LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH PASTOR:

MAXIMIZING PERSONAL MINISTRY IN A DIGITAL AGE

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Shirley Groce

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

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April 15, 2023

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. This research was particularly relevant in an era of social distancing required by the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical framework for this study was Greenleaf's servant leadership theory. Ten experienced pastors were interviewed to determine how they balanced the impersonal nature of streaming worship services while maintaining personal contact with their congregations. These interviews were transcribed, and important themes were identified to determine best practices for using technology while maintaining high levels of personal contact and individual attention. The objective was to gain more insight into the senior pastor taxonomy of rapidly expanding churches and to understand how to use technology to communicate with their congregation in the digital era through high-tech, high-touch ministry. Social scientists assert that the best setting for human growth and development is one that encourages social connection with other developing individuals (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The study's results may be helpful to pastors who want to use technology to minister to their flock and keep in touch with them personally. Pastors perceive that technology has allowed them to maintain relational connections with their congregation despite physical distance. They acknowledged technology limitations and the importance of in-person interactions and community development. Advantages include greater accessibility and efficiency. Disadvantages include the potential for shallow relationships. Pastors perceive in-person, face-to-face connections as crucial for spiritual connection and understanding.

Keywords: high-tech, high-touch, pastor(s), servant leadership, technology, and church.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Lucille Carter Keith, an angel who has gone to be with the Lord. My mother devoted her life to God and made sure that her children learned the basic principles of the Bible. She gave her all while working at a center for the blind, ensuring that the kids were fed each day of the week. Despite my mother's workload, she ensured that her children attended church and Sunday school despite her busy schedule, which required her to work every Sunday except once each month. My mother gave me the zeal to pursue my academic and professional ambitions. She also taught me many life principles that I now follow. She taught me the importance of treating others as I would like to be treated. I can still remember this lesson today.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my oldest daughter, Latongia K. Groce-Pepper, who passed away on June 10, 2018. She was a brilliant young lady. She earned a master's degree in information technology. She earned a degree in physics as her major and a minor in mathematics. We often talked about getting a Ph.D., and she would say, "Mom, you can do it." She knew everything was possible through God. I often called her "Dr. Pepper" because that is how I perceived her. As I am in this Ed.D. program, her spirit has always been present in challenging times, saying, "Mom, you got this." Latongia, I will always treasure your memories because I know we will reunite on that wonderful day.

Acknowledgments

The journey to accomplishing my dissertation was an actual test of my virtues. I had to have faith, patience, and perseverance. I acknowledge that it would not have been possible to attain my doctorate without the grace of God and the assistance of several significant individuals. To God, I want to thank You for allowing me the opportunity to complete this dissertation journey. Lord, I give all the glory, honor, and praise, for You are worthy alone to be praised. You gave me strength and wisdom in the name of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. To my sisters, I want to thank Barbara Garrett and Brenda Jackson for asking out of concern about how I was doing through this long journey. I thank my brothers, John and Willie Carter, for their concern about my welfare during this time. John, I thank you for your many prayers on my behalf. I honor you. I really appreciated your words of encouragement, which helped me stay strong as I worked on my dissertation. To Randy Miller, my friend, thank you for letting me share my research topic and information throughout this process.

Dr. Bosch, I am grateful that you agreed to serve as the chair of my dissertation committee. I am grateful for your interest in my research and for the consistent constructive feedback that has enabled me to maintain my concentration and my motivation throughout the process of completing my dissertation. Your advice has been invaluable. I am grateful that you were always reachable by phone, email, and Canvas. I am thankful for your support and encouragement, which enabled me to keep going even when I was concerned. I am filled with gratitude that we were able to go through this adventure together. I cannot thank you enough for your consistent support and direction.

Dr. Smith, thank you from the bottom of my heart for reading my dissertation and giving valuable suggestions. Your feedback was very helpful in helping me polish my work. I cannot

express how much I appreciate your encouragement and support; they have been a tremendous source of strength for me throughout this process.

Last but not least, I want to express my gratitude to Elvis, my wonderful husband, and best friend, for helping shape me into who I am today. We have been through challenging times, but God has never failed to show His unfailing love. This journey would not be a reality without you. Thank you for the many hours of reading and editing my papers. Elvis, the love you have shown me will not go unnoticed. I look forward to spending the rest of our lives together. Only God knows what our next quest will be. To my daughters, Shavada Lee and Dr. Tywana Groce-Mallette, thanks for sharing this long and exciting journey with me. Now that I am not working on schoolwork, we can talk on the phone as long as you like. The Bible says having children is a gift from the Lord. You are genuinely that blessing. You girls act upon my thoughts even before I think about them. Thank you for your godly wisdom and obedience. I will always love you. To my grandchildren: thank you for your faith and belief that Grandmama can do anything. You are a divine gift to be cherished and loved.

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Institutional Review Board (IRB)

New International Version (NIV)

Research Question (RQ)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Today, all human knowledge is within reach with the advent of technology. Answers to any question are simply a Google search away. While extremely useful, this atmosphere has encouraged self-reliance and turning to the internet instead of looking to other people for help. People shop for the best sales that work for them. The church is compelled to compete for a clientele once controlled by an absolute ecclesiastical monopoly living in a multicultural world of individual preferences. Instead of people deciding whether to attend church each week, many now find the church is only one mouse-click away: a world of virtual religion where seekers find answers to spiritual questions any day of the week. Every day is "church": click on, jump in, jump out (Reeves, 2000). Using computer-based presentation technologies is prevalent in high-tech worship (Schultze, 2004). These technologies range from still and animated slides created in programs such as PowerPoint to video recordings and live video projection piped to screens in the sanctuary and other locations such as the nursery and narthex.

According to Naisbitt et al. (2001), technology is not the only solution to the human yearning for inner serenity and faith. They distinguish between a high-tech-based approach or a "high-touch" approach which is more personal. The authors explore the paradoxical world of modern-day America since this is where the high-tech world is most prevalent and, hence, where there is much to learn about its effects on people's lives. Their book describes high-tech and high-touch converging as the meaning of technology evolves from objects to interrelationships to consequences. High-tech, high-touch refers to the deliberate incorporation of technology into a person's daily life. Jesus promises and demonstrates a high-touch approach to ministry. He said, "He will give another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth" (New

International Version, 2011, John 14:16-17). He promised to help and pray for believers in their

weakness (NIV, 2011, Romans 8:26-27).

In church communities, the same reasoning applies. Instead of going to a pastor or

spiritual advisor for advice, many people search the web for answers. Humans were created for

relationships; they are relational beings. Humans were designed to have a relationship with their

Creator and others. In the creation story in Genesis 1:31, God looks at each thing He has made

and sees it as "very good." Nevertheless, when God considers Adam, He says, "It is not good for

the man to be alone" (NIV, 2011, Genesis 2:18). The human needed another human.

Technology is not bad; it becomes problematic when substituted for human interaction. It

allows people to stay connected when they cannot be together. Technology has advantages in

allowing people to hear God's Word when they are sick or cannot come to church. Technology

will enable them to stay connected.

Technology has some disadvantages to the life of the church. Interacting and connecting

with people face-to-face is essential in both life and church. Naisbitt et al. (2001) believed that

the greater the amount of technology around us, the more there is a need for human touch.

Technology can cause damage as well as benefits. People are genuinely human only if they are

the expert in their actions and the arbitrator of their values, only if they are the architect of their

progress. They must act by their God-given nature, freely accepting its possibilities and claiming

them (Wolyniak, 2015). Aminnejad et al. (2020) offer an example of a case study of high-touch

versus high-tech:

> A few weeks after the COVID-19 crisis, the patient companions at the Nekooei-
> Hedayati-Forghani Hospital were replaced by a group of volunteer clergymen. These
> clergymen had been trained for primary personal protective measures, and they were
> volunteers. This served as an example of the contrast between high-tech care and care
> that emphasizes personal interaction. After one week, the patients, nurses, and doctors
> were all asked their opinions regarding the presence of volunteer clergymen serving as

patient companions. The results of the poll revealed that the majority of those surveyed were satisfied with the arrangement. According to the findings, 92.9% of patients were satisfied with the presence of clergymen, while only 2% of patients were dissatisfied with the presence of clergymen. The patients' contentment with the presence of clergymen can be explained by the fact that they were able to overcome the feeling of isolation that they had been experiencing, that their fear and anxiety levels were lowered, and that their spiritual well-being was improved as a result of the clergyman's presence. (p. 1)

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. The study examined the benefits and disadvantages of using technology in this process. Chapter One of this study explains the motivation to understand how a high-tech, high-touch pastor can maximize personal ministry in a digital age. This investigation, which started with background information on the research concern, the dissertation problem statement, and the research questions being addressed, was eventually the result of such interest. The study's assumptions and limitations and definitions of important words were then discussed. An overview of the significance of the research and its overall design appears at the end of Chapter One. The remaining chapters include a summary of the findings, a summary of qualitative research undertaken, some conclusions, and recommendations. They also evaluate recent and historical literature on church administration in biblical and business contexts.

Background to the Problem

The Bible has much to say about creativity, technology, and communication. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV, 2011) says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." In Genesis 4:17 (NIV, 2011), Cain built a city. Jubal, Cain's brother, was the father of all who played the harp and flute (NIV, 2011, Genesis 4:21). Tubal-Cain was the forger of all instruments of bronze (NIV, 2011, Genesis 4:22). God

directed and instructed Noah to build an ark. Using the instructions of God, Noah designed and built this complicated boat (NIV, 2011, Genesis 6). Abraham and Isaac were engineers and dug wells (NIV, 2011, Genesis 26). Bezalel, filled with the Spirit of God, built the tabernacle with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts (NIV, 2011, Exodus 31:3-5). Aaron styled an idol in the form of a golden calf (NIV, 2011, Exodus 32:4). Tools were used to fashion the golden calf (NIV, 2011, Exodus 32:4), and Moses also used them to carve out the stones that God used to write the Ten Commandments (NIV, 2011, Exodus 34:4).

Technology itself is morally neutral. How it is used determines whether it is beneficial or harmful. One would think that the temple and sacrificial altars were good things, so the tools used for building them would be acceptable. Nevertheless, tools were forbidden onsite when building the temple, and everything used was natural (NIV, 2011, I Kings 6:7). The natural use was done to prevent anything from interfering with solely worshiping God. Similarly, technology is used today in every aspect of the church. The Lord gave Moses similar instructions for constructing altars. (NIV, 2011, Exodus 20:24-25; Deuteronomy 27:5; Joshua 8:31; Kings 6:7; Isaiah 44:12). Nothing should diminish God's worship, but one should consider whether or not technology may be doing so (Whiting, 2011).

The same tools can be employed for good or evil; instruments can be utilized for war or peace. According to the prophets Isaiah and Micah (NIV, 2011, Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3), humans would one day turn their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Joel foresaw a moment when the populace would forge pruning hooks into spears and plowshares into swords (NIV, 2011, Joel 3:10). Something used for destruction can equally be used for good, according to Whiting (2011). The purpose of tools is to make the lives of those who use them more manageable. They are not more powerful than the person who made them or the

person who uses them; instead, they are designed to be submissive to the person who employs them (NIV, 2011, Isaiah 10:15). The text of Deuteronomy 19:5 (NIV, 2011) explained how an ax head might dislodge and strike a person, causing them to die. Tools have benefits and drawbacks, as the Bible demonstrates. Like computers, they can work endlessly and continuously to calculate, analyze, and complete tasks, making life less complicated.

Computers have allowed instant person-to-person communication (via mobile telephone or internet) and worldwide text, art, and video distribution. The full impact of this changing media environment will reveal itself slowly. Still, it is evidence of new forms of political commentary (blogs, for example) and interpersonal organization (flash mobs, MySpace, and similar online ventures). There are new levels of interpersonal connection (mobile phones, text messages), new patterns of financial investment (microfinance), and new kinds of business relationships (eBay and online trading). Therefore, there may be a concern regarding theology and church within this media environment. If changes in the media environment affect so much else, it should expect those changes to impact the way people think theologically and how the church acts, said Soukup (2008).

The main aspect of face-to-face communication is the ability to see the other person while having a discussion. Communication is enhanced since the speaker and the listener can see and understand facial movements and body language. The term "body language" refers to communication that occurs through postures, gestures, and other conscious and unconscious signals and signs given off by the body (Hajjaj, 2018).

Using facial expressions as a means of communication is another significant aspect of body language. Facial expressions are typically associated with feelings (Elliott & Jacobs, 2013). The face is the most influential organ for conveying a particular state of mind (Ekman, 1965).

Because they reveal so much about one's true self, eyes are often called the windows of the soul. For instance, people who tend to avoid eye contact are likely feeling embarrassed or ashamed, or they may be experiencing sorrow.

However, relating their interpretation to other gestures and behaviors is essential because human beings are unpredictable. Understanding people's emotional conditions and cultural histories requires one to be able to read their body language. To accurately read body language, the body's movements should correspond with what is being said in face-to-face communication (Altun, 2019).

