Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Restoration of Key Middle Age Demographic Can Save the African Methodist Episcopal Church

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Doctor of Ministry

By

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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St. Luke faced years of struggles resulting in a dwindling ministry and membership with specific impacts resulting in missing generations within the church. The missing generations include Generation X who were born between 1965-1980, Generation Y who were born between 1981-1996, and generation Z who were born between 1997-2012. There are many methods used to combat church decline and incentivize membership growth including evangelism, mega facilities, appealing ministry, and church legacy attracting the community. This research sought to prove that if ministries were developed specifically targeting the wants and needs of the missing generations souls would be won for Christ and the St. Luke membership would grow. To identify the needs and desires of potential members, a survey was conducted to understand the current spiritual state, any existing church hurt, and ministry topics. Using the information gathered the St. Luke ministry was revamped and participants were invited to participate in the ministry classes and activities. Interviews of the participants were executed to gauge the success and execution of the new ministry approach as well as understand more about the answers provided on the surveys.

Contents

Figures

Abbreviations

DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD   *Liberty University School of Divinity*

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the African Methodist Episcopal Church ministers have been chosen in accordance with biblical principles by God and serve under assigned pastors who have chosen an itinerate ministry. Ministers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church can serve locally, or they can choose an itinerate ministry similar to that of a pastor. Once a minister resolves that his heart has been convicted to serve God in an itinerate pastoral role for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Proverbs 18:16 teaches, "A man's gift makes room for him" (New International Version), the commissioning to be ordained as minister starts. As this soon-to-be pastor reconciles the idea of leading God's people and transitioning from under the wings of the pastor that has guided him up until this point, there is now a glimpse into the work that will now reflect his own leadership. This can be a welcomed yet scary transition because there is no promise in the word about what type of people will agree to allow a pastor to lead them. Whether there is a church plant revealed or an appointment made through the chains of command within an affiliated denomination of churches, this new pastor is faced with the challenges of people's ministry and management. Thus, the purpose of this research focus was on a pastor that took on an existing ministry that was diminishing.

Unfortunately, today's church is no longer what history has captured as a body of people banding together fearlessly to meet the needs of the surrounding community in efforts to evangelize the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pamela Martin et al. examined the Black Church and noted that early in the church's history there was a clear influence of the community's unity due to the civil rights movement; however, fanatical Christianity influenced believers to focus away

from addressing the here and now of the human condition.[1] In fact, history's romanticism of an effective ministry is generally the opposite of what today's churches offer to a pastor intent on serving God and God's people. Instead of inheriting organized effective ministries, many pastors today inherit broken ministries that are being held together by a small collection of broken people. Moreover, as the pastor assessed the state of the ministry of which he hoped to proudly lead and partner in battle against the enemy with his assigned laity there are a few problems clearly revealed. These problems have been identified as follows.

The first problem revealed was that there existed a huge gap in age groups that makes up the laity of capable people to put on the armor of God to accomplish the work necessary to grow the body of Christ. Gayraud S. Wilmore suggests that although the Black Church has influenced the culture more than any other entity, due to criticism and attacks by black professionals, comedians, and students, today's church may well have no enduring future.[2] In fact, the numbers of seniors are in abundance, which is welcome. However, the challenge that the pastor faced was that the seniors had a greater need of support rather than meeting the needs of others in the ministry. Additionally, this group of resolute seniors found themselves living according to yesterday's standards while reveling in yesterday's victories which have long expired and no longer illuminate the gospel or attract new able bodies. Alternatively, these seniors had a great impression on their grandchildren.

This led to the second observation, which highlighted that there were several young people ready to be molded and influenced to lead a life of salvation and service; however, there were few hands to invest in this valued commodity. Mark Cannister suggests that today's church

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[1] Pamela P. Martin, et al., "Black Mega-Churches in the Internet Age: Exploring Theological Teachings and Social Outreach Efforts," *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 158, Gale General OneFile.

[2] Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Black religion and black radicalism," *Monthly Review* (July-August 1984): 121, Gale General OneFile.

is missing opportunities to impact today's youth because the church has chosen to focus on

Christian education instead of understanding the dichotomies between evangelism and

discipleship for youth ministries in order to reach a world that is increasingly unchurched.[3] This

is partially due to the fact that the available hands are too few, are unable to relate, are teaching

with yesterday's methods, are ineffective at interpreting God's love, are failing to inspire

effectively, and are unable to convince the youth that they will succeed by walking in faith when

faced with fleshly challenges that would betray their submission to God with embellishments of

sin. There are too few people to organize and administer attractive ministries that will help these

youth to realize God's love and favor amid abusive and oppressive home and school lives. It

became evident the pastor could not miss this third and important revelation about key

demographics.

There was a key demographic missing in the church. People who are either in their

twenties, thirties, forties, or fifties are missing from the church membership. Where are they? A

responsible pastor begins relationship building with the members present intending to share the

love of God and appreciation of followship while probing to determine where these missing

generations are. The pastor looks to revive existing ministries and build a leadership team to

partner in launching new ministries while probing to locate these missing generations. The pastor

begins looking at other churches and talking with other pastors only to learn that they are

experiencing the same issues: a huge generational gap is growing unconscionably. The pastor

looks to published literature to begin an investigation based on what authors have written, yet

amid the explanations and suggestions within meaningful books there is no true answer to the

question about these growing generational divides. Klause Issler suggests that these generations

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[3] Mark Cannister, *Teenagers Matter: Making Student Ministry a Priority in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 34.

are missing from the church because either their hearts have hardened as proven by people becoming closed off and resistant to the truth of Jesus, or their arrogance by not pondering the implications of known Gospel truths.[4]

Pastors can no longer continue to wonder seamlessly for answers or wait for other leaders to solve the problem in their local church and community. Alternatively, the pastor of the local church has an opportunity to act by praying to God and owning the responsibility to call God's children back to the Lord. Now is the time to relay the Gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that these missing generations hear God's call to come back to him. To support the spread of the Gospel God's leaders must preach, teach, and minister directly to this lost demographic to meet their spiritual needs and awaken their spiritual desire to be redeemed asking, "What must I do to be saved?" Additionally, pastors and leaders must consider refocusing resources on building programs that reclaim former believers and church goers from other competing organizations and worldly distractions that have prevailed over the call to Christian discipleship. Pastors can take over an existing ministry with expectations of a different type of ministry work, yet it is clear that if there is any desire for ministry growth as envisioned when accepting the leadership role, he must find balance in meeting the needs of the current membership while focusing a generous effort and resources at reclaiming all the missing twenty, thirty, and forty-somethings that are clearly present in the community but not engaged with the church. As stated by James Emery White, "The church's mission, given by Jesus himself, is to reach out to a deeply fallen world and call it back to God. According to the Bible, this involves active evangelism with subsequent discipleship, coupled with strategic service to those in need, such as the poor."[5]

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[4] Klause Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 18, VitalSource Bookshelf.

[5] James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z – Understanding and Reaching the New Post Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 52, Kindle.

Ministry Context

This research focused on a small church practicing Christian Methodism under the African Methodist Episcopal umbrella. The church congregation was St. Luke A.M.E. Church. St. Luke is located in the Sunnyside community in the fourth largest city in the United States of America, Houston, TX. The total population of the Sunnyside community is 20,282 people across four intersecting zip codes (77021, 77033, 77047, and 77051).[6] Additionally, the median age in Sunnyside is 33 with population being split 46% male and 54% female.[7] It has also been documented that the area's occupational employment is two-thirds white collar and one-third blue collar with the average household having at least three people.[8]

A.M.E. stands for African Methodist Episcopal and is governed by a council of bishops. Andrew White describes the A.M.E. church governance as an executive and administrative officer of the A.M.E. denomination falling under the responsibility of elected bishops granted authority during general conferences.[9] The council of bishops assigns individual bishops every four years to individual episcopal districts to govern the churches under the district's umbrella for the four-year term. Each of these assignments take place at the general conference every four years and brings together a mixture of the laity and ordained preachers as delegates who are given the responsibility to audit current regulations and add new legislation to the A.M.E. Church Discipline. Dennis Dickerson reflects on the history of the A.M.E. church and highlights the 1956 General Conference as an important occurrence that empowered districts to navigate

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[6] "Overview of Sunnyside, Houston, Texas," last modified September 14, 2018, https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Texas/Houston/Sunnyside/Overview.

[7] "Sunnyside Demographics," accessed August 30, 2020, https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/TX/Houston/Sunnyside-Demographics.html.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Andrew White, *Know Your Church Manual* (Nashville, TN: AMEC Publishing House, 1995), 21.

complicated rules and parliamentary procedures enabling local delegates to vote secretly in order

to guide bishop assignments with the intention of improving ministry effectiveness.[10] The

Discipline is an 879-page book that houses all of the rules used to govern A.M.E. churches,

including subjects from ministerial ordination and appointments to the key ministries required at

each A.M.E. location.

In addition to the A.M.E Bishop's council there is a district hierarchy which includes the

bishop assigned to the district followed by the presiding elder and the local pastor. The assigned

bishop is granted the authority to appoint presiding elders to a sub district with the responsibility

of ensuring that each local church follows the governances of the discipline and bishop.

Dickerson reflects back to 1868 when there were only four presiding elder districts; however this

multiplied to twenty-four presiding elder districts by 1900 and has greatly increased over the

years based on the growth of the church.[11] White points out that the presiding elder is the only

officer of the church that is not a member of a local church that has the authority to represent the

connectional church.[12] The presiding elder and the bishop partner to identify pastors from a pool

of itinerant preachers that have been ordained and have agreed to travel to where there is a need

at local churches. The assigned pastors were assigned to function as the CEOs of each local

church.

Each pastor serves their local congregation understanding that each year they are eligible

to be moved to another location during the annual conference. White defines the pastor as the

official head of the A.M.E. local church and accepts the responsibility for the total program of

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[10] Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2020), 465.

[11] Ibid, 157.

[12] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 34.

the church.[13] The serving bishop uses identified criteria including financial performance,

ministerial performance, and local congregational influence to determine if a serving pastor will

be assigned to a new local charge. If a pastor is moved other ordained ministers in a known pool

could be assigned or other serving pastors can also be moved to backfill the opening at the

church. Dickerson also discusses the performance of pastors at times being lackluster and

describes some congregations as uncooperative resulting in needed leadership changes.[14] The

churches are categorized from one to five with one representing the largest churches declining

and five being the smallest of churches. The classification is assigned to a church every four

years taking into consideration the funds raised and the reported membership over the four-year

term.

      The mission of the A.M.E. Church is to minister to the social, spiritual, and physical

development of all people. The 2016 edition of the A.M.E. Discipline states the vision of today's

church as follows,

> At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the AME Church shall
> engage in conducting the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the
> AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost and to serve the needy. It is
> also the duty of the church to continue to encourage all members to become involved in
> all aspects of church training.[15]

In addition to the vision there is a three-part purpose which states, "1. To make available God's

biblical principles, 2. To spread Christ's liberating gospel and 3. To provide continuing programs

that will enhance the entire social development of all people."[16]

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[13] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 54-55.

[14] Ibid, 157-236.

[15] The African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016*, (Nashville, TN: The AME Sunday School Union, 2017), 23-24.

[16] The African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016*, (Nashville, TN: The AME Sunday School Union, 2017), 24.

This vision and purpose are tied to the originating history and founder of the A.M.E. Church. African Methodism was founded from the Free African Society. The Free African Society was formed in 1787 in Philadelphia, PA by American preachers Richard Allen and Absalom Jones and other free African American preachers. The original mission of the group was to provide fellowship, a place of worship, and monetary support for members and their families in case of sickness or death. White reflects on the history of the A.M.E. church's founding purpose as a movement to organize safely and separately from white peoples' churches to have freedom of worship and self-expression.[17] Those who gathered for worship organized in a black smith's shop originally due to white Christians denying the use of normal church worship facilities. Richard Allen is considered the founder of the A.M.E. Church as he received his ordination and became the first bishop of the church. The A.M.E. church became the official first Black Methodist denomination in 1816 when it was formally organized in Philadelphia, PA.

The actions of discrimination, oppression, and institutional bias within the church targeted at African American people has resulted in a church community that looks to not only free people from sin, but also free people of any race and creed from being terrorized and judged by a relentless opposition. Wilmore considers the roots of the Black Church formation and describes it as tenacious considering the developmental factors of the black religion in the United States; yet, capable of a distinctive phenomenon.[18] In fact, the AME Church has adopted four religious Doctrinal Affirmations including the Apostles' Creed as the Affirmation of Faith, the Articles of Religion, the Special Declaration on Apostolic Succession and Ritualism, and the Catechism on Faith. Considering these doctrines of faith, two of the most import parts of

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[17] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 5.

[18] Wilmore, "Black religion and black radicalism," 1.

Christianity are considered rights for all believers. Both baptism and communion are considered rights for believers and made available for them.

The A.M.E. church has a policy in place for becoming a member, first starting on trial membership before being adopted into full membership. White identifies the methods of becoming a member to include responding to the invitation to start probation, profession of faith, transferring from another church, restoration, and even affiliated membership.[19] Additionally, the A.M.E. Church has a policy for training and ordaining preachers into the organization. The training takes five years total with the Deacon ordination taking place after completing the third year and the elder ordination taking place after the fifth year. Each ordination has additional educational requirements of a bachelor's degree for the first ordination and a Master of Divinity degree for the final ordination.

Another important part of African Methodism is stewardship. As stated by the Doctrine, "Tithing shall be the official doctrinal stewardship position of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Every church shall work toward a full tithing commitment."[20] The A.M.E. Church comes together each year at a weeklong event known as the Annual Conference. During the Annual Conference, the bishop gathers together the sub-district's leaders and delegates to participate in the business and reporting of the church. White describes the annual conference as the basic unit of the connectional church which brings together pastors, presiding elders, and committees to report out to the church body and presiding bishop.[21] This includes, but is not limited to, training courses, roll calls, missionary reporting, board of examiners reporting,

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[19] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 27.

[20] Ibid, 53.

[21] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 63.

ordinations, pastoral appointments, financial reporting for each local church, and reporting on conversions for the past year. The state of Texas is identified as the Tenth District.

As a part of the Tenth District's Annual Conference, St. Luke has been in existence for sixty-one years as of 2020. The ministry has been negatively affected by the itinerant ministry due to young up and coming pastors having short-term assignments as they pursue larger more illustrious appointments. Additionally, the itinerant ministry has rotated older pastors that have either lost their drive to be an effective leader in the ministry or prevented a relationship with the missing generations due to an inability to relate one to another. Over the past few decades, pastoral assignments have averaged two to six years. This has resulted in many new ministerial efforts being disrupted as new visions were introduced. There has been a constant start and stop to ministries, different levels of enthusiasm combined with what could be considered, at times, careless leadership that has impacted the St. Luke church's wellbeing.

The current pastor was working towards the completion of his third year's pastoral appointment at St. Luke. During the first year leading St. Luke, the current pastor found about ten people actively participating in church worship on Sunday mornings and fewer showing up to be participants in other ministry activities. As of the second year's term, the active membership has increased to an average of twenty-four members on a Sunday morning for worship and about ten people participating in additional ministry activities outside of worship. Stewardship stabilized in the ministry allowing for repairs to the facility, normalization of bill payment, salary payments, and a new focus on investing into the ministry has occurred as a part of the second year as well.

In the third year, the assigned pastor identified the missing generations easily as most of the membership is comprised of senior citizens who were either physically incapable or mentally

disengaged from pushing the ministry forward within the Sunnyside community. Some of the

disengagement was tied to their age and other reasons for the disengagement was due to the

neglectful leadership of past pastors assigned to the church. The pastor's challenge was to be a

leader that was invested in revitalizing St. Luke by creating ministries that engaged the

community and targeted the missing key demographics that lived in the Sunnyside community.

Brian Croft recommended a biblical approach that demonstrated an investment of time and

dependence on the power of God contrary to the creation of a new pragmatic program trending

today.[22] At the start of the research St. Luke's strongest method of reaching the community was

via weekly worship services, weekly church school, and Bible study throughout the week. The

result of this research revealed that there were ministries needed that would feed the hungry,

clothe those in need, and a plethora of additional ministries that would have met the physical,

social, psychological, and spiritual needs of each person delineated by individual age groups in

the community.

Problem Presented

The problem was that the St. Luke A.M.E. church was dying due to low representation of

a key middle age demographic. The A.M.E. church has a considerable gap between seniors and

youth within its membership. It appeared that the age range of twenty-one to fifty-five was not

well represented in St. Luke A.M.E. church, which mirrors several other local Houston churches.

As a result, St. Luke and the African Methodist Episcopal church was limited by not having

enough people to financially support the church. Moreover, the church was facing challenges

because it could not effectively evangelize to the younger age groups or effectively train these

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[22] Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization – Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Great Britain, UK: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2018), 51.

age groups to pass on administrative responsibilities as current elders within the laity retire or die. Moreover, if the numbers continued to dwindle, then there would be fewer and fewer people to confess their call to the ordained ministry to preach the gospel. An additional short-term effect was that there were fewer youth in the church and the long-term effects were predicted that the church dies because no remedy was identified and implemented. An assumption was also made that this is an indication that the African Methodist Episcopal church is losing multiple generations to atheism and other cultural fads.

Moreover, the Sunnyside community was not being effectively evangelized due to a lack of ministry training being sponsored by St. Luke and other churches in the Sunnyside community. Andy Stanley's discussion on teaching as a catalyst aligns growing faith with the actions of teaching, discipline, and ministry as paramount in reaching a community.[23] The Sunnyside community was primarily comprised of African American families. There were multiple schools within walking distance of St. Luke. There was a senior citizen facility as well as parks and recreational facilities that drew crowds of residents within the community. The immediate community makeup around St. Luke was a block of single-family homes for low to medium income residents. There were also apartment complexes and senior citizen facilities that finish the composition of the community. At the time of the research, the church's reach was minimal as the church has failed to engage the surrounding community consistently. Therefore, single families were not evangelized, ministered to, or even invited to worship regularly.

In fact, there were no marketing of outreach programs or efforts to reach this community or the targeted demographics regularly as word of mouth was the primary means of marketing. The neglect of this aspect of ministry resulted in an ineffective church outreach and

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[23] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 11.

misconception of normalcy or contentment for St. Luke. Close observations indicated that the church membership did not focus on the problems of the surrounding community and members were satisfied with once-a-week worship, which only required minimum participation from them. The minimum participation included actively neglecting the facility, ministry, outreach, preparation, Bible study, and evangelism.

The membership was not trained for ministry or evangelism. Given the attitude of minimalism and complacency the membership selfishly focused on surviving as a church. The minimal requirement for survival was simply to open on Sundays for worship and paying the connectional assessments. It is important to note that upon taking over the pastoral role, the church was behind in assessments for the connection. Additionally, the church was in debt to the city for fees charged due to a lack of upkeep to the property. Moreover, the church had a series of other debts tied to credit cards, insurance payments, and salaries due to the presiding elder and musicians. It is not an over statement to say that the church was focused on doing a minimum to survive.

One final issue that contributed to the overarching problem of the church was the state of the facility. One of the major responsibilities of any church is to maintain a facility that is safe and comfortable. St. Luke's facility was not maintained well. The entrance welcomed members and visitors with weathered tile and carpet mixes. Given the facility is older there were only two restrooms at the front of the church which severely need remodeling. The carpet and pews in the sanctuary are worn and dirty. Finally, there are a few concerns about the floors and walls that are not only safety hazards, but flat out unattractive. The outside of the facility is primarily brick and disguises several issues; however, anyone that walks the property will not miss the blatant neglect of the building.

The combination of problems with the facility suggests an unsafe and uncomfortable dwelling in the event that a nonmember wanders into worship. Yet the facility mixed with the membership's lack of engagement in ministry and focus on minimalistic efforts for church survival created a perfect excuse for the missing generations to ignore the existence of the church as an option for worship, ministry, or service. Therefore, there was a necessity of church modernization for the facility and the ministry if there was an expectation of successful evangelism to occur at St. Luke. As stated by Kennon Callahan, "A strong healthy congregation has space and facilities that create a warm first impression of welcome, being attractive, and helping persons feel at home."[24] Moreover, Stanley emphasizes that the church environment should emphasize what the ministry is intending to communicate as a means of communicating the message before the message.[25]

Purpose Statement

The purpose for this DMIN action research thesis was to identify a solution for the dying ministry of the African Methodist Episcopal church and local St. Luke A.M.E. church. Unfortunately, the reality of the African Methodist Episcopal church was that the pews are near empty during worship and the population was primarily made up of senior citizens and some of their grandchildren; however, a key demographic was not represented in the church. The key demographic was between the ages of twenty-one to fifty-five, which was the current group of adults that should have been prepared to inherit the responsibility of ministering the gospel of Jesus Christ. The research identified a solution for evangelism, ministry, and outreach that

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[24] Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strong, Healthy Congregations Living in the Grace of God* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2010), 205.

[25] Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, 12.

focused on appealing to the missing generations to create a desire for a relationship with God. Moreover, the research investigated how St. Luke can improve capabilities associated with revitalizing the local ministry and impacting the surrounding community by leading this demographic to Christ.

This research had personal importance for a few reasons. First, the St. Luke pastor learned after the appointment that a recommendation of church closure was submitted by prior leadership. The current pastor stated that he had no interest in being responsible for a church that closed its doors on his watch. St. Luke was the assigned pastor's fourth pastoral charge, and it was the first time that the pastor had been given an opportunity to lead a ministry in a community that remained primarily African American. Past churches were in areas that were either being gentrified or witnessed a transition from a primarily African American community to a mostly Hispanic community. Both transitions resulted in very difficult experiences after attempts to evangelize and meet the needs of the community. Gary McIntosh challenges churches to make a conscious decision to be aware of morale's impact on the church environment and ability to offer something valuable to the community and city of which it ministers.[26]

Additionally, despite the neglect of past leaders, the pastor believed that active evangelism and responsive ministries would reverse negative effects of neglect. The pastor stated that if God called him to be a catalyst in the revitalization of the A.M.E. Church, then it was important that he identified a plan that could be implemented at St. Luke and other A.M.E. churches. Thus, this research was intended to be a difference maker in helping other pastors experiencing the same problems equipping them to transition to having hope for successful revitalization. Moreover, if a successful plan were identified and new outreach programs were

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[26] Gary L. McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 27.

duplicated in the A.M.E. Church there would be a great possibility that similar programs can be implemented across religious denominations.

The result could not only be that St. Luke finds new life, but many other churches could be helped. As these churches find success in closing the gaps between age groups, the efforts focused on evangelizing these missing generations would result in souls won for Christ and the Christian body growing. Not only would this be a rewarding result for those involved in the research, but it would also be a confidence booster for pastors that are faced with difficult decisions about their role, the ability of the ministry, and the effectiveness of outreach.

Basic Assumptions

It was assumed that the reason that the former members left the church was because there were not ministries that met their needs or kept their interests engaged. It was also assumed that the former members begun to engage different belief systems, but still maintained a basic belief in God. An additional assumption was that these former members still reside in the Sunnyside community. To conduct the research each person was expected to have access to virtual meeting platforms by either their computer, phone, or tablet. Also, it was feasible to trust that each participant would be honest about past experiences and the reason they left the church. St. Luke's members were also requested to actively participate in the new ministries to help secure ministry connections with the potential members. Finally, it was implicit that the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be spread and not come back void as the power of God takes control in this research project. Isaiah 55:11 states, "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not

return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (NIV).[27]

Definitions

- African Methodist Episcopal – Formed officially in April 1816 at the first General conference in Philadelphia. Delegates appointed to represent different churches resolved that the people of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and all other places who should unite with them, should become one body under the name and style of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.[28]

- Discipline – A.M.E. book that contains the articles of religion that are maintained, in part or in whole, by every reformed church intended to prevent members from being ignorant of doctrines or any part of the AME Discipline.[29]

- Itinerate Ministry – the extension of the church is best secured through an itinerancy operating under a general superintendency that provides, as possible, for each congregation of believers a minister qualified to present the doctrines and Holy Scripture, and to direct the temporal economy of our societies.[30]

- Deacon Ordination – awarded to a traveling minister of two full years standing in the annual conference is eligible for the Order of Deacon, provided he or she satisfies the Annual Conference for fitness of the office.[31]

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[27] McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 32.

[28] The African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016*, 10.

[29] Ibid, 11.

[30] Ibid, 129.

[31] The African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016*, 124.

- Elder Ordination – Deacon of 2 years in good and regular standing are eligible for election to the order of elder, provided they give evidence of satisfactory performance during studies prescribed in the doctrine and discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal church.[32]

- The Great Commission - Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven 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" (NIV).[33]

- Generation Z – (born 1996-2015) follows millennials, the most racially diverse generation to date, which includes a growth in the makeup of people of different races. The number of multiracial youths has also increased, making it the fastest growing of all identity groups in the U.S. In addition to substantial racial diversity, this generation has high rates of non-heterosexual orientation and acceptance of gender fluid identification.[34]

- Church revitalization – A church is revitalized by the power of God through the spirit of God at work through the word of God by means of a faithful shepherd of God.[35]

- Generation X – (born 1965-1980) also known as busters, this is the group that followed the boomers.[36]

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[32] The African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2016*, 125.

[33] Ibid, 1186

[34] Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, *Generation Z: A Century in the Making* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 30.

[35] Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 24.

[36] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 37.

- Millennials - (Gen Y, Millennials, Yers) Gen Y are born in the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century. Generation Y grew up with free access to modern technologies, therefore, their ability to use ICT in their everyday lives and work is much better than workers from other generations. Generation Y grew up in the age of globalized economy surrounded by mobile phones and the Internet, e-mails, e-committees. For them Internet is that place where they may find everything.[37]

- Baby boomers - 1946-1964 persons who were born after WWII during the demography explosion.[38]

- Spiritual gifts - Romans 12:6–8 lists prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy.[39] 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 lists words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, miracles, prophecy, and distinguishing between spiritual tongues and the interpretation of tongues.[40]

- Novel coronavirus – Also known as COVID-19 or Corona, a novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is different from the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.[41]

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[37] Agnieszka Stanimir, "Generation Y – Characteristics of Attitudes on Labour Market," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2015): 22.

[38] Ibid, 23.

[39] Ibid, 1372

[40] Ibid, 1390

[41] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Coronavirus Disease, Your Health Frequently Asked Questions," updated September 9, 2020. Accessed September 10, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html.

Limitations

The purpose of this research was to find ways to engage the missing demographics that ideally would grow the Christian body and the membership of St. Luke. Given that St. Luke is in the Sunnyside community of Houston, TX, this research specifically targeted the identified key demographics in this community. The research's key demographics were adults ranging from the ages of twenty-one to fifty-five. The term of this research was limited to the A.M.E. 2020/2021 conference year.

Given the unknown availability of former St. Luke members, the research also considered the former members of a neighboring A.M.E. church, Evangelist chapel. While Sunnyside's demographics suggested that the median age of the community is thirty-three, the research was limited to former members of churches as contact information was accessible. The coronavirus caused limitations on personal contact with people; therefore, it was important to start with a base of people that contact information was available for and a known relationship with the A.M.E. church exists.

Due to the infectiousness of the corona virus each of the ministry meetings were held virtually. Surveys were distributed electronically, and interviews were completed using virtual meetings as well. The first set of weeks were used to prepare surveys, revise ministry opportunities, and organize plans to successfully deliver programs through virtual platforms. The virtual platforms considered included Google Meet, Facebook Live, and YouTube. After the materials were prepared the outreach efforts were initiated to the identified participants. The data was collected, calibrated, and reported upon.

Delimitations

There were a few items that were very important to note as delimitations. First, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the method of research was limited to virtual platforms and email surveying. Therefore, the research focused on known contacts versus seeking the target demographic in the Sunnyside community. Moreover, the goal was to identify and contact a number of former members within the age demographic. Given there was limited success with the formerly affiliated members, the researcher looked to investigate a pool of participants from a sister A.M.E. Church that serviced the same community.

