media and virtual technology can reach more people than they anticipated.

Analysis: The response here is very positive. The participant seems to be comfortable using social media and virtual technology. It would seem that they favor the church continuing use of social media and virtual technology.

Participant 3

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I feel that social media has good and bad applications. Using all platforms to spread the gospel is an excellent use of social media.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: To an extent, yes. I view the church services each Sunday.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: Yes, it keeps us connected and engaged.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: Yes, Zoom.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: Yes, because it reaches a larger audience. I like the option of in-person or remote.

Analysis: The responses by this participant are explicitly directed to the church's use of social media. According to the answers during this interview, using social media platforms is an excellent way to spread the gospel.

Participant 4

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I think social media is good if used properly. There is some controversy about what is on some social media platforms that creates mistrust in using it.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: Yes. I do not use it as much as I did when I was working, but I still use social media.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: Yes. Social media connects you with family and friends who are far away. For instance, I use Zoom to connect with family living in other states. We get together on Zoom, and it is like a family reunion. We can see each other as we talk.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: Yes, Zoom, Facebook Live, Twitter, and text messaging.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: Yes, I do. The pandemic has shown the church that it can connect with the members and others outside the church by using different technology forms to communicate. When the pandemic is over, I think the use of social media and virtual technology will continue because of the number of people it reaches.

Analysis: The participant thinks social media is good to keep people connected, especially during the pandemic.

Participant 5

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I know what social media is. I think it is good in some ways.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: I do not use social media. I do not have access to social media, so I do not use it. I'm not too fond of Facebook or social media platforms of that kind.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: I think it is an excellent way to talk with others. My grandchildren use it all of the time to speak with their friends.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: I use my computer to watch our weekly worship services and other church programs on the church website. On my phone, I can use Zoom communications for church group meetings.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: When the pandemic is over, I think the church will go back to in-person worship, and there will be no further use of social media and virtual technology. I believe that church groups will continue to use technology like Zoom for meetings and Bible study, which is good.

Analysis: In the conversation with this individual, the discussion about what will happen when the church returns to in-person worship is interesting. They think there will be no need for social media or virtual technology once in-person worship resumes. However, they believe some ministry groups might continue using some form of social media technology for meetings.

Participant 6

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: Social media is good. I think it needs to be adequate monitoring of the technology to prevent misuse, especially with children.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: Yes, I use social media. I am handicapped and social media is a means of staying in contact with friends and family.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: Yes, I think it is an excellent way to talk with your family and friends.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: Yes, I use Facebook quite a bit, I use the Zoom platform, and I also use computer websites to keep in touch with people.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: I miss in-person church worship. I like the fellowship of in-person gatherings at church. Social media and virtual technology will continue to be a plus for the church because they will reach those who cannot attend services in person. I believe the pandemic was just the jump start many churches needed to use the various technologies available such as Facebook Live, YouTube, Zoom, and other platforms.

Analysis: The answers to the survey questions are from a person with a handicap reveal the use of social media technology as a necessity. Using social media and other technology keeps this individual connected with the world.

Participant 7

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I know about social media. It is okay, I guess.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: I do not use social media. I do not know enough about it to use it.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: From what I can tell, it seems to be a good way for people to talk with each other. The only way I use it is when my grandchildren set it up and I talk.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: I use my cell phone all of the time. I only use the other technology when my grandchildren set them up for me. So if you are asking if I know how to use them, the answer is no. I do not have the patience to learn all of the stuff.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: I watch my church services on Sundays with my family, and it is a good thing to have during this pandemic. I think the church will continue using it after the pandemic. It is good to have this technology in dangerous weather, and you cannot get to church or even if there is another kind of disaster. Everything is changing. I do not think things will ever go back to the way they were.

Analysis: When asked about social media, the response here is that they “do not know enough about how to use it.” The person interviewed seems to be comfortable with other members of the family accessing the different social media platforms and then watching or participating when it is ready.

Participant 8

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I think social media is a great way to communicate with people and is suitable for business use. It is usual for businesses to use social media as an advertising tool. Therefore, I think social media is good.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: Yes, I use social media.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: I do think using social media as a means of communicating with others is good. The different platforms available do not restrict you to any particular application.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: I use Facebook live for church worship service on Sundays. I use Zoom communications for Bible study and church group meetings. I still use my phone a lot for texting.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: I think social media and virtual technology will continue once the pandemic is over because churches have seen how effective the use of these platforms is for reaching

people. It not only connects with people in the immediate communities but across the country and around the world.

Analysis: The answers given by this participant indicates a good understanding of social media and how it can be of value in many circumstances. The comments here show how the respondent sees the social media platform's effectiveness for church services and programs even after the pandemic.

Participant 9

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: I think social media is good. It is an excellent way of getting information.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: Yes, I use social media often.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: When I think about talking with others, I mostly use my cell phone for that. I love the texting feature.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: Since things have changed because of the pandemic, my children and grandchildren have taught me how to use Zoom, Tic Toc, and Facebook.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: The use might not be as widespread as it is now, but I think that there will be a form of virtual technology in the church after the pandemic because people are lazy, and if there is a way they can enjoy church and not have to be in the physical building, they will.

Analysis: Because this participant was willing to learn how to use different social media and virtual technology platforms, this newfound knowledge has a sense of enjoyment for them.

Participant 10

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: Social media has become a necessity in the world today. I think people put too much personal information on social media. But, there is some helpful information to be found on social media also.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: I use it, but I am not always on social media to get into people's business.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: Social media can be a way of finding someone with whom you may have lost contact. I do not think it is suitable for having a conversation, that is why we have phones. We can talk or text one another.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: I have learned to use Zoom because I am part of the ministry that uses this communication platform for meetings. All of the sessions are on Zoom.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: I think the church will combine in-person worship and virtual technology. I do not feel virtual technology will become the only way the church has its services after the pandemic, but I believe some churches will cut back on in-person worship services in favor of virtual.