Some people struggle with written communication so face-to-face communication can be much more effective. Not everyone can communicate verbally, such as in the deaf community or those with developmental disabilities. However, communication is essential to them as well. Some people have distinctive skills and are much more precise with verbal communication. Social interactions allow people to confide in one another, promoting a sense of belonging. Taking a slightly different approach but reaching the same conclusion, social connections with other students in the classroom prompted good behavior improvements (Paul et al., 2016). In a similar vein, each Christian is responsible for their social interaction. People have a moral obligation to share what they have, which is partially fulfilled through social interaction (NIV, 2011, Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 6:18). Communities experience healthy growth and development when there are reciprocally beneficial exchanges that "mutually aid each other," just as people grow most when they connect in partnerships (Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

Nevertheless, churchgoers have much to say about what they miss most about in-person services. According to the Barna Group (2021), among churchgoers whose services were still strictly online, receiving communion / Eucharist (24%) and talking with people at the beginning

and end of service (23%)—items that were often difficult to replicate digitally—were identified as the top two most missed elements. Other aspects of worship that rose to the top of the list included listening to a live service or homily (21%), the chance to connect with like-minded people (19%), and greeting others or passing the peace during service (17%). As seen in this survey, listening to a live service or sermon rose to the top. As individuals have changed their communication habits, religious individuals have altered the means through which they interact spiritually. According to Campbell (2005), "online space can offer a powerful and legitimate religious experience. Moreover, these religious experiences in online space allow people to feel spiritually connected to others who share similar perceptions of religious interaction" (Lombaard, 2007; McCully, 2014, p. 3).

According to Dura (2020), Moses claimed that God created humanity as recorded in the very first chapters of the Holy Scriptures. Even God admitted that singularity is unhealthy for humans when He declared in the Garden of Eden that it is not suitable for a man to be alone. God will produce the right kind of assistant for him. In the void of the Sinai desert, Moses served as a lawmaker for the Israelites, defining humankind as a collective being rather than a solitary individual. The collective being of humans enabled people to understand how God and humanity interacted, followed by how humans interacted with others, as shown in the Decalogue.

Harlaoanu (2020) reported that in the past, the church was where one shared a memory from the prior week. Friends sat next to friends who knew each other's difficulties. They could cry on one another's shoulders. Especially for those living alone, the church's presence became the only way to meet other people and converse. No matter where believers were in their faith, fellowshipping provided strength. Being around other believers allowed people to learn and grow in their faith and nourish the souls of one another.

The book of Acts provides some notable examples of the power of fellowship in the body of believers. Acts 2: 40-47 (NIV, 2011) is critical to understanding the Christian community. The community is a vital refuge for those who gather as forgiven, baptized believers. They experienced a time of refreshing (NIV, 2011, 3:20) as they gathered around teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers—activities that marked the church to this day, preventing anyone from being in need. Wonders and signs often referred to healing activities, and the community of believers was devoted to human well-being and was made possible through the Lord. Acts 4:23–34 (NIV, 2011) offers a second look at this fellowship of believers and highlights all these actions and the Spirit's presence. However, the church depended on attendees for the Holy Spirit to dwell there (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 2:22).

Church buildings are the heart of communities and places where people come for Christian worship services and other Christian religious activities. During COVID-19, lockdowns were implemented in almost every state in the spring of 2020 to help combat the spread of COVID-19. These lockdowns disrupted nearly every aspect of people's lives in the United States. The decision to close churches throughout the United States as part of the lockdown strategy generated heated debates.

From the 23rd of March until the beginning of July 2020, all churches, and other places of worship in Australia were forced to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of mainstream Christian churches implemented virtual worship as a response. This was accomplished through live-streamed services and various other online gatherings and events (Martyr, 2022).

Since the church is comprised of individuals, then no one but that person can decide to shut down or lock up their personal "temple of God." The church has triumphed over COVID-19

if its members pray in the privacy of their homes, with their loved ones, or connect with others through online media chats or audiovisual calls. They did not allow the circumstances to dampen their spirits. This entire process reminded people to attend church services not only on Sundays but also during other times of the week and year (NIV, 2011, 2 Timothy 4:2). There is no way to defend locked churches against worshipers of this kind (Otobo, 2020).

In opposition to the prevalent COVID-19 and contextual restrictions, pastors valued spiritual presence and practiced it the best they could, even when the congregation was absent. They used commonly accessible and affordable media while submitting themselves and their churches to God's everlasting and always-guaranteed presence until physical gatherings resumed (Tagwirei, 2022).

According to Martyr (2022), people's day-to-day lives were drastically altered due to the pandemic in the year 2020 and the closures it caused. One such measure was the introduction of social distancing in Hungary and around the world. This affected people's ability to communicate with their families and friends, as well as their ability to maintain employment and education. Research showed that at the beginning of the year 2020, Hungarian computer data traffic providers recorded an average increase in turnover that was 30% higher than the previous year. Even more significant was the rise in social media usage in April, which was 54%. Churches and other religious communities have, of course, been impacted by the changes brought about by physical and technological advancements. In April 2020, as a direct consequence of the pandemic caused by the coronavirus, a significantly heightened level of digital presence was observed in the day-to-day activities of religious institutions, churches, and the followers of these institutions (Martyr, 2022).

It became abundantly clear that there was not a single, all-encompassing answer to the problem of how religions and churches appeared online; there were those who effortlessly adapted their activities to the digital interface and those who did not or even rejected it. Communities that were more open to change and innovation were more likely to be able to adopt online participation successfully. The practice of quarantine has brought to the attention of religious communities' opportunities in the technology field previously unknown to them. During the initial phase of the pandemic, significant springtime holidays for all of the world's religions were made available online (e.g., Easter, Seder, Ramadan). The same thing occurred in the celebration of Christmas and Hanukkah during the second wave of winter (Martyr, 2022). Many people have developed the ability to adapt and rely heavily on modern technology.

People from a middle-class background who are retired and live alone have the ability to adjust to the social isolation they experienced through interactions with family and friends via video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and others. On the other hand, the percentage of Black Americans who have home broadband services is significantly lower (66%) compared to the percentage of non-Hispanic White adults who have such services (79%). Additionally, while nearly 80% of adults under 65 have access to these services, only 59% of adults 65 and older have access to home broadband services (Pew Research Center, 2015). When all of these factors are considered together, older Black adults had a lower likelihood of accessing the internet, a vital resource for maintaining social connections and obtaining essential information during the COVID-19 pandemic. This circumstance demonstrated quite clearly how the "digital divide," which is based on race and age, can contribute to developing and exacerbating feelings of social isolation and loneliness among older Black adults (Martyr, 2022).

The church has never been just a building, but rather the people, so this should be emphasized as we recover from COVID. The church's people produce community, according to Reimer (2021). Regardless of how high-tech the world becomes, there will be a need for a high-touch, personal approach. As the late author and futurist John Naisbitt (2001) put it, it is high-tech, high-touch. Hence, the likelihood of a technology's success depends on how much it changes people's lives.

<p style="text-align:center">Statement of the Problem</p>

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world and impacted the Christian church. Due to government mandates, many churches stopped meeting in person. Nevertheless, the work of Christ and his ministry continued. COVID caused many churches and pastors to rethink how they did ministry. The business world quickly pivoted to workers working from home and using technology to replace face-to-face interactions. This project examined the possibility of using that same technology within the church while maintaining effective congregational and interpersonal ministry.

The spiritual needs of the entire congregation had already been partially met with technology before the pandemic. Many churches offered their services virtually if individuals were sick or shut in. Social media provided worshipers additional opportunities to engage with sermons by tweeting, inviting questions, sharing pictures of church activities, or continuing conversations throughout the week. Social media also helped to open and improve the church. However, it failed to meet many individual psychological, physical, or emotional needs.

According to Magezi (2015), some pastors believed that technology was a tool that did not exalt God. They argue that the materialism and glorification of the self that characterizes celebrities and televangelists are in stark contrast to the humility Christians look forward to

experiencing. These pastors opposed using technology in the church even though they own smartphones and computers. Some pastors raised concerns regarding bringing religious content online because of equity issues since some people lived in isolated areas and had trouble accessing various internet platforms (Ganiel, 2021).

Naisbitt et al. (2001) recognized ten changes emerging in Western society, which he termed "megatrends." Of the ten, one appeared most crucial to the church of Jesus Christ. This megatrend is the transition from what Naisbitt called "forced technology" to a society characterized by a balance between "high-tech" and "high-touch." Each technological advance of the last few years has sparked a desire for the appropriate change toward high touch. According to Naisbitt, the more sophisticated the technology around people, the more they need human contact. This study examined how the church implemented technological means for individual telecommunication while maintaining the "high touch" that the ministry requires.

While some pastors oppose technology, if prioritizing individual contact can be maintained as in the business world, evaluating whether these technological tools can be effectively used in ministry is worthwhile. When considering the ministry of a church, sharing the gospel, and making disciples are important aspects, but this project is primarily focused on meeting congregational needs. Some even critiqued the virtual congregational approach because it did not allow face-to-face fellowship. While some saw the activities of online participants as an indicator of a desire and intention to further their growth, others believed that digital venues undermined traditional forms of community and the role of the leader in promoting spiritual development. Some argued that digital venues undermined these things (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The evidence suggested that face-to-face interactions were more beneficial than technology-enabled interactions (Swartz & Novick, 2020).

Technology alone did not resolve people's search for inner faith and peace (Naisbitt et al., 2001). The same line of thinking applied to communities within churches. Most people today look to the internet for answers rather than consulting a pastor or other religious leader. According to Naisbitt et al. (2001), the more technology in our environment, the greater the demand for personal interaction.

Starbucks has learned the balance between high-tech and high-touch. The company constructed its business not just by selling coffee but also by becoming a public place outside of work and home. People come together, put aside their worries, rest, relax, and converse. Starbucks is about relationships. One individual, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time are how it hopes to inspire and nurture the human spirit (Michelli, 2014).

According to Byrne and Nuzum (2020), the use of technology alone is insufficient; it is not and never will be able to replace actual physical presence. On the other hand, if our ability to be with others is limited by disease, government restrictions, or other hindrances, this technological approach could meet needs that otherwise would go unmet.

In Mark 12:28–34 (NIV, 2011), Jesus exemplified high-touch ministry. Jesus demonstrated high-touch ministry regularly for three years before his death on the cross. It was also a final touch from his betrayer, Judas, which began His journey to the cross (NIV, 2011, Mark 14:44-46).

This research study examined how high-tech, high-touch pastors maximize ministry while using technology by evaluating their lived experiences. Empirical research of this phenomenon, guided by the theory of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), revealed foundational principles for better ministry leadership development and retention among emerging ministry leaders. The literature falls short in linking the high-tech, high-touch pastor

who is maximizing personal ministry in a digital age, particularly through employing videoconferencing technology among African American pastors in small churches**.** This researcher interviewed ten senior pastors to find transferable themes regarding how these pastors are maximizing personal ministry while using technology.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. Because technology can help and hinder this process, there were steps pastors took to strengthen interpersonal relationships with their church members. For this study, the definition of a high-tech, high-touch pastor was those pastors whose task of directing the people toward a more profound advancement, growth, and spirituality in the Christian faith was achieved using digital technology. The theory guiding this phenomenological study was Robert Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theory. While this is a "secular" leadership theory, it was exemplified in Christ's and Paul's life and ministry. A servant leadership approach prioritizes others' needs first and shares power rather than wielding it from the top of a hierarchy. One of Jesus's last lessons to His disciples involved touch as he washed their feet (NIV, 2011, John 13:1-17).

Research Questions

The open-ended qualitative phenomenology study interview questions were based on studies suggesting high-tech, high-touch pastors maximize personal ministry in a digital age. The following research questions guided this phenomenological study:

RQ1. How do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for relational connections from a distance?

RQ2. What do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive to be the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology?

RQ3. What steps, if any, are high-tech, high-touch senior pastors taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society?

RQ4. How important do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

In a qualitative phenomenological study, Moustakas (1994) clarified that the researcher does not establish assumptions but focuses on a subject and crafts a query or issue to direct the investigation. The following assumptions were foundational to the research:

The researcher assumed that the research sample was large enough to offer reliable answers to the research questions.

The researcher assumed that pastors must never lose the human touch as they continue to support members in this digital age.

Delimitations of the Research Design

The present study had several limitations. The study was limited to ten evangelical African American pastors of small churches in the Greenville area of upstate South Carolina. They were questioned on their use of technology to develop close interpersonal connections and communication with individual church members. This study was also limited to experienced evangelical pastors with at least two or more years of pastoral experience who have held online services. Furthermore, the study did not thoroughly investigate all aspects of the high-tech, high-touch pastor's efforts to maximize personal ministry in the digital age.

In selecting the African American community as the focus of this study, it is important to clarify that the goal was primarily demographic in nature, rather than culturally focused. The

intention was not to limit the examination to cultural experiences within this community. Rather, the demographic makeup of the population served as a practical starting point for the study. It is crucial to emphasize that the aim of this research was not to limit the study to the experiences of African Americans, but rather to explore the intersection of various demographic and cultural factors in shaping these experiences.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were relevant to the study and are supported by the literature used to create the research's framework:

1. *Church*: The church is God's spiritual family; it is the Christian community the Holy Spirit established as a result of the testimony to God's awesome deeds in Christ Jesus (Clouse, 2013).

2. *High-tech, high-touch: "*High-tech, high-touch is a comprehensive view of technology, including its human element" (Naisbitt et al., 2001, p. 16).

3. *Ministry*: The office held by individuals consecrated by ecclesiastical authority to be ministers in the church or who have received a call to special vocational service in a church (Liefeld, 2013).

4. *Overseer:* An overseer is someone who looks out for the welfare of other people (Liefeld, 2013).

5. *Pastor:* The leader of a local church is a pastor (Siegwalt, 2004).

6. *Servant Leadership*: "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 6)

7. *Technology*: The integrated use of physical equipment and computer software to store, retrieve, process, and transmit information (Logan, 2008).