The sister church that was asked to provide an alternative sample of formerly affiliated members was Evangelist Chapel A.M.E. The pastor of Evangelist estimated their membership at one hundred members. Evangelist and St. Luke are approximately ten miles from one another which worked out to be an approximate ten-minute drive time.

The research focused on former members and/or known associates of members that did not have a church home. The research considered any person that was in their twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties. The research focused on three areas including spiritual beliefs, identifying attractive ministries, and identifying the reasons why the person who had opted not to fellowship with a church made that decision.

Participants were disqualified if the person had joined another church. Participants were disqualified if they were no longer residents of the Sunnyside, Houston, TX community or any other part of Houston and its city limits. Participants were disqualified if they were unresponsive within the specified window of time needed to complete the research. Participants were disqualified if they were unable to participate in research activities.

The focus on the research was to determine why participants had chosen not to be a member of a church, participate in local ministries, or give their life to Christ. Additionally, the research looked to identify different types of ministries that would engage participants with the purpose of verifying if any newly offered ministries were appealing to the participants. Finally, the research included a series of interviews that were used to further investigate the answers provided. The newly introduced ministry courses were used to gather feedback about the success of the implementation and the effectiveness in reaching this demographic.

Thesis Statement

Given that the new ministry exercises resulting from this research identified a viable solution that engaged people in their twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties St. Luke A.M.E. Church was able see the Sunnyside ministry participation temporarily increased over the research term. If the research was effective in understanding why key demographics had left the church, then St. Luke would be able to create and evolve ministries resulting in former members rejoining the St. Luke congregation. If the research identified ministry gaps for the underrepresented age demographics, then the targeted demographics would participate in the ministry, commit to serving God, and accept Christ as their personal savior. If the research was successful, then St. Luke would develop a platform that can be replicated at other churches which would address problems with ineffective evangelism. If the research was successful, then ministry leaders would become more effective in leading ministries and creating disciples that spur a spiritual revival and a renaissance throughout Sunnyside and neighboring communities.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The Black Church was once great and has the potential to recover to continue down the path of greatness if there are steps taken to resolve the gaps of the missing demographics. This conceptual framework presents a literature review which focuses on the history of the Black Church while highlighting the research that has been published about why ministries have failed and how to respond. In addition, a theological discussion is presented which highlights excerpts of Holy Scripture, the Bible, with the intent of characterizing the scriptural purpose as a part of the St. Luke ministry revitalization process. Finally, the theoretical foundations will be presented to illustrate how the African Methodist Episcopal church had approached reaching the unchurched and the unsaved.

Literature Review

It is important to note that there was extensive research on the Black church, both its successes and its failures. Given the current state of the Black church's decline being represented in St. Luke, it was important to understand the historical existence of the church and its contribution to the surrounding communities. Moreover, given a clear decline in Christianity an investigation into the known opposition to church and ministry success was necessary to understand how to pivot St. Luke's ministry to revive it.

Additionally, this literature review examined evangelism as a necessary tool to revive a ministry as well as considered other researchers' recommendations to impact church growth locally. Recognizing a need for church revitalization plans were presented as a key mindset that must be taken on by both the church's leadership and laity. Finally, the research discussed the

importance of having a well-trained staff of leaders within a church to reach the target

demographic of community members who had not confessed the Lord, Jesus Christ, as their

savior and lord.

History of the Black Church

The African American Church, also known as the Black Church, has a long sense of

pride over its history. Historically, the Black Church is an entity that everyone in the surrounding

neighborhood respected and revered. This church entity derived its respect from continued

perseverance despite the many hardships and struggles of the people it served and was led by. As

stated by White, "We who make up the Christian church believe that God, through Jesus Christ

can transform individuals in such a way as to cause them to want to be like, think like, and act

like Jesus in every area of their daily lives."[1]

One would think that the Black Church would never lose its identity given how it

demonstrated such a passion for survival despite mirroring the tragedy of its people. In fact, one

could argue that churches serving other cultures have faced a fraction of the challenges endured

by the Black Church. When reflecting on the history of the Black Church Bishop Forrest C. Stith

stated,

> It follows that such an evolution is filled with creative tension. For those eight million
> who represent the racial majority, it often requires energy, time and financial resources to
> be inclusive, that are often seen as sacrificial at the most, and simply annoying at the
> least. But for the minority, like the 440,000 African Americans, it is often a struggle of
> emptiness in a sea of the majority world's culture, and a hunger for models, images and
> symbols that represent our unique cultural heritage. It is a constant struggle for identity
> and purpose, most especially during the period of 1939 to 1968.[2]

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[1] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 21.

[2] Bishop Forrest C. Stith, "The paradox of African American Methodist history," *Methodist History* 48, no.
2 (2010): 77, Gale Academic OneFile.

African Americans practiced inclusion in their worship, ministerial services and spirituality regardless of the necessary sacrifice. White reflects on the history of the A.M.E. church starting in 1787 when Richard Allen founded the A.M.E. church. It was founded with the purpose of seeking spiritual, social, educational, and general growth and development for Americans of African descent while remaining welcoming to all who practiced Christianity.[3] However, other entities practiced judgment and oppression despite an abundance opportunities and freedom. The gift of ministry for the majority can come across as an annoyance for societal majorities; however, for minorities in Methodist churches it is a necessity and a priority for its community's survival.

History revealed that leaders needed to understand and serve as a role model for Christianity and spirituality within the church to satisfy the African American community's desire to see the power of God in their community. Historically, Black communities have challenged societal norms with the leadership and community-based movements that grew from meeting in the sanctuaries of Black Churches. Wilmore states,

> Black religion has always concerned itself with the fascination of an incorrigibly religious people with the mystery of God, but it has been equally concerned with the yearning of a despised and subjugated people for freedom--freedom from the religious, economic, social, and political domination that whites have exercised over blacks since the beginning of the African slave trade. It is this radical thrust of blacks for human liberation expressed in theological terms and religious institutions that is the defining characteristic of black Christianity and black religion in the United States--from the preacher-led slave revolts to the Black Manifesto of James Forman and the Black Declaration of Independence of the National Committee of Black Churchmen.[4]

Independence and freedom, fueled by desires for worship and service of God, drove the Black Church to fight to be free of the shackles that granted limited access, liberty, and

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[3] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 20.

[4] Wilmore, "Black religion and black radicalism," 1.

expression of spirituality simply because of skin tone. Moreover, the Black Church partnered with surrounding communities to rebel against municipal powers that limited many other freedoms for African Americans. Congregations grew because of their desire to partner with the community to witness the power of a liberating God. While reflecting on the origin of the Black Church Jonathan L. Walton stated,

> Institutionalized white supremacy, whether in the forms of chattel slavery, physical terror, or racial codes regulating the mobility of non-enslaved Black people, denied African Americans the right to full civic involvement, political access, and economic participation. Yet, African Americans, in varying ways, created visible and invisible arenas of relative ecclesial freedom and spiritual autonomy to buffer the soul murdering effects of America's apartheid systems.[5]

The early Black Church demonstrated the power of a liberating God that would reward participants' humility and servitude with salvation, safe worship, and a vineyard ready for harvest regardless of societal racism and segregation disallowing Black people to participate in white churches. Walton makes it clear in his writings that African Americans demonstrated clear determination in creating an entity safe for worship and community support.[6]

Historically, while African Americans practiced scriptural based theologies in consideration of fellowship and brotherly love, the church has not been successful at evangelizing other cultures. For example, Matthew 5:43-45 teaches, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (NIV). An example of this can be found in Matthew 22:37-39 in which Jesus states, "'…Love the Lord your God

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[5] Jonathan L. Walton, "For Where Two or Three (Thousand) Are Gathered in My Name! A Cultural History and Ethical Analysis of African American Megachurches," *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): pg. 135, Gale General OneFile.

[6] Ibid, 136.

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest

commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (NIV).

Regardless of the ideas of religious freedom and a desire to see a unified Christian body,

the Black Church has a long history of segregation from other races. Robert A. O'Neal, Jr. states,

"A sad commentary decries the inability of the Black Church to attract other races. European

Americans make up 5 percent of the African American Church and Asians less than 1 percent. If

the current trend continues, the future of the historically Black protestant churches appears

ominous in North Carolina."[7] The Black Church's limitations in successfully evangelizing other

races is not limited to North Carolina; it is represented, both historically and currently,

throughout the United States. White assures readers that historically the A.M.E. church has been

open to fellowship with any believer regardless of denomination or membership as

communicated in the church motto ending with "man our brother."[8] This dominant force for the

African American community was not troubled by ineffective evangelism of others historically;

however, now with the state of the Black Church in decline, the Black Church must investigate

all challenges to ministerial effectiveness.

Opposition to Ministry and Church Growth

In a perfect world every ministry effort would result in a lost soul reached or a saved

person realizing the empowering presence and liberating power of God. However, despite

earnest efforts, the Black Church has stumbled with ministerial effectiveness. Many people can

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[7] Robert A. O'Neal, Jr., "The Black Church and the Current Generation: A Program to Address the Decline of African-American Church Attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina," (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2019), 6, Scholars Crossing.

[8] White, *Know Your Church Manual*, 66.

nitpick or complain about problems with local churches that are tied to personal experiences; however, there are clear oppositions to church ministry and growth that all churches should be aware of and prepared to overcome. For example, there are churches today that are prideful about accomplishments from yesterday and have not evolved their ministry for today's society. Bill Henard states, "Long term members of a church may resist change and revitalization because it suggests that the church has not been successful. It also suggests that the members or leaders are not doing a good job. This could also reveal fear of losing power in the church to new members."[9] When a church resists growth and development it could be the result of members struggling to live in the reality that the church is not reaching its community any longer. In fact, there could be deeper problems preventing change such as a power struggle within the church membership.

When problems within the ministry manifest, it could be revealing that a lack of discipleship exists within the church. Squabbles about power and decision-making indicate that the membership is more concerned with politics within the ministry rather than reaching the lost. Eric David Martin states, "The first weakness is a lack of discipleship and follow through on behalf of the church. This weakness is illustrated through the dismal lack of involvement in outreach and discipleship programs in the church…"[10] Martin's research showed that when the church was polled to identify perceived weaknesses the first weakness identified was a lack of follow through by members because they had not been discipled. No ministry can be effective if

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[9] Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live?* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 61.

[10] Eric David Martin, "Developing and Casting a Great Commission Vision at Vann Avenue Baptist Church, Evansville, Indiana" (DMin thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 8, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

the church does not train members as disciples, so they understand how to prioritize evangelism

within the church.

Another opposition to the Black Church today is the criticism that church receives from

people who are not invested in the institutional success but have a podium of influence within the

African American community. For example, there are people who have experienced hurt from

the church, who speak against it and have become effective in turning people away from the

church. Alternatively, the reputation of the church is attacked by people who do not believe in it

as they provide negative impressions of the church with no substantive examples. Wilmore

defines this opposition as a paradox for the Black Church as he pontificates the following:

> One of the continuing paradoxes of the Black Church as the custodian of a great portion
> of black culture and religion is that it is at once the most reactionary and the most radical
> of black institutions; the most imbued with the mythology and values of white America,
> and yet the most proud, the most independent and indigenous collectivity in the black
> community. In order to appreciate black religion and the Black Church--indeed, in order
> to understand black radicalism anywhere in the world--one must delve into the nature and
> meaning of this paradox of the religious experience of Africans--both on the African
> continent and in the diaspora. The radicals who deprecate the Black Church, the black
> professionals who avoid it, and the black television comedians who mimic it, need to
> know how facilely they have absorbed white ignorance and how they have sewn
> themselves up in that bag.[11]

When the church faces criticism it is important that the church leadership and members

are spiritually prepared to combat against the negative impressions with the word of God.

Unfortunately, a combination of the discipleship challenges, insufficient training, and superficial

priorities results in a church that is unequipped to defend itself with the Gospel of Jesus. O'Neal

diagnoses local congregations that struggle in this manner: "Spiritual weakness in the church,

precipitated by many factors including the performance of ministers as stated earlier is another

cause of declining church attendance. Spiritual weakness may seem to be an abstract term, but it

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[11] Wilmore, "Black religion and black radicalism," 1.

means proclaiming a concept while missing in practice."[12] When a church suffers with spiritual weakness it is difficult to direct people to God because they are not serving as an example. Disciples of God should represent the righteousness of God. When there is not an example of who God is, or his righteousness, there is only judgment and ridicule.

A lack of righteous living will always reflect poorly on the church because people will assume that believers are the same as nonbelievers. People outside of the church assume that there is nothing productive taking place within the church or that the church is not teaching people to live by Scripture effectively. James Scott Harrell references the book of Ezekiel to support the challenges of the church and states,

> Evil permeated the culture with this absence of Biblical teaching in v 29. The evil that naturally resides in the human heart was no longer restrained by god's word and the example of godly leaders. As a result, selfishness and evil grew bolder. People used other people for personal gain, knowing they would get away with it.[13]

The people identified in Ezekiel 22:23-31 were in a self-centered state, which caused them to be disobedient to God and take advantage of one another.

When selfishness manifests in Christians' actions today, it becomes a noticeable barrier to ministry and hampers church growth. In fact, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons state, "…our lives do not match our beliefs. In many ways, our lifestyles and perspectives are no different from those of anyone around us."[14] The church must practice righteous living in order to demonstrate the values of having a relationship with God. Otherwise, the actions of the people who love the church and love God will inadvertently work against the ministry efforts that

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[12] O'Neal, "The Black Church and the Current Generation," 8.

[13] James Scott Harrell, "Church Replanting in Mainline Churches Vision Casting and Equipping Evangelical Church Replanters " [Publisher not identified], 2012, 9.

[14] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UN Christian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 41.

should be championed by participants. L. McIntosh, J. R. Smothers, and R. T. Smothers observe how millennials can relate to the church. They write, "Millennials want to belong to a group of people where they can know one another and be known. Communities of belonging (not obligation) is what they desire. Millennials want to be inspired and feel they 'get to' be a part of something that is changing the world instead of 'got to.'"[15] Millennials are looking to find a community that has no obligations for membership yet serves a clear purpose. Today's society desires the look and the experience to match what they have envisioned. If the Christian church continues to fail at distinguishing itself from other organizations, it will lose the opportunity to reach the lost.

<div align="center">

Evangelism

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Evangelism is not only a directive from Jesus Christ to his disciples, but it is an example that Christ lived out before the world. Luke 4:18 states, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (NIV). It is in this chapter that Jesus informs his disciples and followers, the church, that he has a responsibility of evangelism. Moreover, Jesus attests that he has been anointed by God to conduct these actions of evangelism that include proclaiming the good news, proclaiming freedom, recovering the sight of the blind, and setting the oppressed free. This is an example of evangelism and ministry that is then declared in the Great Commission as Jesus' followers' responsibility. As stated by Rick Warren, "Jesus loved lost people and loved spending time with them. From the gospels, it is

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[15] L. McIntosh, J. R. Smothers, and R. T. Smothers, *Blank Slate – Write your Own Rules for a 22ⁿᵈ Century Church Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 32, Kindle.

obvious that Jesus enjoyed being with seekers far more than being with religious leaders. He went to their parties and was called the 'friend of sinners' in Luke 7:34."[16]

The Great Commission states, "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" (NIV). The Great Commission is actively demonstrated in the New Testament, not just by Christ, but also by those who followed him. The disciples understood that Jesus had the authoritative governance anointed by God to guide them to evangelize. The example and directions provided by Jesus created a gold standard an evangelical mission for those delivering the Gospel and the acceptance of those receiving. Gene Getz states, "After visiting the churches in the Galatian region and sharing the letter composed by the 'apostles and elders,' Paul and his companions ventured into virgin territory. Once again, the Holy Spirit spoke directly, this time giving them specific geographical directions. They had not been this way before, and they knew very few people who had."[17]

As illustrated in Acts 16:6-9, the Holy Spirit revealed where Paul needed to evangelize next. After this, he set off on a missionary journey to spread the Gospel of Christ. Paul had not been to Galatia in past travels and there is no indication that other evangelists had been there either; however, they followed the lead of the spirit to spread the gospel and grow the body of Christ. The Galatian people are an example of today's Generation Z. They have not been exposed to Christianity and the power of God. Therefore, it is important for the followers of God to evangelize this group of people. White states, "They are not simply living in and being shaped

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[16] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 207.

[17] Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2003), 57, Kindle.

by a post Christian cultural context. They do not even have a memory of the gospel. The degree

of spiritual illiteracy is simply stunning."[18] Generation Z is currently paralyzed spiritually

because they do not have exposure to the Gospel. Today's society is becoming post Christian

because of this growing deficiency. Given the lack of exposure to the Gospel the people that

need to be reached are becoming spiritually illiterate. Therefore, there is a need for evangelism

more today than ever before, specifically directed at Generation Z.

Stith recalls the history of the Methodist church as it developed evangelism to meet the

needs of God's people in parallel with social issues. He writes,

> The paradox is that we cannot find the new wine, save we rediscover the values, theology, and spirit of those who went before us. There were those who saw no contradiction between evangelism and social action, or the important pairing expressed in the words of Charles Wesley, 'Unite the pair so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety.' Is it not paradoxical that the uniqueness of the historical evolution of this great denomination has been its ability to be inclusive; its inclusion of lay members in decision making, of persons of color, of women and a large number of ethnic minorities and other groups?[19]

Yesterday's church combined evangelism with social justice issues to offer the

congregants and community members Christ centered ministries that met their social and

spiritual needs. Evangelism should be inclusive of everyone in the community and empower

them with the spirit of God. Intentional communication tactics should be strategically developed

with goals of evangelizing the Gospel and helping the lost with other needs to improve their

quality of life. Mark Cannister states,

> Every missionary understands the importance of communication. A language barrier is a foundational obstacle that must be overcome, and missionaries strive to learn the language of the people they are trying to reach. Learning the language of a people group is more than simply learning words; it is learning how to converse with people in a manner that can engage thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams.[20]

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[18] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 63.

[19] Stith, "The paradox of African American Methodist history," 77.

[20] Cannister, *Teenagers Matter*, 25-26.

To be effective in evangelism, it is important for evangelists to understand the importance of communication and how to communicate with the targeted demographic. Missionaries have long understood that communication that relates and inspires helps to usher people into relationship with God and fellowship with the church.

Church Growth

One would think that evangelism alone would spur church growth; however, there is more to the perfect formula to spur church growth. In consideration of ministry and the approach to having it be effective Stanley states, "The longer you serve in a particular ministry environment, the less aware of it you become."[21] In fact, the idea that churches will grow, and people will get saved simply by word of mouth would suggest that there would be more mega churches and every smaller church would be full. Given the many churches that are either closing or in decline there is evidence that mega churches are not the result of a true church growth formula. Instead of seeing the positive effects of evangelism within many churches, what has been noted is that a few mega churches have formed with believers leaving smaller local churches for larger venues.

Martin et al. state, "Beginning in the 1970s, some Black congregants abandoned smaller, more intimate, family-oriented, neighborhood churches to attend mega-churches."[22] One could argue that the appearance of mega churches is an example of artificial church growth and that a

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[21] Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, chapter 9, Time in, Awareness of.

[22] Martin et al., "Black Mega-Churches in the Internet Age," 156.

true formula for church growth must still be discovered. Wilmore identifies the growth of Black

Churches as a mixture of socio-economic issues and spirituality, and advises,

> The period between 1890 and the Second World War was one of the luxuriant growth and proliferation of many forms of black religion in the United States and Africa that challenged the bourgeoisification of the mainline black denominations. Black holiness and Pentecostalism, arising from southern folk religion pressure-cooked in the teeming ghettos of the North, mixed in fascinating combinations with some of the black consciousness and nationalistic tendencies noted above.[23]

Therefore, the answer to church growth is not to form a mega church, but instead it is to

create ministries that thrive because they are meeting the needs of the people of today. The Black

Church has consistently grown because of an effort to consolidate social injustices with the idea

of spiritual liberation. As stated by Martin et al.,

> Consequently, a fundamental understanding of the functions of Black Churches requires some knowledge about how race, racism, and racial discrimination have impacted the spiritual needs of African American people. Therefore, some social scientists often study Black Churches to explain the achievements, cultures, and politics among African Americans.[24]

The Black Church grew in numbers because of societal norms that were unjust towards Black

people. To understand the historical growth of the Black Church, and how to grow today's

church, it is important to understand the impacts of racism and racial discrimination and aim for

forming a transformative ministry.

Mega churches also find themselves financially capable of providing services such as

family counseling, couples ministry, classes to help with substance abuse or alcoholism, and

ministries to develop and highlight expressionism; however, this again is not what creates or

sustains church growth. Birgitta J. Johnson states, "Such activities and programs are but a by-

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[23] Wilmore, "Black religion and black radicalism," 2.

[24] Martin et al., "Black Mega-Churches in the Internet Age," 156.

product of megachurches' fast and sustained growth, and not the key."[25] As stated by Warren, "Healthy, lasting church growth is multidimensional. My definition of genuine church growth has five facets. Every church needs to grow warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through worship, broader through ministry, and larger through evangelism."[26]

Discipleship is the key to grow a church, and the focus of disciple-making must be looking to Jesus for guidance instead of the people working to serve in the ministry. Nathan A. Finn states, "The Disciples do not make their own disciples but point people to become followers of Jesus, the teacher. As such, the disciples do not put forward their own teachings but faithfully pass on the teachings of the Teacher. Both believing and practicing Jesus' teachings are required, by those making disciples and by the new disciples."[27] If a church congregation is to experience growth it is key to focus on Jesus and his teachings, remembering John 15:8: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (NIV). McIntosh states, "Three-fourths of established churches in North America are either declining or on a long-term plateau. Such churches are ineffective at making disciples—at least new disciples—and function with a lack of fruitfulness and hope."[28] In order for today's church to grow each believer must become a disciple willing to disciple others with a purpose of honoring God.

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[25] Birgitta J. Johnson, "Back to the heart of worship: praise and worship music in a Los Angeles African-American megachurch," *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (2011): 112, Gale Academic OneFile.

[26] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 47.

[27] Nathan A. Finn, *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church* (City, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 83, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[28] McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 20.

Church Revitalization

Several churches fear the idea of change, especially if the membership has experienced success with traditional tactics in years past. Stanley encourages change for the church and leadership by stating, "The uncertainty and need for change in our current church culture underscores the need for bold leadership. Leadership that is willing to embrace the unchanging mandate prescribed to us in the first century and to proclaim it in such a way that our twenty-first century audiences will understand and receive it."[29] However, change is the exact action that declining churches need to secure their future. The Black Church seems to have lost connection with the middle-aged portion of the society, generation Z. Croft defines the church revitalization process as follows, "A church is revitalized by the power of God through the Spirit of God at work through the word of God by means of a faithful shepherd of God."[30] Therefore, churches must take action to refocus their work on the word and the will of God. If there are any other underlying issues that motivate revitalization the church congregation could risk the chance to witness God's glory in their community.

In lieu, to inspire change that is God-centered, the leadership at the church must take the role of influence using preaching and teaching. As stated by McIntosh, Smothers, and Smothers, "But an openness to change can also come through systematic preaching, learning, planning, and implementing. There are people in every church who really do believe and follow the mandates of Christ to love our neighbors and who will call the church to account for not doing so."[31] The need for change can be identified and inspirational to followers if the pastor and leaders in the

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[29] Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, Section 2 Our story Walking Toward the messes, Removing the Move from Movement.

[30] Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 24.

[31] McIntosh, Smothers, and Smothers, *Blank* Slate, 38.

ministry preach, teach, and implement the vision for change. According to Stanley, "The church needs leaders who are willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure that we hand it off to the next generation in better shape than we found it."[32] There are many members that believe in the power of Christ and will follow and participate in the surge for revitalization.

Church revitalization must be planned strategically and implemented systematically. This will impact the preaching, teaching, and communication to support the new direction. Communication must be clear for leadership, members, and the community. Thom S. Rainer states, "A pastor once asked me how much he should communicate an important issue in the church. My response was 'a lot more than you're communicating now…' If something is important to the church, it really cannot be over-communicated."[33] If a church is going to revitalize or make important changes, it is important that the pastor over communicates to the church to ensure they are aware of the change and support the change.

Bruce Boria suggests an eight-step process to realize church revitalization. His process to guide change in a church includes establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad based action, generating short term wins, consolidating wins in order to produce more change, and finally anchoring new approaches into the culture.[34] This process can not only empower a church to revitalize, but it can have lasting impacts on the culture of the church. An additional consideration for evolving church culture as a part of the plan for church growth is identifying

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[32] Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, Section 2 Our story Walking Toward the messes, Removing the Move from Movement.

[33] Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved my Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group 2016), 12.

[34] Bruce Boria, "Before You Introduce Change: 'Vision Casting' Isn't Step One, Or Even Step Two," *Leadership Journal* 28, no. 2 (2007): 79.

spiritual gifts. McIntosh supports this concept by asserting that achieving God's vision for the

church is dependent on the intersection of the pastor's leadership passion, congregants' gifts and

passions, and alignment to the identified needs of the community.[35]

John Matthew Burton, Jr. states,

He also challenged his church members to take the initiative, to join the ministry team and to participate in transforming Central Church into a spiritually gifted, lay-led ministry. To make the transformation process work at Central, the church chose an equipping ministry process. The membership engaged in a spiritual gifts assessment process to identify their gifts and to allow them to start doing ministry as a product of their giftedness.[36]

To revitalize the church, members must identify and use their spiritual gifts. Additionally, the

members of the church must buy into the idea that they must participate in the ministry.

Timothy G. Jacobs engaged in a project to increase church growth that was intent on

understanding what contributes to church growth and how to influence church growth. In Dallas,

the project pursued a new church plant that took a revitalized vision of a senior pastor with the

hopes of growing a church plant and touching the surrounding community. There were many

lessons in this effort including vision casting and clear intentional communication. Jacobs

illustrated one of the lessons learned as follows, "This project suggests that vision casting for a

new church plant involves more than a statement but a lifestyle that is coherent theologically

and. The senior pastor will not just present a statement but a radically focused and cogent

package that brings credibility."[37] A clear lesson learned was that there must be a beacon light or

a clear example for others to follow that points them to Jesus. The pastor leading the church must

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[35] McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 75.

[36] John Matthew Burton, Jr., "Casting the Vision: An Equipping Ministry Launch for a Gift-Based Lay Ministry," (DMin thesis, United Theological Seminary, 2007), 3, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[37] Timothy G. Jacobs, "What Selected Senior Pastors of Church Planting Churches Identify as Key Communication Factors in Casting Vision for a New Church Plant," (type of paper, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2011), 20.

live a life that not only aligns with the vision, but also aligns with God's Scripture in order to inspire others to follow. The goal is followship and discipleship within the church which will continue to inspire others to follow Jesus Christ.

The character of the senior pastor, associate pastors, and ministers must represent the character of Christ as well as avoid the rebuff of those who the church desires to evangelize. Paul taught that Christians should never do anything that would bring offense or create an obstacle for anyone so that the ministry of Christ would not be discredited.[38] In Romans 14 Paul also teaches that the ministry must be welcoming to all people whether they are considered strong or weak in their faith. Romans 14:3 states, "The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them" (NIV). In this exert of the Holy Scripture Paul teaches that the ministry should not be judgmental of people who have cultural differences. In fact, to grow the church Christians must be encouraged to stand for the Lord in all that they do.

When referencing the church's implementation of Jesus's teachings about standards and values White wrote, "Those two ideas - church and counterculture - i.e., at the heart of reaching a post Christian generation. The challenge is, first, to understand the ideas and, second, to engage them."[39] If the church is going to be successful in reaching Generation Z it needs to do two things: (1) The church needs to understand the counterculture influencing this generation away from Christianity and (2) adapt to the new culture. This will enable the church to create a ministry that reaches the unsaved. The church must be careful to create a place of love,

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[38] Ibid, 1401; 2 Corinthians 6:3.