Analysis: The assumption here is that social media is a necessity and good when looking for information on various topics. However, the respondent thinks people are sharing too much personal information on some of the available platforms. There is agreement that once the pandemic is over, there will be a combination of in-person and virtual worship at many churches.

Participant 11

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: Social media is not something that I am comfortable with using. I have seen certain things on social and decided that it is not for me.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: No, I do not use social media.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: Some people think social media is the only way to talk to others. But using social media is not as private as making a phone call or texting the other person. I do use text messaging.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: Since we have been in this pandemic situation, my wife and I watch our church services using Facebook Live, but she sets all of that up. I do not know how to do all of that stuff. She connects us with Zoom when we have a meeting for the Refiners group at church. That is the extent that I use other forms of technology.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: I think social media and virtual technology in the church will continue after the pandemic is over. The use of this technology might be suitable for some church programs, but I do not believe it works for Bible study.

Analysis: The use of social media is something this participant is not comfortable with engaging. The negative comments and images he sees are not something he wants to be a part of; however, while they use Facebook to watch church worship, he knows nothing about accessing the various sites. He leaves the setting up for his wife. He does think social media and virtual technology are suitable for some church programs, but not all.

Participant 12

Question: What are your views on social media?

Response: Social media is appropriate when used in the proper context. Like everything else in life, people have exploited social media and used it to fit their personal and sometimes hurtful views.

Question: Do you use social media?

Response: Yes, I use social media, but I am careful what information I place on social media.

Question: The pandemic has caused things to change in the way people communicate with one another. Do you think using social media as a way to talk with others is good?

Response: Again, I feel social media is an excellent way for people to talk with one another if done correctly. There is quite a bit of foul language used on social media. That is not belittling others in your conversations and not using foul language.

Question: Are there any forms of technology other than your phone that you are currently using to keep in touch with others?

Response: Yes, my family uses Zoom and Facebook live to stay in contact with each other. We also use Facebook Live, YouTube, and the TV app on our church website to participate in our church services.

Question: Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?

Response: I believe that once the pandemic is over, the church will continue using social media and virtual technology as a means of communicating with the membership and community.

Analysis: For the most part, this participant thinks social media is good when used correctly.

They believe that when the pandemic is over, the church will see how social media and virtual technology enhance its visibility in the community and help with membership growth.

The interviews reveal that all participants know of social media and at least one other form of technology used for communications. However, there is a difference of opinion when it comes to how the participants view social media. While they disagree on social media use, they agree that social media is necessary in the way the world communicates today. Most of the participants use social media though it might not be regularly. The study participants agree that social media use for talking with others is good for the most part. A couple of the study participants questioned privacy when using social media as a tool when talking with others. The privacy question is a concern for all when using social media for conversations with friends. Overall, the responses to the use of social media to talk or speak with others are positive.

It seems that everyone interviewed uses other forms of technology even though they had not considered this question. Do you use a cellphone or smartphone? The participants use their phones constantly without realizing that this is a form of social media technology. Each week they watch Saint Paul's worship programming utilizing social media. The most widely used platform is Facebook Live. These seniors did not think of the use of Facebook Live as a social

media platform. It was just turning on the computer, if they had one or a smartphone, going to the Facebook platform, and tuning into the worship service. The fact that Facebook and Facebook Live are social media platforms never occurred to them. Some of the participants are using YouTube or the MYPBC.TV platforms to assess the church programming each week. These, too, are social media platforms. The study participants' conversations show that they did not equate these various communication forms to social media platforms.

The responses to the last question in the one-on-one interviews are surprising. The question asks, "Do you think social media and virtual technology in the church will continue once the pandemic is over?" Only one person thinks that the church will not continue using social media and virtual technology once the pandemic is over or under control. This participant feels that things will go back to as they were once the pandemic is over. Once the church doors have reopened, there will not be many people who will want to watch a screen in place of being in live worship. However, the other participants agree that there will be a continuation of this technology's use in some form. The consensus is to wait until the church reopens to see if this technology is viable.

The survey results and interviews also reveal that the cost of having the necessary technology is not an issue. The participants in this study already had the essential equipment needed to assess the weekly worship services and other programs offered by the church during the pandemic. The assumption was that most of the church membership in this age group is on a fixed income, and some online and virtual services would create a problem. These services could be an added expense to their budget. Also, the assumption was that this age group would need

extensive training to use the various social media platforms.¹²³ The individual interviews indicated that most seniors do not have an issue using digital media technology for church programs and worship. According to the senior pastor, this age group shows more participation in worship services than any other age group in the church. The results show that seniors could adapt to this alternative church worship style, and the situation is not as dire as the leadership thinks. They may not like not having in-person worship, but they have adapted to the church worship services and program changes. The seniors may not be one hundred percent in favor of this way of having worship services, but they have accepted the changes and agree that this is best until the pandemic slows or dissipates.

The participants in this study indicate they are comfortable using the new media platforms at Saint Paul's Baptist Church. It appears from the interviews that they are more comfortable with Facebook Live and MYSPBC.TV and YouTube as vehicles for church worship participation. Facebook Live and MYSPBC.TV seems to be the preference because of the interactive features offered. Using these two platforms, seniors can talk with one another through the chat feature provided. It also gives the user a chance to participate live in the service. Church staff monitors the chat feature during church services and programs. There are also online pastors to oversee the chat rooms available for members seeking prayer and consultation.¹²⁴ These two platforms show users how participation in worship does not always have to be in person. "Today, many are utilizing social media in a way that substitutes for what they previously sought in the church. Community, prayer, and support are now gleaned through one's

¹²³ Pamela Roberts, "Electronic Media and the Ties," *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 25, no. 2 (2001): 97-98.

¹²⁴ Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmutt, "Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship" *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (2014): 267-285.

usage of social media.”¹²⁵ The respondents in this study also revealed they like that if they miss the designated time of worship because it is on these media platforms, they can view it later.