8. *Touch:* Human interaction, being with other people, either physically or using technology. (Naisbitt, 2001, xv)

Significance of the Study

Fellowship (Greek κοινωνία) is crucial for effective church ministry. The recent coronavirus pandemic's social distancing mandates and closures had severely reduced church

members' interpersonal fellowship. These measures had also decreased the personal attention pastors can give individual church members when they do not see them each week.

While technology such as streaming video services can somewhat replace in-person preaching, it cannot fully replace fellowship and the human contact of proximity. However, technology such as video conferencing can increase the number of people pastors can interact with individually. Technology has made it possible for those who cannot attend church in person to have access still, but it should never be used as a replacement. Some people are hospitalized for weeks and months and rely on technology to connect to the church. However, when they can attend service, technology should not replace fellowship. According to Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV, 2011), "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Technology cannot wholly replace fellowship and interpersonal connection.

Using the theoretical framework of servant leadership, where the pastor seeks to know and serve each congregant individually, this qualitative phenomenological study examined how pastors have already adapted and intended to adapt to this "new normal." Pastoral interpersonal ministry in the post-COVID era was investigated, including technology's role. This study provided input and suggestions for pastors to maintain and enhance their interpersonal relationships.

Christian leadership is the initiative a believer takes to exercise their abilities, authority, and power, both intrinsic and extrinsic, to encourage, inspire, and enable others to work together to accomplish agreed-upon goals acceptable to God. This type of leadership is characterized by humility and a sense of responsibility (Zigan et al., 2021).

Paul provided a list of personal attributes necessary for leadership in the ministry. Some attributes are wisdom and knowledge, teaching and instruction, encouragement, humility, a servant's heart, spirit-led, compassion, shepherd-developer, and prayer. There is a connection between ethical leadership styles and several of these characteristics, including the honesty, dignity, and servanthood exhibited by a leader.

Moral principles are brought up in a variety of modern leadership theories, including transformational leadership (Akdere, 2015), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), spiritual leadership (Fry et al., 2011), and authentic leadership, to name just a few (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Although these theories are based on a distinct group of premises, they share a common concern with leaders' unspoken moral guidelines to motivate their followers (Ko et al., 2018). The concept of love as being at the center of everything is foundational to the Christian belief of servanthood, which many Christians hold as the essential aspect of their faith leadership (NIV, 2011, John 13:12-13) (Melé & Fontodrona, 2017).

Throughout Scripture, it is evident that God is concerned with the qualifications of a pastor. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (NIV, 2011) details what pastors should resemble. The theoretical framework for this study was based on Greenleaf's servant leadership theory. This leadership theory is secular but typified in Christ's and Paul's lives and ministry. Servant leadership is an approach that puts others' needs first and shares power rather than wielding it from the top of a hierarchy. Jesus Christ set the pattern of servant leadership. Whitfield (2014) argued that servant leadership is defined as leading with "servant first" at the forefront, a quest to serve others' needs before showing them, resulting in those served becoming servants. Regardless of how high-tech the world becomes, there will be a need for high-touch. According to Naisbitt et al. (2001), increasingly advanced technology increased our need for personal interaction. Finally, this

research stood to aid researchers seeking to understand better how high-tech, high-touch pastors maximize personal ministry in a digital age.

Summary of the Design

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used for the study. Twenty pastors were chosen in a convenience sampling and ten were eventually interviewed, and their answers to a set of standardized questions were transcribed and coded and themes emerged regarding the research question. The transcription was coded using secure information management qualitative data software to identify emerging themes. The qualitative phenomenological analysis included transcribing and coding interviews based on Creswell's (2014) data analysis spiral. Developing a thick description of the phenomena was based on the themes identified through data collecting and analysis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In this review, the researcher examined the various facets to be studied to determine scholars' past findings. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. In addition, this research studied whether technology could help or hinder this process. This chapter presents a review of pertinent literature for the research topic, the theoretical framework for the study, related literature, the rationale for the study, the gap in the literature and profile of the current study.

Theological Framework for the Study

What does the Bible say about the church and the congregation? A biblical and theological background for doing such a study was applied. This section of the research discusses pastoral leadership, biblical servanthood, the pastor's role, the role of equipping the saints, and the church's role. Then consideration was given to the purpose-driven ministry, the five purposes of every church, and the church model.

Pastoral Leadership

God gave "some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ" (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 4:11-12). Schussler-Fiorenza's (2017) commentary said Ephesians 4:11–16 (NIV, 2011) comprises a single Greek sentence divided into multiple English sentences. The gifts given by the holy Messiah Jesus, who fills the universe, are people who carry out various functions rather than things or offices. This Messiah calls for people who can

carry out specific leadership roles for the saints. Romans 12:5-8 (NIV, 2011) and 1 Corinthians 12:28 (NIV, 2011) both have comparable lists. Teachers can be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Even though men have historically held church leadership roles, not all these professions are solely for men.

The Bible is the primary source of written authority for the Judeo-Christian faith, and Christians believe it is the main rule of life for humanity. Pastors are a gift from God to the Church because He loves them. The metaphor and title of a shepherd are the most appropriate of all those used to represent spiritual leadership. Pastors are leaders in faith-based organizations charged with helping to form the vision for the church (MacArthur, 2017). Pastors should have a personal vision for making disciples. Pastors have numerous responsibilities placed on their shoulders, including answering calls from congregation members around the clock, seven days a week (Boarts, 2018). Through the ministry of the Word and sacrament, the pastor serves others by enlightening them in Christ (Vanhoozer & Strachan, 2015).

In any given week, a pastor may deliver a Sunday sermon, lead Bible study groups, create innovative programs, visit sick and shut-ins, perform last rites, be a youth minister, and plan a mission trip. A pastor's roles and expectations might depend on their denominational identity. Pastors of all faiths can find deep personal satisfaction in following a call to serve others in ministry, even though the job has extended hours and can be emotionally challenging (Joiner, 2020).

A pastor is also charged with being the community face of his house of worship. Pastors serve as household managers, an *oikonomos*, or stewards of God's mysteries (Vanhoozer & Strachan, 2015). Pastoral responsibilities are never-ending. The church is not constructed of wood, tile, bricks, or mortar. The church represents God's people (Swindoll, 2014). Therefore,

the church's leadership must be of the highest caliber. They are expected to live godly lives and serve as role models for appropriate conduct in the local community. The church will follow in its leaders' steps (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004). The people become disoriented if the leadership is ineffective. Paul understood church leadership's value, particularly in the troubled city of Ephesus. The Greek word *episkopos* can also be translated as patron, watcher, or protector. Its English translation is overseer (Swindoll, 2014). Paul regarded being an *episkopos* as a noble profession and a position worth pursuing. Many refer to this individual as a pastor if he serves the church as a career minister or as an elder if he also serves as a leader (Swindoll, 2014).

Throughout Scripture, it is evident that God is concerned with the qualifications of a pastor. What pastors should resemble is laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 (NIV, 2011). Those who seek the position of overseer aspire to a higher calling. An overseer is someone who looks out for the welfare of other people (Liefeld, 2013). According to Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015), pastors should be public theologians to proclaim the truth and be intelligent. In this passage, the Bible says the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. The pastor is the primary (but not the only) minister and the foremost (servant) among equals. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. Anyone unable to properly care for his family will also be incapable of properly caring for the church of God (Vanhoozer & Strachan, 2015).

According to Swindoll's (2014) commentary:

The church is a family, not a business. It is not a sign of a good parent to have continuously well-behaved children. Healthy kids behave appropriately for their age, and sometimes teenagers lose control. One may inquire: Does the man maintain a tranquil, orderly home environment? Does he have lofty standards for his kids that foster a feeling

of respect for themselves? Do they respect him and treat him with respect? Do you think his children will grow up to be good young people, or do you think they will get into trouble if nothing is done?

A pastor must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders to avoid disgrace and the devil's trap. A pastor ought to have financial honesty and not be greedy for gain (NIV, 2011, Titus 1:7; 1 Timothy 3:3; 1 Peter 5:3). A pastor must be upright in his financial transactions and not be accused of chasing money over the kingdom of God. A pastor must be hospitable (NIV, 2011, Titus 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:2).

Paul gives admonishment to pastors. In Acts 10:17–38 (NIV, 2011), Paul said he would go to Rome knowing God told him he would die. He was out on a sort of farewell tour after leaving there. The elders were a group of pastors who served the pastors. The Bible uses the words elder and pastor interchangeably; the term pastor is from the Greek word for a shepherd while an elder is a bishop and overseer. Paul called the church elders to visit him in Miletus because he wanted to meet with them one last time.

In Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders, he said, "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia" (NIV, 2011, Acts 20:18). Paul was telling pastors that they are not supposed to be some celebrity who leaves the greenroom, goes out, gives an excellent speech, returns, and never interacts with the people. Therefore, he told them he was in tears because of the struggles he had to go through due to Jewish plotting. Paul came to these elders respectfully, encouraging them to learn to serve the Lord more humbly after experiencing a setback (NIV, 2011, Acts 20:19).

Pastors should take a personal interest in people. Different settings have varying levels of interpersonal relationships. When Jesus was on earth, one time He preached to a massive crowd

of 5,000 men, not counting the women and children. Another passage tells us that He had a group of 70 followers and sent them out two-by-two. Jesus was much closer and paid personal attention to the twelve. And He had an inner circle of Peter, James, and John. Similarly, pastors ought to care for every person in the flock, but the level of attention may vary depending on the circumstances.

Hall (2020) asserted that any sickness isolates the unwell and keeps them away from the relationships that give life meaning and are essential to our everyday existence. Pastors focus on these illnesses as a witness to the lasting interdependence of the human predicament rather than as a means of effective treatment, reestablishing contact with the afflicted person through the pastoral visit.

Biblical Servanthood

In the Bible, much is said about servanthood. The central theme of the Bible is the servant of all, who is Jesus Christ. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (NIV, 2011, Mark 10:45). This designation as the Son of Man refers to His deity, but also His humble identification with humanity. Although He could rightly claim all the rights and privileges due to God, He voluntarily chose to serve others. The personification of the holy ones of the Highest is this same Son of Man. He stands for those who suffer due to their devotion to *YHWH's* law and nation (Strauss, 2017).

His self-offering to the point of death was one way He served others by giving them life. When Jesus returns with his Father and the holy angels, those not ashamed to pick up their cross and serve will be saved and participate in His glory.

When people give Christ the authority to be the Lord of their lives, His excellency will be seen in how they serve others (NIV, 2011, Mark 9:35; John 15:12-13). How people love God

will be demonstrated in how they love others. "For what people preach is not themselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with themselves as a servant for Jesus' sake" (NIV, 2011, II Corinthians 4:5). Jesus Christ is the most outstanding leader of all time, and that is true servanthood. Servanthood is an approach characterized by Christ "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (NIV, 2011, Philippians 2:6-7). According to Ayandokun (2009), the Bible strongly emphasizes leadership since God approved man's ability to lead his creation. A man was given the power to dominate the world. Leaders do not exist without God's knowledge and authority.

The pastor's role in conducting the ministry's work and preparing the church for service is controversial. He is one of God's sheep himself, serving under Christ, the Great Shepherd. The pastor has a dual role that other church members do not have. He is a member of the congregation, just like everyone else. But the pastor is also the shepherd. In this metaphor, the shepherd oversees the flock, but the sheep do the work. He protects and feeds the sheep with the Word of God. The person in charge should act like a vigilant shepherd who goes ahead of his flock, seeks suitable pasture and water, and guides the sheep to well-known, secure locations. He is the under-shepherd of the Chief Shepherd (Du Plessis & Nkambule, 2020). People are not solely following the under-shepherd, but they are following the Good Shepherd (NIV, 2011, John 10:11). Scripture teaches that Christ gave apostles and prophets. He gave evangelists, pastors, and teachers for perfecting the saints and the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 4:11-12). The pastor is a servant in the house of the Lord.

Just before the Jewish Passover feast, which would be Jesus Christ's "last supper" with the disciples who had followed Him for three years, He began with an object lesson of washing their feet (NIV, 2011, John 15:14-17). On another occasion, Jesus told them, "If any man desires

to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (NIV, 2011, Mark 9:33-35). In the

same vein, Du Plessis and Nkambule (2020) said when the disciples argued about who should

hold a prominent position in the kingdom, Jesus began to teach. He instructed them on the

fundamentals of service by telling them that anyone who wants to be first must put everyone else

before themselves and serve everyone (NIV, 2011, Mark 9:35).

Jesus did not descend from heaven to carry out his own will but rather to carry out the

will of the One who had sent him (NIV, 2011, John 6:38). By setting an example of humility and

selflessness for his disciples to follow, Jesus Christ led them to the highest level of service both

to God and to the people around them. People who have been called by God and are committed

to serving others should seriously consider entering the ministry as a pastor. The servant of God

is to be kind and patient when they are wronged, but at the same time, they are to be steadfast

and unwavering in the truth, including correcting those who are in opposition to what they

believe to be right (NIV, 2011, 2 Timothy 2:24–26). Now that the role of the pastor has been

examined, this review will focus on the church's ministry.

Ministry of the Church

Pastors, Sunday school instructors, and religious education administrators are only a few

examples of the church's ministry. Church teaching ministries include youth groups and Bible

studies. The Christian pastor's role entails a broad combination of duties (Edwards et al., 2020).