[39] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 69.

forgiveness, and acceptance as well as leadership that inspires a life of righteousness centered on

the ideals of Jesus Christ.

A study was done at Vann Avenue Baptist Church by Martin that revealed the importance

of understanding the community and creating ministries that have an impact in leading people to

Christ. Martin states, "It is important for churches to understand their contextual factors because

they are an important component in seeking the best ways to reach the community[…]Failure to

tailor local church ministries to meet the existing realities of the community can lead to

frustration and failure."[40] Vann Avenue Baptist Church realized the need to have ministries that

are needed by the community that delivered the message of Christ in order to reach the lost. If

the church does not have ministries that are impactful to the community, it will be met with

failure and disappointment impacting the church health.

The facility must be ready for church growth as well. The facility must appear safe,

inviting, and manicured to reflect the care that the ministry will have for potential parishioners.

Additionally, the worship experience must also be appealing to many generations. Johnson

suggests,

> Through the use of space and interior design, megachurches contest the layers of meaning
> linked to iconic images and symbols identified with sacred spaces (e.g., tall steeples,
> stained glass windows, altars, crosses, religious portraiture, and neatly lined pews). Thus,
> for some church leaders, praise and worship music establishes order, encourages
> intimacy, and musically reinforces a sense of community and the sacred […][41]

It is important that churches use the space appropriately to bring about a sense of community

with one another and create a space that welcomes the Holy Spirit. Therefore, churches today are

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[40] Martin, "Developing and Casting a Great Commission Vision at Vann Avenue Baptist Church, Evansville, Indiana," 6.

[41] Johnson, "Back to the heart of worship," 108.

using traditional symbolic things such as altars, crosses, and religious portraitures to help congregants focus on worship and the spiritual presence of God.

It is important to note that the church must prioritize maintaining the facility regardless of the limitations of income. If a facility is considered unclean, unsafe, or in poor condition regardless of age, the community will be reluctant to congregate regardless of the intended good of the ministry programs. O'Neal states, "Limited income produces a diminishing effect on the edifice and quality of leadership. Churches without proper building maintenance will eventually deteriorate. In today's culture, churches on the forefront find it necessary to not only maintain but to remodel and upgrade."[42] Church facilities that are not maintained create a roadblock for active ministry. Churches have members with low incomes and cannot afford to pay the pastor let alone renovate or upgrade facilities. However, to position the church and ministry for growth it is necessary to prioritize what seems worth being secondary or tertiary.

There Was a Need for Spiritually Disciplined Leadership

Leadership in the AME church revealed a cultural history that grew from slavery and segregation as a means to guide people to Christ and it demonstrated how to guide believers to a better life. Tunya Griffen investigated the history of the leaders of the Black Church and discovered, "Throughout the Reconstruction era over 2000 men held political office and many of those were ministers. The moment that all things seemed possible, in particular for the Black Church..."[43] In fact, Griffin argued that the AME church led communities to navigate through issues that ranged from civil rights to gender justice.[44] The importance of strong leadership

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[42] O'Neal, "The Black Church and the Current Generation," 8.

[43] Griffin, Tunya. "Overcoming Barriers to Leadership Equality for Women in the Church of God in Christ and African Methodist Episcopal Churches."ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2021. Pg. iii

[44] Ibid. pg. iii

during the research period proved to be just as important because a standard for spiritual well-being and disciplined service was deemed necessary to grow the St. Luke ministry.

Quality leadership in the Black Church was a necessity similar to that of other ethnicities throughout history. Claudia Rapp, author of *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity the Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* revealed, "In the growing Christian communities of the first centuries, certain individuals were singled out by their spiritual authority – the presence of the Holy Spirit or a special connection with Christ made manifest in special gifts or qualities."[45] Moreover, Rapp taught that strong spiritual leadership was demonstrated by Jesus who converted followers to a spiritual family that touched, transformed, and elevated others by leading them to fellowship with God.[46] Strong leaders have proven to be the backbone of a successful church because the example that the set of being led by God has influenced others to trust in God.

Rapp believed that leaders called by God and anointed by the spirit were blessed with the ability to communicate for the benefit of others as they used empowered preaching and teaching.[47] Tod Bolsinger taught that leaders should model their ministry based on the lessons found in Romans 12:2 driven to a divine transformation instead of becoming conformed to the world.[48] In fact, Bolsinger stated, "Leadership is energizing a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world."[49]

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[45] Rapp, Claudia. *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity the Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. 67

[46] Ibid. 67

[47] Ibid. 68

[48] Bolsinger, Tod E. *Canoeing the Mountains Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory. Expanded Edition*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018. 36

[49] Ibid. 36

The role of a leader in the church has been cemented throughout history as the owner of the responsibility to instruct, encourage, and serve as an example of living for God. As stated by Bolsinger, "In Christendom… Preaching and leadership were synonymous. The Leader was a person with authority, title or position who was given voice and charged with offering a vision for faithfulness and mission."[50] Spiritual authority has been required of leaders as the worked to grab the attention of the lost and attract the nonbelievers to the righteousness of God.

Tim Gregory, contributing author of *Modern Metaphors of Christian Leadership Exploring Christian Leadership in a Contemporary Organizational Context. 1st ed. 2020,* called these leaders agents of change.[51] Change of any kind whether in a church, community or an organization has always been difficult. It has taken strong leaders to introduce and implement change and inspire people to adopt the new perspectives associated with the change. As stated by Gregory, "These individuals can come from within the organization or from outside of it, but regardless of where they come from, they have the unique ability to ignite and fan the fire of change that all organizations will eventually need to grow and stay successful."[52] This type of leadership was necessary for St. Luke to reverse the decline as the church sought to inspire Christian discipleship.

Training Leaders and the Congregation to Reach Target Demographics

The church needed to identify the targeted demographics and execute a plan developed to reach the target(s) of their outreach efforts. It was important to identify the ethnicity, age groups,

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[50] Ibid. 38

[51] Henson, Joshua D. *Modern Metaphors of Christian Leadership Exploring Christian Leadership in a Contemporary Organizational Context. 1st ed. 2020*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020. 21

[52] Ibid. 21

socioeconomic state, and spiritual beliefs of the people that the outreach was intended to impact. Warren taught churches to, "Create a composite profile of typical unchurched person your church wants to reach. Combining the characteristics of residents in your area into a single, mythical person will make it easier for members of your church to understand who your target is."[53] For the Black Church, it was important to have an outreach profile for the African American male.

O'Neal stated, "Upon closer observation, startling revelations take shape. One of the most significant problems contributing to the decline of African American church attendance is the recent and notable substantial decline in the number of men attending church. This trend happens to occur in the general population of churches."[54] The lack of men participating in church was clearly affecting the Black Church negatively. It was important that in identifying target demographics that the church targeted men specifically as a part of its outreach. Most importantly, the church needed to be prepared to both reach those that have little or no spiritual belief as well as encourage them to pursue a relationship with God.

McIntosh, Smothers, and Smothers used Pew Research Center data to make an argument of urgency in identifying and reaching specific target demographics. They wrote,

> A recent survey of thirty-five thousand Americans by the Pew Research Center confirmed that a rise of the none has grown to encompass 23 percent of America's adults as of 2015. This means that about one out of every four adults in the United States, when asked about their religious identity, would say nothing.[55]

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[53] Warren, *The Purpose Driven*, 166.

[54] O'Neal, "The Black Church and the Current Generation," 7.

[55] McIntosh, Smothers, and Smothers, *Blank Slate*, loc. 66, Kindle.

When considering generation X, millennials, and generation Z there are several individuals that claim no religious beliefs. This was the target demographic that the church should be focused on evangelizing to so they could lead people to Christ. In fact, White states,

> Drop everything and start paying attention to Generation Z, which now constitutes 25.9 percent of the US population. That is more than Millennials 24.5 percent. That is more than Gen X 15.4 percent. Yes, that's even more than Baby Boomers 23.6 percent. By 2020, members of Generation Z will account for 40 percent of all consumers. They will not simply influence American culture, as any generation would; they will constitute American culture.[56]

Church leaders needed to follow the lead of marketers today and focus on Generation Z. Generation Z was the largest part of that day's society and they were steadily growing. The impact of Generation Z on this society would constitute how American culture would be defined in the future. Kinnaman and Lyons argued, "There are about twenty-four million outsiders in this country who are ages sixteen to twenty-nine. It is significant to note that outsiders are becoming less and less a 'fringe' segment of American society."[57] The number of people who no longer believed that there was one true God was growing every day. With the numbers growing Christians were challenged with the need to identify and relate to this non-Christian group that was between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine. Otherwise, there would be continuous growth of nonbelievers and a continuous decline of Christian believers. To bridge this gap training was required.

The United Church of Christ served as an example of a need to train pastors, leaders, and members the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which highlight Christ as a redeemer and savior for sinful souls, and how to evangelize the churches targeted demographic. If one were to trace the United Church of Christ's decline to a root cause, there would be proof that there is a lack of

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[56] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 37.

[57] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UN Christian*, location 66.

engagement with the Gospel of Christ as an evangelism tool to impact church growth. In fact,

James Scott Harrell states, "The UCC, which was founded in 1957, has declined in the number of

churches associated with the denomination every year but one since its founding. This decline,

the author contends, is due to the crumbling theological foundations brought on by the

denomination moving away from the historic gospel."[58] Kirbyjon Caldwell and the Windsor

Village United Methodist Church in Houston, TX served as an example of an alternative to the

United Church of Christ's documented decline. Caldwell transitioned from being a New York

investment banker to a senior pastor, taking his church from a fledgling congregation to over

10,000 members after graduating from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist

University.[59] Caldwell's transition from a secular career to a successful pastor leading thousands

was a result of his education and training combined with his dedication to serving God in

response to a divine calling to ministry.

Burton addressed how to transition his church's laity from having limited impact to

becoming successful in outreach. As stated by Burton,

> Recognizing that their church was not identifying spiritual gifts within its body and
> failing to equip its people to be in ministry, Central's Equipping ministry Team chose to
> launch an assessment program to evaluate the gifts of the laity. They continued with an
> extensive program intended to equip and to motivate the people to user their gifts in
> relevant and effective ministry.[60]

Central recognized it had a responsibility to help the members recognize their spiritual gifts,

develop their gifts to become strengths, and utilize these gifts as strengths as they participate in

the ministry.

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[58] Harrell, James Scott. "Church Replanting in Mainline Churches Vision Casting and Equipping Evangelical Church Replanters" [Publisher not identified], 2012, pg.16-17.

[59] Walton, "For Where Two or Three (Thousand) Are Gathered in My Name!" 139.

[60] Burton, "Casting the Vision," 43.

Jacobs discussed the impact of pastors that were trained and positioned in communities to plant churches and ministries by Northwood church. The training enabled their focus on the work of Jesus Christ and their gifts to begin purposeful ministries.[61] The first step in training was to identify the gifts of those who have repented and submitted to God's rule and were interested in becoming disciples. Finn stated, "Jesus' kingdom community forms the nucleus of the eschatological community - people already changed by Jesus' kingdom invasion and serving his mission, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and awaiting his final establishment of the new age."[62] The combination of believers dedicated to service and trained to meet the demands of serving the community should have resulted in reaching a lost generation.

Theological Foundations

The Holy Bible illustrates the state of God's people struggling with their sin nature, the start of God's church, God's power to Grow the church, and how believers can serve God by spreading the Gospel of Christ. This section has identified scriptures that provide instruction and guidance in serving God through ministry to his people for the purpose of growing the body of Christ. Specifically, there was a presentation on God's call to his people intending to prove that each believer has a responsibility to respond to God in service. Additionally, the Holy Scripture was used to explain the call to action that God had given to each believer. Finally, there were key characters identified from Scripture that responded to the call to evangelize God's word.

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[61] Jacobs, "What Selected Senior Pastors of Church Planting Churches Identify as Key Communication Factors in Casting Vision for a New Church Plant," 68.

[62] Finn, *Spirituality for the Sent*, 78.

God's Call to His People

The Holy Scripture is evident in its revelation that God has an active call to deliver his people and bring them back to him. For example, in Daniel's final vision, noted in 12:1-3, there is a discussion about God's intent to deliver his people back to him during a great time of tribulation and distress. As stated by Stephen R. Miller, "Daniel was therefore predicting that at the end of the age there will be 'a time of distress' unlike anything experienced in the history of the world. Michael will be needed to help deliver Israel during this trying period."[63] Moreover, Isaiah 43:1 states, "But now this is what the Lord says – he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine" (NIV). As stated by J. Alec Motyer, "So the Lord determined to have a people for his very own, brought them into being and shaped them on the wheel of circumstances. This is the first ground on which the Lord will say, you are mine. The second ground is redemption."[64]

Another consideration was God's demonstration of love by sparing the judgment of sin to those who return to God in service and realize the call to royalty as found in Malachi 3:17 and Exodus 19:5-6. In consideration of Malachi 3:17, Richard A. Taylor states, "God heard and recorded the godly speech of the righteous ones comprises the result: God is preparing an eschatological day on which he will redeem the righteous and judge the wicked."[65] Whereas Randall Bailey teaches that Exodus 19:5-6 was the beginning of a crossroad for God's people entering a covenant. Bailey stated, "If the people chose to obey and keep Yahweh's covenant, the

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[63] Stephen R. Miller, *New American Commentary*, vol 18, *Daniel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), The Vision (11:2-12:3)

[64] J. Alec Motyer, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Isaiah*, (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Academic, 2015), 301.

[65] Richard A. Taylor, *New American Commentary*, vol 21A, *Haggai, Malachi* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), Motivation: The Coming Day (3:16-4:3).

result would be the birth of Israel as 'a community of faith,' which transcends their biological descent as the 'Sons of Israel,' and establishes them as Yahweh's treasured possession."[66] God's call to his people was also supported in the New Testament in John 15:16 and Colossians 1:13-14.

The gospel of John revealed God's selection of his people with the intention of them bearing fruit, while Colossians demonstrates God's call for his people to come out of darkness and have joy. In fact, James Montgomery Boice taught that John 15:16 is not only a pledge of friendship with God, but that the relationship, friendship, and service to God is a source of realizing the blessing of God despite people's inequality tied to our humanity, sin, ignorance, and finitude.[67] As stated by Jack Cottrell, "God had moved a population from danger to safety, from Satan's dominion to Christ's."[68] It is important to recognize God's call to his people and his directive to bear fruit, which translates to active evangelizing. Now considering the state of St. Luke's decline, the former members, and the number of community members that are unchurched, it is important to recognize that God is calling each person individually to return to him. St. Luke cannot afford to ignore the call of God to return to him in service and neither can the surrounding community.

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[66] Randall Bailey, *The College Press NIV Commentary*: *Exodus* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2013), 207.

[67] James Montgomery Boice, *Boice Expositional Commentary*, vol. 4, *Gospel of John* (Ada, OK: Baker Books, 2013), 1183.

[68] Jack Cottrell, *College Press NIV Commentary: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* (Joplin, MO: The College Press Publishing Co., 2013), II. Paul's Prayer for the Colossians (1:9-14).

God Directs His People to Evangelize

In Matthew 28:19-20 the resurrected savior, Jesus Christ, delivers his final instructions to evangelize as a directive to all believers. This exert of Scripture identified the need to teach obedience to God, the need to baptize believers as an outward showing of an inward belief, and the evangelism of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as savoir. In Acts 2:38 Peter preached to the lost in his community admonishing those who listened to repent and accept Jesus as lord to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The result of Peter's effort was many men asking how to become saved and then coming to Christ for salvation. Outside of these illustrations of the evangelism directive and the action taken exist many other scriptures that reiterate God's expectation.

For example, 2 Corinthians 5:20 states, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (NIV). Considering this text, Cottrell taught that each believer must recognize the responsibility that they are entrusted with by God to deliver God's message and word of salvation through Jesus Christ.[69] An additional consideration is 2 Timothy 4:5, of which Thomas Lea states, "Although it is true that some Christians have the gift of evangelism more obviously than others, that fact must not discourage active sharing of the gospel by all believers. The Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) and the example of the Book of Acts make clear that witnessing is not simply a responsibility for ordained leaders but for all believers."[70]

In fact, to support the call to evangelize the Holy Scripture also informed believers that they are to function as God's handiwork given that each believer has been created to do good

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[69] Jack Cottrell, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 2 Corinthians* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 2013), 2. Christ's Message of Reconciliation Delivered (5:16-6:2).

[70] Thomas Lea, New *American Commentary*, vol 34, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), (4) Timothy's Personal Charge (4:5).

works that were prepared for in advance (Eph. 2:10). This responsibility and appointment was also supported by Ephesians 4:11, of which Boice states, "The gifts are given to each Christian— that is, everyone has at least one gift—and for that reason, the church is only fully vigorous and healthy when all are ministering."[71] It was clear that God had given instruction to the body of the church that they must evangelize with the Gospel of Christ. This directive must be acted upon by St. Luke if there was to be a change in reaching the missing demographic in the community.

<div align="center">Scriptural Evangelist Examples</div>

An evangelist's responsibility is to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of God, acting as an instrumental part of God's intent to save all people. Not only does the Scripture expressly indicate the God is patiently waiting on each person to come to him, but it gives many examples of people who heard the call and owned the responsibility of spreading God's gospel. The primary example that each person should pattern themselves after is Jesus. The New Testament Scripture illustrates his life in the four Gospels showing his work to spread the word of salvation as an execution of one's faith in God. There are many examples of Jesus doing the work that each believer is now responsible of accomplishing including giving sight to the blind, healing the sick, cleansing the people with leprosy, raising the dead, and preaching the gospel to the poor, as illustrated in Matthew 11.

An alternative example is found in Luke 9:6, of which Jesus sends the twelve disciples out to evangelize the Gospel by preaching to the poor. As stated by Leon Morris, "They went through the villages, which points to a country tour. Luke does not go into detail but says that they preached and that they healed. That they did it everywhere shows that between them they

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[71] James Montgomery Boice, *Boice Expositional Commentary - Ephesians* (Ada, OK: Baker Books, 2013), 133.

covered a lot of ground."[72] There are additional examples highlighted throughout the book of

Acts as well including Peter, Philip, John, the men of Cyprus and Cyrene, Barnabas, and Apostle

Paul. In the Old Testament there are also the examples of the prophets such as Jonah, Jeremiah,

and Isaiah that preached the judgment and salvation of God. Given the scriptural examples of

believers that acted upon their faith to grow the church, St. Luke's leaders and members must

follow the example Jesus Christ and others set to purposefully reverse the notable decline. The

scripture demonstrates how God uses a willing servant to impact the growth of the church.

Therefore, with God the membership of St. Luke must faithfully evangelize to give God an

opportunity to bring his people back to him.

Theoretical Foundations

Ministry Practices

The Bible identified a standard requirement to become a part of the Christian body,

which was to confess Christ as Lord and to be baptized. While it was important that each

believer functioned as an evangelist, no matter the formal role of spiritual gift appointed, most

churches used a common mechanism to reach people: church worship. Church worship was

highly marketed on Sunday mornings as the primary method to equip believers to serve and to

influence nonbelievers to confess their sins and accept the Lord as king. The A.M.E. church was

no different from any other church in this regard.

Beneath the Sunday worship umbrella was of course the choir, greeter's ministry, the

preached word, fellowship during service, announcements, and the invitation to Christian

discipleship. In partnership with Sunday worship was also church school. While church school

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[72] Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Academic, 2015), 183.

was common on Sundays there are challenges to this forum if it is to be an effective tool used to reach the lost or grow the ministry. When discussing Sunday school facilitation, Laura Cassidy-Moffatt arrested her readers' attention by stating, "It was shown to be an outdated model practiced by a dwindling group and is neither a church growth tool nor an effective discipleship model that is transforming lives. The model needs adaptation."[73] Cassidy-Moffatt facilitated research focusing on seven different Baptist churches to make these conclusions; however, any church participant has expectations that this tool is present at a church, yet they were not having positive growth as a result of church school. Moreover, all A.M.E. churches facilitated church school.

Church schools have been more of a fund-raising tool for the A.M.E. than an evangelism or equipping tool. This is not the result of bad or misdirected intentions, but instead, as Cassidy-Moffatt addresses in her research, it is a tool that needs to adapt to today's targeted demographic. During the period of research, the A.M.E. church primarily accessed all tools for Sunday school from the A.M.E. church school union. The content was generally well researched, yet the presentation of material and facilitation of classes was limited to the expertise of the local lay volunteer in most cases.

Weston W. Williams identified small groups as an important tool for evangelism. Small groups were discussed as a means of bible study targeting specific groups. These small groups were the equivalent of a class leader system implemented by the A.M.E. church. There were organized, intentional lessons that were focused on the Bible and intended to meet the needs of the group demographic by translating the Scripture to application. In his discussion about small groups, Williams pointed out that some groups meet at the church and others meet in people's

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[73] Laura Cassidy-Moffatt, "Spiritual Formation as More Than Cognitive Belief: An Ethnographic Study of Adult Sunday School in Baptistic Churches in Massachusetts," (DMin thesis, Bethel Seminary: St. Paul, 2016), 6.

homes. In each case there are challenges to the small group Bible studies because of leaders' and participants' dedication and maturity. For example, Williams stated, "Another reason home groups were less mature and grew less may be because the people placed in them were less mature in the beginning. This could have meant they lacked a desire to commit to a weekly meeting. It may be that they did not know how to grow in their home group."[74]

A.M.E. churches used a combination of preachers and lay members to facilitate small groups and Bible studies. There is a preference to have ordained preachers, either Elders or Deacons, lead, or partner in leadership with the laity. Unfortunately, church membership often outnumbered the number of ordained preachers. Moreover, it was common that several lay leaders that volunteer to lead these groups are stretched thin and can at times be ineffective due to burnout or lack of training. It was also important to point out that the ordained ministers in the A.M.E. church have gone through the Board of Examiners training, but this training focused more on A.M.E. beliefs and doctrine rather than teaching, evangelizing, or growing a church. There is another concern that Williams identified, which was that there were times when his research found that small groups became more focused on fellowship rather than Bible study, relegating the groups ineffective as an evangelism tool."[75] While this was a concern, there were additional tools used by the A.M.E. church to evangelize the gospel.

In addition to worship, church school, and bible study, there were other ministries that are common to A.M.E. churches and listed in the A.M.E.'s Discipline: Women's Missionary Society, Young People's and Children's Division (YPD), Lay Organization, Allen Cristian Fellowship, The Sons of Allen, and Music & Christian Arts. The Women's Missionary Society

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[74] Weston W. Williams, "The Intentional Church Evaluating Sunday School Classes, Small Groups, and Their Effectiveness," (type of paper, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2013), 64.

[75] Williams, "The Intentional Church Evaluating Sunday School Classes, Small Groups, and Their Effectiveness," 67.

has focused on meeting the needs of the community; however, this group does maintain fundraising responsibilities that can be distracting. The YPD was a crucial ministry that focused on infancy to young adulthood ending at the age of twenty-five, according to the Discipline. The Lay Organization was fully focused on organizing the church membership independent of any ministerial participation to empower the church laity to participate in the administrative work of the church. There were efforts to look outside of the walls of the church as a ministry, however the Lay Organization primarily looks to partner with the clergy to ensure church legislation is appropriate and that the church hierarchy maintains operational effectiveness. The Sons of Allen was formed for the purpose of encouraging men to become involved in helping other men find Christ. The Allen Christian Fellowship was formed for the purpose of promoting intelligent and practical Christian living among young people. The challenge to each of these ministries was their effectiveness with reaching this target demographic.

It was clear that the AME church valued organization and different types of ministries to function as the foundation to engage the masses. However, the ministries were each spearheaded by the presence of ministers that had confessed that they had received their calling from God. These leaders had proven to be foundational for every church to have success and longevity. Gregory compared the leaders in church organizations to that of Elisha the Old Testament prophet that cared for the well-being of both his peers who also prophesied as well as fellow laborers that served God.[76] Leaders that practiced spiritual disciplines as they served and cared for others while working in ministry assured that churches were sustained. Gregory stated, "When leaders openly demonstrate concern for the individual needs of their subordinates, they

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[76] Henson, Joshua D. *Modern Metaphors of Christian Leadership Exploring Christian Leadership in a Contemporary Organizational Context. 1st ed. 2020*. Pg. 26

increase the level of commitment those individuals are willing to express toward the

mission…"[77] It has been leaders that had led in the mold of Elisha demonstrating their care for

other laborers and followers that have propelled churches to sustain ministries year after year.

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[77] Henson, Joshua D. *Modern Metaphors of Christian Leadership Exploring Christian Leadership in a Contemporary Organizational Context. 1st ed. 2020*. Pg. 27

Chapter 3

Methodology

The goal was to find the people to participate in the research process. The project considered two perspectives. The first perspective was the participation from a group of the leader in the church. The leaders in the church were important because whether they recognize it or not each person leading has a direct impact on the members and potential members associated with St. Luke. Therefore, it was important to analyze the skill set, and mind set of the leaders at St. Luke. Leaders at the church included a combination of lay members and ordained preachers. Ordained preachers obtained either the deacon ordination or the elder ordination. Also, licensed non-ordained preachers were eligible to participate as leaders. This research attempted to get participation from each group.

In addition to the participant leaders pulled from the clergy, the research included lay leaders also. These leaders were associated with the missionary organizations, young people division, Sunday school department, Bible study, and small group ministries, to name a few. Furthermore, leaders were key because they too had a direct impact on how other participants viewed St. Luke and the ministries of St. Luke. The combination of leaders, both clergy and lay, demonstrating a willingness to change and adapt was key to proving the problem statement. Moreover, given the leaders were asked to change and adapt or evolve, an impediment to the ministry was identified which became a problem that needed a resolution to progress the ministry at St. Luke. This group was small, yet it was very important.

The second group of participants included people that were not practicing Christians and did not have a membership with St. Luke or any other church. One of the fundamental thoughts about the problem statement was that people in general were not in disbelief that God is real. To

the contrary, they were simply not engaged with the ministries at St. Luke in the current state or did not feel as though the ministry addressed their specific areas of need. Therefore, the goal was to understand the needs of people that were not in current active standings with St. Luke and identify why.

It was important to note that the societal norms at the times of this research changed due to COVID-19. This research adapted to the constraint of digital forums which impacted the participation of participants. Given that the Sunnyside community was considered a low-income area, it was expected that occasionally participants that wanted to participate were unable given their access to resources such as the internet, computers, tablets, or smartphones that would enable the necessary participation. Additionally, it was observed that participants were accustomed to traditional forums of ministry and expressed an unwillingness to participate outside of the normal sanctuary and classroom assembly settings.

Intervention Design

Identifying Candidates

The Sunnyside community was considered a community in need. Sunnyside was primarily Black or African American, about 82% of the community, which came to be over 20,000 people. Of the 20,000+ people in this community there was an estimated 6408 residents in the age range of 40-64 representing 31.6% of the population, an estimated 4257 residents within the ages of 22-39 representing 21% of the population, and an estimated 1274 between the ages of 18-21 representing 6.28% of the population.[1] The median income of this community was

[1] "Overview of Sunnyside, Houston, Texas," last modified September 14, 2018, accessed August 30, 2020, https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Texas/Houston/Sunnyside/Overview.

reported at an estimated \$28,600.[2] It was also reported that there were seventeen churches in the 77051 zip code and each of the churches' facilities have an occupancy ranging from 50 to 300.[3] If each of these seventeen church facilities could house 300 people there would only be 5000 people served combined; however with each of these facilities differing in size it was clear that the current presence of churches did not meet the population needs in Sunnyside.

Moreover, it was common to hear reports that church membership was down annually. Additionally, it was common to get reports that visiting was down at a number of the churches and given the current COVID-19 state there was a lesser-known presence of ministry and outreach efforts as churches became more familiar with online broadcasts and worship. More directly, concerning St. Luke, the average viewership online ranged from twenty to fifty people viewing weekly. Given the target to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth there was clear opportunity within the Sunnyside community. Most importantly, there was no presence of an effective ministry or outreach in Sunnyside. There was clearly a need for ministry and an opportunity for ministry.