Zoom is another platform that the study participants have become accustomed to using. Zoom allows one to see and interact with other people in real-time. It is the next thing to being fellowship with other people in person. The church uses Zoom for general church and small group meetings, including Bible study. The participants in this research embrace this form of communicating because it gives them a chance to see friends, and also, they have found it to be a great way to stay connected to family members outside of the church.

Follow-Up Survey

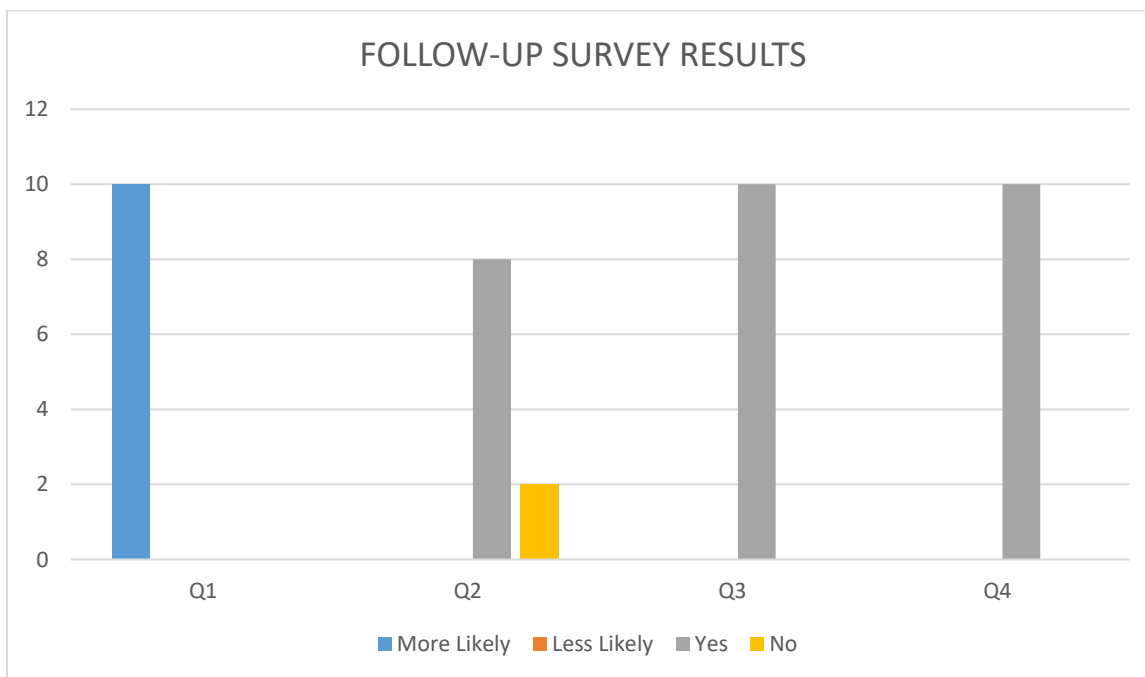


Figure 2. Follow-up Survey Results for Q1 - 4

The follow-up survey questions (Appendix B) revealed that the elder members of Saint Paul’s Baptist Church over 70 years old were willing to learn and use social media and virtual

¹²⁵ Phil Towne, “Spirituality in an Age of Technology,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 17, no. 2 (2014): 195-205.

technology, becoming comfortable with and accepting these communication methods. The trend here shows that those surveyed would be willing to learn about the church's various technological communication delivery platforms. Although those surveyed are in a particular age group, they may be willing to listen to a presentation regarding different electronic communication technology for church worship and other church programs. A question that came up doing the interview was if they were willing to learn to use social media and virtual technology if they were not familiar with the various platforms. There is no total agreement from those surveyed that they are willing to become familiar with and learn to use virtual technology and social media platforms. Still, the indications are that they are not opposed to the idea.

Those surveyed agree that the church should provide instruction and training in social media and virtual technology to continue using these platforms. Moreover, there is an indication from the pastor and leadership of the church that the use of social media platforms will continue after the church's reopening. However, from the surveys and interviews, it is apparent that there is a need to closely monitor how the older church members engage with these alternate communication forms. The surveys indicate they are watching the worship services and other programs, but are the services engaging them? The results suggest that even when these older adults are not familiar with or comfortable with social media and virtual technology, they still participate in weekly church worship. Whether they know how to set up and access the various platforms or not, someone is helping them. Even though they are not in the physical church location, the survey's answers reveal that virtual services still hold the worshippers' attention and are just as engaging. Having participated in these virtual services, this researcher can say they are just as interesting as in-person worship. There is more interaction between the viewer and the preacher in the service presentation in some cases.

The surveys in this study gathered information on the comfort level of using technology for older adults at Saint Paul's Baptist Church. Those surveyed are using the technology though they may not be comfortable with the platforms. However, using the various platforms indicates they are willing to try. The majority of those surveyed do not think social media and virtual technology are wrong for the church. The concern is using these various communication platforms in the wrong way. There is a concern by some participating in the research regarding how social media can send derogatory and hurtful messaging. The answers given in the discussions show that even though older adults have positive views about the various communication platforms, they are not comfortable with their usefulness.

These surveys and interviews did not capture the entire elderly population at Saint Paul's Baptist Church. Many of the older congregation members did not want to participate in the study. Nevertheless, results from the surveys show more aging adults are aware and use social media platforms and virtual technology regularly. Because Saint Paul's embraced using different platforms for communicating earlier on, there is some familiarity with this technology. However, there was an expectation that the results would reveal that the older members were not familiar with social media and virtual technology. Instead, the interview results show that older adults use social media and virtual technology at Saint Paul's Baptist Church even if they are not comfortable with it.