In one historical study (Blizzard, 1985), six central ministerial territories were defined: ritualist,

providing rites of passage; pastor, providing care and counseling; preacher, delivering sermons;

teacher, delivering biblical education; organizer, facilitating activities within the church and

community; and administrator, overseeing staff, buildings, and finances. The church is a catalyst

for transformation and change and is given great attention (Pillay, 2017). This next section of the research dealt with defining and explaining the unique role of the church's ministry.

Role of the Church

The disciples were given the command by Jesus to "Go and make disciples" (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:19). Paul writes in Ephesians 4:12 (NIV, 2011) that the purpose of the church is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" which is an explanation of the function of the church. The church needs to make Christ known to the world.

Grudem (2020) defined the church as the community of all true believers for all time. In Ephesians 5:25 (NIV, 2011), Paul asserted that Christ so loves the church that He gave Himself up for her. All individuals whom Christ died to rescue, all those saved by His death, are collectively referred to as "the church" in this context (Grudem, 2020). When it comes to describing the process of spiritual formation, the Bible frequently makes use of organic metaphors and language. For instance, Jesus instructed His followers to "bear fruit" when they followed Him (NIV, 2011, John 15:1-16). Paul uses farm terms such as "planting" and "watering" (NIV, 2011, 1 Corinthians 3:6), as well as "sowing" and "reaping," to describe the process of spiritual growth (NIV, 2011, 2 Corinthians 9:6). Christ's mission was to cleanse His good creation, which had been corrupted by sin, and to save people from the consequences of their sins.

Hence, the church's mission must mirror that of Christ and facilitate the natural growth and development of new members within the Body of Christ. But disciple-making does not just happen. It is a purposeful process that requires a relational and spiritual commitment to provide the necessary elements to prosper the individual and the body of Christ. Both of these outcomes result from the successful completion of the process.

Similarly, Paul expressed that if one speaks the truth in love, a person will develop into a mature "body" whose Head is Christ. This will happen because the truth will be spoken. As each body component performs its function, it is from Him that the entire body, which is joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows, and builds itself up in love (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 4:15-16). The people of God form the church, and its member's functions are to teach biblical doctrine to others so that others may become established in their faith.

Church planning assists the organization in outlining the tactical maneuvers that will be required to fulfill its mission and realize its vision. Churches can achieve some level of success even without a plan. Still, those who devote time and resources to formulating a comprehensive strategy and plan can accomplish their goals much more rapidly. Pastoral ministry is influenced by the church's mission (Akin & Pace, 2017). The church's mission is to disseminate the good news of Jesus Christ and make everyone aware of their need for salvation. The church must nurture those who already are believers and build them up to maturity in the faith. Christ gave His church the commission to spread the word of salvation to the ends of the earth. The good news of the Gospel is God's greatest gift to all individuals (Grudem, 2020). It was prophesied in the Old Testament to save humanity and give them a share in His divine life through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Evangelistic work of proclaiming the gospel is the primary ministry that the church has toward the world. Evangelism is the church's primary outreach to the outside world, not more important than worship or nurturing (Grudem, 2020).

The church must function differently from the world. The church is not to be conformed to this world (NIV, 2011, Romans 12:2), but they must be part of this world. The church is the hands and feet of Christ. They are to deliver the good news to those needing to know the Lord. Discipleship plays an ongoing role in God's plan for creation. God orders the church to spread

the gospel of His saving grace through Christ Jesus and the truth of His revelation to all peoples (Boan & Ayers, 2020). He orders people to invite individuals to faith, baptism, repentance, and obedient discipleship. In the Old Testament, God invited humanity to gather in front of Him in worship (Grudem, 2020). Spiritual development occurs in the church encircled by a "cloud of witnesses" of those believers who have lived in the past. These witnesses surround God's people today, and it seems only fitting to think of them as God's great spiritual church or assembly alongside God's people of the New Testament (Grudem, 2020).

The church impacts every aspect of a believer's life. They help the communities in which they live to become better places. This is how Christians put their faith to work. To shape and transform society, the church must be a voice for the voiceless and make space for improving servant leadership (Van Wyk, 2017). The church leaders recognize that transformation is part of God's redemption blueprint. Van Wyke (2017) captured this sentiment well by stating people must have a lived experience as an inward-outward spiritual journey for transformation as a process to be supported towards God's redemptive plan and line up with how the church is a change agency, according to church leaders. Three purposes of the church are to minister to God, minister to believers, and minister to the world (Grudem, 2020).

Purpose Driven Ministry (What Does the Church Do?)

In his book *The Purpose Driven Church* (1995), Pastor Rick Warren explains that many churches focus on only one aspect of the factors that churches should perform, such as evangelism, worship, teaching, or fellowship. He suggests churches should be "purpose-driven" and do their ministry in these areas simultaneously rather than just focusing on one. This study shows how pastors can use technology to accomplish some of these purposes.

The purpose-driven ministry for the church is to preach the gospel, make disciples, and teach all nations (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:19). The church desires to evangelize the world with the message of eternal life through Christ Jesus. "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" (NIV, 2011, Romans 10:14-15). "As it is written, how lovely are the feet of those who deliver good news" (NIV, 2011, Isaiah 52:7). The shepherd metaphor is a suitable and practical illustration of the character, function, and proper conduct of trustworthy leadership among God's people (Gunter, 2018).

Healthy, consistent growth is the outcome of the right balance between the five biblical purposes of the church. Rick Warren shared a proven five-part strategy that will enable a church to grow (1) warmer through fellowship, (2) deeper through discipleship, (3) stronger through worship, (4) broader through ministry and (5) larger through evangelism. To be purpose-driven is to be driven by God's purposes, not human purposes. These purposes, according to Warren's teaching, are found in two passages in the New Testament book of Matthew (NIV, 2011, Matthew 22:37–40) and the Great Commission (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:19–20)."

Five Purposes of Every Church

Rick Warren (1995) gave five purposes of the Church:

- Love the Lord with all your heart (*worship*: The Church exists to worship God (NIV, 2011, Matthew 4:10) – people should worship because they want to, not out of duty).

- Love one's neighbor as yourself (*ministry*: The Church exists to minister to people (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 4:12) – the church is to minister to all needs: spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical).

- Make disciples (*evangelism*: The Church exists to communicate God's Word (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:19-20) – The Great Commission is stated in five Bible books (the four Gospels and Acts), and thus is essential).

- Baptizing them (*fellowship*: Identification with the Body of Christ (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 2:19) – the church exists to provide fellowship for believers; baptism symbolizes salvation and fellowship within the Body).

- Teaching them to obey (*discipleship*: The Church exists to edify/educate God's people (NIV, 2011, Colossians 1:28) – discipleship is the process of helping people become more like Christ in thought, feeling, and action).

The Church is a product of God's creative work (NIV, 2011, Acts 20:28, I Corinthians 3:9, 17; 15-9); it was established and is owned by Jesus Christ ("I will build My church") (NIV, 2011, Matt 16-18) and the Holy Spirit guides and empowers the Church (NIV, 2011, 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:5–27; Romans 12:4–5). As a result, it is a source of boundless joy for the Church to look to God to explain both the design and mission He had in mind for the Church.

The task of the Church is to bring people into membership as disciples. Just before Jesus' ascension back into heaven, He gave His disciples the following commission: "Go ye all nations into all the world, make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you" (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:19–20a).

The purpose of the Church is to bring glory to Christ as its leader. Paul said, "In Christ, people are chosen to give credit to God" (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 1:11–12). The purpose of the Church is to enlighten its members, called "saints." The word "saints" means "holy" and applies

to individuals (Roy, 2011). The Church is responsible for uplifting and consoling its members individually (NIV, 2011, 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 13:11).

"They gave themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer" (NIV, 2011, Acts 2:42), could be considered a purpose statement for the Church. This verse suggests that the activities and purposes of the Church should be as follows: 1) teaching the doctrine of the Bible, 2) offering a place of fellowship for believers, 3) participating in the Lord's Supper, and 4) praying. Another commission for the Church is proclaiming the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1-8).

Church Model

The church assembles those called out of both worlds into a Body. The church is God's spiritual family; it is the Christian community the Holy Spirit established due to the testimony of God's marvelous deeds in Christ Jesus (Clouse, 2013). The church is God's kingdom on earth and is a mission in expression; this is what most people think of when they hear the word "church."

According to the book of Acts, the church's expansion involves new members and the development of its geographic reach. It is an expansion into the moral and spiritual domains. In the fellowship that the Word of God and the Holy Spirit have created, members are expected to have qualities such as faith, love, joy, honesty, and purity.

Every minister and layperson concerned with carrying out the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations is encouraged to do so when they hear about the church's growth (NIV, 2011, Matthews 28:19-20). Thus, it must be done to ensure that missionary work is carried out effectively. The story of the beginning of the Christian church is told in the book of Acts. A "literary bridge" is created between the ascension of Jesus and the commissioning of the

apostles as they wait for the promised Spirit. In the second chapter, everything that took place at

Pentecost is described, including the Holy Spirit falling on the church unexpectedly and

unbelievably, referencing Peter's sermon (NIV, 2011, 2:17–35) and the results of Peter's

preaching (NIV, 2011, verses 37-41).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully recount the past two millennia of church

history. Since those early beginnings in Acts, the Catholic church and sacramentalism have risen.

The Eastern Orthodox church split from the Western Roman Catholic church in the Great Schism

of 1054 A.D. The Protestant Reformation returned a portion of the Christian church to the

concept of salvation by grace through faith. There is a distinction between the ideas of pastors in

Protestant churches and priests in Catholic and Eastern traditions. The Bible teaches the

priesthood of each believer so that individuals can approach God directly (NIV, 2011, I Peter

2:5-9). However, priests and pastors exercise soul care in watching over and caring for their

flocks.

According to Carroll (2006), Protestant clergy prioritize preaching and teaching,

particularly those heavily influenced by the Reformers such as John Calvin and Martin Luther. In

contrast, Catholics and those in the Orthodox communion emphasize the clergy's priestly role—

particularly as celebrants of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is at the heart of Catholic and

Orthodox life. In these traditions, a priest's preaching and teaching duties are considered essential

but secondary tasks. As expected of Jewish rabbis, priests are expected to serve as teachers of the

faith, even more so than what is expected of Protestant clergy (Carroll, 2006). Further diversity

can also be seen in the social and personal characteristics of those engaged in pastoral leadership,

in addition to these different priorities. The book of Acts educates people on the spread of

Christianity across the entire known world. The theme of Acts is summed up in a verse found in

the very first chapter of that book: "But you will receive power after the Holy Ghost falls upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (NIV, 2011, Acts 1:8). Now, centuries later, what began in Jerusalem has spread to the most remote parts of the world. That had always been Jesus' intention from the beginning. As these churches grew, the pastors were responsible for " making disciples" by teaching and spending time with the church members.

There are many opinions and models for how modern churches should operate, but I Thessalonians aims to be an exemplary church that other churches could model. I Thessalonians 1:7 (NIV, 2011) says, "And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." The way the believers at Thessalonica listened to and reacted to the gospel was so appropriate and positive that they became a living example that still applies today. Every local church should deliberately strive to bring back genuinely biblical priorities and values. Birkey (2019) stated that the church aims to encounter the joy of renewed life together. He also noted that the church ought to live out its identity as an organismic body as a counterculture community of faith. The church needs to accept the primary purpose for its existence that is inherent in its assembly. For everyone to contribute their fair portion to the ministry's work, the church's ministry must be rooted in the priesthood of all Christians.

Servant Leadership Exemplified in Jesus Christ

Jesus is an illustration of a servant leader who, despite being entirely divine, adopted humanity and human experience (Crowther, 2018). Jesus Christ has been the central character in Western culture for the past two thousand years. He stands at the center of the mission, the center of Scripture and history (Stott, 2020). Jesus' main goal was to reconcile sinners with their God so that they might share eternal life with Him. Fulfillment is the defining characteristic of Jesus

Christ as described in the Gospel of Matthew (Stott, 2020). The summary of Matthew 5:17 (NIV, 2011) presents a primary purpose of Jesus's earthly ministry – to fulfill the law and the prophets. Jesus came to achieve all the Old Testament foretold and finish all the righteousness the Old Testament required, as described in Matthew 5:18 (NIV, 2011), where He is said to fulfill the law. Jesus fulfilled his prophesied mission by being a humble servant leader. Jesus called his disciples and said, "If you want to be first, you must be last" (NIV, 2011, Mark 9:35). Jesus Christ is the prime example of a servant leader. He showed it by giving his life, not only his death, as a ransom for many. Jesus sat down and assumed the posture of a Jewish rabbi (NIV, 2011, Matthew 5:1; 13:1; Luke 5:3; John 8:2; cf. Mark 12:41), and he called the Twelve to him. Serving others is the path to true greatness. One must be last to be first, which is the role of a lowly servant.

Servant leadership is a social sciences theory exemplified by Christ's and Paul's lives. The most excellent model of leadership of all time was Jesus of Nazareth (Blanchard & Hodges, 2008). Jesus was a servant leader. He said that He had come not to be served but to serve. The Bible's first tenet declares that God is in charge: "In the beginning, God" (NIV, 2011, Genesis, 1:1). It is interesting to observe that the first word is *bě rē šît* ("in the beginning"). God is associated with leadership both syntactically and liturgically as the Creator (Doukhan, 2018).

As shown in Isaiah 53: 4-6 (NIV, 2011), Jesus was a sacrificial Lamb. He gave his life for everyone (NIV, 2011, Mark 20:28). Most importantly, Jesus demonstrated leadership through His life. Christ offers himself as a means of satiating the requirements of the world by delivering on the promises of salvation, forgiveness, healing, and divinization (O'Donnel, 2017).