To identify participants, there were four approaches used. The first was to use past St. Luke church roles. One primary reason was that a large portion of former members did not attend other churches. Therefore, if these members were not in church practicing their faith, they were prime candidates to participate in the research. In fact, if they were willing to share insights from their past experiences with St. Luke it would have given prime opportunities to evolve the ministries during the research term and could have impacted outreach as well as helped to

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[2] "Overview of Sunnyside, Houston, Texas," last modified September 14, 2018, accessed August 30, 2020, https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Texas/Houston/Sunnyside/Overview.

[3] "Churches in 77051," accessed October 4, 2020, https://www.faithstreet.com/locations/postal_codes/77051.

rebuild relationships with former membership. This could have been considered a definite win for the research and ministry efforts.

The second approach to identify candidates was to use the electronic platforms that were established to stream services. Due to COVID-19 St. Luke was forced to broadcast worship services online via YouTube. As expected, YouTube captured viewership, provided analytics about engagement, and maintained contact data for those who commented and liked videos housed on their platform. This information was used to identify and contact participants that were engaging St. Luke via YouTube. Once contacted, the researcher verified whether the viewers were willing to participate in the research project. It was observed that there was different and additional viewership from Sunday to Sunday which provided a number of new opportunities to evolve the ministry and outreach of St. Luke.

The third approach to identify candidates was also an electronic platform. Like YouTube broadcasts, Facebook became an important platform to feature St. Luke ministries given the stipulations associated with COVID-19. Facebook helped identify potential candidates with two methods. First, the platform-maintained contact history for people who viewed the church pages, those who liked the pages, and those who befriended the organization through the pages. Moreover, as a secondary opportunity to identify candidates, Facebook recorded those who interacted with the worship services as "views," which showed who commented and followed the organization because of the worship, preaching, and teaching that they were exposed to via the platform. This list of contacts was explored to find opportunities to engage worship participants with the research.

The fourth approach to identify participants was to partner with other churches in the Sunnyside community. As stated earlier, there were seventeen churches in the 77051-zip code,

all of which were expected to have a declining church role. More specifically, the goal was to

first source participants from Evangelist Chapel. Evangelist Chapel was one of the seventeen

churches identified in the Sunnyside community and Evangelist was also an A.M.E. Church. It

was considered beneficial to focus the research on a source of participants that were already

exposed to the A.M.E. beliefs and methodologies. If these four primary approaches failed to

retain the needed participants, then relationships with other churches near St. Luke would have

been used to identify contacts for research participants.

<div align="center">Approaching Contacts</div>

An introductory letter was written to communicate the details about the research. The

introductory letter provided an overview of the research assignment and introduced the idea

about creating a ministry that meets the needs of the Sunnyside community. The letter explained

that there was a desire to see the impact of churches grow in Sunnyside and asked participants to

help in finding key insights to grow engagement within the community as well as identify ideas

that would maintain the engagement with useful ministries that help lead people to Christ.

Using the approaches mentioned above, a contact list was drawn up to identify potential

participants. Depending on the source of the contacts, an introduction letter soliciting their

participation was issued. For those who were identified via a church role of former members,

whether from St. Luke or an alternative church, an email was issued to the potential participants.

For the participants that were identified through an electronic platform, i.e., Facebook or

YouTube, then direct messages were issued to the participants leveraging the engagement that

had already been established.

There were a few considerations to disqualify a potential participant from this research

project. One such disqualification was if the participant no longer lived in the Sunnyside

community or greater Houston area. Additionally, possible participants were disqualified if they were unable or unwilling to participate in any or all parts of the process, did not complete surveys or interviews within a reasonable time frame, expressed that they would be unwilling to receive Biblical lessons that were intended to lead the participant to accept Christ as their savior, and did not fall into the age of the target demographic.

The Research Process

The research process followed several standard steps. Primarily, each potential participant was contacted with the introductory letter. The letter asked each participant to respond within ten business days agreeing to participate. Upon responding to the introduction letter and agreeing to the intervention the participants were issued a survey to begin the data gathering process. The participants were asked to return the survey within ten business days.

Upon completing and returning the surveys each participant was asked to schedule interviews within fifteen business days. The fifteen business days allowed time for the researcher to review the participant surveys and prepare for interviews with each of the individuals. Interview questions were standard for each participant. The initial interview included questions resulting from the survey question answers with the intention of receiving clarity on answers as well as setting expectations about ministry participation and the feedback loop.

When the process with the participants was initiated, there were also surveys issued to ministry leaders. The survey for ministry leaders included questions about the current state of the ministry and outreach as well as ideas about the "to be state." Given that the ministry leaders were in place executing surveys and interviews of the leaders in parallel to the nonmember participant activities was feasible. Once expectations were set for both participants and ministry leaders the intervention transitioned to the ministry meetings and outreach activities.

Ministry meetings occurred in two phases. The first phase took place after the initial interviews. Participants were asked to participate in weekly ministry meetings. After participating in a couple of sessions, the participants were interviewed again to get feedback on the ministries. The feedback was used to make immediate updates to the ministry to ensure that the ministries were engaging and effective. The term for the first set of ministry interviews took place within a four-week term to make allowances of schedule conflicts. Once updates to the ministry were addressed, participants were interviewed a third time to verify if the changes to the ministry were effective and of value to keep in place going forward. Following the series of interviews and changes the research was concluded transitioning to the analysis steps to understand results with intentions of verifying if the problem statement had been resolved.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Assessing Leaders

The purpose of the intervention was to identify if there was an appropriate response to the St. Luke church's decline in membership. Given that the ages ranging from twenty-one to fifty-five were not well represented in St. Luke A.M.E. church, which mirrors a few of the other local Houston churches, this intervention sought to understand the why and identify the solution. More specifically, the intervention was purposed to understand how missing generations within the church can be replenished. It was conjectured that there were factors that drove away these key age groups such as lack of engagement, fruitless ministry programs, a communication gap, misdirected focus of ministry, or a facility that has not been maintained. The most important objective was to identify ideas that would rejuvenate the local ministry and draw this age group back to Jesus and His bride, the church. The intervention consisted of three different research

perspectives which included the assessment of the current leadership, reaching out to potential members, and implementing change within current ministry programs.

The behavior demonstrated while in ministry has commonly been considered a reflection of the character of the pastor and the church body as a whole; therefore, it was important to assess the leadership of St. Luke to determine if the leadership was demonstrating the characteristics of Christ. As stated by Jasmin Brown, "Many organizations including the Church have experienced myriad scandals and moral deterioration throughout the years, leaving people still desiring leaders in whom they can place their trust."[4] In fact, Brown advised that all forms of integrity are important and necessary for people that participate in ministry as Christian leaders.[5] This acknowledged the fact that ministerial staff and teachers were instrumental in teaching believers about Christianity and reflecting Christ for all members and participants. For that reason, the current state of the ministerial staff and teachers needed to be assessed. The assessment was to understand if the leadership aligns to Scripture primarily and the purpose of the teaching. For example, leaders were asked to verify if they believe in the Holy Trinity in reference to Luke 3:22.

Brown also stated that guidelines for Christian leaders should be employed to provide structures, standards, power dynamics, and guidance for doing church itself as a part of the ethical Christian standards model.[6] Therefore, certain standards were investigated for ministry and lay leaders. For example, Paul gave direction on how to be saved in Romans 10:9, which states, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart

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[4] Jasmin O. Brown, "The Importance of Integrity in Christian Leadership: Giftedness + Integrity[3] = Productivity," (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2012), 1, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[5] Ibid. 2.

[6] Ibid. 2.

that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (KJV). This text was used to set the criteria for salvation and then followed by the question of accepting Christ personally. A leader must buy in to the purpose of the program of which they were leading and without the most fundamental trait of Christianity being present it was impossible to believe that a leader can be effective. Basically stated, salvation was an essential requirement to be a leader in the church.

Sara Rolle, a contributing author to the book *Leadership Growth Through Crisis*, taught that "key character traits include authenticity, influence, quick acting, courageous, committed, focused, purpose driven, and aligns with the vision for the church while planning to make it successful."[7] These character traits ensured that ministry efforts and courses were purpose driven and relatable to those amongst the laity. For that reason, part of the assessment of the leaders focused on valuing spiritual growth and study to ensure that leaders were prepared. As an example of effective and prepared leadership Rolle used the relationship between Nathan and David in which Nathan provided leadership, learning, and a feeling of safety for David as expressed in 2 Samuel 12.[8]

Aderonke Kujore Adelekan directed leaders to consider Esther's example of humble leadership when she urged everyone following her to pray, trust God, and submit themselves boldly before the king to request forgiveness when their lives were under high threat of death, as outlined in Esther 4.[9] It was this type of leadership that demonstrated trust of the power of God that was important and must be assessed for existence in the St. Luke leadership. For that reason,

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[7] Sara Rolle, "Leadership in Crisis and Crisis in Leadership: A Courageous Follower's Perspective," in *Leadership Growth through Crisis: An Investigation of Leader Development during Tumultuous Circumstances*, ed. Bruce E. Winston (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 103.

[8] Ibid, 111.

[9] Aderonke Kujore Adelekan, "Toward a Greater Understanding of Crisis Leadership: A Christian Perspective and the Opportunities in Crisis," in Winston, 42.

the leadership was asked if they had any experience in leading a person to Christ and if they actively followed and obeyed God. The answers to these questions most assuredly revealed if a person was leading people to trust God and be saved.

Reaching Potential Members

The approach to reaching potential members was rooted within the spirit of evangelism and in the spirit of utilizing known connections primarily. The argument for the importance of evangelism was presented throughout the body of this document. For that reason, evangelism was at the root of the research. Ramón Luzárraga stated, "Popular religion is 'an indispensable starting point,' which is where a person daily encounters God's presence, receive supernatural wisdom as a gift of God's grace, as they celebrate life's joys and grapple with its struggles with others in their Church community."[10] Luzárraga taught that using one's spiritual gifts as a part of a personal evangelistic ministry has been practiced in Latin America, the Caribbean, and proven just as important locally wherever believers live.[11] For that reason, identifying potential members starts with existing relationships and expands beyond existing relationships until the ends of the earth.

Biblically, communities turned to Christ through evangelism within communities because of this neighborly act. In fact, the book of Acts illustrated a detailed and orderly eyewitness account of how the early church was born and grew because of the spread of the gospel immediately after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the book of Acts narrated how the ministry was integrated into everyday life as a part of finding value in the ministry of Jesus as discussed between witnessing neighbors. Acts 1:8 gave account of the empowerment that occurs

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[10] Ramón Luzárraga, "Always a Theology of the People: Theology in the Anglophone Caribbean," *Politikologija Religije* 11, no. 2 (2017): 259.

[11] Ibid. 11.

for individuals who choose to witness and evangelize the Gospel of Christ by saying, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (NIV). While at times it was not thought of as an individual's responsibility to witness, the expectation was for every believer to witness to the Gospel of Christ. Moreover, when a believer was obedient to the directive of witnessing, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit for the task at hand. Ravi Gokani and Lea Caragata taught that believers should be actively sharing how we got through stuff as believers in Christ who use their faith.[12]

Therefore, the first goal of this research was to evangelize former members. While it was not documented why members left the church, given the known relationships, available contact information for former members, visitors, and friends of St. Luke, there was already a bridge to approach this group of people. Gokani and Caragata advised that believers were aware of the emptiness and brokenness of the people in their community and can offer Christ to address these needs and many more.[13] Identifying former members presented the opportunity to reestablish relationships between the St. Luke ministries. Moreover, it opened the door to learn why the member left and settle any lingering issues from the past. In fact, this line of communication not only addressed the healing of any issues and visibility into yesterday's issues, but it also enabled the church to know if members went to other churches or if they had set aside their religious practices.

Former members that had continued their service and faith, and who walk under the guidance of other churches, were encouraged to continue their faith walk with their chosen

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[12] Ravi Gokani and Lea Caragata, "'Non-Violent Evangelism': A Look at how Members of Evangelical Faith-Based Organizations Share Faith with Service Recipients in Southern, Ontario, Canada," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work* 40, no. 3 (2021): 270.

[13] Ibid., 273.

church. Alternatively, those who had set aside their religious practices and faith walk were

witnessed to and encouraged to return to St. Luke and participate in this research to populate the

missing generations. Gokani and Caragata suggested the approach of using respect, honor, and

listening as a means of earning the right to be heard when evangelizing.[14] Therefore, when the

former members were contacted the researcher listened to understand what fractured the

relationship between the former member, apologetically approached mending fences, and offered

guidance on how to reinstate the relationship between the former member and St. Luke. As

stated by Gokani and Caragata, "We use programs as a means to build a relationship […] It is

sharing God's love. Sharing God's word in inviting them to have a relationship with God."[15]

The second alternative to identify research intervention participants was to look to other

local churches' former members. While there was not the same type of existing relationships, it

was assumed that former members of other churches were primarily believers in God.

Additionally, aligning with the faith once practiced could create an opportunity for the researcher

to understand what caused the relationship with that church and God to fracture or be set aside.

Gokani and Caragata taught that these interactions with believers should be used for prayer as

well as understanding what needs exist.[16] Similarly to the former members of St. Luke, if a

former member of another church indicated that they had joined a different church or ministry in

order to actively work out their soul's salvation, they were eliminated from research candidacy

and encouraged to continue their faith walk as is.

The final means of identifying candidates for the research intervention was to look at the

Sunnyside community and surrounding areas directly. Originally, the outreach in the community

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[14] Gokani and Caragata, "'Non-Violent Evangelism,'" 274.

[15] Ibid. 274.

[16] Ibid. 271.

considered door to door visitation and solicitation; however, given the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative means of identifying participants had been adopted. At the time of the research, St. Luke began to build its social media presence utilizing tools such as Facebook and YouTube. Thein Doan advised that older evangelism methods, described as invest and invite methods, which are dependent on believers collaborating directly with nonbelievers to guide to a sanctuary to be led to God, are less effective today.[17] In fact Doan states,

> This lessening evangelistic effectiveness is attributed to several reasons including the rise of the Millennial generation, the loss of a cultural Christian memory, and the rise of the none. The Seeker/Attractional Church model was birthed out of a desire to reach post-war Baby Boomers that strayed away from the traditional churches of their parents.[18]

Therefore, given the changes in generations it was appropriate to identify potential members and research candidates through social media.

Importantly, participants who engaged St. Luke through social media worship or ministry activities were identified just from participation and automatically communicated a means to contact through social media. As stated by 'White, et. al., "…Social media as a form of self-directed mass communication that allows people to communicate with each other without going through the channels set up by the institutions of society for socialized communication, encompassing a broad range of activities, platforms, and technologies all with a common theme…"[19] Given the clear ability to communicate, and assumed agreement in the necessity to either serve, worship, or honor God, these connections can be taken advantage of for the purpose of the research intervention.

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[17] Thien H. Doan, "30-Day Evangelism Challenge: A Video-Based, Social Media-Driven Evangelism Training Program" (DMin thesis, Biola University, 2017), 10-11, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[18] Ibid. 11.

[19] P. White, F. Tella, and M. D. Ampofo, "A Missional Study of the Use of Social Media (Facebook) by Some Ghanian Pentecostal Pastors," *Koers* 81, no. 2 (2016): 1.

Implementing Change within Current Ministry Programs

The next purpose of this intervention was to address the need for change within ministry programs. As stated by Andrew Davis, "The most powerful weapon in the hands of our Almighty Lord for the destruction of Satan's dark kingdom is a healthy local church. No one knows this better than Satan, and therefore it is expected that he will be vigorously active in fighting reform efforts made in specific local churches."[20] Therefore, as information became available, the ministry was asked to be responsive in bringing about change to the ministry. In fact, Davis teaches that a part of revitalization is to recognize the opposition and transform into a healthy, fruitful Great Commission church.[21]

For that reason, each interaction with the leadership to assess their state of wellbeing as ministry leaders was documented. Any shortfalls, lack of strategy or adoption, lack of knowledge or content, lack of motivation, and other distresses that impacted the health of a local ministry were documented for the purpose of driving change to transform the ministry. Additionally, every interaction with a potential member of St. Luke was documented to understand that person's state of living out Christian agenda and how St. Luke can partner in their growth. Davis stated, "Christian views on salvation, the exclusivity of Christ, sexual morality, the sanctity of human life, the nature and permanence of marriage, and the like, are less and less accepted. The steep decline in the health and fruitfulness of many local churches is both a cause and an effect of this decaying orbit."[22] However, a Christian ministry should illustrate the fact that Christ is

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[20] Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 17.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

great, and the Word of God is sufficient to address how to abound today by strengthening a relationship with Christ.

Therefore, specific to ministry and outside of the weekly worship this intervention looked to not only engage leadership and potential members, but it also looked to evolve in meeting people where they are in the present. Ideally, the changes made to the content of ministry, how content was presented, how people engaged with St. Luke, and how effective St. Luke was maintaining a relationship with the missing generations that were being directly evangelized to for the purpose of the Great Commission was intended to be impactful to all participants.

The Tasks that were Done

Seeking Research Approval

As a part of the Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Doctor of Divinity program, each candidate was required to both substantiate their research and gain approval from the Institutional Review Board. The Institutional Review Board review process ensured that research was addressed ethically and met the standards of Liberty University's doctoral program. As a part of this process, the approval of the Liberty University faculty mentor was provided to illustrate approval of the direction of the research and the approach to execute the research.

The Institutional Review Board required submission of several materials including a document to gain consent from participants, a letter for recruiting participants, and any documents used to facilitate research such as surveys or questionnaires. Additionally, the Institutional Review Board required the completion of a questionnaire and engaged the researcher to understand the problem statement, method or research, how research results are to

be used, how results were to be secured, and how privacy was employed as a part of the research process. The Institutional Review Board and faculty approval, once granted, positioned the researcher to begin the research according to the plan documented which worked towards addressing the hypothesis in question ethically.

<div align="center">Develop Questionnaires</div>

The goal of the research was to identify how the missing generations from twenty-one to fifty-five could be reengaged with St. Luke and build the ministry of today's church. The hypothesis for this research assumed that if ministry and programs were created or evolved to engage and meet the needs of adults twenty-one to fifty-five, then individuals will not only receive the message of salvation through Christ, but also join St. Luke as a member of the church. The transition from potential member to full member was dependent on identifying the current state of ministry and the perspective of non-members about St. Luke's ministry to the community. Therefore, a standardized list of questions was necessary to address the people identified as leaders in the church as well as the non-member participants.

Outside of the research presented throughout this thesis, the authority on behavior, character, relationships, salvation, and growth were derived from the Holy Scripture. Therefore, outside of the consent agreement each question had been presented with a dependency on the Holy Scripture to ensure that all engaged, whether leader or non-member participant, understood that all were subject to the authority of all mighty God. Given the desire to prove the hypothesis surveys for leaders, non-member participants, and follow up interviews were documented.

Understanding the impact and influence of leaders in the ministry it was important that the message of reliability, responsibility, and a desire to demonstrate the essence of Christ in the

role of a leader within the ministry was not only communicated but urged through the questions asked of participants. Therefore, a list of fourteen questions was created with the intention of assessing the current state of the leader and the leader's willingness to evolve for the good of the ministry and St. Luke. Furthermore, each of the fourteen questions was attached to Scripture excerpts which not only communicated God's authority and expectations, but also challenged the leaders to submit to Christ's authority in their considerations for answers. While it would be great for the leaders in Christ to research the context and message of the scriptural excerpts, it was not necessary to respond to the questions and understand that the ministry's intentions are to exalt God as opposed to oneself.

On the other hand, the questions for non-member participants were created to identify their current relationship with God, identify if participant families could be ministered to, and assess what type of ministry interested the participant. Furthermore, the questionnaires sought to identify the cause of fractured church relationships or why there had not been a relationship with God and his church in the past. Moreover, there was an intent to communicate the authority of the Holy Scriptures to non-member participants as well. Therefore, on selected questions Scripture excerpts had been assigned to the question. Again, it was not necessary for the participant to research the context of the scripture excerpt; however, the goal was to align the participant with God's role in the research and purpose for ministry. Nineteen questions were created to assess the state of the non-member participant's opinion of St. Luke, active ministries, and personal relationship with God. Of the nineteen questions eight were rooted in Scripture to discuss God's authority and their personal state of salvation, according to the Gospel. Finally, there was an open text box included with the questionnaire to allow the non-member participant to freely express any thoughts about church, church ministries, or their relationship with God

which may have impeded their pursuit of growing in their relationship with God and his bride, the church.

<center>Identify the Right Tools to Facilitate Research</center>

There were several tools considered to conduct the research. Of course, obvious everyday tools such as paper and in-person interactions were at the front of the list. However, the ability to retrieve and secure paper documents long term, in a timely manner, was a challenge. The idea of issuing paper documents required active in-person participation and created an unnecessary expense for the research process. Under normal circumstances the researcher assumed that people would take documents home and return them within agreed upon schedule terms; however, during the changing societal norms as dictated by COVID-19 the researcher assumed that return of physical documents would be impeded. Moreover, there was an expectation that some participants would lose or misplace the forms and issuing paper documents repeatedly would not support the time constraints of the research.

Social media was an option to communicate with research participants as well. However, the challenge to align consistently through social media was a concern. Each participant did not use or maintain the same social media tools. That would proliferate the communication effort across multiple platforms and add additional privacy concerns due to the participants' ability to unintentionally post the survey and responses through the social media. For these reasons, the researcher eliminated social media as the foundational communication tool.

The next tool considered to communicate the questionnaire securely and effectively was the Microsoft suite including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Of course, these tools were effective in documenting the messaging to be communicated, but there is a lack of controls to capture

participant feedback effectively and consistently. Moreover, using the Microsoft suite of applications was heavily dependent on email exchanges. Moreover, the tools to address analysis were not built in and required manual manipulation which would result in errors.

The final tool considered was a survey tool. Many survey tools were considered using Google to search and compare including Qualtrics Core XM, Survey Monkey, Alchemer, Get Feedback, and Momentive, to name a few. The features and capabilities of the tools were compared to understand which tool would be best to implement as a part of the research process including cost, analytical tools, the number of questions that could be included in the survey, options for communicating using the tool, ability to reissue or follow up on surveys issued, and notifications about survey responses or lack of responses. Thus, SoGosurvey.com provided the best combination of features and capabilities to manage the surveys and was the selected tool going forward. The survey questions were then transitioned from a word template into SoGosurvey.com and set up for execution upon participant contact information being uploaded.

In addition to the survey tool, it was clear that additional communication tools were necessary to address the research. Given the presence of COVID-19 in the Sunnyside community, in-person meetings were discouraged to limit the spread of the virus. Therefore, an online platform was needed to facilitate both group ministry meetings and one-on-one discussions online. The platform needed to provide secure login, the ability to record sessions, and the ability to present or share documents during each session. The tool identified to facilitate meetings online was Google Meet. Also, to support additional communication needs, telephones were also used to facilitate interviews and to address questions about the research project.

Contacting Participants and Executing the Research

With the method to identify participants selected and the tools to facilitate the research in place, the next step was to begin reaching out to potential participants. A list of leaders from the church was first created to begin the research of the known group of leaders. Phone calls were made to all leaders of church ministries including ordained preachers, evangelists, and lay leaders. While all leaders were welcome to participate, the researcher determined that five participants were an acceptable number to represent a sample of the leaders actively working as a part of the St. Luke ministry team. Fortunately, five participants accepted the invitation and provided their email addresses to initiate the next steps. First, a consent form explaining the purpose of the research, how others can benefit from the study, how personal information would be protected, how to withdraw if they changed their mind, how to contact the facilitator of the research, and how to contact the IRB if needed for any reason was sent to the participants. Participants were asked to respond within ten days of receiving the consent document.

Upon responding to the consent document, and after receiving their consent, the leaders completed the fourteen-question leadership survey. The leadership survey required less than thirty minutes even if someone took time to investigate and digest each question. Alternatively, the survey took less than ten minutes for most participants given the simplicity of the questions and understanding the authority of the Scripture. Participants completed and submitted the survey within fifteen days. After submitting the survey, participants were interviewed to review the answers submitted on the survey.

While actively engaging the ministry leaders, the researcher reviewed past St. Luke membership records to identify former members that were still living. The researcher created a list of people and phone numbers, and the work began to contact former members. The non-

member participant goal originally was thirty for the research; however, after many attempts to find candidates failed, the researcher reduced the number of required participants to ten. Many people from the church records had invalid contact information. Additionally, approximately one in fifteen former members with valid contact information accepted the invitation. Also, several people who accepted the invitation did not respond to the consent email from SoGoSurvey.com.

Therefore, the researcher executed contingency steps. The researcher contacted other churches in the Sunnyside community to provide a list of former congregants. This request was met with some reluctance from a few church leaders, however there were candidates identified from this method. Similarly, to the list of former St. Luke members, this list of perspective participants did not provide enough participants to participate and complete the research process. For that reason, the researcher reviewed YouTube broadcast contact logs and subscribers along with St. Luke's Facebook friends' lists to complete the participant search. The use of each of the methods planned identified a responsive group of ten participants to take part in the research.

Similarly, to the steps followed for the leadership team, the researcher pursued either written or verbal agreement to participate in the research intervention. This communication initiated the issuance of the consent agreement to the perspective participants. The researched requested that participants complete the consent within five days. If the potential participants did not respond by agreeing to the official consent or reach out with questions in five days, the researcher followed up with the participants using phone calls, instant messages, or emails to gain consent. In some cases, the researcher reissued the consent requirement through the survey tool and in other cases the researcher identified new participants if candidates remained nonresponsive or withdrew due to the language or research ideas illustrated in the consent agreement.

The researcher issued the non-member survey to participants that accepted the consent agreement. The participants were directed to respond to the non-member survey within five days of receiving the non-member survey. If a participant did not respond within the requested five days, the researcher executed a series of follow ups via phone calls, instant messages, and emails. In some cases, participants became unresponsive or chose to withdraw, requiring the use of the above outlined process to identify a new candidate. The non-member nineteen-question survey was designed to accept to thirty minutes to complete; however, most participants completed the survey between ten to fifteen minutes.

As participants completed and submitted the survey, the researcher reviewed the results and scheduled follow-up interviews. In addition to scheduling follow up interviews, the researcher invited participants to attend Bible study courses focused on applying Scripture to current day life. The researcher requested participants to participate over a period of eight weeks. During this time period the research documented feedback based on the current state of ministries and created a backlog of ideas to develop new approaches. The researcher assumed that their participants may be absent during the eight-week period; therefore, after the participants attended the first two sessions interviews were executed to gauge effectiveness, comfort with material, perception of leaders for courses, and ideas for new approaches to deliver Christian content. Additionally, the researcher challenged participants to continue engaging the St. Luke ministries and consider membership to fill the generational gaps identified as missing within St. Luke.

Data Analyzed

The data analysis identified and accumulated multiple types of data with most of the focus driven by qualitative data analysis. The data captured for the leadership group was different from data captured from the non-member participants. However, identified and captured similar themes among the participants from both groups. Themes that ran parallel between the data groups focused on belief and how the belief impacted their interaction with the church ministries at St. Luke. The researcher broke down the initial data groupings between believers of Christ and non-believers. When considering the believers versus non-believers, the researcher compared responses to draw conclusions about actions. Additionally, the researcher evaluated the data to determine if the ministry programs were considered beneficial for both groups and if there was a willingness to participate regardless of current belief.

There was an expectation that the data would also reveal opinions about the leaders' capacity to lead in an impactful manner when engaged with believers and nonbelievers. Additionally, the data identified effectiveness and confidence of the active leaders which revealed their ability to adapt to change and use new content. Leaders' responses indicated if the leadership's capacity to lead was influenced by a sense of personal calling as well as the length of time each participant served in a leadership role. Ideally, this belief represented the leader's effectiveness with current ministry content as well as new content which should ideally be affirmed by attendees.