As shown in the results of the interviews, those who took part in the research use social media for church service and other church-related programs. The conversations afterward revealed that while the study participants are comfortable with social media, they do not feel this is the norm for most seniors in the church membership. Other research indicates that older adults use platforms like internet technology for things other than communication. Older people still

prefer reading something in print rather than using the internet and other social media platforms.¹²⁶ The research shows that older adults had not anticipated the importance of digital media and virtual technologies for communication. For the more senior congregation members to benefit from the alternate worship service delivery, they must be digitally engaged.¹²⁷ According to Dave Browning, author of *Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact*, the first so-called digital generation is eighteen to thirty-four years old.¹²⁸ Looking at Browning's findings, older adults will naturally not adapt to digital technology because it was not around during their formative years. Learning to use this technology requires patience. Most older adults do not have patience for learning new things. However, an Academy of Management Learning & Education article says, "as a group, older adults have complex attitudes toward technology. On the one hand, there is evidence of wider use and positive affect toward computers among older adults."¹²⁹ These findings could also include the use of digital and virtual technologies.

Those in this research are comfortable using digital, virtual, and social media technology because they used much of it while in the workplace. After retirement, they still kept up with the changing technology. However, those who did not use much technology had problems navigating the ever-changing digital world in their typical day. If you are not using technology daily, it can present problems. For older adults to benefit from the internet and other technology

¹²⁶ Stephen Smith, "The Sermon in the Twenty-First Century," *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 7 (2019): 105-107.

¹²⁷ Leela Damodaran, Wendy Olphert, and Jatinder Sandhu, *Fit for Purpose. In the New Dynamics of Ageing*, Vol. 1, edited by Walker Alan (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018), 169-192.

¹²⁸ Dave Browning, *The Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 115.

¹²⁹ Natalie E. Wolfson, Thomas M. Cavanagh, and Kurt Kraiger, "Older Adults and Technology-Based Instruction: Optimizing Learning Outcomes and Transfers," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 13, no. 1 (2014): 26-44.

opportunities, they must be digitally engaged.¹³⁰ The participants in this study all used technology in their occupations while in the workforce. Thus, the church's change to digital and virtual technology did not significantly impact them.

The individual conversations revealed that though some of the participants use social media and are comfortable with it under various conditions, they do not want it to take the place of in-person contact with others. From the survey and interviews, knowing about the different social media technology platforms is not the issue. Instead, the problem is more of choice. The seniors who participated in this research seem knowledgeable about today's technology. They have no problem with the church using this technology during the pandemic. The participants in the study understand why the church is communicating in this way. And that is to ensure the safety of the membership. The more significant concern is, will the use continue after things return to some semblance of normalcy. Will things change, or will they remain the same? From the conversations with the participants, there is concern that if the church continues with this option of watching virtually, how will it affect church in-person attendance?

The study results with the Saint Paul's participants in this research reflect that while some of the church's senior members aged 68 and older were having problems using these different technology platforms, others were comfortable with it. This study represents just a fraction of seniors over the age of 68 in the church. This age group is usually pretty flexible when it comes to new things at church, but the pandemic's suddenness had taken them by surprise. They, like everyone else, were not prepared for what lay ahead with the pandemic. Learning a new method of interacting with church and family, and friends became an obstacle for some. Furthermore, as

¹³⁰ Leela Damodaran, Wendy Olphert, and Jatinder Sandhu, *Fit for Purpose. In the New Dynamics of Ageing*, Vol. 1, edited by Walker Alan (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018), 169-192.

people grow old, learning new things is not as easy for older adults as for those younger. Then there are those seniors who do not want to learn new things.

This study focused on older adults and technology for the church worship experience. Engaging and empowering more senior people to use new technologies is necessary, tailoring existing tools and training methods to meet their characteristics and interests. The church must consider that not everyone can use this new technology for the worship experience. In an article in the *Academy of Management Education and Learning* publication, the authors say research shows that "as a group, older adults have complex attitudes toward technology."¹³¹ Nevertheless, there is evidence of broader use and positive effects on older adults' technology. These authors also point out that more research is needed to determine if there is a need for age-specific instructional formats. If so, determine what instructional principles help which age group, under what conditions, and why.¹³² The leadership at Saint Paul's must look at how to effectively help older members become acquainted with the technology required to participate in church activities remotely. There is evidence from the interviews that more senior members are willing to learn new technology if offered by the church.

This study reveals that while the participants are familiar with the various electronic communication modes, some were reluctant to think the new approaches were suitable for regular weekly church services or would last. Most older adults do not like change. This pandemic's quick, almost mind-blowing appearance caused many changes in everyone's

¹³¹ Natalie E. Wolfson, Thomas M. Cavanagh, and Kurt Kraiger, "Older Adults and Technology-Based Instruction: Optimizing Learning Outcomes and Transfers," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 13, no. 1 (2014): 26-44.

¹³² Ibid.

everyday life. Older adults like moving at a slower pace, taking time to get used to change. Some more senior adult members at Saint Paul did not want the changes explored in this study.

Of the over 200 invitations sent out to the church's older members, only 12 responded to participate in the research concerning the use of new technologies in communication. Several questions come to mind as to why there was no more participation in this study. Could it have been fear of the invasion of their privacy? Could it have been that they did not want anyone to know their limitations regarding technology? Or could it have been that they are just tired of how this pandemic has caused so much grief and tension? This researcher can only speculate about the reason for the lack of participation. Whatever the reason, older adults need to prepare for how the world will continue to communicate because of the pandemic. The leadership at Saint Paul's is willing to provide any help necessary to help in this transition. The problem seems to be that not all of the older adults of the church members are willing to express the fact that they need assistance.

This researcher learned that many seniors are very private about their lives. They like to remain independent and do not want to appear to need assistance for anything. This independence could stem from their childhood upbringing. The fifties and sixties were very different from how the world is today. The study revealed that the seniors know about the technology available, but they do not want to use it in some cases. Listening to the responses in the one-on-one interviews, this researcher concludes that the issue is not knowing about social media and virtual technology; it is more about changing the way of doing things. It seems that most of the participants in the study are pretty knowledgeable about social media and virtual technology. However, not wanting to use it is crucial in accepting the technology. Change is a part of life; everything must change. While all change may not be good, people must yield in the

case of change during a pandemic. The realization that the church doors are closed brings the seriousness of the pandemic and how it affects every facet of life. The safety of every person in the church membership is of the utmost priority every pastor and church leader faces during this time.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Everything in the world changed with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. No longer were people allowed to go as they pleased or gather in groups for recreational activities, work, or even church services. It appeared that suddenly, the world shut down. In the beginning, it looked like this would be for a short time. However, as the situation grew worse, the pandemic halted everything. As it became apparent that the world would need to develop ways of doing things differently, people became restless because of limitations on their everyday activities.