As a servant leader, Christ showed love in his ministry on earth. The essential qualities of servant leadership are *agape* love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service

(Patterson, 2003). Christ exemplifies the same virtues in Galatians 5:22 (NIV, 2011), but the Spirit's fruit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness. Hence, Jesus was a good man with specific ministry objectives (Rich, 2020). Jesus had clear foresight because He spent a lot of time learning, practicing, and perfecting it in His spirit. He was twelve when he realized he had to return to his Father's home (NIV, 2011, Luke 2:49). There was a call. He was a prophetic teacher whose call would include all core aspects (Rich, 2020). His purpose would be to find and save the lost (NIV, 2011, Luke 19:10). He had a great passion for the entire universe. Jesus, who had a definite objective, drew people to reality by showing how much He cared (Rich, 2020).

Many scholars recognize Jesus Christ as a servant leader (Blanchard, 2018; Briner & Pritchard, 1997; Howell, 2015). After analyzing Greenleaf's new writings for years, Spears (2010) outlined ten servant leadership qualities necessary for future servant leaders' growth. These qualities are essential to the development of servant leaders. The ten characteristics are: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the development of people, and building. These ten qualities are the cornerstone of servant leadership (Cook, 2020). Throughout Jesus' ministry, He displayed these characteristics repeatedly.

The Pastor's Role

Pastors are individuals whose lives should exhibit the characteristics outlined in 1 Timothy 3:2–4 (NIV, 2011) and Titus 1:6–9 (NIV, 2011). God has given several defining passages describing a pastor and what a pastor should do (NIV, 2011, 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). There are qualifications and standards that God expects His chosen pastors

to uphold. God does not view pastors merely from the human perspective. "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (NIV, 2011, 1 Samuel 16:7).

Pastors provide spiritual guidance to the members of their congregation. Pastors should be theologians, knowing biblical doctrine (Gartner, 2010). In an individually appropriate manner, pastors seek to relate the healing and liberating message of the Gospel to their parishioners' life histories. Their duties involve preparing weekly sermons, preaching, organizing worship services, and communicating the Scriptures to their congregations. The pastor's primary responsibility is to spread the Word of God and shepherd followers searching for spiritual guidance. They are to be shepherds of God's flock under their care (NIV, 2011, 1 Peter 5:2–3). They must know their people individually to oversee their flocks and care for souls.

Pastors are like good shepherds in that they should use the authority given to them to benefit those entrusted to their care, not for gain or gratification. God wants pastors to be willing to serve rather than pursue unjust wealth. The narratives in Genesis chapters one and two make it abundantly clear that God intended for human beings to take pleasure in His creation's splendor, plenty, and fruitfulness. The first humans discovered a prosperous and fruitful place in the beautiful setting of the Garden of Eden, and it was always God's plan for humanity to thrive in every way possible. So, God gives people a lot of resources and chances to succeed so they can thrive.

Pastors should not show favoritism or prejudice toward those entrusted to them. Instead, they should set an example for the flock. James states:

> My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters:

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (NIV, 2011, James 2:1-5).

Salwen et al. (2017) take a slightly different approach but come to the same conclusion. They said the pastor's job is to shepherd the flock of God, keeping an eye on things not because they have to but because they want to, as God would have it. They are not to dominate those in their care but be an excellent example to the flock. Pastors and people should maintain a peaceful coexistence with one another. One should not be proud, but one should be willing to associate with people who are lower in status. They are to be humble and not arrogant. (NIV, 2011, Romans 12:16).

According to Wilson and Hiestand (2016), pastoral ministry is the most diverse and challenging occupation, and their duties vary widely. The fact that they must contend with criticism, difficulties in time and financial management, and issues relating to their physical and mental health all contribute to the challenges they face.

Pastors are specialists in understanding and responding to all manifestations and varieties of human sorrow (Wilson & Hiestand, 2016). They are responsible for providing guidance and instruction to members of the community or congregation. People often go to their pastors for help before considering going to a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist, for counseling (Wang et al., 2003).

The most fitting of all the headings and metaphors used to define spiritual leadership is that of a shepherd (MacArthur, 2017). The shepherd of the congregation always keeps a close eye on the spiritual requirements of every flock member. As shepherds, pastors are to protect their flock from going astray, guide them to the green pastures of God's Word, and defend them against the vicious wolves that would ravage them (NIV, 2011, Acts 20:29).

According to Scripture, pastors are chosen by God. In this matter, their profession differs from those who choose careers based solely on their interests, abilities, or preferences. There is a divine vocation for pastors, and God's purpose is for them to walk worthy of the calling (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 4:1). A person who feels called to the ministry believes that God has called them for a particular reason to spend their lives to serve in a church. Pastors are a special gift from Christ to the church, and God gave them as a gift in response to His people's prayers (Harvey, 1904). Scripture reaffirms, "He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 4:11).

Preach the Gospel

Jesus' central message is that of the kingdom of God. He preached the Gospel everywhere He went. According to Mott (1905), the Greek etymology describes what it means to proclaim the Gospel. He noted that in addition to talking, it might also mean announcing, proclaiming, or conveying good news. Rizley and Washer (2021) defined the gospel as the declaration of the good news about what God has done for wayward sinners through Jesus Christ because the word gospel in Greek (*euangelion*) denotes "good news." The gospels contain more than 80 instances of the phrase "kingdom of God." For example, "The time has come," He said, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (NIV, 2011, Mark 1:15). Jesus' messages were about the love of God. The Gospel must be delivered in a style that serves as an educated and understandable message introduction (Mott, 1905). The primary way that the Christian life is established and sustained, learned, and taught is by listening to sermons (Willimon, 2020). Jesus spoke in Luke 4:18 (NIV, 2011), saying the Lord had sent Him and

filled Him with His Spirit to proclaim liberation for the oppressed, sight for the blind, and release from captivity.

Preaching the Gospel is necessary so that those who do not know Christ may have the opportunity to become believers and Christ-followers. Rizley and Washer (2021) captured this sentiment by stating that the Gospel must be preached for sinners to know God. There is a need for gospel preaching because there is no other way for sinners to establish a relationship with God as their reconciled heavenly Father than through hearing and accepting the good news of redemption in Christ. In Romans, Paul said, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (NIV, 2011, Romans 10:17). Jesus instructed his people, giving guidance through the Word that caused them to repent of their sins and experience a transformed life. Jesus traveled across the cities and towns of Israel, speaking in their synagogues, and sharing the Gospel of the kingdom (NIV, 2011, Matthew 9:35).

Role of Equipping the Saints (For the Work of the Ministry)

Pastors equip the saints by empowering the faithful to carry out ministry activities. Equipping the believers is the responsibility of the pastor, the chief steward. They have undergone training to grasp who they are and their stewardship obligations. Pastors have been called of God to participate in service and mission endeavors. They must now carry out such efforts faithfully and successfully (Peter, 2020). In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV, 2011), Paul was declaring to Timothy the importance of understanding the Jewish scriptures and the difference between their uses. When pastors are equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, it first begins with rightly dividing the preaching and teaching of God's word. When the preaching and teaching are correct, it prepares people to accomplish the Great Commission that Jesus Christ gave to all who believe in His name. The pastor is to equip the saints through the Word of God

(NIV, 2011, 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Acts 6:4). They are to prepare saints through prayer (NIV, 2011, Colossians 4:12-13) and trials (NIV, 2011, James 1:2). Collins's (2013) wrote regarding 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV, 2011) that Scriptures is used for instruction, conviction, correction, and training in righteousness. Timothy had seen the instructor, Paul, in action (NIV, 2011, 3:10). He then was to serve as a teacher of what he had been taught (NIV, 2011, 2:15) and mentor other aspiring educators (NIV, 2011, 2:2). The Bible is helpful for instruction in righteousness as well.

According to Peter (2020), in addition to preaching and instruction, workshops, seminars, courses, and mentorships, in particular, pastors assist believers in becoming effective gospel witnesses in various situations. Equipping and empowering God's people cannot merely be one of the church's programs; instead, it must be an environment in which the church operates. Equipping the church is a process used to make disciples. Therefore, church leaders must reach the members on their Christian journey. Robert's (2016) commentary asserted that, according to Ephesians 4:12 (NIV, 2011), God's people must be adequately prepared for service work and ministry. God's people are expected to participate in Christ's church. Everyone is God's minister, not in the sense of being vocational "ministry professionals," but in the sense that God has chosen them to serve Him, the members of the church, and those around the world.

One step in church growth is when the pastors fulfill one of their roles in the sight of God by equipping the saints. Ephesians 4:12-14 (NIV, 2011) teaches that this preparation must occur until each individual reaches the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, achieving mature belief and reflecting the measure of the fullness of Christ. Hence, the saints will be prepared for service, and the Body of Christ will be strengthened. Pastors need a proper perspective on preaching and ministry leadership to equip the church. This perspective entails deeply considering the realities of God to allow those truths to manifest themselves in practices

intended to empower the Body to share the gospel of Christ with the community (Espinoza, 2017).

Taking a slightly different approach but reaching the same conclusion, Alawode (2020) wrote that church planting is analogous to gathering and storing the souls of individuals saved by grace and afterward, preparing and equipping them to go out and carry out a similar work of gathering and storing each one for spiritual processing through the teachings of God's Word.

Peter (2020) offers a four-fold empowerment process for equipping the saints:

(1) Inspiration: Motivating someone to apply for a ministry post by highlighting their abilities, defending the importance of the position, and advancing the effort's goals.

(2) Information: Teaching the steward theology, theory, and skills they need to do the job well and faithfully.

(3) Imitation: Giving an experienced and successful worker a chance to serve as a mentor by showing how to lead or do ministry.

(4) Innovation: Letting the steward lead or minister in a certain way while being watched over by the pastor or another qualified staff member and guided by the mentor in ministry.

In the Christian religion, the term "ministry" refers to the office held by individuals consecrated by ecclesiastical authority to be ministers in the church or who have received a call to special vocational service in a church (Liefeld, 2013). Within the church context, the pastor is in charge of the group of people doing the work. In Romans 1:1 (NIV, 2011), Paul wrote, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gifts in order to make you strong." This is the typical language for a pastor to use. There is no standing alone in this struggle. The Church can be thought of as a multi-organ system. Christians cannot live without one another. Paul said

he longed to see them so that he could impart some spiritual gifts to make them strong—that is, so that the people may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (NIV, 2011, Romans 1:11).

The pastor is not the only person involved in the ministry. At every level of human existence, people are embedded within a highly interconnected, spider-like web of elements that interlock. God created a world where things can grow, develop, and continue to exist because of connections and interactions within ecological systems (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The system in the church is called the ministry of the church. As servants of God, it is people's responsibility to acknowledge this created reality and conduct their lives, spiritual development, teaching, and preaching in such a way as to be in harmony with it (Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

In searching for a theoretical framework under which to conduct this study, the servant leadership theory developed by Robert Greenleaf was a natural fit because pastors should be leaders who follow the example of Christ. This section describes the development of the theory and how scholars have applied servant leadership principles to the church.

Servant Leadership Theory

The story of Leo inspired Robert Greenleaf to build on the idea of servant leadership. The wanderer who related this tale goes in search of Leo, and after a period of time spent traveling, he eventually comes across Leo. He comes to realize that Leo, whom he had previously known only in the capacity of a servant, was in reality the titular head of the Order that was funding the journey. It was led by Leo, a noble leader who was its guiding spirit. Leo, the guiding spirit, inspired Greenleaf, which later caused him to play a significant role at AT&T during his 38-year career. While Greenleaf did not write like a theologian, he believed in how Jesus conducted his ministry (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf did not necessarily develop the theory from a biblical

worldview but instead took elements of Jesus' life and ministry as a backdrop for developing the theory. This distinction was why there was a divergence between biblical servanthood and Greenleaf's social science theory. The foundation of servant leadership starts with the innate desire to put others before oneself. Then, one made a conscious decision to strive for leadership. When compared to someone who is a leader first, that individual is very different (Greenleaf, 1977). The attention given by the servant to ensure that other people's top priorities are being met made a difference. Greenleaf (1977) asserted that he did not base his leadership opinions on philosophies or academic research but rather on his reflections. He lacked the natural bent to tie up the fundamentals of life into tidy bundles of coherence and logic.

 The most significant indicator of servant leadership was whether or not the people it served developed personally. Do those who receive service improve in health, wisdom, accessibility, independence, and their likelihood of becoming servants? What effect does this have on socially disadvantaged groups? Will they profit or at least avoid extreme deprivation? (Greenleaf, 1977).

According to Sendjaya (2015), the basic principle of servant leadership was taught and personified more than 2,000 years ago by Jesus Christ and his followers, much earlier than the works of Greenleaf or Hesse. Greenleaf drew from his experiential leadership practice and deep Quaker religion. The church quickly embraced this modern servant leadership approach to understand Jesus' leadership styles, much like the rest of humanity adopted it for its practical utility (Singfiel, 2018).

In the 1970s essay "The Servant as Leader, Greenleaf "founded the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964 (since renamed the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership) to develop his leadership theories" (King-Meadows, 2015, n.p.). Many other philosophers and thinkers

throughout history have proposed ideas that, while largely unrealized, were nevertheless

significant because they advanced and changed the thinking of others (Letizia, 2018). Servant

leadership has remained popular because it focuses on the growth and well-being of people and

the places they live.