The data also exposed if a leader was an effective follower. An effective minister was expected to buy into the followship of Christ as well as the followship of the pastor and vision cast for ministry. The data assessed how the leader was currently interacting with material and opinions about new materials which encompassed the leader's adaptiveness for new courses as

recommended by the potential members. Moreover, the researcher considered participant survey answers in addition to observations while presenting new course material and a willingness to change presentation methods and/or materials as a means of pivoting to demonstrate compliance to an adaptive ministry to engage the targeted groups.

Transitioning from the leader analysis there was a focus on the current state of belief for the non-member. The researcher intended to use this approach to identify personal beliefs first and then the researcher investigated each participant's family status. Using the participant's belief and family status provided insight on whether one household's conversion or new membership could singularly address the gaps in membership identified in the problem statement. Moreover, the belief and family status indicated what additional opportunities for ministry were necessary to impact the community. Whereas the goal of this research was to solve the problem of multiple missing generations, it was key to take advantage of revelations about all age groups within a household and prepare the ministry to meet the needs of all identified.

Continuing to build on the data of belief of the possible participants the goal was to identify the level of spiritual influence in the non-member's life. It was important to not only understand whether there is belief in God or not, but there was also a need to understand the wellbeing of the person's belief. This meant exploring the idea of a relationship with God and most importantly their opinion and relationship with Jesus Christ. The approach here was to present Scripture about the Holy Trinity and follow up with questions about salvation as an individual. Similarly, the researcher utilized questions about spiritual status and wellbeing to understand the state of the spouse, if applicable.

Of additional importance was to understand what caused the person and their spouse to not participate in worship, church membership, or ministry at this point in their lives. The

researcher investigated each person's past experiences in a church or ministry environment. The goal here was to determine what caused the participant to disengage from church or God. Moreover, there was a look into the positive and negative experiences to identify church hurt as a reason that caused disengagement. Additionally, a root cause of disengagement was a lack of programs, learning opportunities or studies that focus on scriptural life application. The researcher used the data collected to draw conclusions about the ministry's effectiveness in relating to both individuals and families. The researcher leveraged the data to create a backlog of future content, programs, and services.

Protocols and Using Tools

The researcher used surveys and interviews to identify and gather information. Both surveys and interview questions were standard for both groups of participants, leaders and nonmembers. The researcher issued survey questions using the So Go survey tool and the researcher reviewed each submission after completion. The researcher interviewed each nonmember participant after the survey submission. Additionally, the researcher scheduled each participant in upcoming ministry meetings or class sessions.

Nonmember participants joined the ministry classes or meetings after the surveys were completed. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with the nonmember participants to gauge the impact of the ministry class or session. The researcher sought to use the second interview to understand the effectiveness of the material and the leader during the sessions. Additionally, the research requested feedback concerning the content's relatability and ease of application. The intent of this reflection was also to understand if the content, interactions in the classes, and direction by the leaders had an impact on the participants' spiritual wellbeing. In

addition to impacting the spiritual wellbeing of the person it was also important to understand if the participation encourages the participant to plan to seek membership and become further engaged in the ministry.

Alternatively, the interviews of the leader participants helped to understand if the leaders felt as if they were currently engaged well with participants and if the content being taught or presented was effective. The researcher asked leaders to evaluate if changes influenced participants to not only return to future classes, but to grow closer to God. As an observer of the classes, the researcher was able to witness whether the participants engaged as described by the leaders. By meeting with both leaders and nonmembers the researcher was able to identify constructive collaboration between both participants and develop an opinion on the effectiveness of the changes. The researcher used sensing to identify themes within the responses, and interactions resulting from the meetings and classes. The researcher used the assumptions of this project, and the current state of the St. Luke ministry, a special note of silence or unspoken truths to identify additional data in the report.

Chapter 4

Results

Impact of COVID on the Study

After reviewing the census data for the Sunnyside community there was optimism that there was a great opportunity to find an unlimited number of participants to participate in the research project. The census revealed that there were several community members of which fell under the missing generations, both male and female. Observations of the community immediately revealed several neighborhoods with single family homes, multi-unit apartment complexes, and multiple K-12 schools, which was an indicator that the missing generations were present. However, COVID-19 has had multiple impacts on the research for this project. The effect of the pandemic had an impact on recruiting participants, feedback forums, scheduling, and availability for participation.

Finding candidates from the community became one of the biggest challenges of the research project. The research was launched at the height of the pandemic when the tactics used to fight against the illness included staying home and avoiding people. Small and large group settings were restricted, which impacted the ability to identify candidates by word of mouth or visitors to St. Luke who may be seeking services or a church home. Additionally, the restrictions and precautions about interacting with people due to the ease of disease transmission prevented door to door recruiting or any other recruitment that could occur via foot traffic. Another heavily impactful factor was the response to word-of-mouth initiated from St. Luke members to their friends and families.

Some of the feedback received resulting from word-of-mouth attempts was that there were other priorities that were more important than starting a new spiritual journey, finding a

church home, or participating in a research project. The recruitment of people to participate was fulfilled by using many different outlets including word-of-mouth, past roll contact lists, and social media. Additionally, there were cycles of people who agreed to participate but became infected and pulled out or became responsible for the care of others causing them to end their participation. In fact, there were some who filled out the form to participate and then became unavailable or would not return follow ups calls, which was later revealed to be tied to the virus.

Time management and valuing time differently were also communicated as reasons to decline invitations to participate in the research. Many potential participants advised that the impact of working from home really cluttered the normal work life balance that was in place prior to the spread of COVID-19. There were reports of longer working hours, increased stress, and many other distractions for which there was no escape. This life experience simply eliminated the idea of participating in a research project. Additionally, many potential participants made the choice to focus more on their family. With many people having more time to see their family they took advantage of the time to get to bond. This too led to the rejection of invitations to participate.

Having feedback loops was of the utmost importance for the research project. The feedback loops were necessary from the leaders and potential members, whereas the leaders needed to give a perspective of interaction and impact while teaching and the leaders needed to give the perspective based on observations from monitoring the classes. Furthermore, the potential members needed to give their perspective of the course material and effectiveness of the leader presenting. The standard for this type of interaction prior to COVID-19 was in a classroom amongst peers. However, with the restrictions on coming together, online forums were necessary to facilitate.

A few observations can be noted from attempting to facilitate ministry classes online. Primarily, leaders' availability became impaired due to COVID. Schedule availability to teach and observe became difficult to manage. Additionally, several potential members were non-committal and failed to follow through due to priorities and COVID. These issues created problems because a potential member would start the process and then not follow through. This incomplete or partial participation eliminated candidates and required starting the process over by identifying new candidates. Additionally, this caused the research and feedback loops to be extended and separated due to participants starting the process at different times and attending different classes.

The result was ten people participated in the process as potential members. Five leaders participated from the member leader pool at St. Luke. Instead of the research portion of the project taking place within the originally planned term, the research term extended to over twenty weeks. Additionally, exceptions were made for not attending ministry courses or Bible studies consecutively as intended as a requirement to complete the research for the non-member participant. And while there was an intended plan to have consistent auditing of the courses or Bible studies, exceptions were made not to have a particular person in place to observe and audit. As the facilitator of the research, the researcher was present for all courses and Bible studies to observe and document the impact of presentations and interactions of leaders and nonmembers.

Evaluating Leaders

Leader Profile

Five leaders from St. Luke participated in this study. Among these leaders were two ordained ministers with the highest ordination of Elder available in the African Methodist Episcopal church. Both elders earned advanced education including master's degrees in religious

fields of study. Of the two ordained ministers one has served as a pastor of both an A.M.E. and a non-denominational church in the past. The other ordained minister has never pastored but has participated in many different denominational ministries. Both have been members of St. Luke for over five years. Both were also over the age of sixty.

The other three ministers were under the age of sixty, with one person in their mid-fifties and the other two in their thirties. Neither of the three ministers have been ordained; however, one of the ministers was in pursuit of her first ordination as a deacon in the AME Church. This person earned a master's degree and is currently enrolled in seminary to pursue a Master of Divinity degree. The other two were not ordained and did not have a college degree. Two of these ministers were with the church for twenty plus years, while the other became a member for about two years prior to the research starting.

Of the five ministers two were male and three were female. Each of these ministers rotated leadership responsibilities that had included preaching Sunday messages, teaching Sunday school, Bible studies, and other courses offered to enhance the state of the believer. Given that each person had a direct line into the congregants through many different channels it was important that they buy into the vision of the pastor and accept the responsibility to evolve their approach and content which would have ensured that the congregants grew spiritually.

<div align="center">Current Spiritual State</div>

Assumptions were made that all leaders in the church were believers in Christ and would ideally practice what they preach. Moreover, assumptions were also made that the leaders in the church ministry had a deep desire to see the lives of people change because of the lessons drawn from Scripture due to their call from God. For that reason, each leader was questioned about the most basic part of their spiritual belief. Questions to evaluate belief were as follows:

Question 1:

Luke 3:22 states, "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus?
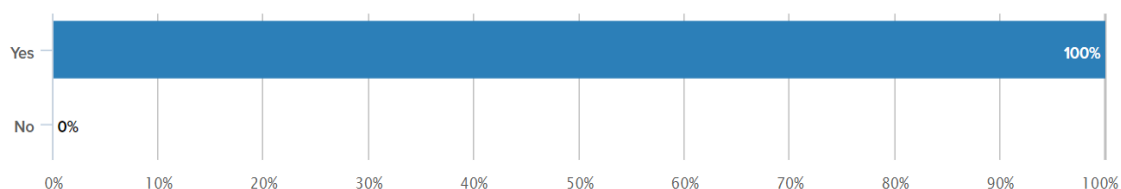

Figure 4.1. Leader responses to Question 1.

Question 2:

Romans 10:9 states, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Have you accepted God as your personal savior?
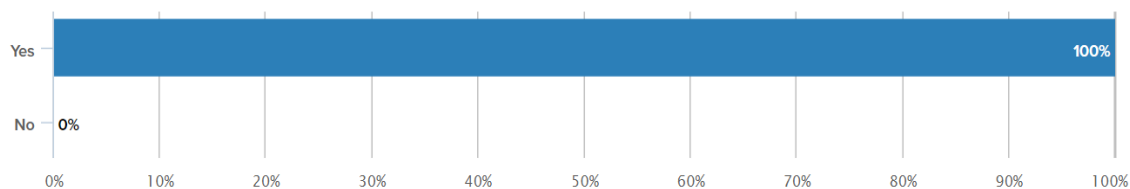
Figure 4.2. Leader responses to Question 2.

The results of these questions revealed what was expected and what was necessary. It was important that the people who worked in the church and held a position of influence each aligned on the fundamentals of Christian faith. This point concluded that the St. Luke ministry had the basics of what it needed to represent the presence and power of God. Importantly, the fact that the leaders firmly stated their faith suggested that they will have the ability to defend their faith as well as relay their faith to others for whom they would continue to be responsible.

Alternatively, if the leaders did not align on this fundamental portion of the faith there would have been a clear risk to the ministry to be effective. This would have led to not only gaps in lessons and approaches to teaching or managing information for the ministry but would have been a clear miss in assigning responsibilities for an important part of the church's ministry success. A leader that did not believe or expressed shaken faith would have left St. Luke vulnerable to any person that participated with alternative beliefs. Given this was not the case, no change in leadership was deemed necessary to continue the research based on the first set of questions. In fact, given that the leaders had accepted Christ and shared a willingness to confess their faith, a key building block to minister to the church and community was identified.

Spiritual Growth

The leadership team's current state of self-assessment continued by looking at trends for valuing spiritual growth and opinions of oneself as a leader in the church. The purpose for investigating thoughts on spiritual growth derived from many of Paul's teachings about maturity, growth, and a spiritual mindset; all of which impacted a person's well-being as well as the well-being of the people around them when it came to the assessment of sin versus righteousness. Moreover, when the position had enabled visibility into lifestyle, values, and leading others to be more like Christ, it was important that the leaders became spiritually strong and mature.

Spiritual growth was highlighted in many books of the Bible, both from the Old and New Testaments, illustrating the importance of humankind growing closer to God while maturing during their carnal walk. For example, the Prophet Samuel's growth was expressly documented in 1 Samuel 2:26, which stated, "And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people" (NIV). It was here where there is particular attention associated

to Samuel's spiritual growth as he gained favor through his relationship with God. Moreover, his relationship with people was also favorable enabling him to be a messenger and a worker for God. Each quality was necessary during the research for those who accepted the responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission as representatives of God's church.

Additionally, 2 Peter 3:18 taught, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (NIV). Also, Hebrews 6:1 taught, "Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death…" (NIV). Both New Testament scripture selections emphasized the necessity to grow spiritually to overcome death and become more effective in ministry. For that reason, two questions were asked of the leaders to gauge their understanding of the need for spiritual growth.

Question 3:

Colossians 1:9-10 states, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Do you value spiritual growth?
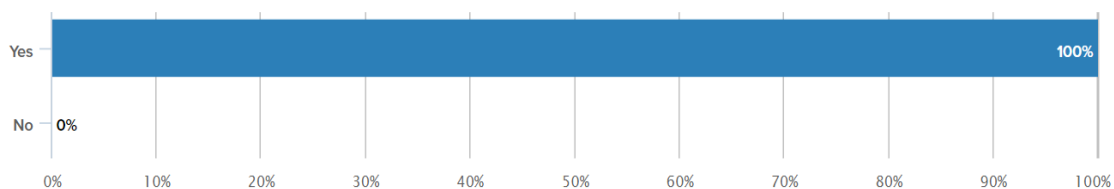
Figure 4.3. Leader responses to Question 3.

Question 5:

2 Timothy 2:15 states, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Do you study the Bible?
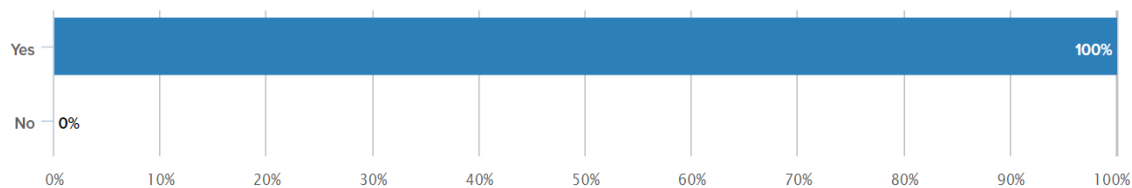

Figure 4.4. Leader responses to Question 5.

A consensus continued between the five subjects in that each personally identified with the need for spiritual growth. During interviews, each leader expressed similar responses in discussion of question 3 and stated that there was a clear understanding of why Colossians 1:9-10 was chosen to support the thought behind the question. In fact, in each participant, there was a similar desire to experience the wisdom and understanding that could only come from God. Moreover, while there were moments of regret expressed concerning personal spiritual walks with God, there seemed to be a common theme desiring to be better for God mostly and for the ministry partially.

However, when discussions about bearing fruit became the topic there were not considerate discussions about God's ministry, teaching better, being accountable to other Christians, or aligning with how personal growth along with the growth of others tied together. Well deserved, the ideas about spiritual growth were about battles with sin or matters of adversity leaving plenty of opportunity to shift focus on effectively evangelizing the Gospel of Christ and leading ministries that would influence others to accept Christ.

Of equal importance with a desire for spiritual growth was the approach to accomplish spiritual growth. One leader suggested that the primary method of spiritual growth was life experience referencing one of Jesus' teachings to his disciple after finding them asleep while

awaiting his return from praying. Matthew 26:41 states, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (NIV). While life experience was certainly a great teacher, there are other methods to grow spiritually. Accordingly, prayer was also a means of growth, as well as revelation from the Lord. There were sound doctrines found in the scripture which enabled each believer the same opportunity to gain experience spiritually.

The leaders also expressed that consuming the preached word was a primary means of growth and awareness of the Lord. Again, there was no denying the impact of the Gospel of Christ being preached; however, a leader in the church must be diligent in their studies of the Bible. It seems that each agreed whole heartedly that Bible study is a method to grow spiritually, but it was not emphasized. Another common theme was reading books about different self-help topics and, at times, utilizing commentaries. However, a true emphasis on the impact of Bible study for each was not a topic of discussion until the question itself was read back to the leaders. While each professed to study the Bible at times, there was no theme which demonstrated consistency in Bible study to grow spiritually strong. The gap between topics of Bible study and spiritual growth became a revealing factor in determining why potential members were not drawn to St. Luke's ministry. It may have been that there was not a foundation of Scripture being used as the core of interactions between leaders and laymen, which emphasized the need for programs that would have equipped leaders with the Word of God and prepared them to study disciplines that would be lasting in a society that was focused on worldliness.

In fact, as a deeper dive, the survey looked at the frequency at which Bible study was taking place. As noted in figure 4.5, sixty percent of the leaders questioned stated that they studied the Bible daily. Alternatively, there was a big gap between the others with a small portion that studied weekly and, even less frequently, there was a study occurring one to two

times a month. While there was alignment in the need for study, there was certainly no alignment

on the frequency of study.

Question 6:
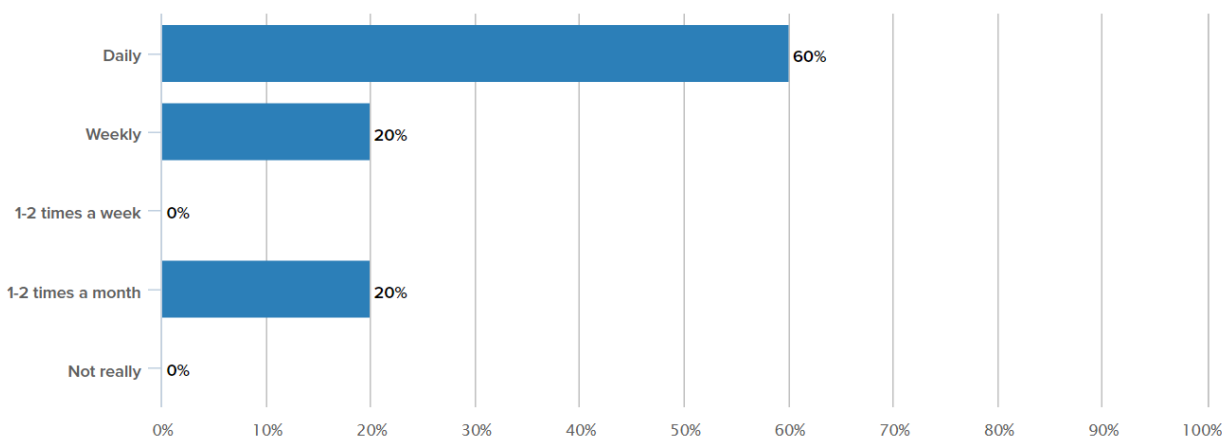
If so, how often do you study the Bible?

Figure 4.5. Leader responses to Question 6.

During the interviews questions concerning Bible study techniques and materials were

discussed. The biggest revelation that came from each of the leaders was that the term Bible

study was being mistaken with reading the Bible. Each referenced their Bible study as reading

daily Scripture through applications or reading and reflecting on personally meaningful

scriptures. Bible study required reference of a commentary or other supporting documentation of

the Scripture to understand the intent of the Scripture. Moreover, Bible study also required an

understanding of the culture and context of the passage selected. With well-rounded opinions of

the Scripture, and an understanding of the culture and context of the Scripture, a person's studies

would reveal opportunities for life application. These lessons prepared a person to evangelize

and defend the Gospel of Christ. Additionally, this type of study would have prepared leaders

with the tools to appeal to the current state of God's creation to influence them to repent of their sin and accept Christ in their hearts.

Given the confusion between reading the Bible and studying the Bible, a new discipline was deemed necessary if the goal were to improve the impact of St. Luke's ministry. More importantly, the frequency of study needed to increase more intentionally to strengthen ministerial efforts. Another point that was revealed in the interviews was the lack of consistent participation in Bible study courses that were led by other leaders at St. Luke. One common book that was used amongst each of the leaders is church "School Literature." Although there continued to be gaps in consistent usage which was driven by personal schedules to lead church school, there was a general usage that gave insights from commentaries and other thought leaders from the field of Christian studies.

It was unmistakable how important it was to study the Bible. Yet, given the known importance there was one member of the leadership team that only considered studying once or twice a month. This Bible study was not intentional or habitual. The interview revealed that it was more of a chore and only approached in times of clear need. No examples were provided of what could have inspired more study. Alternatively, the leader which made the choice to study once or twice a week desired to feel a closeness with God but had expressly identified several other priorities which prevented more study. Again, the study did not include supporting literature, but focused on reading scriptures to strengthen and encourage oneself throughout the day.

Am I a Leader?

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Preparation is the key to leadership success. The more prepared you are the less your struggle..."[1] which suggested that the struggles of St. Luke could be minimized if the leaders were better prepared. For that reason, it was important to understand if the leaders considered themselves leaders. A hypothesis could be derived to suggest that these leaders did not study with the frequency expected simply because they did not see themselves as leaders in the church. Question four focused the participants on the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics of leaders, according to the Holy Scripture, with the intent to be reflective on perception of participatory roles.

Question 4:

Ephesians 4:11-15 states, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." Do you consider yourself an effective leader for God in the church?
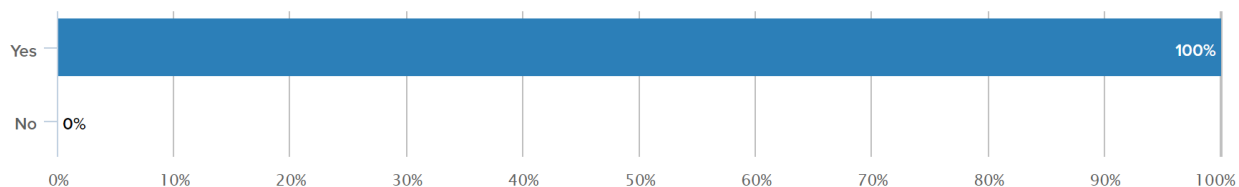

Figure 4.6. Leader responses to Question 4.

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[1] Franklin, Benjamin, "Quote Ambition 70 Preparation Quotes on being Ready at all times," Last modified 2022, access date November 2, 2023, https://www.quoteambition.com/preparation-quotes/

As expected, each leader participant responded to this question stating yes, they considered their role as a leader in the St. Luke ministry. During the interview, each participant expressed similar thoughts about the role of leader. Neither had a specific conversation with the senior pastor about an appointment to a leader role, but instead the role of leader was due to each person's calling from God first. To support the calling from God, each stated that there was a natural assumption of leadership by preaching and teaching roles in the church.

Given the participants' assumed the role of leader during the interview, a discussion about personal responsibility in either growing the church membership, maintaining a relationship with active members, and being prepared to better engage the community occurred. The leaders deferred primarily to the appointed pastor and other official offices within the church as the responsible parties. It was at this point that Ephesians 4 was again brought to the forefront of the discussion. Specifically, if there was a call and an inherent responsibility to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God…" (Eph. 4:12, NIV), how can a person who has self-asserted the role of leader defer the responsibility of leadership to others?

Another point in reference to Ephesians 4 was the clear attack on Christianity and God's bride the church. A question was presented to inquire on how the responsibility of engaging and building the ministry could have been deferred given the many different doctrines that have sought to detract from the power of God's gospel, especially given its apparent effects on St. Luke's ministry effectiveness to reach the missing generations. Specifically, the Bible stated that those called to be leaders are to work to ensure that believers "may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14, NIV). Results

of this discussion found agreement that each individual leader had work to do to fulfill the role in a manner necessary to lead the lost to Christ and strengthen believers.

The questionnaire sought to assess each leader's maturity by the term that each leader has actively led in the church. The results of this question provided insight into the commitment and perception of responsibility within the ministry. A hypothesis was determined that if a person has been a leader in the ministry for a longer term that they would better understand the necessity to study and be an active part of growing the ministry. Alternatively, a hypothesis was derived suggesting that leaders that did not have lengthy experience as church leaders did not have the exposure or training to own the responsibility of study in preparation of being an active part of growing the ministry.

Question 7:

How long have you been a leader in the church?
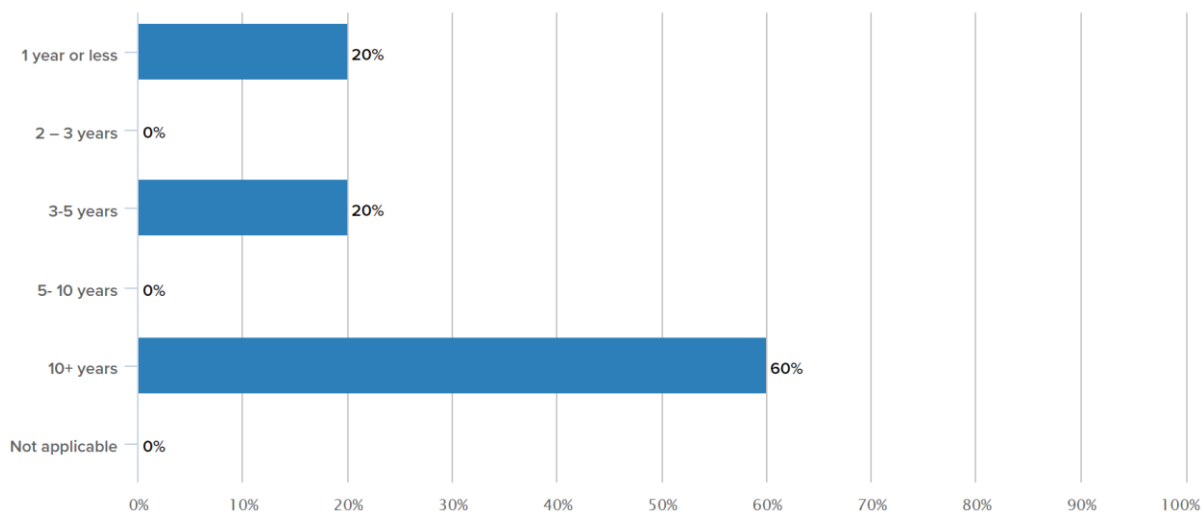
Figure 4.7. Leader responses to Question 7.

Given the two hypotheses proposed a favorable outcome was expected considering the need to own the responsibility to grow the ministry as well as preparing to teach and defend the Gospel of Christ. Sixty percent of the participants had led for more than ten years. An important

revelation revealed in the leader profile was that two of the leaders had filled pastor roles in their past. Given the history of leadership in roles past, and their lengthy terms of leadership in the church, the hypothesis was proven to be false that tenure inspires ownership of responsibilities.

With twenty percent of the leaders' experience falling within the three-to-five-year parameter the researcher derived that this group's representation was neither that of a novice nor an expert. Given the hypothesis of length of time influencing acceptance and ownership of ministry preparedness and ownership, a false validation was again identified based on responses to interview questions and questionnaire responses. The final response confirmed the second hypothesis about owning responsibility to prepare and engage others in building the body of Christ.

The final twenty percent fell within the parameters of one year or less of leadership experience which supported the hypothesis of a novice not having the training or insight to be responsible for the growth of the ministry. Additionally, this experience level of leadership became revealing when the approach and frequency of studying the Bible to prepare for the work in the ministry was considered. It was also worth investigating if the influence of the other tenured leaders' approach contributed to the novice minister becoming negatively influenced. Alternatively, a hypothesis was derived that suggested if the approach of the pastor in studying, teaching, and preaching was visibly different than his example was the example to follow. Either way, it was necessary to adopt newer study habits and approaches to be an effective leader for God's ministry at St. Luke.

<div align="center">How the Leaders Execute Their Purpose</div>

The Great Commission required people to have a sense of responsibility when it came to evangelizing the Gospel of Christ. Not only was there a requirement for believers to own the

responsibility of evangelizing, but Scripture also taught that if there was not ownership and action that there was no way for the Gospel to go forward and be effective. Romans 10:14 taught, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (NIV). This was meaningful to all leaders in the ministry because they must play an instrumental part in having an effective ministry. Leaders were on the front lines and without owning the responsibility and living the purpose St. Luke's ministry would not have a chance to reach the missing generations.