In some cases, companies ceased operations because of the restrictions limiting the number of people in an area. Companies that could continue operating were at a disadvantage because employees had to remain six feet apart and wear facemasks and sometimes more restrictive protective gear. Because of the pandemic's deadliness, governments worldwide shut down unnecessary travel among their citizens. The world's governments advised people to only go out for necessities such as food and medical supplies. Visits to the doctor and elective surgeries stopped because this pandemic is so contagious. Doctors began using technology like Zoom communications to see their patients. Because of this technology and other means of communication, doctors are now seeing their patients regularly.

The pandemic also changed the way of activities like shopping and going out to eat. Ordering online is a favorite pastime for many people during this pandemic. Because stores have limitations on how many customers can shop at any given time, shoppers turn to online shopping to get items they need or want.

This pandemic has been suitable for the delivery industries. Everything from groceries to medicine to clothing is now being delivered instead of going into the actual retail establishment. In addition, because restaurants are under certain seating capacity restrictions, ordering food and

picking it up is normal. These options are the best options to keep people safe until there is a slowing of the pandemic.

When looking at the pandemic's effects on the world, religious activities for the church changed dramatically. Like all other churches, Saint Paul's Baptist Church changed how regular religious programming continued to be. No longer could there be in-person worship services. Churches have suspended in-person worship services for the safety of their congregations. To continue providing spiritual guidance, churches have gone to alternate worship styles. Pastors and church leadership resorted to using electronic modes of communicating with the members of their various churches. Depending on the size of the church, the communication mode could be very complex. Smaller churches provided spiritual guidance through weekly worship services by connecting to its member by phone. However, larger churches became more sophisticated using the available technologies.

Much research and thought went into how Saint Paul's would continue meeting the needs and providing spiritual care for the church membership and community. In March 2020, Saint Paul's Baptist Church began connecting with the congregation using social media and virtual technology. Deciding that the church would shut down public access to all locations until it was deemed safe to gather in large groups once again was painful. The senior pastor and church leadership decided that providing worship services through virtual methods was best during the pandemic. Hence, various communication platforms with the church membership include Facebook Live, YouTube, Zoom, and the interactive church website. Through the website, the church also developed the MYSPBC.TV platform. Churches being closed or shut down for an extended period caused many issues. Providing services like funerals, weddings, baby

dedications, baptisms, and the like changed. There could be no in-person or at most minimal attendance to these services because of the risk of becoming infected with the virus.

Because of the church building's extended closure, many older members of the Saint Paul congregation had issues with weekly worship services and programs. They were not used to not having weekly in-person services and participating using electronic modes of worship was not working for them. In addition, some older adults or seniors do not have the focus or patience to learn to do something new. Like many people, what they thought would be a short interruption in their life, turned out to be what seemed like a lifetime.

This study aimed to explore the impact going to electronic and virtual church services has on the older membership at Saint Paul's Baptist. In addition, the study examined how this congregation population navigated the use of social media and virtual technology to stay connected with the church during a pandemic. Most of the young to middle-aged church members embraced change. However, the same cannot be said for the older church congregation members. The more senior members tend to like things to remain the same with minimal changes in the flow of church activities.

Older adults were not as accepting of change as young people are. Various authors have written on a variety of subjects regarding how older adults and younger people take change. Using new technology shows a significant divide between how these groups view change.

In an article on "Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture" in a *Mission Studies* magazine publication, Philip Meadows alludes that even though some young people have a much more naturalized relationship with technology, it is by no means universal. Earlier generations were the pioneers of most contemporary technologies, for whom living in a digital culture has become at least second nature. It is not about when a person is born but about their relationship

to the technology that matters.¹³³ There is some truth in what Meadows says, but it is more than a relationship to technology; it could be the fear of technology. Using different technological and virtual platforms for church service and participation presents a change many older people are not ready to pursue.

There are some obstacles involved in helping some older members learn how to use technology. First, they must want to know how to use different new technology. As stated earlier, many older adults are resistant to change. Learning new technology is a change for them. While many senior members at Saint Paul's have cellphones or smartphones, not all are technical enough to do more than call and text. That is where education and training come into play. As a church, ensuring everyone has access to the platforms used for regular ongoing church activities is the pastor and church leadership's responsibility. Through the pastor's leadership, the church's senior members should understand the importance of using technology for such a time as this. Setting up training for operating and using the church's various platforms for communication and church programming is a priority. Creating a program to train the church's senior members must be easy to comprehend and interactive. If the activity is too complex, the seniors may lose focus.

Their drawback in providing training for seniors during the pandemic is they cannot gather in groups safely. Second, they must have access to the equipment needed to participate in the worship programming through social media and virtual technology. One can do many things with a smartphone, including watching live streams and casting videos. However, most seniors would be more comfortable watching a larger screen like a computer or TV screen. Most communication platforms today are transmitted through internet connections. Most seniors who

¹³³ Philip R. Meadows, "Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture," *Mission Studies* 29, no. 2 (2012): 163-182.

live alone are on a fixed income, and Wi-Fi would be an added expense. Wi-Fi is not something many seniors can access unless younger people can help them use this technology, and it is available to them. Most streaming platforms require a Wi-Fi connection. Cost may be a significant concern when considering social media and virtual technology platforms. Most people are comfortable discussing their income with others, especially older adults.