A servant-leader shares authority puts the needs of others first, and helps people build

and operate as efficiently as possible. In the same vein, White (1985) claimed serving others

without expecting anything in return is the hallmark of a servant. Dierendonck and Patterson

(2018) asserted that according to the most recent meta-analysis, servant leadership could account

for 12% more variation in important employee outcomes than transformational leadership, which

has a stronger organizational focus. A method in which leaders and followers help each other

achieve greater heights of morality and motivation is transformational leadership (Akdere, 2015).

Growing research showed that servant leadership is effective and essential for the leader, their

followers, and the company.

Greenleaf (2008) asserted that a servant-leader does not emphasize leadership but begins

with an innate desire to serve; a servant-leader is a servant first. As a social phenomenon, servant

leadership is setting an example for others and working together to accomplish a common

objective (Van Wyk, 2017). Servant-leaders believe they must assist others in growing and

learning so they may contribute to their fullest potential. Servant leadership encourages people to

work at a level that offers their best. It is not about the servant leader but those they lead.

According to Newsom et al. (2017), followers often view servant leaders as moral

decision-makers acting in their best interests. They understand that these leaders are acting on

behalf of others, which strengthens their emotional bonds with them. Servant leadership is just

about relationships. The ability of pastors to minister effectively to people depends on their

ability to forge connections. These connections stand out because common faith, values, trust, and respect characterize them. Building relationships requires being there for the other person; for Christians, that means being there with a particular trait (Colarelli, 2007). The wealthy young man, the adulteress woman, and the woman at the well are just a few illustrations of how Christ is vividly visible to people in the Bible. In each of these situations, Jesus' presence had a strong, often life-changing effect that made people see themselves and their problems differently and left them wanting more (Colarelli, 2007).

Servant-leadership is characterized by putting the needs of others before one's own to transform those served into servants as a result. And the choice to lead then follows (Whitfield, 2014). Therefore, the person who chooses to serve others first differs significantly from those who decided to lead first. Servant-first and leader-first are two extreme sorts (Whitfield, 2014). The servant-first leader ensures that other people's top priorities are met. Everyone must submit to the people they serve before they can serve (Morenammele & Schoeman, 2020). Peter (2020) asserted that, similarly, the elders of the Christian churches in Asia Minor are encouraged by the Apostle Peter to shepherd the sheep of God that were among them (NIV, 2011, 1 Peter 5:1). Like Paul, Peter made it clear that the flock belongs to God and not to human shepherds. Pastors act as under-shepherds to God, the true owner of the flock.

Many scholars have attempted to define servant leadership. Servant leadership does not have a universally accepted definition (Cincala & Chase, 2018). This researcher defines servant leadership as one who puts the needs of their followers ahead of their desires rather than leading to gain power or assert authority. Nevertheless, as Greenleaf's oft-quoted passage begins, service comes first for the servant leader. It starts with the instinctive desire to put others first (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf and numerous others have tried to broaden or enhance the

definition of servant leadership (Cincala & Chase, 2018). Hernandez et al. (2011) offered many general differences in leadership descriptions. Eva et al. (2019) provided a concrete illustration of the difficulty in defining the idea among researchers and proposes a new definition of servant leadership: (1) a willingness to help others; (2) putting the needs and interests of each follower first; and (3) a move away from being self-centered and toward caring for others, both inside the company and on the broader community.

According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), servant leadership has been referred to as an altruistic calling due to a leader's profoundly ingrained desire to influence others' lives. The servant-leader initially chose to serve, and due to that desire, an aspiration to lead others emerges (Greenleaf, 1977). Like Jesus and the disciples, servant leaders believe that servant leadership objectives are to help followers develop into leaders who reflect what Jesus taught about power, self-awareness, humility, servitude, and focusing on others' needs.

Servant leadership theory differs from other leadership theories such as transformational leadership. For instance, transformational leadership emphasizes a desire to lead and motivates followers to perform well, whereas servant leadership focuses on a passion for serving and preparing others to serve (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014; Heyler & Martin, 2018). The Bible alluded to servant leadership when Jesus stated that whoever wishes to be first among you must submit to all (NIV, 2011, Mark 10:45). To be first, one must be last and serve all (NIV, 2011, Mark 9:35). John 13:16 (NIV, 2011) says, no messenger is more important than the one who sent him, and no servant is more important than his master.

Multiple studies show the positive influence of servant leadership within organizations (Neubert et al., 2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Prakasch et al., 2019). Spears (2010) followed Greenleaf's lead and refined the theory by highlighting servant leadership actions. Several

contemporary academics have influenced the foundation of the servant leadership paradigm. One downside to the theory is that no one can agree on precisely what constitutes servant leadership (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2018). Furthermore, limited empirical research has been conducted regarding servant-leadership (Farling et al., 1999; Northouse, 2013). As Zohar (1997) said, servant-leadership is the core of quantum thinking and leadership.

The Body of Christ should demonstrate servant leadership. Jesus taught His disciples that they should serve others and place the needs of others before their own. Perhaps the ultimate illustration of servant leadership was demonstrated when Christ washed His disciples' feet (NIV, 2011, John 13:14-16). "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." Akerlund (2015) asserts that for a superior to bathe an inferior's feet was unheard of since having one's feet washed was viewed as a symbol of superiority. Jesus continued by saying that His followers should follow His example and imitate what He had done. According to Christ, no one is more important than the God who sent them, and no one is more significant than the God who hired them (Akerlund, 2015).

Servant Leadership Applied to the Church

Crowther (2018) states that servant leadership works well in the church and Christian ministry. Servant leaders are essential for the church to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. People should be grateful that God has sent church teachers. According to 1 Corinthians 12:20 (NIV, 2011), God appointed first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers in the church. Those who possess these gifts should help people understand Scripture. These prophets and teachers are servant leaders who should not fight and quarrel (NIV, 2011, 2 Timothy 2:24) but be humble toward others and devoted to the ministry to which God has called them. Jesus Christ exemplified sacrificial self-emptying leadership, and the church must do the same.

Servant leaders should look for a way of putting others' needs before their own to satisfy someone else's needs. Northouse (2013) captures this sentiment well by stating servant leadership strongly emphasizes the leader's consideration of the needs of followers, empathy for them, and nurturing of them. Servant leadership can encourage in these uncertain times. Leaders depend on God to satisfy their needs, as the church depends on servant leaders to continue their function (Letizia, 2018). Christ continues to serve the world through the Holy Spirit through the church (O'Donnell, 2017). The church is where people seek godly counsel during times of trouble. People search for spiritual direction and nurturing, yet far too frequently they do not turn to the church for assistance (Javore, 2011).

When the disciples argued about who should be most important in the kingdom, Jesus taught them the underlying principles of servanthood. He said that if anybody wants to be first, they must be last of all and servant of all (NIV, 2011, Mark 9:35). Because Jesus led and served the people He led, He is the best example of servant leadership. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet (NIV, 2011, Matt 20:20; Luke 22:27; John 13:14), He showed what servant leadership resembled. Jesus taught his disciples what it is to be a faithful servant leader. The premise of biblical servant leadership is that Jesus is instructing his disciples in a new way to lead—through service rather than force and authority (Locke, 2019).

When it comes to the church, servant leadership offers a novel perspective for those in positions of authority within the church. They should have honesty, accountability, compassion, humility, strength, vision, influence, and positivity. Servant leaders own up to mistakes, provide structure, and take calculated risks (Sousa & Van Dierendonck, 2017). Because Christian leaders are called to be servants, they should be different from other types of leaders (Tidball, 2012). Christ seeks servants who are academically versed in the Scriptures and ready to live virtuous,

service-oriented lifestyles devoted to the service of Christ (Concordia Theological Seminary

Faculty, 2021). Churches should raise leaders who embody the principles of servant leadership.

<center>**Related Literature**</center>

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore how high-tech, high-touch

senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their

church members and lead them using digital technology. Because technology can help or hinder

this process, pastors must take steps to strengthen interpersonal relationships with their church

members. This section reviews additional relevant literature on the research concern. It first

focuses on technology and ministry, high tech/high touch toward individuals, creating and

maintaining personal connections, and using technology to supplement rather than replace

contact. Various potential technologies are discussed, including video calling to individuals,

streaming church services, church websites, and social media. The importance of church staff,

volunteers, and the congregation as a whole will be explored. Finally, the importance of personal

"touch," meaning maintaining personal contact with each person and family, is discussed.

Technology and Ministry

Technology is everywhere. Everything in the world is either a product of nature or the

creation of man (McNeil, 2002). Technology is all around. Magezi (2015) mentioned that certain

pastors from different theological movements believe technology is a tool that does not exalt

God. They make the case that the humility Christians anticipate contrasts sharply with the

consumerism and self-glorification of celebrities and televangelists. Despite owning smartphones

and computers, these pastors oppose using technology in the church.

On the other hand, while technology has made church administration more efficient, if

technology hinders individuals from communicating with one another, it could become a barrier

to deeper human connections. Like anything else, technology has both advantages and disadvantages. Online preaching tools, such as sermon outlines and even complete sermons, are helping many preachers. Originally, the pastor's library consisted of books, files, notebooks, tapes, and other tangible materials stored on a bookshelf. Eventually, more and more podcasts, e-books, websites, Bible software, and online college and seminary courses are replacing the pastor's physical library (Young, 2019). All of these changes are due to the enhancement of technology.

The United States and the rest of the world's economies depend on technology. Today, people have everything within their reach. Answers to any question are simply a Google search away. Technology is not the only solution to people's quests for inner faith and peace (Naisbitt et al., 2001). The same rationale applies to church communities. Instead of going to a pastor or spiritual advisor for advice, people often turn to the web for answers. Naisbitt et al. (2001) theorize that the more technology is embraced, the more there is a need for human touch.

Technology alone will not make the world a more livable environment. Technology has expanded the reach of human interactions. It allows individuals to contact distant friends and family and creates infinite potential social connections. However, evidence shows in-person interactions are more beneficial than technology-enabled contact (Swartz & Novick, 2020). Man is truly human only if he is the master of his actions and the arbitrator of their value, only if he is the architect of his progress. He must act by his God-given nature, freely accepting its possibilities and claims upon him (Wolyniak, 2015).

The Bible talks about technologies, some good and some bad. Cain built a city in Genesis 4:17 (NIV, 2011). Jubal, Cain's brother, was the father of all who played the harp and flute (NIV, 2011, Genesis 4:21) and the forger of all instruments of bronze (NIV, 2011, Genesis 4:22). God

directed and instructed Noah to build an ark. Using the instructions of God, Noah designed and built this complicated boat (NIV, 2011, Genesis 6). Abraham and Isaac were engineers and dug wells (NIV, 2011, Genesis 26). Bezalel, filled with the Spirit of God, built the tabernacle with ability, intelligence, and the knowledge in all kinds of crafts (NIV, 2011, Exodus 31:3-5). Aaron styled an idol of a golden calf using a tool (NIV, 2011, Exodus 32:4).

Tools were used to fashion the golden calf (NIV, 2011, Exodus 32:4), and Moses also used them to carve out the stones that God used to write the Ten Commandments (NIV, 2011, Exodus 34:4). One might surmise that technology is morally neutral, in the sense that if one is producing something beneficial, then the technology itself must be beneficial. One would think that the building of the temple and the altar were good projects, so the tools used for those activities would be acceptable. And yet, means were forbidden onsite when building the temple, and no tools could be used on them, so the stones were in their natural (original) state as God made them. Altars in the Bible were always made of natural, God-created stones rather than manufactured bricks. Therefore, devices prevented anything from interfering with solely worshiping God.

It is interesting how prevalent technology is in churches today. The same instruction was given for constructing altars (NIV, 2011, Exodus 20:24-25; Deuteronomy 27:5; Joshua 8:31; Kings 6:7; Isaiah 44:12). Nothing should take away from the plain worship of God, so Christians should think about whether and how technology might do so (Whiting, 2011).

Yet, Whiting (2011) continued by stating that the same tools can be employed for various purposes, including good and evil, war and peace, and both. The prophets Isaiah and Micah both looked to a future where people would beat their swords into pruning hooks and spears into plowshares (NIV, 2011, Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3, Joel 3:10). So, something initially intended for

peaceful use was used for war. And a weapon designed for destruction may be re-configured for peaceful applications. Tools are intended to be useful for users and are not meant to be greater than their creators. The wielded instruments are intended to be subservient to the wielder (NIV, 2011, Isaiah 10:15). Deuteronomy 19:5 (NIV, 2011) describes how an ax head might accidentally fly off and kill someone. In this situation, the person may seek refuge in a safe city and live there (Whiting, 2011).

Computer electronics have enabled instant person-to-person communication (via mobile telephony or internet telecommunication), self-publishing, and worldwide distribution of writing, art, and video. The full impact of this changing media environment revealed itself slowly. However, new media operates independently of traditional journalism, including blogs, flash mobs, MySpace, and similar online projects for organizing social gatherings. New forms of communication (text messages and mobile phones) and financial investment practices (microfinance) have emerged. eBay and online commerce are examples of new types of economic interactions. There are also new forms of entertainment, artistic expression, and alternative forms of news reporting. Concerns about theology and the church may arise due to the current climate surrounding the media. If changes in the media environment affect so much else, one should expect those changes to impact the way people think theologically and how the church acts (Soukup, 2008).