To live the purpose each leader was required to be a willing evangelist and grow their skills to become a capable teacher. The result of active evangelism and effective teaching would bring about results that grow the body of Christ. One result of these two practices was conversions or rededications. Someone who had not accepted Christ as their personal savior accepts him because of hearing the Gospel of Christ. An additional action was for the person that knew Christ but had lived in active rebellion to choose to repent about the circumstances of their rebellion resulting in a rededication of their commitment to live righteously. Each believer should be actively working to lead people to Christ. However, leaders in the church needed to lead by example with their effort to be an instrument of the lost being saved. For that reason, question 8 was proposed with conversation during the interview focused on exploring the circumstances around the answer.

Question 8:

1 Peter 4:10 states, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace…" Have you lead anyone to Christ?
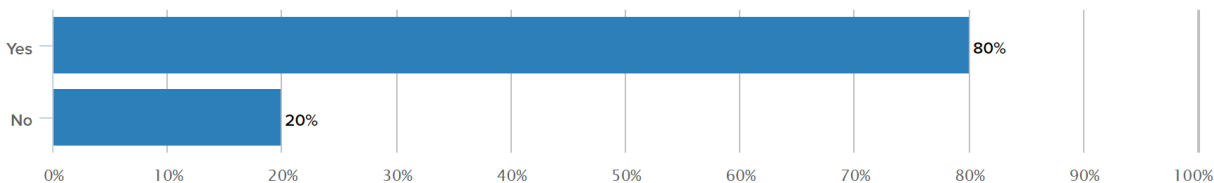
Figure 4.8. Leader responses to Question 8.

Every believer should have an experience leading someone to Christ and witnessing the Holy Spirit work as the proposition concerning living in sin versus living in righteousness was proposed. The acknowledgement of accepting Christ is life changing for the person who accepts Christ, as well as for the person who offers Christ. For this reason, the question is prefaced by the reference of 1 Peter 4:10. During the interview each leader was asked if they had considered themselves as gifted, anointed, or empowered to do the work of evangelizing the Gospel. While there were times of reflection over difficult or challenging times, each affirmed the receipt of one or the other. The interview, after affirming either a feeling of being gifted, anointed, or empowered for the work of evangelism, then asked if there was a feeling of being responsible for the people around them.

The Scripture excerpt states that believers are good stewards of God's grace by serving one another. Therefore, it was important to have a sense of responsibility for the people around one another or within a person's circle of friends and acquaintances. This approach of questioning brought about uncertainty and evasiveness. As one leader stated, when it comes to taking care of their family or close friends to ensure wellbeing, the answer is yes. However, there was a disconnect concerning the call to actively minister to even this group. There seemed to be a lack of concern for others that would cause continuous or repeated pursuit of ministry to someone who has declined ministry efforts in the past or has shown a lack of interest.

Additionally, the effort to have a genuine connection with people who are student participants in ministry courses to identify and meet their needs was not seen as a responsibility. In fact, if it was not an easy win each had a similar perspective to execute their lesson and offer salutations until the next meeting. There was no thought of service beyond the outlined lesson and no evangelism beyond an occasional witness if the lesson inspired it. Surprisingly, with this approach, all but one person has experienced leading another person to Christ.

However, of the four leaders that have confirmed that they had led another person to Christ, the experiences were very rare. The interviews revealed that one person has had a recent experience of within the last two to three years. The other's experience leading someone to Christ was several years prior to the research with no certainty of when the experience was realized. As expected, the leader who expressed the least number of experiences in leading was the person that had not experienced leading someone to Christ. Unfortunately, this person shared similar approaches and considerations for expressing the type of service needed to be a conduit for the Holy Spirit to be at work.

Additionally, given the Great Commission, it was important to be focused on services and ministry to grow the Christian body in the Sunnyside community. One of Paul's most important expressions is found in Romans 10:1 which expresses his desire for the community in Rome. The basis of concern for the church at Rome and desire to see each person saved brought about question 9, which states:

Question 9:

Romans 10:1 states, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." Do you want to see growth in St. Luke's ability to lead people to salvation?
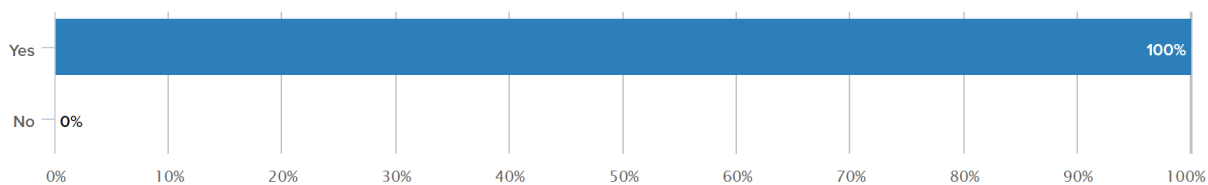
Figure 4.9. Leader responses to Question 9.

The results of this question affirmed the appropriate response for a Christian leader, but the actions and other responses did not always align with what is portrayed in the answers. Not only was the focus on salvation for leaders, but there was also a need to bring about unity and encourage fellowship as a leader.

Question 10:

Acts 2:46-47 states, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Do you want to see the Sunnyside community unify in their belief in God and fellowship as described in Acts?
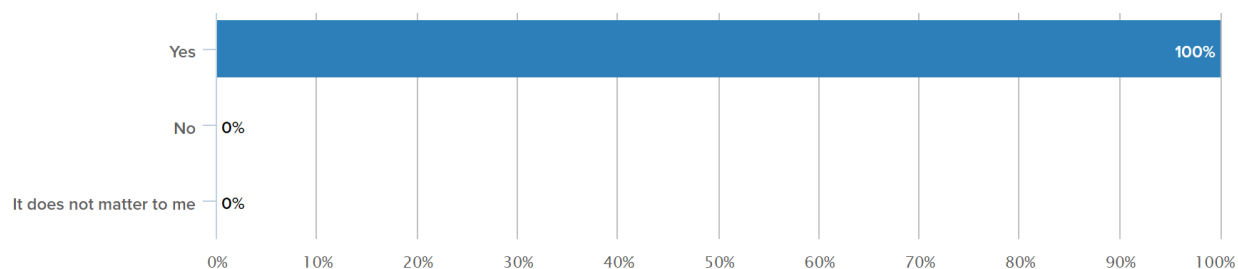

Figure 4.10. Leader responses to Question 10.

The leaders aligned in a desire to unify the community fully, which aligned with the example. During the interview there was a central theme that if this were fully executed there would naturally be a more peaceful and loving community. Given the missing generations within

the church, and deficiencies identified within the current approach to ministry, a need for change would seem appropriate to fulfill the purpose of St. Luke's ministry. However, knowing that a change was needed did not mean that participants were willing to change.

Perceptions on Change and Change Management

No one can be considered a leader if there is no one who follows. More importantly stated by John Quincy Adams, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."[2] For that reason, the leaders were queried about their willingness to change and adopt new philosophies to better lead the St. Luke ministry.

Question 11:

Would you be willing to change how you lead to see change in St. Luke's effectiveness in ministry?
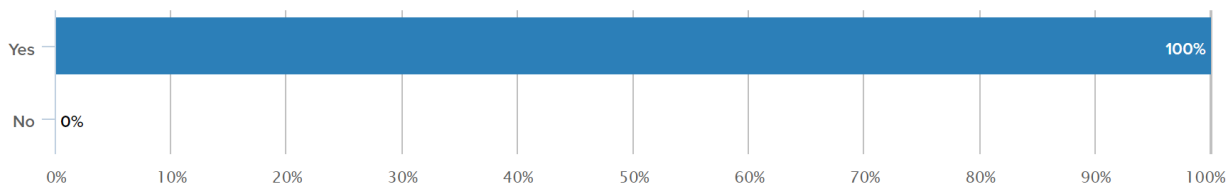

Figure 4.11. Leader responses to Question 11.

Each leader agreed that they would be willing to change in the poll, and additionally agreed that change was necessary during the interview. This indeed suggested that leaders were prepared for the work of the ministry challenges as change was introduced. The purpose and identity of the leadership team was important as well. Given the saving grace of Christ Jesus, which was present in each of the leaders' lives, it was important there was unity on how they

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[2] Adams, John Quincy, "Quote Ambition 70 Preparation Quotes on being Ready at all times," Last modified 2022, access date November 2, 2023, https://www.quoteambition.com/preparation-quotes/

identify. Moreover, if they identified similarly, their actions should have represented the same: that of a disciple versus that of any other role in our society.

Question 12:

John 13:13-15 states, "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. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." What is more important to you: to be disciple of Jesus or leader of the church?
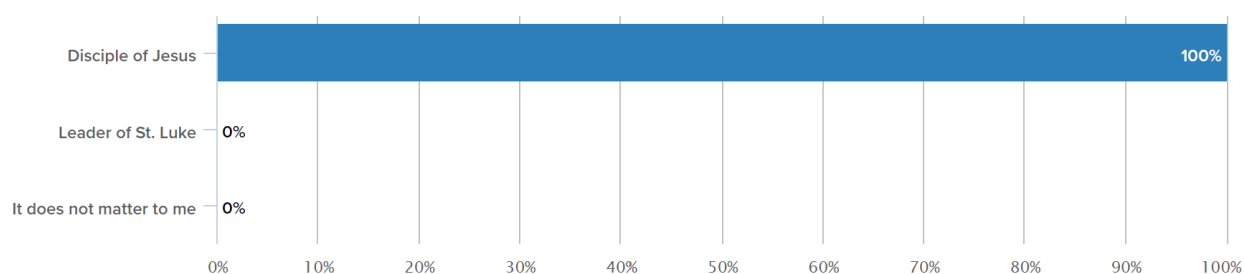

Figure 4.12. Leader responses to Question 12.

The combination of Scripture and the question painted a continued picture of servant leadership and followship of which there was one hundred percent agreement from the leaders. The St. Luke disciples were challenged to change as a part of their followship in demonstration of their desire to be more like Jesus to fulfill their purpose. Part of the change adoption was to transform in alignment to the vision of the current pastor's vision.

Question 14:

Jeremiah 3:15 states, "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." Will you commit to follow the leader that God has appointed to St. Luke?
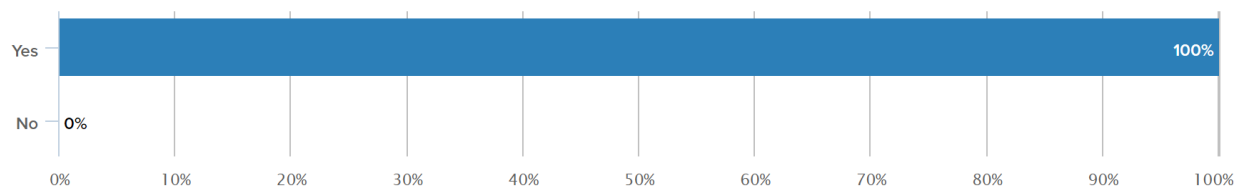
Figure 4.13. Leader responses to Question 14.

Following God required embracing following the leader that followed God as he was appointed by God. There were times where philosophies about ministry, discipleship, teaching, preparing or studying, and preaching were different between past leaders and current leaders. However, there was a need to unify under the spirit of God and adopt the new vision presented by the current leadership because the shepherds appointed were inspired and appointed by God. The leaders verbally confirm the commitment which was presented in the survey that they will follow the pastor of St. Luke. There were always challenges, however it boiled down to if each person was willing to follow God.

Question 13:

Deuteronomy 28:1 states, "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth." Is it difficult for you to follow and obey God?
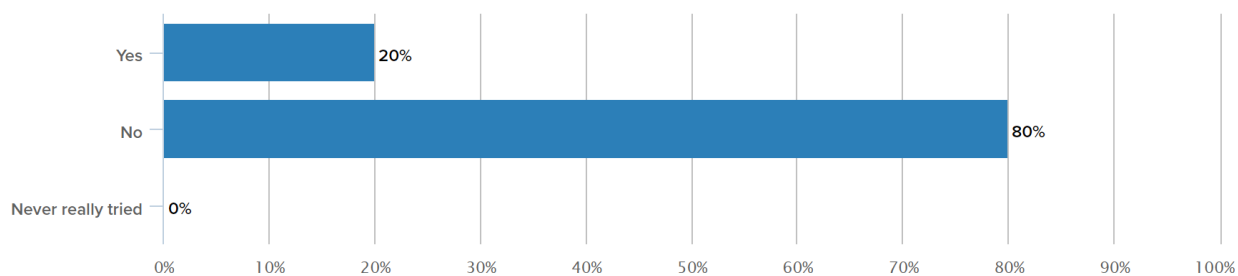

Figure 4.14. Leader responses to Question 13.

The ultimate reveal of this Scripture was God's promise to bless those who obeyed Him. Given the changes requested of the leaders to fulfill their purpose in the ministry, it was important to understand that this purpose was adopted in obedience to God. Scripture taught obedience was better than sacrifice; however, the presence of sin and temptation overwhelms everyone at times, causing disobedience and rebellion. Each leader has been asked to be introspective and open considering their discipline to become obedient to God. Only one person, representing twenty percent, stated that they found obedience difficult in the survey.

When this question was explored during interviews, a follow-up question asked was how the challenges to be obedient impact their fulfillment of the need for servant leadership in St. Luke's ministry. Inconsistent availability and judgment of other's efforts were identified as factors that influenced rebellion against the idea of full obedience of God's call. There were in fact other personal factors noted that bring about disobedience that were not shared openly during the interview, but a clear statement of awareness and a desire to grow in this leader's obedience to God was communicated.

Alternatively, the other leaders, representing 80 percent of the group, discussed their ease in obedient followship revealing that it was not actually easy. There were a plethora of excuses or reasons identified after discussing what discipleship and servant leadership should look like. The group through the interviews aligned that obedience to God's call has challenges and that there was room for growth.

Non-Member Participants' Evaluation

Participant Demographics

The true adventure of this research was finding candidates that fit into the criteria desired

for the project. It would have been ideal to have a fifty-fifty split between men and women;

however, the actual participant gender split was skewed to include seven women and three men.

Originally, a key distinction for the participation was that the participant needed to be a resident

of the Sunnyside community. However, with the impact of COVID-19, there were no

participants that completed the process from the Sunnyside community. What was important was

that the participants that did participate were within the Houston city limits and were willing to

both commute to in-person activities and sign on virtual platforms to participate in ministry

activities.

A key requirement for participation was that each person had to fall within the age group

of St. Luke's missing generation. For that requirement there was representation for each
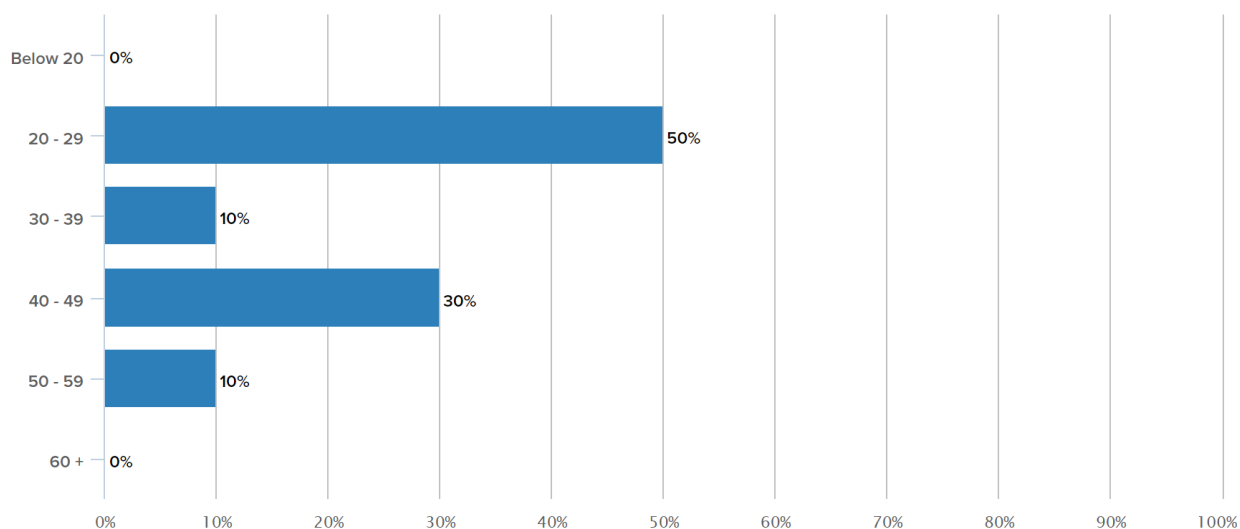
generation.

Figure 4.15. Breakdown of ages of non-member participants.

The results identified that each of the key groups were represented, with fifty percent falling within the parameters of the ages 20-29. The next largest age group represented was 40-49, which represented thirty percent of the participants. Finally, the age groups of 30-39 and 50-59 each represented ten percent of the participants.

Marital status represented an important consideration for the participants as well. This was important because if a participant were married an opportunity to minister to both the participant and the spouse could present itself. Additionally, it was important to identify if the participants had kids, which presented an opportunity to minister to the entire household. Figures 4.16 and 4.17 display this data.
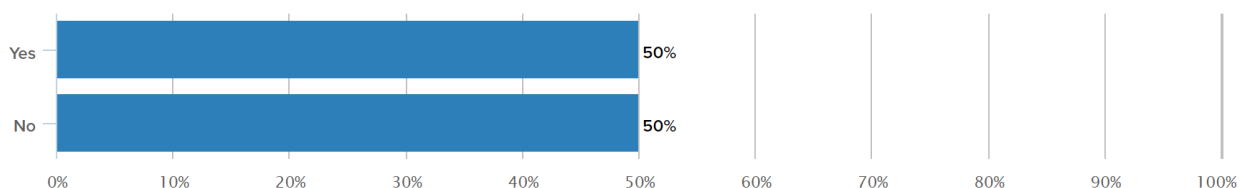

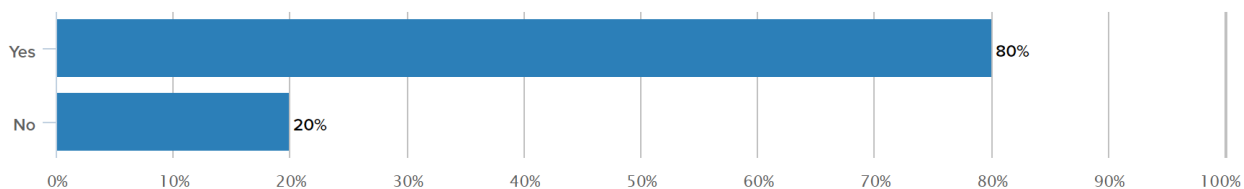Figure 4.16. Marital status of non-member participants.

Figure 4.17. Whether non-member participants have children.

The survey results indicated that fifty percent of the participants were married. Of the fifty percent that were married, two participants were within the 20-29 age range and three participants were within the 40-49 age range. Of the fifty percent of participants that were not married, three of the participants were within the 20-29 age range, one participant was within the 30-39 age range, and one was within the 50-59 age range.

Concerning the participants that had children, there were eight participants with children and two participants that did not have children. Of the eight participants that had children, there were three participants that fell within the age range of 20-29, there were three participants that fell within the 40-49 age range, there was one participant that fell within the age of 30-39, and finally one participant that fell within the 50-59 age range. The two participants that did not have children fell within the age range of 20-29. Figure 4.18 displays the breakdown of non-members who have children.
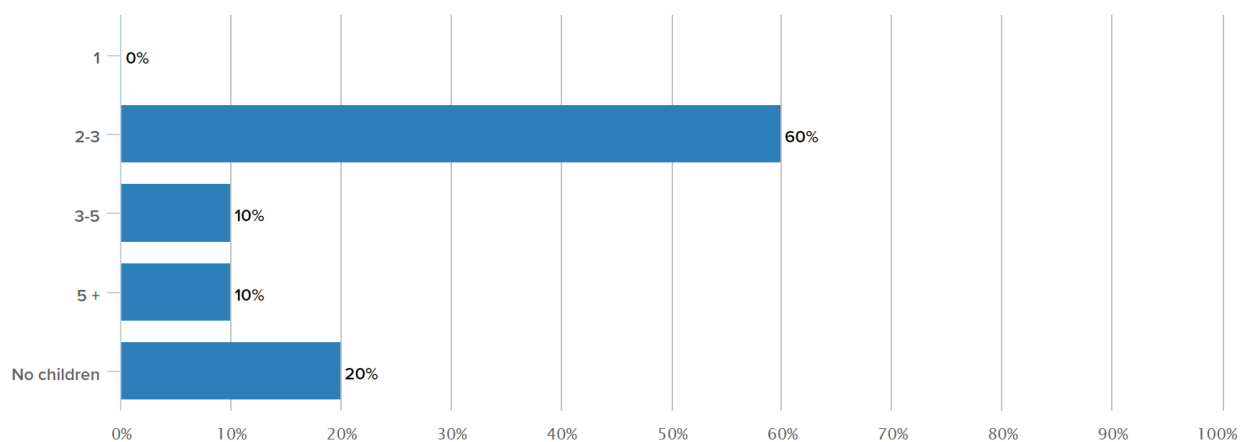

Figure 4.18. Breakdown of non-member participants who have children.

Given the statistics for the participants that were married and the number of participants that had children, the potential for the St. Luke membership to grow multiplied. In fact, if the participants join St. Luke as members, the membership could not only grow in the missing generations immediately, but also for generations to come if long lasting relationships were established. If there was a perfect response to this outreach, resulting in the participant, spouse, and children joining St. Luke, the membership could increase by forty-three members. Based on interviews about families, there were some kids that were in their twenties which could definitely build the ministry in demographics that had minimal membership and participation.

Spiritual State

The spiritual state of the participants was of importance. The goal of the ministry was to build individuals and families in many different facets; however, the primary goal of the ministry was to ensure that members were saved by accepting Jesus Christ as their personal savior. The questionnaire investigated the spiritual state of each nonmember participant with the first question:

Question 1:

Luke 3:22 states, "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus?
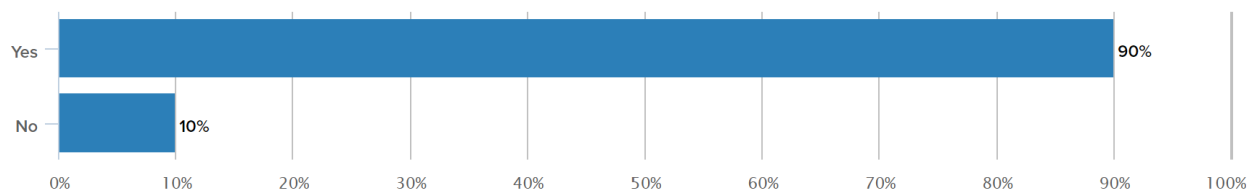

Figure 4.19. Non-member responses to Question 1.

Given ninety percent of the nonmember participants believed in the holy trinity of God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus, the Son of God, the primary work for this group was to reinforce their belief, to grow their faith, and to inspire obedience to God. However, there was one participant that has identified disbelief of the Holy Trinity. This person was within the 40-49 age bracket and a married male with children.

The interviews with this participant revealed a few interesting facts. The first fact was that this participant grew up attending church and, until his twenties, was a faithful participant in worship services. This participant's family have all sustained church membership and he admits that at one point he had accepted Christ; however, life experiences have caused him not to

believe. Interestingly, the participant did believe that there was a God but did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, nor that Jesus had the power to save. The work of the ministry needed to work on this participant to restore a belief that was once there to influence restoring Christ as his personal savior.

In addition to believing in the Holy Trinity, the ministry was intent on shepherding souls to Christ. The reality for each human was that sin plagues lives across the world. In fact, Scripture calls out the challenges of sin repeatedly. For example, Romans 3:23 states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NIV). Another example was found in 1 John 1:8, which states, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (NIV). One final Scripture reference about the issue of sin comes from Ecclesiastes 7:20, which states, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (NIV). Given this reality the following question was proposed to the participants:

Question 2:

Romans 10:9 states, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Have you accepted God as your personal savior?
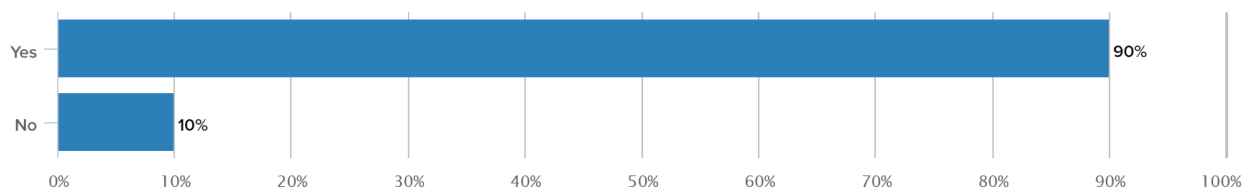

Figure 4.20. Non-member responses to Question 2.

The good news was that of the ten participants, there were nine that identify with the need for salvation. Nine out of ten openly confessed to being saved and believing in Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Accordingly, the participant that did not believe in the trinity is the same

person that has chosen not to accept Christ as savior. Further investigation was required of those who are married.

Question 5:

Luke 3:22 states, "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Does your spouse believe in God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus?
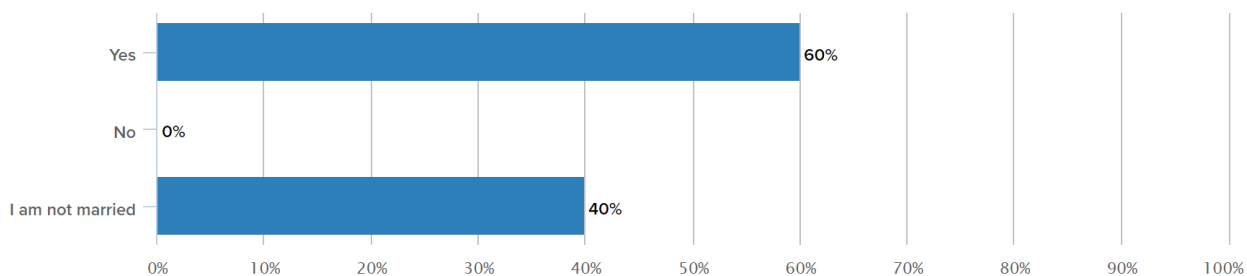

Figure 4.21. Non-member response to Question 5.

Amazingly, those that were married all believed that their spouse shared similar beliefs. In fact, from interviews, there was a general hope that their children adopted the belief in God as well. This desire was in place even though there were no overt efforts to teach the children their belief or participant in church or Christian activities that would instill the belief. Also, an interesting discovery was that the participant that does not believe in Jesus shared that his spouse believes in Jesus and has accepted Christ as her personal savior. Again, there was an opportunity for ministry and the growth of St. Luke if the changes implemented captured the commitment of the participant and their family.

Given that all the participants believed in God, and the majority believe in Jesus, it was important to understand if they have an active membership at a local church. Given there was not an active membership at a church this research looked to understand why, given their beliefs in God.

Question 9:

Are you an active member of a church?
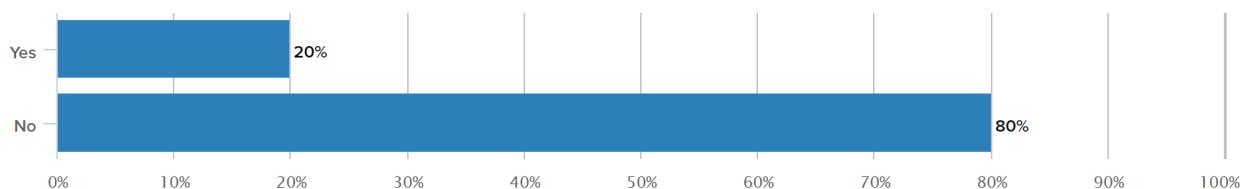
Figure 4.22. Non-member responses to Question 9.