The church's primary goal is to provide for the spiritual needs of its members and the community. When feeding its members and community's spiritual needs, the church uses preaching and teaching from the Bible. There is an expression "cooking for the whole house." When a pastor or church leader delivers a sermon or teaching moment, it is for the whole church, not for any segment or group in the church. The goal is to connect with everyone listening to the message. Using technology for church worship and programs during a pandemic requires thinking outside the box. In thinking outside the box, one must consider how to "cook for the whole house," in this instance, reaching the whole congregation. The use of social media and virtual technology is the solution. This study shows that not everyone will accept the new way Saint Paul's Baptist Church provides its programming. There is a divide between moving forward or staying in place. Moving forward involves change and change always meets resistance from some people. Moving from in-person meetings to virtual platforms is not everyone's cup of tea. However, to provide for the needs of the church membership and community, the church has to do the right thing. Doing the right thing connects with and reaches the church members and the surrounding community by any means, and social media technology is the right thing to do.

The concerns of this study are how comfortable the older or senior Saint Paul's Baptist Church members are using virtual technology, including social media. The study did not look at

how the congregation's younger members feel about using this technology for church. Earlier generations pioneered most of the contemporary technology in use today. However, the younger generation grew up with this technology, and using it is second nature to them.¹³⁴ Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, TikTok, and texting are all things the younger generation uses freely. Sherry Turkle points out, "Teenagers say they would rather text than talk."¹³⁵ Teenagers have the mindset to keep up with the rapid changes in technology. As one grows older, the capacity to learn the new technologies becomes more difficult. The older one is, the less likely available technology will be used. Until this pandemic crisis, using technology like the internet for older adults included emailing, accessing news, and referencing information. As new technology becomes available and necessary, everyone needs to adopt the new practice regardless of age.

The church can become a beacon of meeting the needs of their communities spiritually and leading the way, helping them become proficient with technology. The young will not be a hindrance to this move. However, there will be some pushback or resistance from the older members of the church community. This research indicates that even when the church elders are acquainted with technology, the ease of adaptableness and accessibility are questionable from the survey responses and interviews.

As the church continues moving forward with technology, leading the congregation requires helping all receive the necessary tools and training to keep up with the ever-changing technology. Most churches have a tape ministry where the weekly sermons or programs are recorded and then provided to the sick and those who are shut-in, most of the time, the elderly of

¹³⁴ Philip R. Meadows, "Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture," *Mission Studies* 29, no. 2 (2012): 163-182.

¹³⁵ Paul K. McClure, "Tinkering with Technology and Religion in the Digital Age: The Effects of Internet Use on Religious Belief, Behavior, and Belonging," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 3 (2017): 481-497.

the church. There is nothing required of them except having something to play the recording. The church's use of social media platforms and virtual technology caused everything to change. It required becoming familiar with the various communication platforms to engage and participate in the church's services and programs. Many people are unprepared for this change because of the rapid re-vamp in church programming and worship experiences. Seniors are caught more unprepared than any other age group in the church congregation. Going to social media platforms and virtual technology put undue worry and stress on some older people at Saint Paul. This researcher is concerned that they will become withdrawn from engaging with the church's services and programs because they do not have the needed technology.

The "*Life Stage*" small group concept that is in place at Saint Paul's could be the solution for this issue. The groups comprise people of the same age span within ten years. An example is aged 60 to 69 years old. Providing care and support to the group members is the goal. Using the small group concept, those within the life-stage group aged 70 and up with knowledge of social media platforms and virtual technology would help those who needed it. Also, members from other groups could assist in helping. In doing so, they exhibit the biblical principle of helping one's neighbor in need. God created man to be communal, love one another, and help one another. The pandemic tests the code of helping one's neighbor in their time of need. God's greatest commandment is to love Him first, then love one's neighbor as one would oneself. The love He speaks of involves helping one's neighbor.

Saint Paul's realized earlier on that use of technology is the future of the church. The church is the source of the mission, and people need to know that to continue this mission, they

need to connect “to participate in God’s mission faithfully and effectively.”¹³⁶ Social media gives the church the ability to reach others globally they could not ordinarily. Social media and virtual technology are tools that extend the gospel and fellowship beyond the church building walls. The use of this technology by the church gives the church a stronger voice in today’s society. Everyone must learn and become comfortable in the use of these communication platforms.

When Saint Paul’s Baptist Church went to an alternative worship platform, they did it hurriedly and had not considered how it could affect the ministry participation of the entire membership. As a result, some church members had difficulties with the change, especially the seniors. Many seniors could not access worship services visually because of the necessary equipment. However, most did have cell or smartphones and could call in to listen to the services. Most Saint Paul’s seniors are retired and on fixed incomes, which means they cannot afford additional expenses. To the surprise of this researcher, the senior pastor at Saint Paul says there is more participation among the seniors in virtual worship services than in any other group. It appears that seniors see the value of using various digital devices to stay connected and engaged with family, friends, and the church.¹³⁷

It is worth noting that some assumptions regarding older adults and virtual technology are not accurate. However, older adults seem to use the various platforms presented by technology and are proficient. The stigma that older adults are resistant to learning new technology is true in some cases, but overall, they adjust to change. The realization of learning to use new technology is helping older adults stay in tune with the ever-changing communication platforms of the

¹³⁶ Dwight Zscheile, “Social Networking and Church Systems,” *Word and World* 30, no. 3 (2010): 247-255.

¹³⁷ Kathy Brittain Richardson and Carol J. Pardun, “The New Scroll Digital Devices, Bible Study and Worship,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 14, (2015): 16-28.

world. Digital technology has become the way the world communicates. Older adults have had to proceed with the flow of things, with most churches moving to digital communications during this pandemic. However, most church members are becoming restless because of not having in-person worship services. Older adults are becoming impatient with not having the weekly fellowship they are accustomed to having. Over the long run, viewership is down because of the prolonged pandemic. People are becoming bored with watching church programming week after week on a screen.