According to a poll by the Barna Group in 2021, participating in communion or Eucharist (24%) and interacting with others before and after service (23%) were rated as the top two things churchgoers missed when services were only available online. Both of these things are often hard to replicate digitally. Other high-ranking aspects of worship were going to a live service or

sermon (21%), being able to talk to people with similar beliefs (19%), and greeting people, or "passing the peace" during services (17%).

This survey shows that listening to a live service or sermon was a popular choice. As individuals have changed their communication habits, so religious individuals have altered the means through which they interact spiritually. Online environments can provide a rich and genuine spiritual experience (Campbell, 2005). Furthermore, people with similar beliefs about religious contact can feel spiritually connected through religious experiences in online spaces (Lombaard, 2007, McCully, 2014).

According to Kildea (2021), technology might illuminate why people today are so passive. Religious believers can now attend religious services virtually, with Mass being live streamed into their homes. On the other hand, live broadcasting is not a substitute for in-person service attendance and cannot satisfy the faithful's spiritual hunger for the Eucharist. The current alternate option permits a type of religious ritual that goes beyond Spanish flu contemplation. Technology makes it possible for spiritual needs to be met during unforeseen circumstances. By the end of March 2020 and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, one in five people worldwide had been forced to stay home. In the United Kingdom, these lockdown tactics included closing chapels and churches (Bryson et al., 2020).

A few weeks after the COVID-19 pandemic, a group of volunteer pastors were trained in personal protective measures to replace the patient companions in Nekooei-Hedayati-Forghani Hospital. After one week, the patients, nurses, and physicians were asked whether they were happy with the presence of volunteer pastors as patient companions. Findings revealed that only 2% of patients were dissatisfied with the company of pastors, with 92.9% satisfied. The patients' contentment with the pastors' presence was primarily motivated by their ability to combat

loneliness, lessen their dread and anxiety, and advance their spiritual well-being. Some people were still yearning for the special touch a pastor gives during times of being alone. Once again, the high-tech, high-touch pastor was learning to maximize personal ministry in a digital age (Aminnejad et al., 2020).

Elliott (2021) asserted that when pastors were required to create appropriate content for presenting services on platforms like Facebook, Zoom, YouTube, and others, most pastors admitted they were at a disadvantage since they were unfamiliar with technology. Some pastors used technology to their advantage during the lockdown, while others had trouble. Some were upset because they could not keep up with their colleagues and were embarrassed by their lack of computer proficiency.

According to Magezi (2015), churches and pastors fall into two technology categories: either technologically aggressive embracers or lukewarm embracers of technology, including technology objectors. Those pastors who were aggressive embracers of technology were pioneers and focused on technology's benefits. They tend to be viewed as polished, young, and technologically astute. These pastors have embraced technology wholeheartedly in their congregations. They search for various ways in which it may improve their ministries. They are aware of the advantages of technology and freely employ it in the church. The second group of congregations and pastors include lukewarm embracers of technology and technology objectors. They are cautiously and gradually adopting technology. The majority of these pastors work for centrally administered denominational congregations. The pastor must first get permission from the leadership to use specific technologies. Individual churches and pastors within these denominations have limited latitude to conceive of and implement local congregational ministry. The pastor only has a small amount of freedom to choose how to employ technology within a

predetermined range. Pastors and churches like these do not use technology like public address systems, data projectors, and simple messaging systems very often.

On October 24, 2005, the Bama Group published a report demonstrating the rise in popularity of new religious experiences and expressions luring millions of people closer to God but away from congregational church participation. Because of technology, more people are discovering God. They are not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another (Hudgins, 2019), "All the more as you see the day approaching" (NIV, 2011, Hebrews 10:25). Reimer (2021) asserted that more than 75% of individuals surveyed in research among German Evangelical Lutheran churches supported keeping worship services in the internet mode even after the coronavirus may have passed. While people continue to worship online and satisfy their spiritual needs, technology is supplying high-tech. The high touch that some people need, and desire is not being met because they have abandoned coming together in the church building for face-to-face and personal interaction. Social media and the internet directly hinder personal connection, negating and even overturning a person's capacity for it. A person always connected to the digital world risks becoming hollow and lonely over time, unable to relate to or be present with others, God, or oneself (Ocampo, 2018). Through the growth of bonds anchored in shared worship, fellowship influences the connections between people and places that are missing. The use of lockdowns and social distancing practices has upset these tenets (Bryson et al., 2020). Therefore, this study's problem was whether there are benefits and disadvantages to pastors using technology to develop close interpersonal connections and communication with individual church members.

High-Tech/High-Touch Toward Individuals

Humans touch countless things daily, but another kind of touch affects lives more

significantly. That sort of touch is the touch of another person. Jesus demonstrated many examples of touch in the Bible. Byrne and Nuzum (2020) asserted that styles of pastoral ministry are clearly derived from the Gospels for the Christian chaplain. The difficulty for hospital chaplains is how to integrate this paradigm of pastoral ministry when they are restricted in their ability to "be with" each other. Therefore, they draw on the example of Jesus, who served the most vulnerable people in society, went to the fringes, and touched those with leprosy. When Jesus touched lepers, this example of the touch He rendered required His physical presence, as seen in Scripture. He touched Peter's mother-in-law, who lay sick with a fever. "And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her, and the fever left her" (NIV, 2011, Mark 1:31). Jesus touched the dead young girl. "Taking her by the hand, he said '*talitha coum*," (which means, "little girl, I say to you, get up") (NIV, 2011, Mark 5:41). And she got up. On another occasion, Jesus helped a man who was deaf and mute. Taking him aside, he rubbed his tongue and put his fingers in his ears before sighing and addressing him with the words "Be opened" (NIV, 2011, Mark 7:33-34). There was the case of the blind man. "And some people brought him a blind man and begged him to touch him. He then took the blind man by the hand and asked him, have you noticed anything? After spitting in his eyes and placing his hands on him" (NIV, 2011, Mark 8:23). God is the source of all life, but God literally breathed into Adam and Eve the beginning of human life. "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (NIV, 2011, Genesis 2:7).

Church members must experience the pastor's high-touch, just as Jesus gave his followers high-touch. The urge to hold someone's hand at the end of their life or be present in person can never be replaced by virtual technology (Byrne & Nuzum, 2020). The Thessalonian Christians were encouraged by Paul to greet one another with a kiss (NIV, 2011, Romans 16:16).

Technology will not replace people's ability to show empathy, show someone they care about them, or make someone laugh when they need to (Bajer, 2017).

As a natural result of the lockdown and the lock-up, some clergy reported a loss of intimacy with others (Village & Francis, 2021). However, several clergy members also improved their relationship with God during this period. Indicators of this discrepancy were cited by 39% of clergy who said they felt distant from other people and 43% who said they felt closer to God.

According to Byrne and Nuzum (2020), Jesus was alone in the garden of Gethsemane during his time of seclusion, thinking about and concerned about what lay ahead. Patients' pain increased when they were left isolated and alone. Patients need chaplains to watch and be there in their hour of despair precisely during this point. Seeing patients alone has concerned pastors and chaplains about providing that special touch to those they shepherd during those lonely times.

Create and Maintain Personal Connection

Creating and maintaining personal connections is crucial for the church. People with more satisfying interpersonal relationships experience a sense of belonging to something or someone other than themselves. One reason it is so important for pastors to establish and maintain personal connections with their congregation is that a strong friendship gives one something to cling to during trying and stressful times. Although it is impossible to replace the hands-on experience, Zoom is an alternative online platform that can bridge gaps when face-to-face gatherings are not an option (Thakkar et al., 2021). Tobey (2017) found that when individuals were asked to stop using social media, texting, and email for even an hour, this seemed like a lot to ask and even impossible to accomplish in a culture heavily reliant on these

technologies. As seen, many young people yearn for unwavering focus and an emotional connection through face-to-face conversation, and pastors should pay attention to this.

Whether a pastor maintains a personal connection face-to-face or through social media, the connection must remain. One of the most sensitive tasks of the pastor is spiritual counseling and soul care. It is not easy to think that care or counseling might be automated (Young, 2019). Spiritual counseling through technology is more of a challenge for pastors than preaching through technology. Pastoring is not just about preaching; it is about sharing in the lives of others. As Scripture teaches in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, pastors should care for those they watch over, similar to how a mother looks after her children (NIV, 2011).

According to Weima (2014), the second metaphor of a nursing mother emphasizes Paul's affection for the Thessalonian believers during his previous visit. The first metaphor of newborns shows the innocence of Paul's behavior and motives during that visit. It is clear from the metaphor's usage that the metaphor's point is love. The warmth of feeling conveyed by the uncommon participle in this passage shows Paul cares so much that love is the essential element stressed. Paul and his fellow missionaries desired to share the gospel and themselves with the Thessalonian believers. And the final causal clause indicated directly that these Christians became beloved by them.

Therefore, this study's problem was whether there are benefits and disadvantages of pastors using technology to develop close interpersonal connections and communication with individual church members. Pastors should share in the lives of those whom they lead. They should treat their members like fathers and brothers by encouraging, comforting, and urging those they lead to living a life worthy of God who called them into God's kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, NIV, 2011). Pastors should build and maintain personal relationships with

church members to support them when things are difficult. The critical subject of in-person counseling to meet unique needs such as bereavement is addressed below.

Because each person handles loss in varied ways, effective personalized psychological and spiritual interventions are crucial for people experiencing difficulties coping with grief. The pastor regularly provides consolation to their church members in times of loss while they are grieving (Newsom et al., 2017). "Praise is to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we receive from God" (NIV, 2011, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

More than 20 years of study have revealed that pastors are the most sought-after sources of assistance for mental distress, with 40% of those in need turning to pastors rather than other healthcare practitioners. Chalfant et al. (1990) found that socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and church attendance were more important than religion regarding how helpful the pastor was as a resource.

Spiritual breakthroughs happen when one cares for those struggling with complex issues, is present when someone is in agony, and prays with them when they are in need. Providing a solid, biblical sermon to minister the Word of God is crucial. However, providing pastoral care and other forms of personal ministry is equally significant. Pastoral care and counseling are essential ingredients in the life of the church. Pastors have been challenged to develop alternate worship styles during the COVID-19 epidemic to uphold their congregations and provide pastoral care for the fearful, ill, and grieving (Bryson et al., 2020).

Use Technology to Supplement Rather Than Replace Contact

Pastors kept in touch with their congregations with the help of technology, which was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021. According to Ting et al. (2020), during COVID-19, the direct use and successful application of digital technology to address a significant global public health challenge in 2020 increased the public and governmental approval of such technologies for other areas of healthcare, including chronic disease in the future.

Interestingly, there has been a transition to distance education in higher education during COVID-19. In residential colleges, students used to attend classes physically, but that has often been replaced or supplemented with virtual contact. Whitelaw et al. (2020) said that countries that have quickly implemented digital technologies would have an advantage in stopping the spread of a highly contagious virus during COVID-19. They had to facilitate planning, surveillance, testing, contact tracing, quarantine, and clinical management to remain front-runners in managing disease burden. However, this same transformation has not yet widely occurred in the religious sphere. Many felt that they were suddenly experiencing isolation forced upon them from the start of the pandemic. While some welcomed the suspension of everyday activities, others provided extra time for thought or to draw breath, while others found the enforced isolation challenging. It was several weeks during the pandemic before online meetings and telephones became available. It is interesting how quickly some criticized the frequency of online meetings as yet another hardship. There is no denying that the accessibility and ease of communication technology significantly impacted the capacity to keep in touch with loved ones in person and conduct pastoral care and public worship (Elliott, 2021).

Byrne and Nuzum (2020) asserted that technology alone is not enough; it can never replace physical, pastoral presence. However, when constrained in the capacity to be with

people, it might assist in meeting a need. According to research published by Tobey (2017), most young people feel more comfortable with someone "sensitive" to their nonverbal feelings. These young people's overwhelming desire and preference for face-to-face communication was found to be related to both the desire for the presence of complete attention and the capacity for emotional expression. Technology is a beautiful way for pastors to communicate with people. However, face-to-face communication is needed. Technology is helpful in all areas of life, but personal contact and communication with those close to them are still necessary for many people.

Schubert (2020) said that communicating with a church from a distance was good but not good enough for Paul in the Bible. The letter Paul wrote to the Romans was sixteen chapters long. He wanted to visit the Romans but could not, so writing the letter was the next best thing (NIV, 2011, Romans 1:13). For as Paul explained in his letter, "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gifts to strengthen you, and that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (NIV, 2011, Romans 1:11-12). Paul considered it a supplement because he could not talk to them directly. Like Paul, pastors ought to admit that their church would benefit more from their presence in person. Nuzum (2020) wrote that one of the most urgent challenges for pastoral care is how we remain pastorally close while physically distant from patients with alleged or confirmed COVID-19. In the same vein, Byrne and Nuzum (2020) said the experience of caring for isolated patients inspired the use of technology to offer care, connection, and support the response. As technology continually makes it possible for pastors to stay connected with their congregants, technology must not replace the person-to-person contact some people require.

Video Calling Connection to Individuals

It is crucial to establish a personal connection or "touch." Even when physical touching is not possible, pastors can make a virtual connection with their church members. Williams (2021) asserted that COVID-19 shifted attention from large screens in the sanctuary to small screens of laptops or desktop computers in the living rooms of church members. Technology such as video calls allowed audio and visual communication. Addo (2021) stated that music is essential in the liturgy of African Pentecostal churches. Embedding traditional instruments such as congas, drums, or rattles, as well as melodic vocalizations from choir members, all contribute to a multisensory experience of worship. He said this unique cultural element lost its value when migrated to an online environment, as it became almost impossible to synchronize instruments and voices from multiple devices.