Keeping in mind that one of the criteria to participate was not to have an active membership, question 9 looked to confirm that criteria. Given many of the participants believed in God and have accepted Christ, one would have expected that they would be active members of a church. However, the response indicated that eighty percent of the participants did not have an active membership. Moreover, during the interviews of the two participants that claimed active memberships, they expressed that their membership was with St. Luke. This was influenced by the commitment to participate in the research and their involvement in the ministry courses.

However, the two participants admittedly did not attend worship or Bible study prior to the research. Moreover, neither had communicated their interest in joining the St. Luke membership prior to the research. An additional observation was identified by question ten:

Question 10:

How long has it been since you attended church?

Figure 4.23. Non-member responses to Question 10.

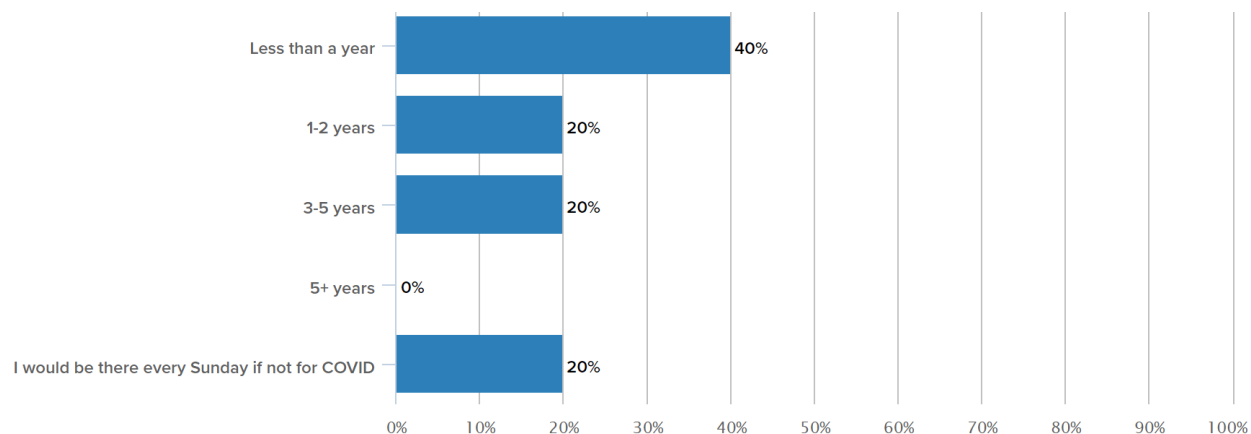The result of this question brought some optimism because forty percent of the participants had attended church within the last year. However, during interviews, the churches visited did not meet the needs of either person spiritually or the participants did not consider either location as a church home. During the interviews they were asked how frequently they attended, and it was described as once or twice, but nothing to be considered regular. In fact, it was the influence of other relatives that brought about attendance for what could be described as special occasions.

Two people, representing twenty percent of the participants, also answered that they would attend every Sunday if not for COVID. However, when this question was investigated further neither participant had been to church within the past year or consistently when they did attend. Other twenty percent of the participants answered the question that they had not been in one to two years. One of these two participants was the person that did not believe in Jesus and expressed that church does satisfy a need to learn about God. However, there was resentment expressed that the focus of many worship services was on Jesus Christ. The final twenty percent had not attended church for the longest period and seemed un-phased.

Question 11

Why have you chosen not to attend church?
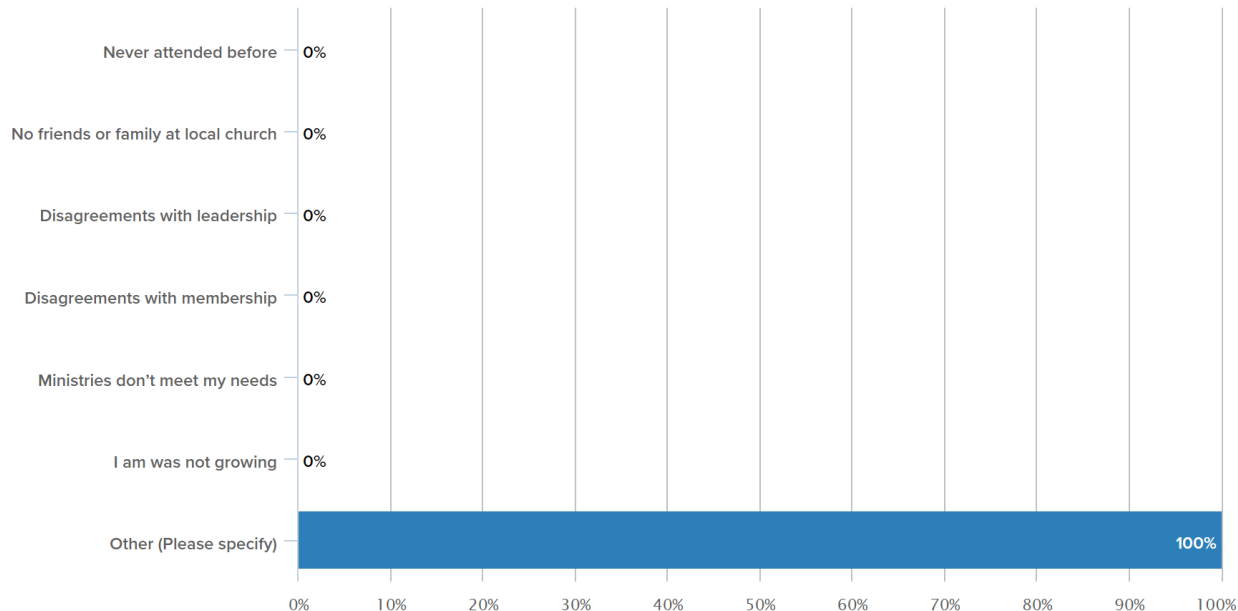
Figure 4.24. Non-member responses to Question 11.

The researcher believed that a person's spiritual wellbeing was increased based on the fellowship with God and with other believers in the Christian body. Romans 10:17 states, "[…] faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (NIV). Thus, to understand why each of these participants had not attended church the question why was presented. Assumptions were made about why people do not attend church and presented as options to be selected by the participant. Of the seven options that were available, "other" was selected by each participant. Figure 4.25 records the reasons identified as the cause for not attending church or being an active member of a church.

#	Reason for not attending or joining
1	Life and school sometimes make me feel as though I do not have the time to attend. I do however read daily scriptures sent to my phone, pray, and have conversations with God regularly.

2	Covid and work schedule with my wife.
3	Work schedule
4	Usually do not feel a connection with the sermon. It either misses me completely or I am distracted from the message by all the extra dramatics in the church house.
5	I do not believe in Jesus. I believe in God.
6	occasional car trouble
7	I was not receiving the word and I needed to change churches and I have not found a church home with which I am comfortable.
8	During the pandemic prior attended regularly
9	COVID
10	Covid-19

Figure 4.25. Non-member responses for not attending church regularly.

Forty percent of the participants reported that COVID-19 was the primary cause of not attending regularly; however, these participants had not attended regularly in multiple years. Other notable causes for not actively attending or having a membership were other priorities which include work or school schedules. An additional reason impeding active church participation was car trouble. However, there were two important comments centered on the value of the content that stood out. Both suggested that the content was not relatable or impressionable as one would hope when they attended church. This caused a lack of involvement and a disconnect between themselves and the church. The final reason that was a general theme for the nonbeliever was the fact that things are based on Jesus of which there was a disbelief.

The final analysis used to understand the spiritual state of the nonmember participants was to understand the level that spiritual growth was valued. There were so many ways that

people felt accomplished in life, and many times spiritual growth was not ranked high enough to merit focus in that area. When interviewed, insight on where spiritual growth ranked was investigated, and what other things were considered as valuable to each participant. Question 13 was used to introduce the discussion.

Question 13:

Colossians 1:9-10 states, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." What is more important to you as you evolve to the best version of you considering how the church can help you evolve?
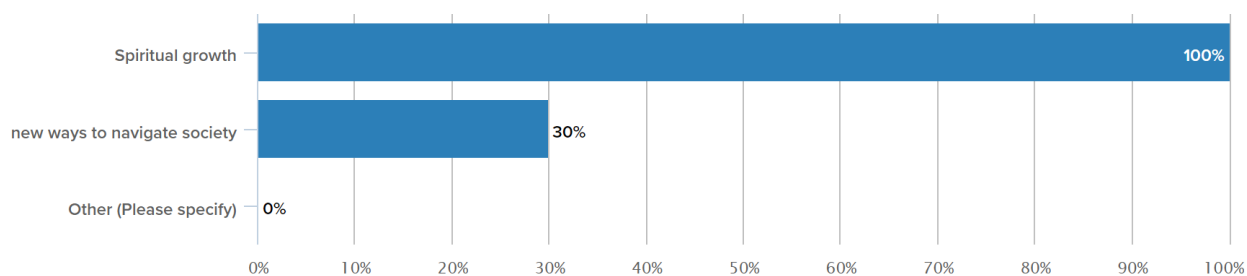
Figure 4.26. Non-member responses to Question 13.

The goal of this question was to consider what the best version of oneself looks like. Based on the Scripture selected to accompany the question, the best version of a person was that they grow in the knowledge of God and walk in a way pleasing to him. This question allowed multiple answer selections and even the ability to mark "other," which resulted in providing a place to fill in alternative answers. Every participant selected that they desired spiritual growth as a key accomplishment in becoming the best version of themselves. Moreover, the other option was not selected by anyone, and no alternatives were added.

Three participants selected "new ways to navigate society" as a response to question 13. The three participants that selected this answer have all stated that they have accepted Christ as savior. The three participants during their interviews had a common theme to what the answer "new ways to navigate society" meant. The themes that were reoccurring from this conversation were thoughts on racial relations, family wellbeing, and financial freedom. Two of these participants were female and one of the participants was male. Two of the participants were in their twenties and the other was in her forties.

Each of the participants seemed to have different thoughts about their spirituality overall. Also, the participants were aware that each had room to grow spiritually. However, spiritual growth or spiritual wellbeing was not at the top of the participants' list of priorities. The participants expressed that church membership was nice to have and not a must have. In fact, the participants expressed fond memories of influential pastors, sermons, and lessons. The entire group of nonmember participants found other things to fill the void of spirituality and church attendance even though they believed in God.

<div align="center">Impact of Church Hurt</div>

Donald Cantrell, author of *Crisis Worship – is it Possible*, taught, "If we allow the difficulty to break us, it could affect us for the rest of our life. If we allow the difficulty to make us, by the grace of God we will come out for the greater good."[3] Church hurt has turned people away from the Church and away from God. The impact of church hurt could be a hindrance of St. Luke from growing and reaching the missing generations. For that reason, a few questions were presented to the nonmember participants about their experience with church hurt with

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[3] Cantrell, Donald, *Crisis Worship - Is It Possible?* (WORDsearch, 2009).

hopes of understanding how it has impacted them and providing insights to how to manage that within the ministry.

Question 14:

Church hurt refers to the pain sometimes inflicted by religious institutions or members and the pain causes individuals to distance themselves from communities of belief and from God. Have you ever experienced church hurt?
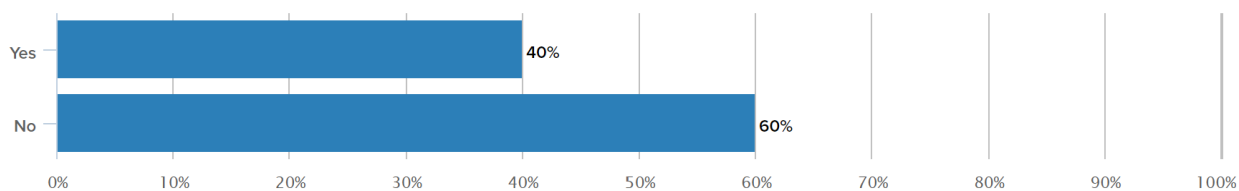
Figure 4.27. Non-member responses to Question 14.

With forty percent of participants experiencing church hurt, the impact of this type of hurt cannot be underestimated. This type of occurrence was considered to be preventative or divisive in the lives of people that desire to have a church membership and strong relationship with God. Two of the participants were married and two of the participants were unmarried. Two of the participants were in their forties, one participant was in their thirties, and one of the participants was in their twenties. The participants' feedback indicated that people of all ages can be impacted by church hurt and that it has left an impression about church membership and prioritizing following God for those impacted.

Question 15:

Romans 14:1-3 states, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and let not

the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him."

What was the cause of church hurt?
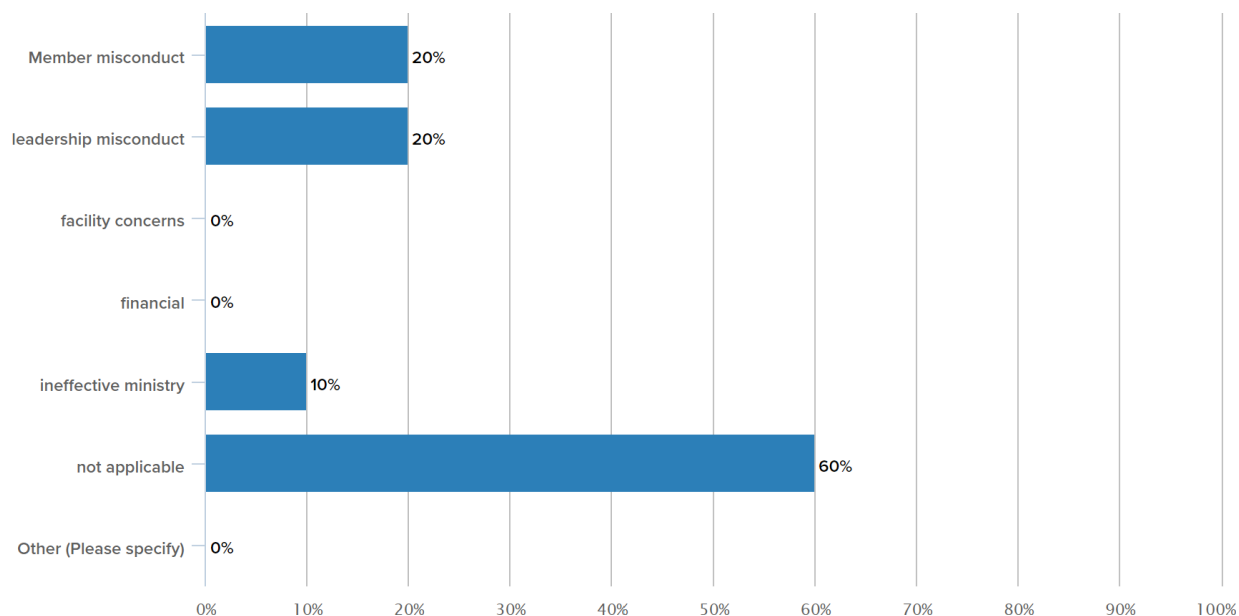
Figure 4.28. Non-member responses to Question 15.

There were three causes of church hurt that were noted by the participants. Two of the participants stated that they experienced church hurt because of member misconduct. There was an expectation of a fair and caring environment at the former churches. However, the two participants expressed feelings of betrayal and mistreatment. There were desires to feel welcomed as a part of ministries and worship services, but disagreements and arguments brought about feelings of discomfort. There were also occurrences of cliques formed within the church membership which openly expressed judgment, which changed the thoughts about church and church members.

The other area of high impact was leader misconduct. With the many stories in the media about corruption within the church, there was a definite need to understand how the leader's misconduct was experienced. Some examples of leader misconduct reported included reports of

leaders that have misbehaved by crossing lines and engaging in improper relationships with members. Additional examples included reports about leaders who stole from people and churches. However, neither story about leadership misconduct was anything as blatant as those examples. What did occur was disagreements of which leaders were counted on to intervene by being impartial; however, the leaders took sides in each case. Instead of the leaders seeking to resolve things peacefully they were described as mean and unchristian.

The last experience of church hurt identified was an ineffective ministry. When this experience was investigated there were expectations of support and a lack of judgment expected. In fact, where needs were identified there was an expectation that the church would fill the gaps financially, emotionally, and spiritually. However, this person's experience did not meet these expectations. Moreover, one of the more hurtful revelations about this experience was that the leader of this church was a relative. The combination of church being such a personal experience, and family making the relationship more personal, the lack of meeting the needs for this participant caused a hurt that was long lasting.

Question 16:

Jeremiah 30:17 states, "But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord…" In addition to opening up to God to be healed and restored, one must also forgive offenders and resolve to not be held captive by past experiences to heal pains associated with church hurt. Have you healed from your church hurt?
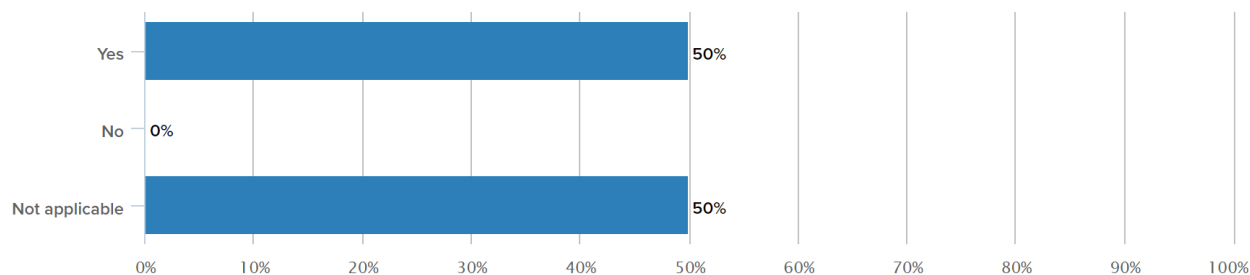
Figure 4.29. Non-member responses to Question 16.

During the interviews, one of the questions asked of those who experienced church hurt was if that caused them to stop going to church. Each person answered yes, there was either a temporary or long-term period that they did not attend church. Expressions of concern about finding a church that had sound leadership and ministries were communicated. Expressions of concern about experiencing similar hurts were expressed and a hesitation to visit churches because of concern that people would act the same way regardless of the denomination's different leadership. However, what was encouraging was the fact that each participant expressed that they were healed from the traumatic experiences. Each person had forgiven the issues of the past; however, they were unwilling to go back to the churches in which they experienced the hurt. Important to note as well was that the participants were also on elevated alert to prevent the same type of experience from happening again.

<center>Lure of Different Ministries</center>

One of the problem considerations of this research deliberated if there was a more appealing offering of ministry courses then more people would find interest in living for God and taking part in the St. Luke ministry. Prior to this research project there were two ministries courses that were a staple in the offerings of the church, Bible study and Sunday church school.

The topics in these two courses were narrowly focused, being driven by two different approaches. The approach for Bible study was to read and understand the Bible. The approach to Church school was driven by the Sunday school literature for the A.M.E. church. Both approaches offered great information about getting to know the Bible and God's revelation; however, there were guard rails in place that have limited topical studies.

Alternatively, the approach of this research was to identify areas of struggle, interest, or need to create ministries that focus on those areas. For that reason, question 12 was proposed:

Question 12

What type of church ministries would you participate in if available at your local church?
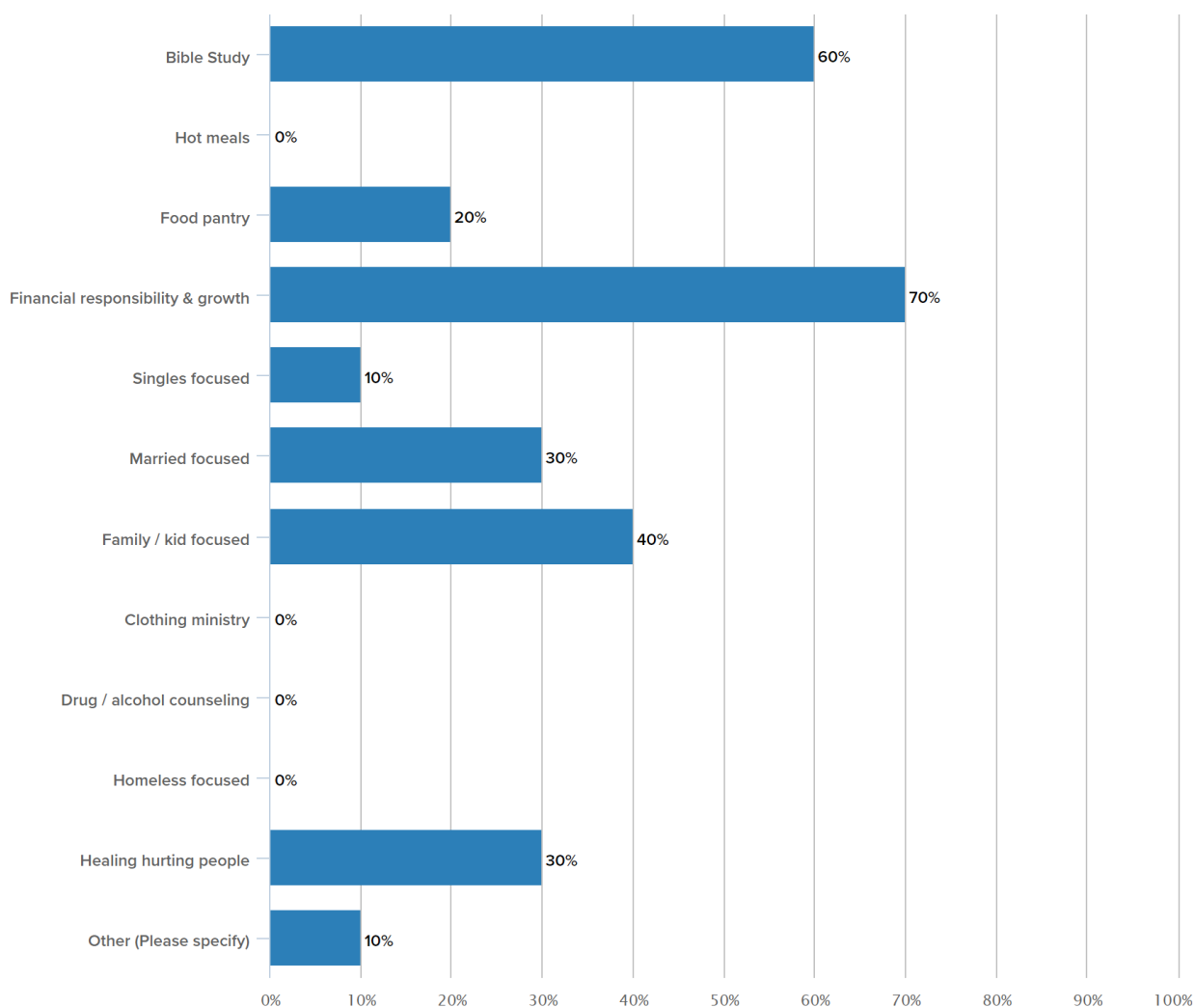
Figure 4.30. Non-member responses to Question 12.

The research results revealed that sixty percent of the participants were interested in traditional Bible study. During the interviews everyone agreed that traditional Bible study was a standard that cannot be replaced. The nonmember participants indicated that Bible study must not only explain the Scripture but must also have concepts about life application. Additionally, the participants stated that just studying a selected text was sometimes difficult to understand and relate to which caused a lack of interest in the long term. However, although everyone agreed that Bible study could not be replaced it was not the top voted ministry.

The participants indicated the most were interested improving financial skills and growth. Seventy percent of the participants stated that they would participate in a course that focused on topics that covered money management, financial freedom, growing one's finances, alleviating debt, and implementing financial strategies that would help them experience life differently or better. Interestingly, as this topic was discussed during interviews there was not very much interest in tithing and giving. One person even commented that they wanted to learn how to receive and was not worried about learning how to give. Discussions about using finances to honor God was approached and there was more interest in learning skills for financial wellbeing with more interests in worldliness instead of honoring God.

The next highest selected topic was family ministries. Forty percent of the participants selected family and kid ministries as a topic that they would participate in if available. It was surprising that only forty percent of participants selected this topic as of interest given that eighty percent of the participants were parents and fifty percent of the participants were married. When family ministries were discussed, there was interest expressed about leading families to be

godlier. Also, there were discussions about how to manage blended families and what was appealing was to have studies about healing families and growing together.

There were two topics that received thirty percent of the participants' selection. The two topics were healing hurting people and marriage-focused ministries. Interestingly, those who had interest in the topic of healing hurting people thought the topic would be appropriate for other people rather than themselves. However, when probed about past hurts of personal experience there was reluctant admittance that personal hurts existed that had not fully healed.

Keeping in mind that fifty percent of the participants are married, it was surprising that only thirty percent of the participants were interested in subjects that focused on strengthening marriage. Also, what was also notable was that one of the three people that welcomed learning about making a successful marriage or strengthening marriage was a person who was unmarried. When asked about topics pertaining to marriage that would be necessary to explore, surviving adultery and aligning on parenting were mentioned. Each of the two subtopics could be considered as family ministry as well but seemed to be valid areas to apply Scripture and learn how to honor God given that the covenant taken between husband and wife is before God.

There were two additional ministry ideas that received votes: food pantries and singles ministries. The food pantry ministry received twenty percent of the votes for a ministry of interest. The singles ministry received ten percent of the votes as an interested area of study. It should be noted that there was an option for a hot meals' ministry, which could work hand-in-hand with a food pantry ministry; however, the hot meals ministry did not get any votes. It was also noted that given there were fifty percent of participants that were single, only ten percent of the participants were interested in a singles ministry.

There were three additional options for ministry ideas that did not receive any consideration from the participants: a clothing ministry, a drug and alcohol counseling ministry, and a homeless focused ministry. Additionally, the participants were invited to share their ideas for ministry initiatives that were not listed. There was one person that shared an idea to sponsor a Toast Master's ministry because they had previously participated in and enjoyed one.

Observations from Bible Studies and Ministry Courses

Using the data from the votes concerning topics two additional courses were added to the St. Luke ministry. The two courses were titled "strengthening the family" and "increasing your territory." The courses were set to take place once a week over a five-week period. The addition of the two courses gave the potential members three courses to select between for the purpose of this research when included with Bible study.

The first lesson learned from these courses was the fact that no one was interested in purchasing materials for Bible-based courses. Similar responses from each person were either paying for a book was not in the budget or there was no time to order or pick it up. Therefore, going forward all resources were purchased and provided for the participants. The next lesson was that even though people expressed interest in specific topics it was not guaranteed that they would participate in the topic that they voted as a need. Most of the participants chose to participate in the normal Bible study that was in place prior to this research project. It should be noted that sixty percent of the participants voted that Bible study was a key ministry as well.

The topic covered in Bible study courses was a study of Proverbs 11, with an emphasis on managing life while living to be righteous. Each of the participants seemed engaged; however, there were challenges about consistent attendance. Each person missed at least one lesson. Additionally, the proctors observing also had absences impacting a consistent viewpoint

from the teacher, the participant, and the proctor. This also impacted the participants from experiencing the lessons being presented using different methods and approaches.

When it came to the feedback from the participants, they were reluctant at times to offer feedback about the presentation; however, they were willing to discuss the topics and subjects. It seemed as if there was concern about offending the leaders or suggesting if a person was effective or ineffective. The comments overall were that the courses taught lessons that were valuable and brought new insights about life and God. There were comments suggesting that some of the teachers did not make the information as relatable as others. The common theme associated with these comments was the age of the teachers.

Younger teachers were able to make the material more relatable. There were a few different methods used to teach the materials. One method was to use workbooks that had the material broken into sections with standard questions and key ideas. The second method was to use videos combined with panel discussions that interacted with the attendees. The third method was to use the Bible and commentary to support lectures accompanied by dialogue with the participants. The nonmember participants rated the video and panel discussions as most memorable followed by the lecture and discussions.