Providing effective ministry during this pandemic has become a challenge the longer it goes on. As a result, pastors and preachers are not as energetic in delivering the message as they might otherwise be in an in-person setting. In addition, older adults feel that church worship is less personable because of not gathering for live fellowship. Though church programming is not in-person, this study reveals some benefits of virtual worship for older members. Being able to worship together more frequently using the various digital platforms is a definite benefit for seniors because that means not leaving home to go to another location. In addition, this lessened the chance of older adults being in accidents outside the home. Meeting digitally and online provides a safe place to worship together.¹³⁸

Because the pandemic has gone on for so long, this researcher's opinion is that the senior members of Saint Paul are becoming more comfortable with the use of digital technology as a means to participate in church service. However, because of the danger of becoming infected with the virus, many older adults hesitate to return to in-person worship for fear of becoming sick, even though vaccines are available.

¹³⁸ Dave Browning, *The Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 94.

From the results of the surveys given to the test group, the older adult members of Saint Paul Baptist Church have adjusted to and are comfortable using remote digital technology for worship. However, the climate of the pandemic forced the church to change its ministry programming leading to closing all campus locations and using other communication platforms to minister to the congregation. Even though the congregation's older members' responses were unknown, they proved to be more faithful in participating than any other age group.

While researching this thesis, the virus mutated several times, causing uncertainty in reopening Saint Paul for in-person worship. However, Saint Paul's has returned to in-person worship on a limited basis. There are in place safety protocols for attending in-person worship services. Being vaccinated is one requirement, and proof of being vaccinated must be uploaded to the church database. There is also a weekly registration required for in-person worship, in which, at the time of the registration, the registrant receives a seat number. In addition, every person attending worship has their temperature checked at the doors before entering the church. Social distancing and masks are also necessary the entire time you are in the church building. Many seniors opted not to attend in-person worship because of the uncertainty of the pandemic and their overall medical conditions. Over the last two years of not having in-person worship services, they are now a little leery of being in crowds for an extended period. With the insight gained from this pandemic, Saint Paul's should proactively prepare its older generation with technology classes, workshops, and one-on-one assistance. Educating this age group can enhance their feeling of usefulness and alleviate the fear of technology. Learning the use of the technology now presented by SPBC could help the senior members feel a sense of being needed. They could, in turn, help teach others how to use the technology. The church may

need to partner with some technology companies to provide education and training for seniors and other church community members who would like to learn more about the various technologies available. Primarily the technology SPBC uses. SPBC already uses the small group concept as a ministry tool. This concept would be good at SPBC to educate members on using social media and other forms of communication technology.

When the pandemic happened, no one knew how long it would last. Most thought we would be back to normal in a few weeks, then maybe in a few months. SPBC's leadership finally realized that this would be the new normal for a while and other ways had to be implemented. A weekly televised program was already in place. The church would continue having the weekly thirty-minute televised Sunday service. Many older adults were already watching it because it was familiar to them. But there was no way to interact with the televised program, nor was there a praise and worship portion that many members, young and old, participated in at the in-person service.

During the pandemic, the seniors cannot attend the weekly Sunday gatherings and monthly meetings to share lunch after Bible study. The room where Bible study and lunch took place was overflowing because they looked forward to these times. The seniors were very active, taking trips and going on outings. COVID-19 took this away from them.

The senior members of SPBC are diligent about attending Sunday worship service; the senior members attend Bible study and come to the church for special programs. SPBC made sure those who needed transportation could call the church and arrange ride pick up for services. The church purchased several small buses to serve this purpose. SPBC made every effort to care for its senior members until the pandemic took them away. In many cases, with the church office not being staffed, they had no one to communicate how this made them feel. In addition, there

was misinformation about the transmission of this virus to each other. The leadership did not want to take a chance with this vulnerable age group, so the church stayed closed for a long time. SPBC's leadership was working behind the scenes to develop alternative plans. They came up with a plan intending to expand the platforms for viewing and the ability to have a more reactive worship experience. The senior adults who were able or had younger people who could teach them could use the various platforms. The seniors who did not have that option could still watch the televised Sunday service. In addition, however, the leadership was working on the way to reach out to the elderly telephonically. Volunteers would divide up the names and call a different group each month. The program is relatively new, but the results seem positive because those contacted are reconnecting with the church.

This ongoing project is for SPBC to include this group of the church congregation and not to allow this group of our members to be left out again. Next time, it may not be a pandemic, but the leadership has to develop a contingency plan to move more quickly. Nevertheless, the pandemic taught the churches and other entities valuable lessons.

Looking at reasons why the elderly members could not participate in the shift from in-person worship to virtual worship, the three top issues could be limited income, no internet access, and lack no computer or tablet. The following section explores ways SPBC can help in these three areas. Preparing the elderly who are willing and able to learn will make them feel less alone and cut off is one way to be proactive. Now that the church is talking about allowing more people to participate in person, plans need to be in place to start educating the elderly.

But is SPBC doing enough by providing service opportunities on various platforms so that it is accessible to anyone with the knowledge, equipment, and financial stability to tune in. The problem still exists of not knowing how to solve our seniors' issues. Problem one is not

being able to afford the internet. Problem two is not owning a computer or tablet to watch the service.

Historically, the African American church has been at the forefront in advocating for its members and the community in which they reside—and keeping everyone informed. In the 1950s and 60s, it was a political and fundamental rights issue. It is once again time for the church leadership to look beyond what they have done to make worship services technologically accessible and tackle the root of the problem. It is now time to advocate for broadband accessibility at low or no cost, especially for senior households and households with senior members.

This pandemic was a wake-up call showing how quickly the vulnerable can be isolated and cut off. What can SPBC do? Learn about what is available and ensure that information gets to the eligible senior members—advocate for this group. Start with free or affordable internet.

People in the US have uneven access to the internet, a problem that was made much more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. What do you do if you don't have access to good speeds where you live? What if you can't afford any of the available providers in your area? And what if no internet service providers (ISPs) offer service where you live?

On May 9, 2022, President Biden announced that 20 internet service providers had committed to offering eligible households high-speed internet access for \$30 or less. “This is significant because the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) will cover up to \$30 per month for qualifying low-income families, thus covering the cost completely and giving these families high-speed internet at no cost.”¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Peter Christiansen, “How to Get Free and Low-Cost Internet,” (2022): Accessed May 15, 2022. <https://www.highspeedinternet.com/resources/how-can-i-get-free-internet>,

High-speed internet is a basic necessity, and both public and private organizations are working on expanding access. This has made it possible for many people in the US to get broadband internet free of charge through the Affordable Connectivity Program and other public and private programs. In addition, there is information available to help answer how to find a provider in the area. This is where the advocates come in. They will find the answers; keep asking until they understand the process.

A solution for the second problem is to allocate some of the church's resources to purchase tablets for the elderly. There are also grants available to make these purchases. Once again, the church advocates will research the process of obtaining these grants. In a church of over 10,000 members, there are many knowledgeable people. Tap into that knowledge pool to solve this problem. Small groups of seniors can receive hands-on instruction on using their new tablet with a support group available to answer questions using a dedicated phone line.

SPBC already has an established program in place with the various Life Stages who meet monthly to share information and have fun. Many members would welcome a project like this to help more senior members become more technically engaged. Especially now that the church is planning to open up to include more members being able to attend, seniors will soon feel more comfortable coming in for training. Having the option of worshiping in person or using their tablet to connect seems like the logical step to prepare our seniors before the next pandemic, or another event happens.

In January 2022, SPBC returned to in-person worship. With most COVID-19 restrictions lifted, many businesses and institutions returned to normal operations. However, SPBC still requires weekly registration to attend worship services because of limited seating. In addition, SPBC still requires all persons to wear a mask, and there is still social distance seating in the

church sanctuary. As a result, most of the more senior members of SPBC are cautious about coming back to in-person worship. Does this mean they are using virtual technology to participate in worship services? Or does it mean that the fear of being in a crowd keeps them from attending? SPBC leadership is looking into these questions. Nevertheless, Saint Paul's Baptist Church intends to discontinue registering for worship services soon and allow total capacity at all locations.

Beginning July 2022, Saint Paul's lifted all restrictions for in-person worship except wearing face masks. However, the church leadership still requires everyone over five years old to wear a face mask while in the building. In addition, to count how many persons attend worship each week, there are self-check-in stations at all doors of the building. Finally, lifting pre-registration requirements opens the services up for anyone to participate, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated. The church will continue to watch for updates the CDC sends out to determine the process for in-person worship and other in-person activities as time goes on.

Since SPBC now has a no restriction in-person worship policy, the number of older adults attending services has been minimal. The assumption is that most fear interacting with unvaccinated individuals attending church services. Therefore, it is understandable that many senior church members are reluctant to return to in-person service because of health concerns. But the Bible says in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear..." (NLT). As the effects of the pandemic subside, believers in the Word of God cannot be fearful of going into crowds or being in public. Because the church continues to use digital and virtual platforms for worship services, this researcher assumes that those not returning to in-person worship are taking advantage of these virtual options. Therefore, the number of participants in the research portion of this thesis does not represent the number of seniors in the church membership role. This

researcher can only hope that those more senior members of SPBC continue to enjoy and participate in worship services through all avenues available to them, whether in-person or virtual. The ultimate goal of the church is to provide spiritual care to people in any way possible.

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Appendix A Recruitment Invitation Letter

Dear Saint Paul Baptist Church Member:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University and a member of Saint Paul's Baptist Church, I am conducting research to better understand how using digital platforms and social media networks affects participation in church worship for seniors. The purpose of my research is to see if senior members at Saint Paul's have access to these various platforms and if they are comfortable using them. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 68 years of age and older. Participants if willing, will be asked to take a short survey regarding their understanding of social media and if social media is a good way to provide church worship service, especially during the pandemic. There will be a follow-up interview via phone, email, text, or Zoom communication, whichever is best for the participant, regarding the survey. Your names or other information in this study will be anonymous. They will only be used for contact between myself and the participant and will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] and leave your name, age, and contact information, or email me at [REDACTED]. Additional information will be provided regarding a consent to participate form and the survey for the study. There are no restrictions for staying in the study to completion. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

Sincerely

Donnie Smith, MDiv, MACE

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix B Initial Survey

1. Are you familiar with social media and virtual technology? Yes___ No___
2. Do you have access to this technology? Yes___ No___
3. Do you use social media? Yes___ No___
4. Are you comfortable using social media? Yes___ No___
5. Do you think the use of social media and virtual technology is right for church worship services? Yes___ No___
6. Have you participated in church worship at Saint Paul’s Baptist Church since it went virtual? If not, why? Yes___ No___

For this section of the survey, check your answer under the appropriate response:

	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Do Not Agree
7. I participate more in service now	___	___	___
8. Church service is not as engaging	___	___	___
9. I miss in-person worship	___	___	___
10. I find it more difficult to stay focused using virtual technology for church worship service	___	___	___
11. Virtual technology for church worship service is here to stay	___	___	___
12. Social media is a good way to communicate during a pandemic	___	___	___
13. The use of virtual technology for Bible study is good	___	___	___
14. I am familiar with using social media	___	___	___
15. I do not like to use social media	___	___	___

Appendix C Follow-up Survey

1. Are you more likely or less likely to use virtual technology for church worship service? More Likely ____ Less Likely ____
2. If you are not familiar with using virtual technology and social media platforms, would you be willing to learn if available? Yes ____ No ____
3. Do you think the church should provide instructions and training for those unfamiliar with this type of technology? Yes ____ No ____
4. Do you think this study was worthwhile for seniors? Yes ____ No ____

IRB Approval Letter

December 2, 2020

Donnie Smith
Kenneth Hood

Re: IRB Application – IRB-FY20-21-361 Older Adults and Digital Worship Service at Saint Paul’s Baptist Church

Dear Donnie Smith and Kenneth Hood,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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