Each of the nonmember participants suggested that there were uncomfortable moments because they did not know the people on the courses and stated that it took time to feel comfortable enough to be open and participate. However, after being called upon and having questions proposed directly to the participants, they became more comfortable after each session. The least impressionable approach to the studies was to use workbooks. The participants rarely did homework to prepare for the upcoming week's lessons and made comments about not having time or interest in self-study. The researcher drew a conclusion from the participant feedback

requiring information be spoon-fed and presented in a way that sparks interest. Otherwise, the lessons were not maintaining interest or engagement.

The feedback from the ministers who taught was generally that they did not experience much of a difference in using the different methods of presentation. At times, the ministers lamented the extra time necessary to prepare to teach the lessons. Additionally, when sharing feedback collected to manage necessary changes in presentation, a certain level of tact was necessary to not offend anyone. The goal was to inspire focus on the purpose of growing the ministry and not cause anyone to feel insecure about working for the ministry. One of the most meaningful changes that was implemented was intentionally seeking interaction and feedback from the participants. The leaders felt that doing this helped them to build a connection with the members and nonmembers better than in the past.

The interviews with the proctors highlighted a few key takeaways from the courses. First, there was a noticeable change in interaction between the leaders and participants with the panel discussion. Additionally, the proctors felt as though the effort to intentionally interact by proposing questions or alternate scenarios as a part of the lesson really caused participants to think and respond to the lessons more than in the past. Finally, the proctors stated that they felt more engaged and at times found themselves participating and looking forward to the lessons each week.

Does Growing the St. Luke Ministry Matter to Participants?

There were two primary goals of this project. The first was to win souls for Christ in the missing generations. The second was to have a ministry that is effective in bringing about positive changes in the community as people unify the body of Christ. For that reason, question

17 was presented bringing to the forefront of thought the early church and challenging

participants to be involved.

Question 17:

Acts 2:46-47 states, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and

breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of

heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the

church daily such as should be saved." Do you want to see the Sunnyside community

unify in their belief in God and fellowship as described in Acts?
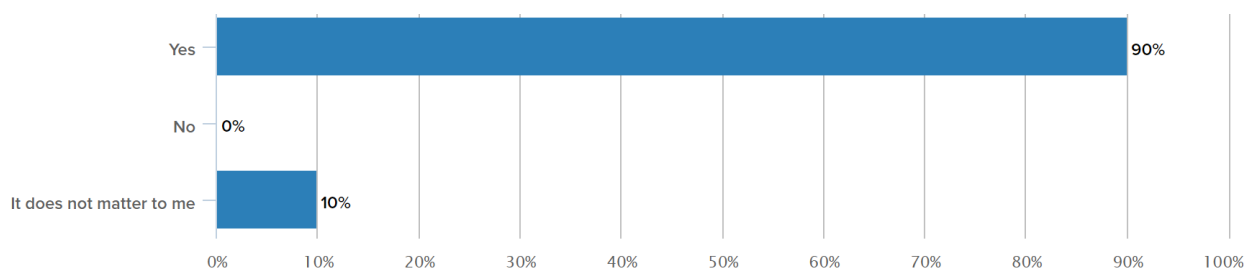
Figure 4.31. Non-member responses to Question 17.

The purpose of the reference of Acts 2:46-47 was to serve as an example of how the

Biblical church worshiped and fellowshipped. This text identifies the frequency, being daily,

signifying that there was a need to be disciplined and committed as a member of the Christian

body. The Scripture discusses breaking bread and celebrating God's goodness moving from the

temple to member's houses. The Scripture also describes the attitudes of this body of believers as

glad and unified in their focus on God's blessings. Each of these characteristics and actions were

important when considering how believers envision their community and the Sunnyside

community.

With this Scripture prefacing the question about unifying the community, ninety percent

of the participants stated that they would have liked to see the Sunnyside community evolve to

reflect that of the biblical church. One person indicated that they were not concerned about the Sunnyside community. Also, this participant, like many who participated in the research, did not live in the Sunnyside community. When asked about why they answered this way the response was "if I lived there, I would be more concerned." This participant was in the 20-29 age group as well.

The next question was intended to build from the idea of unifying the community under the belief in God. Question 18 identifies the Great Commission and seeks to gauge if the participants are committed to actively participate in ministry.

Question 18:

Matthew 28:19-20 states, "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." Will you participate in changing the community by sharing the Gospel of Christ and other things you learn while participating in the ministries of St. Luke?
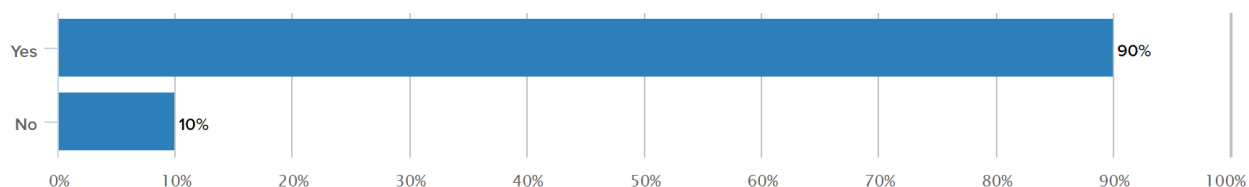
Figure 4.32. Non-member responses to Question 18.

Most of the participants responded in favor of being participants in the ministry and sharing the Gospel. With ninety percent of the participants in favor of this type of activity it was important to prepare and find ways to utilize these participants in ministry events going forward. The person that indicated that they would not participate was the participant that states he does not believe in Jesus.

Question 19:

Please share any ideas that you have about church operations, ministries, the people of

Christ, or your relationship with God that you think prevents your participation in church

and/or service to God.

Of the three responses to question 19, two of the participants indicated that they had

experienced church hurt. The response from participant 7 stated, "Confusion and corruption

within the body than outside, hypocritical and manipulative." The response from participant 5

stated, "Well the people are the most important. Religion plays on people's emotions."

Participant 4 stated, "I desire to strengthen my relationship with God however I don't believe

that the church is the sole." Participant 4 has not experienced church hurt. The past experiences

of the participants and things that have been heard has not outweighed the idea of serving God

and being active in a ministry. There was work that was needed to continue to move the ministry

of St. Luke forward.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The research analysis revealed more problems than answers for St. Luke. Calibration and analysis of the research results confirmed that the concerns identified in the problem statement were not resolved during the research. The St. Luke membership remains in need of revitalization due to the continuing decline. The research participants did not join the St. Luke membership and did not join other churches after following up. The new programs that were introduced did not continue and the leaders returned to a place of complacency.

Did St. Luke's Membership Grow the Missing Generations Membership?

The overall research result was a positive experience for St. Luke but proved that there was a large problem not only for St. Luke, but for all churches. Specifically, the leadership and the participants expressed positive comments about the intent of the research and the implementation of the research process. However, while a good experience from all involved was great feedback, the end result of this research was to grow the church membership as a part of building the body of Christ. Instead of building the body of Christ it became clear that there was a bigger problem at hand. As stated by White, "Secularization means there is less of a supportive context for faith. Privatization has made all things related to faith a private affair, like having a favorite color or food. But most devastating of all has been pluralization."[1] The research was seeking to build the membership within the age ranges of twenty to fifty, which

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[1] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 23.

were missing from the current membership. The research revealed that St. Luke was competing

with multiple faiths and worldviews being equally validated as true, as suggested by White.[2]

The research had multiple representatives from each of these age groups including one

person whose age fell between the ranges of 50-59. There were opportunities to not only witness

to the saving Gospel of Christ, but there were opportunities to confirm if a person had accepted

Christ to be saved. Stith states, "Our hope as a denomination is inextricably tied to our ability to

know and share the stories of all our people. It is this reality which places us into the New

Testament kingdom of God--where all God's people are worthy and equal."[3] There were

opportunities to interact with participants to understand why they were not members of a church

and incorporate the learnings in the ministry mission to welcome people into the body of Christ

with diverse experiences and backgrounds. This aligned with Stith's teachings, which advised

that each person needs a place to affirm unique baggage and deposit that baggage as they pick up

the baggage of God's children to begin walking together as God's children.[4]

Throughout the research process there were noticeable indicators that the research did not

result in membership growth for St Luke. According to Stith, the goal of the research and the

church was to help people in need, successfully minister during times of necessity, and to

transform spiritually in such a way that the ministry partners with individuals while experiencing

struggles. There was a need of willing people to participate.[5] If the ministry envisioned was to

become fruitful, accordingly the research needed to have willing participants. The first indicator

of the possible miss of goal was the difficulty experienced finding participants to engage in the

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[2] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 23.

[3] Stith, "The paradox of African American Methodist history," 79.

[4] Ibid, 79.

[5] Ibid, 79.

research project. Walton states, "Speaking the language of the identified demographic can enable church growth and evangelism."[6] While there was an effort to speak the same language and meet people where they were, there were many people that chose not to respond to invitations to participate. Additionally, there were some that agreed to participate and became unresponsive either after signing the agreement or completing the initial survey. Additionally, for those who did participate, exceptions were made to accommodate absences, late arrivals, or early exits to have some feedback about the topics and material presented during the research process.

The research did not result in membership or long-term engagement. It was not without effort by follow up phone calls or text messages after the research concluded. Blame was not placed on the ministry's content or delivery as the efforts were specifically designed to address the interests of the targeted age groups. Martin et al. states, "In notable contrast to the sole focus on spiritual concerns, the governing organization of the Church of God in Christ recently instituted the Urban Initiative, Inc. to strengthen communities."[7] Martin et al.'s observations revealed that the Church of God in Christ designed new programs to focus on the needs of its target demographic, which resulted in growing mega churches within the denomination.[8] For St. Luke however, there remained an unknown that resulted in an unwillingness to commit to being a part of God's church. For a couple of participants there was temporary participation in worship and continuing in the ministry courses; however, this participation was only temporary. For many of the participants, once the research commitment was met the participant disengaged.

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[6] Walton, "For Where Two or Three (Thousand) Are Gathered in My Name!" 137.

[7] Martin et al., "Black Mega-Churches in the Internet Age," 158.

[8] Ibid, 171.

The primary learning from this research was that even when the ministry was designed to cater specifically to a person's needs and interests the participants still may not respond by committing to membership or the idea of serving God. Martin et al. revealed that it is common for black mega-churches to explore all types of social outreach as a method of ministry including social action, social avoidance, social conservatism, social conversion, social sanctuary, and social service as a means to engage people and witness about God.[9] Interestingly enough, it was important to note that each participant was aware that God is real and that ninety percent of the participants acknowledged that Jesus is real. Martin et al. contends, "Social programs of either of the six categories are able to equip the community with an important perspective of how the church is able to impact their lives."[10] Given that the same ninety percent witnessed that they accepted Jesus Christ as Savior in past years, it was important that the participants understood that St. Luke's ministries were able to offer additional support and guidance in living for Christ. Yet understanding the purpose of the ministry the participants disengaged from the ministries, which demonstrated that there were additional learnings needed to understand what would motivate people to join a church and serve God regularly.

It was also clear that there were concerns about the actions of both the laity and the leadership in the universal church. Burton states, "Churches rarely choose transformation over survival because it hurts; it is like an emotional root canal for the pastor and for the congregation."[11] Some of this concern was justified given the personal experiences that people have had resulting in church hurt as a direct outcome of interacting with other Christians or

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[9] Martin et al., "Black Mega-Churches in the Internet Age," 159.

[10] Ibid, 157.

[11] Burton, "Casting the Vision," 35.

Christian leaders. More importantly Burton made it clear that it was the responsibility of the leaders and laity to work towards a transformation from an unhealthy church to a healthy church despite the challenges and difficulties.[12] A healthy church was not only good for the membership, but it should be a clear draw for those who were hurting, misinformed, and misunderstood, which should enable church growth. Given the percentage of people in the research that experienced church hurt there should be an emphasis on maintaining a healthy environment. This was an area that needed to be researched further as a means of learning new tools to help people and churches.

It should also be noted that there were lasting impressions on individuals due to things that were heard as rumors or highlighted in the traditional and social media outlets. One important comment that was shared by many outside of this research was that there was more than one way to heaven or to align with God. As stated by White, "There are three challenges to the church and faith in God: secularization, privatization, and pluralization. Each of these contributes to the deterioration of the church, faith, and ministry."[13] Statements suggesting that there were alternatives to the Christian church emphasizes the heretic change in today's culture pushing people away from the church even when people believed in God. This opposition was many people's reality, and it costs nothing for people to explore alternatives to the church if they find options that require nothing of them and allow them to live sinfully with no consequence. White suggested that there were so many belief systems tied to alternative concepts that have clearly created an accepting society for all things to be true encouraging people to no longer believe in God.[14] Ultimately, St. Luke continued to own the responsibility of evangelism,

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[12] Burton, "Casting the Vision," 73.

[13] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 23.

[14] Ibid. 24.

ministry, and active engagement of the community if there was a desire to find success in serving the Lord.

The lessons learned concerning leadership were many as well. First, the leadership learned that if they wanted to be impactful that they must prepare and continually study to show themselves approved, which was a needed change. Boria suggested that there must be agreement that the church needs to change or go in a new direction prior to executing the new vision if there was a true goal to be successful and overcome opposition.[15] The article "Before You Introduce Change: 'Vision Casting' Isn't Step One, Or Even Step Two" stated, "Ultimately, Boria cautions churches that ministry efforts and change efforts will find opposition if they cast the vision prior to creating a coalition and creating a sense of urgency to change."[16] A sense of urgency was adopted by the ministry by taking on the challenge to integrate preparation in order to elevate the impact of ministry courses and be committed to using different tools and content as a part of teaching ministry classes. The leaders also understood the importance of demonstrating a desire to engage the membership and ministry participants instead of just lecturing.

Warren concedes, "Loving Unbelievers the way Jesus did is the most overlooked key to growing a church. Without his passion for the lost, we will be unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to reach them."[17] There was a lesson learned that expectations should be communicated to the leaders of the church, applied and practiced in order to grow the church. In fact, Kinnaman and Lyons state, "Leaders and members must be trained to understand the purpose and importance of ministry, teaching, and evangelism."[18] The expectation for the role of

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[15] Boria, "Before You Introduce Change," 79.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 207.

[18] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UN Christian*, 160.

leadership had not been communicated clearly in the past. This left unrealized gaps in ministry efforts, expectations, and execution of the ministry purpose. The gaps were evident in the lack of engagement while teaching and the lack of preparation to put forth an inspired effort. Kinnaman and Lyons also taught the focus of the work was to shift from member numbers increasing in order to focus on making a difference in the lives of the lost by offering salvation and to grow the faith.[19] Therefore, if the body of Christ was going to grow, specifically looking at St. Luke's ability to attract new members, the leaders have to be prepared and intentional with their efforts in spreading or teaching the Gospel of Christ.

<div align="center">Other Outcomes and Learnings</div>

Bill Faye forecasted that one hundred thousand churches will close their doors this decade because church members continue to choose the sin of silence.[20] There was a need to evangelize unbelieving communities, which was started by many authors as the key to church growth. A perspective of Jesus's ministry was shared by Warren as he taught that "Jesus took the time to fellowship with lost people and loved spending time with them adding that Jesus was a seeker far more than being with religious leaders."[21] Given the approach of Jesus and the effort to tailor a ministry towards those who chose not to serve God, there was a need for evangelism.

Not only was evangelism the final mission assignment from Christ in the Great Commission, but there was a need to spread the word about all the good associated with the church. Kinnaman and Lyons observed that both young outsiders and Christians were

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[19] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UN Christian*, 54.

[20] William Fay, *Share Jesus Without Fear* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 5.

[21] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 207.

uninterested in a cheap, ordinary, or insignificant life, but their impression of Christianity today was superficial, antagonistic, and depressing, causing a divide in thoughts about church attendance.[22] An appreciation was expressed by every nonmember participant concerning the idea of asking what matters to each person and then having learning options specifically tied to Scripture. Additionally, the life application concept that was highlighted, which identified and encouraged aligning to God, received positive feedback suggesting that in a world where alternative world views are prevalent it was possible to serve God. White discussed the impact of the many different world views as follows, "They are not simply living in and being shaped by a post Christian cultural context. They do not even have a memory of the gospel. The degree of spiritual illiteracy is simply stunning."[23] Therefore, having a ministry that illustrates lessons that are Scripture-based in a context that can be applied to everyday living can be the inspiring factor that leads people to serve God.

People's spiritual well-being is weak and uncoordinated due to the lack of engagement between people and churches. Inspired learning opportunities and active evangelism are necessary because competing world views and the repeated slogans of alternatives to spiritual enlightenment indicate the need. White states, "Generation Z is currently spiritually paralyzed because they do not have exposure to the Gospel. Today's society is becoming post Christian as a culture."[24] The fact that God's work done God's way will not lack God's support is reiterated by Warren as he calls fellow Christian's attention to the work of missionary Hudson Taylor.[25]

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[22] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UN Christian*, 125.

[23] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 146.

[24] Ibid. 146.

[25] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 202.

Therefore, the solution to an unwell spirit is a healthy dose of the Gospel of Christ delivered by those who believe.

This research proved evidence of a post-Christian culture developing. There seemed to be a blend of belief and a lack of discipline that could be attributed to a lack of church attendance that needed a constant application of witnessing and evangelism. Johnson reflected on how one church looked to address this changing Christian culture with inspired worship stating, "Sunday morning service was live and vibrant […] The pastor, Bishop Kenneth C. Ulmer, was known for preaching inspirational sermons and the praise and worship featured gospel music during Sunday worship that inspired praise."[26] However, if all the people that believe in God did not attend church there has to be evangelism that frequently brought the presence of God to the places where both believers and nonbelievers have chosen to congregate. Therefore, there was a need for Christians at every opportunity to witness about Christ given that White suggests that the lack of exposure of the gospel has done an injustice to the society making people spiritually illiterate, which was often demonstrated by Generation Z.[27]

If Things were Different

Finding the formula that works repeatedly to both change the lives of those in the church currently and inspire those outside the church to join in service and worship of God seemed to be tricky. Mega churches have facilities that house many ministries and many people, but are they any different than a smaller church that does the same with less? Bill Henard states, "When a church sits on a plateau or is in decline, the buildings and grounds turn out to be one of the first

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[26] Johnson, "Back to the heart of worship," 106.

[27] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 43.

areas of neglect. Money becomes tight, and the church initiates a deferred maintenance program."[28] The results of the research would have returned different results if there were more resources available, including better finances and a nicer facility. Henard also indicated a strong belief that when a long-term member exists that they are less likely to look at the facility or ministry with a critical eye.[29] Given the age and length of ministry of the members and leaders, as well as the acceptance of the current state of the ministry, a new coalition of members infused within the ministry would have produced a different outcome.

Also, given the indifference expressed about transforming the Sunnyside community, a change in the research participants may have resulted in a different outcome. Although COVID-19 impacted the ability to pull from a population of neighborhood members, it was difficult to think that participants would not have been more engaged if they did not have to drive longer distances to participate or experience a sense of belonging for this community church. Martin expressed similar experiences stating, "VABC is not assimilating new converts into the ministry of the church. Usually, once new converts were baptized, they did not become a part of the family at VABC; instead, the new converts either stopped attending or moved to other churches in Evansville."[30] Given the size of Houston, TX, there were many options to not only worship but also find entertainment or outlets for sin that ministry engagement seemed as more of a viable option for local community members. Cannister represented this as a common problem in local churches conceding that there were few churches that have developed a comprehensive

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[28] Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live?* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 105.

[29] Ibid. 106.

[30] Martin, "Developing and Casting a Great Commission Vision at Vann Avenue Baptist Church, Evansville, Indiana," 7.

ministry that cares for the current members as well as simultaneously using outreach to engage

the young people in the community where the church lives.[31]

Additionally, formal training would have assured improved results for the church leaders

and an awareness of what circumstances impeded the leaders from being more engaged. The

research identified gaps that impacted the leader's effectiveness; however, there were only some

suggestions about improvement identified with a few tools. As stated by Warren, "The church

should be seeker sensitive, but it must not be seeker driven. We must adapt our communication

style to our culture without adopting the sinful elements of it or abdicating to it."[32] The

importance of an awareness of purpose and a sense of responsibility to meet the needs of the

community cannot be understated. Training leaders to meet the needs of the community and

providing tools to do so improves that ability of the leaders and participants to be impactful in

Sunnyside as representatives of St. Luke. Warren has also suggested that ministry success was

evident when members are trained to replicate the ministry of Jesus, which included being in the

community to feed the hungry, while gathering congregants together with the purpose of

challenging the committed and making disciples of the core group.[33]

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[31] Cannister, *Teenagers Matter*, 14.

[32] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 77.

[33] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 133.

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Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 11, 2020

Geromy Johnson
Ralph Baeza

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-404 Restoration of Key Middle Age Demographic Can Save the A.M.E. Church

Dear Geromy Johnson and Ralph Baeza,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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

Appendix B

Recruitment Template: Email, Letter, or Verbal Script

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry. The purpose of the study is to identify ministries that will benefit the Sunnyside community and to spread the Gospel of Christ to encourage the lost to accept Jesus as Lord while encouraging the saved to continue to follow God. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a resident of Houston, TX living in or near the Sunnyside area. Participants also must be at least 18 years of age, open to growing closer to God, strengthening their faith, and sharing ideas to help the St. Luke strengthen the Sunnyside community.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a survey about your current spiritual state and church engagement. This should take about 10 minutes to complete. Next, participants will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss survey answers. This interview will be done through video conference and can accept to 30 minutes. After the interview is completed, participants will be asked to attend weekly St. Luke ministry meetings for 1 hour over an 8-week period. After attending half the sessions complete a survey to identify changes and share feedback about effectiveness of ministry meetings. This survey will take about 10 minutes. Finally, upon completing the 8 ministry meetings an interview will be required to identify final feedback.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please complete the attached survey and return it me at. For more information, please contact Geromy Johnson at or at the above-listed email address.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me if you intend to participate. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in bettering the St. Luke ministry and Sunnyside community.

Sincerely,

Geromy Johnson
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C

Consent

Title of the Project: Strengthen the St. Luke AME Church Ministry in Sunnyside
Principal Investigator: Geromy Johnson, Sr., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a resident of Houston, TX living in or near the Sunnyside area. Participants also must be at least 18 years of age, open to growing closer to God, strengthening their faith, and sharing ideas to help the St. Luke strengthen the Sunnyside community. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to identify ministries that will benefit the Sunnyside community. Additionally, the purpose is to spread the Gospel of Christ in order to encourage the lost to accept Jesus as Lord and to encourage the saved to continue to follow God.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete a survey about your current spiritual state and church engagement. This should take about 10 minutes to complete.
2. Complete an interview to discuss survey answers and further discuss thoughts about ministry participation. This interview will be done through video conference and can accept to 30 minutes. Interviews will be recorded.
3. Attend weekly St. Luke ministry meetings for 1 hour over an 8-week period. After attending half the sessions complete a survey to identify changes and share feedback about ministry meetings. This survey will take about 10 minutes.
4. Complete an interview at the conclusion of the 8-week ministry to discuss personal impact and opportunities to improve the ministry.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Direct benefits: Participants should benefit from learning new viewpoints that will help them grow spiritually and be presented with alternative ways to flourish in life.

Indirect benefits: Participants will help to create new ministries and evolve existing ministries that will benefit the Sunnyside community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

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

- Participant responses will be anonymous. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- All records will be maintained on a password protected file and computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher[s] will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in ministry focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from group ministries, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Group ministry data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Geromy Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Geromy Johnson by phone at or by email at. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Ralph Baeza at undefined.

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

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

Your Consent

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

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

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

_____

Printed Participant Name

_____

Participant Signature & Date

Appendix D

Leader Questionnaire

In the context of St. Luke's ministry, a leader can be a layperson or an ordained minister that leads ministry efforts including church school, Bible studies, mission efforts, outreach, class leader, and small group ministries.

1. Luke 3:22 states, "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus?

   - ☐ Yes

   - ☐ No

2. Romans 10:9 states, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Have you accepted God as your personal savior?

   - ☐ Yes

   - ☐ No

3. Colossians 1:9-10 states, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Do you value spiritual growth?

   - ☐ Yes

   - ☐ No

4. Ephesians 4:11-15 states, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." Do you consider yourself an effective leader for God in the church?

   - ☐ Yes

   - ☐ No

5. 2 Timothy 2:15 states, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Do you study the Bible?

□   Yes

□   No

6. If so, how often do you study the Bible?

     □   Daily

     □   Weekly

     □   1-2 times a week

     □   1-2 times a month

     □   Not really

7. How long have you been a leader in the church?

     □   1 year or less

     □   2 – 3 years

     □   3-5 years

     □   5- 10 years

     □   10+ years

     □   Not applicable

8. 1 Peter 4:10 states, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace…" Have you lead anyone to Christ?

     □   Yes

     □   No

9. Romans 10:1 states, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." Do you want to see growth in St. Luke's ability to lead people to salvation?

     □   Yes

     □   No

10. Acts 2:46-47 states, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Do you want to see the Sunnyside community unify in their belief in God and fellowship as described in Acts?

     □   Yes

     □   No

□   It does not matter to me.

11. Would you be willing to change how you lead in order to see change?

    □   Yes

    □   No

12. John 13:13-15 states, "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. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." What is more important to you: to be disciple of Jesus or leader of the church?

    □   Disciple of Jesus

    □   Leader of St. Luke

    □   It does not matter to me.

13. Deuteronomy 28:1 states, "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth." Is it difficult for you to follow and obey God?

    □   Yes

    □   No

    □   Never really tried.

14. Jeremiah 3:15 states, "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." Will you commit to follow the leader that God has appointed to St. Luke?

    □   Yes

    □   No

Appendix E

Participant Questionnaire

1. Luke 3:22 states, "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

2. Romans 10:9 states, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Have you accepted God as your personal savior?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

3. Are you married?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

4. Luke 3:22 states, "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." Does your spouse believe in God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

   ☐ I am not married.

5. Do you have children?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

6. If so, how many?

   ☐ 1

   ☐ 2-3

   ☐ 3-5

   ☐ 5 +

7. Do you live in the Sunnyside community?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

8. Are you a member of a church?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

9. How long has it been since you attended church?

   ☐ Less than a year

   ☐ 1-2 years

   ☐ 3-5 years

   ☐ 5+ years

10. Why have you chosen not to attend church?

    ☐ Never attended before

    ☐ No friends or family at local church

    ☐ Disagreements with leadership

    ☐ Disagreements with membership

    ☐ Ministries do not meet my needs.

    ☐ I was not growing.

    ☐ Other _____

11. What church ministries would you like to see at local churches?

    ☐ Bible Study

    ☐ Hot meals

    ☐ Food pantry

    ☐ Financial responsibility & growth

    ☐ Singles focused.

    ☐ Married focused.

    ☐ Family / kid focused.

    ☐ Clothing ministry

    ☐ Drug / alcohol counseling

    ☐ Homeless focused

    ☐ Healing hurting people

12. Colossians 1:9-10 states, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." What is more important to you?

    ☐ Spiritual growth

☐ new ways to navigate society.

13. Church hurt refers to the pain sometimes inflicted by religious institutions or members and the pain causes individuals to distance themselves from communities of belief and from God. Have you ever experienced church hurt?

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Romans 14:1-3 states, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him." What was the cause of church hurt?

☐ Member misconduct

☐ leadership misconduct

☐ facility concerns

☐ financial

☐ ineffective ministry

☐ other _____

☐ not applicable

15. Jeremiah 30:17 states, "But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord…" In addition to opening up to God to be healed and restored, one must also forgive offenders and resolve to not be held captive by past experiences in order to heal pains associated with church hurt. Have you healed from your church hurt?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not applicable

16. Acts 2:46-47 states, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Do you want to see the Sunnyside community unify in their belief in God and fellowship as described in Acts?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ It does not matter to me.

17. Matthew 28:19-20 states, "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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Will you participate in changing the community by sharing the Gospel of Christ and other things you learn while participating in the ministries of St. Luke?

  ☐ Yes

  ☐ No