In the same vein, Van Zeeland et al. (2021) said an online interview means a physical separation between the interviewer and interviewee but also generates emotional distance. The absence of intimacy, which characterizes discussions over online video-calling tools, can make it harder to discuss personal topics, and interviewees may be more hesitant to discuss sensitive issues. Video calling connection to individuals makes it possible for communication to take place, but the presence of a person could be overlooked. Certain aspects of the interview will inevitably be lost when performed online compared to a face-to-face interview. For example, elements of the surrounding environment, such as background noise or the presence of others, will vary for the interviewer and the interviewee (Van Zeeland et al., 2021).

Video calling connections are better than phone calls because of the increased face-to-face interaction with video communications. They hold much more robust and trusting relationships with people when face-to-face communication is impossible. Video conferencing can make one more productive, save time, save money on travel, and help individuals work

together better. According to Van Zeeland et al. (2021), using online video conferencing for interviews is apparent, especially in overcoming geographical challenges and saving time and money. The ability to help support all of those advantages without necessitating continual travel for face-to-face contact is a benefit of video conferencing. The same applies to pastors as they stay connected to their members. Video calls to members have made life less complicated for some pastors to communicate without movement, especially during COVID-19.

According to Addo (2021), worship performed online is different. For novices, it is impossible to tell from the congregation's facial reactions whether the song has an effect. The way people act during worship can significantly change the mood. An individual does not have that feedback in the internet environment. One can only have faith in the Holy Spirit to fulfill their role.

Williams (2021) said using someone else's video so that many people may hear the original author's ideas from their voice liberates them as a preacher since they no longer have to paraphrase someone else's views. Pastors can video conference with their flock without leaving their home's comfort, engaging in face-to-face dialogue while still feeling connected to them. Where church members sit and what they participate in have changed due to the pandemic. However, it is fascinating to see how online closeness may create connections and relationships that may not have existed offline, even to the extent that a Zoom meeting does not make them feel worn out. There are still many opportunities to faithfully carry out the Great Commission in previously unimagined ways. Zoom fatigue has not yet set in (Williams, 2021). Nothing has been able to stop the Gospel from going forward. Similarly, Williams (2021) said nothing had prevented the spread of Christianity over the past two thousand years, and the coronavirus pandemic is likely to be no different.

According to Spiby et al. (2019), midwives reported that more details were discovered through video conference than telephone contact. In a pilot study of video conferencing to help parents after discharge, the dialogue was more profitable and nearly equal to a face-to-face visit. In a study, Van Zeeland et al. (2021) reported that students discovered that the flow of the interviews was not the same. They could ask fewer follow-up questions and had more trouble building rapport with interviewees. The interviews were shorter, and the conversations were more akin to a question-and-answer exchange than an actual interview.

Video calling has allowed churchgoers to stay in touch, particularly during COVID-19. Addo (2021) asserted that emojis, such as the handclap or fire emoji, are used throughout virtual liturgy to signify moments of intense cognitive engagement. Likewise, when a message was particularly potent, believers would write words like "hmmm," "yaaaaaaaaaaaa," "omg!" or "Amen!" In face-to-face services, Christians show their devotion by raising their hands, clapping while standing or sitting, yelling, nodding, or shouting "hallelujah!" in response to these moving moments. He claimed that because the mute button, frequently used on gadgets to prevent acoustic interruptions, has limitations, those physical reactions cannot be adequately communicated in online settings. Making one's house a place of worship through video calling has become the new standard. Addo's (2021) study showed that these platforms, designed to serve as secular necessities, can be partially repurposed and customized to meet religious requirements to function as sacred spaces for religious gatherings.

Video conferencing has benefits and drawbacks, significantly enabling people to stay connected. A study by Pedaste and Kasemets (2021) showed video calling has cons and pros. Travel, lodging, food, and drink were not problems during online video conference calls. However, concerns about maintaining a secure online environment and safeguarding participant

privacy were raised. Supporting sociability was one of the main challenges during an online video conference, mainly when participants were in vastly different time zones. Uncertainty in the budget was another significant obstacle to online video-calling talks. Estimating the number of participants and estimating the revenue from participation fees are more challenging tasks.

Technology and the Church (Internet, Computer Applications, Streaming Video Platforms, and Social Media)

Cellphones and social media have emerged as some of the most influential and crucial methods of reaching churchgoers as churches expand and adapt to the age of ubiquitous smartphones. In addition to enabling personal connections, technology allows the church to use various tools to accomplish its objectives. These and other technological advancements make it feasible for people to stay in touch through trying times, even when face-to-face contact is impossible. For instance, video streaming allows services to be shared with sick and shut-in people who cannot come to the physical building. According to White et al. (2016) findings, the pastors studied used social media, particularly Facebook, to spread the Gospel, disciple people in novel ways, engage with their followers, and inspire them to be close to God through daily devotional posts. Daily, people spend a lot of time communicating with others on social media.

According to Tobey's (2017) study, on average, the attendees reported spending 2.56 hours a day sharing with others via technology. The study showed young people claimed to prefer in-person, interpersonal connections. One might reasonably speculate as to whether or not the young people in question participate in what Barth terms "actual encounters" with one another. Real meetings are sometimes appropriate; technology could facilitate or impede that process. Technology was said to help these young people arrange face-to-face encounters, but they also mentioned that it frequently interfered with these connections when they were taking

place. Many students said they primarily used technology to stay in touch with friends and

family, but they also said it sometimes got in the way of their relationships (Tobey, 2017).

The church can communicate rapidly and share its messages and other resources using

church websites. The Great Commission calls for more than merely verbalizing the Gospel; it

also calls for expressing it internationally by finding new, adaptable, and appropriate ways to

declare it to those who do not understand it traditionally (White et al., 2016).

Email is another technology that allows communication. Email can be sent and received

instantly, making it useful for pastors to communicate with people who are located anywhere

from next door to thousands of miles away. As a result, email simplifies communication by

making it much simpler to share important information and obtain updates on the current

situation. However, this technology may cause difficulties for some people because of a lack of

accessibility, poor quality internet connections, and the non-technological generation (Kgatle,

2020).

Streaming Church Services

Live streaming for church services has never been more crucial than now. There are

many advantages to streaming church services. Churches can adopt online video technology and

use it to disseminate their ministry. Pastors are no longer bound by physical or geographical

constraints when growing their congregation. People worldwide can now enjoy preaching and

teaching through live-streaming church services. Even people with ailments that prevent them

from attending church and finding solutions to their difficulties can benefit from live streaming.

However, those members who live in rural areas may have challenges. Struzek et al. (2020) said

that using digital technology in rural regions might present challenges due to a lack of rapid

internet access and poorly built infrastructure. Because of this difficulty, pastors may experience

issues with their congregations not hearing the sermons delivered via live streaming. Some people do not know how to use smartphones and tablets, have little experience with modern technology, or do not have internet access at home.

Church Website

A church may have a regular website where people can learn about the church (Afolaranmi, 2019). A website enables church members to look into volunteer possibilities, communicate with their congregation and neighborhood, share helpful information with others, and more. Church websites are an invaluable marketing tool for visitors looking for a place of worship to learn more about the offerings that might satisfy their spiritual requirements. The website does not attempt to make in-person contact with a possible convert or participate in the virtual discussion (Sidibe, 2017). Church websites allow a member to stay connected to the church's business. Small Biz Viewpoint (2019) said that religious institutions like churches have websites today because having an online presence is just as important to them as having a physical one. Small Biz Viewpoints (2019) gave eight reasons why churches must have a website:

- Maintains a lively and engaged congregation.

- Accepts visitors and boosts popularity.

- Acts as a forum for information sharing.

- It repeats what you said.

- Use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to market your church.

- It has the advantage of affordable branding.

- Displays your involvement in the community.

- Increases the revenue of your church.

Social Media

Individuals communicate, create, share, and exchange knowledge and concepts through social media using online groups and networks. Social media allows the church to connect, grow, and interact with its target audience. Because of social media, Christians can now foster relationships within their religious community. Edison Research (2021) showed that 82% of Americans use social media. Baccarella et al. (2018) argue that social media appears to be impairing many of the traits that make humans a social species in the first place. Social media usage is growing in the United States. It is also growing in other nations. White et al. (2016) said that according to research on the development and use of the internet in Ghana, 33% of Ghanaians use online communication constantly, 25% regularly, and 30% rarely. The use of social media, on the other hand, has been crucial for pastors in reaching their flock, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Galang and Macaraan (2021) argue that the digital sphere is the new *agora*, which is heavily supported by the church's explicit use of the term "public square" to describe it as a place for dialogue, trade, and communion. While churches may have closed their doors, proclaiming the gospel has found a new home on social media.

Furthermore, Galang and Macaraan (2021) stated that today's church views this platform as a new entry point for evangelization, bringing Jesus into the online world. Ganiel (2021) said 70% of pastors claim that even once all lockdown limitations are lifted, they will continue to operate some internet ministries. Not all pastors are content with the digital age. There are concerns about using online services among some pastors. Because some individuals reside in remote areas and have difficulty using internet platforms, some pastors have raised concerns about putting religion online (Ganiel, 2021). Some older adults lack access to a safe and reliable internet connection.

Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers are essential to pastors in fulfilling their commitment to minister to the congregation's spiritual needs. They find fulfillment in placing the needs of others above their own, giving meaning to their lives as servants of Christ. As a result, a pastor should frequently participate in staff mentoring. When there are no leaders, confusion will not take long to replace vision. Due to a lack of leadership, volunteers who were formerly committed to their work will lose interest (Robinson, 2010). The Urban Institute (2020) said in 2017, 21.5% of Americans participated in volunteerism. Volunteers are stakeholders and are vitally necessary as an extension of paid personnel to complete a significant percentage of the work required to carry out the mission. Volunteer positions are typically unpaid and do not include job descriptions. Instead, they have role descriptions (Deno, 2017).

In contrast, employees at the church have job descriptions and are compensated for their work. The pastor alone cannot do the work of the Great Commission (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:19). They have called on God to use people working by their side to carry out the mission. Ministry within the church is made possible by the staff and volunteers.

The Congregation as a Whole

The congregation as a whole is the heartbeat of the church. A pastoral "shepherd" must have a "flock.". Rader (2020) points out that congregations are made up of people with needs. The pastor must value the congregation as a whole. The pastor learns from the Holy Spirit and Scripture how to tend the flock well. Scripture teaches those called to pastorship to "keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his blood "(NIV, 2011, Acts 20:28).

According to Craven (2012), churchgoers should not view their pastors as Christ's infallible. They are often misperceived as spiritually complete, able to perform miracles, all-knowing, and above reproach when they are also "sheep" under the Great Shepherd. Pastors are frequently elevated by congregations who view them as godly figures. The wise pastor will humbly lead and direct the church, realizing their shortcomings.

Personal Touch

The Bible describes how believers in Christ are to include others in their lives. Saints are Christ's hands, feet, and eyes because they give people the individualized attention they require. Hall (2020) argued that His followers on earth are called the "church," and they serve as Christ's hands and feet. People in the Bible knew the significance of being directly involved in the lives of those around them. Romans 16:16 (NIV, 2011) says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." Jesus knew the importance of personal involvement. He had a personal encounter with the woman at the well (NIV, 2011, John 4). Jesus touched the little children (Mark 10:13, NIV, 2011). He ate with Simon the leper (NIV, 2011, Mark 14:3). As Jesus illustrated, Christians need other Christians' personal touch. Humans need to receive and give that personal touch. Technology is terrific, but a gentle personal touch is more significant.

Jewitt et al. (2021) stated that one's sense of touch plays a significant role in the formation of one's perceptions of the world, oneself, and the perceptions of others. Five studies involving Mexican Americans discovered that personal recruitment was more successful than indirect methods like radio, newspapers, or fliers. Personal touch has existed since biblical times and will continue in the future.

Maintaining Contact with Each Person and Family

The pastor is responsible for keeping in touch with each individual and family in the church. The pastor must be a skilled communicator to maintain relationships with the church family. A functioning church depends on effective communication. Because they are adept at hearing and talking, leaders constantly engage with their followers to keep them engaged with their vision. Practical communication deficiencies can arise in any situation or social setting. People can easily be mistaken or misinterpreted by others, which may lead to arguments or tension within the church (Murray, 2013).

Effective communication is necessary for pastors to avoid misunderstandings that cause debate in the church. United Methodist Communications (2016) asserted a local church communications ministry tells the church's story in ways that encourage people to follow Christ as their Savior. Even if communication is supposed to be faster and simpler than ever in this digital age, it can still be challenging. The church can maintain its unity and connection through an influential community. That study states that communication goals are information sharing and community building among the congregation and other church members.

According to United Methodist Communications (2016), communication is how the pastor gives the message, teaches Bible study, and conducts congregation meetings. The study provided methods for staying in touch with churchgoers through four main channels.

- Communicating with the Congregation
  - Email updates every week
  - Sharing in person: outreach, etc.
  - A newly created worship bulletin that includes and collaborates on ministry
  - Creation or growth of a church's Facebook page
- Communicating with the Community

- Weekly newspaper advertising

- Calendars of upcoming community events

- News releases every month about notable individuals, ministries, or activities in the community

- Welcoming Guests and Visitors

    - Video and a brochure about the church

    - Introducing the church's booklet, a Q&A sheet, and a meaningful message presented by the pastor

    - Greetings training for the congregation (available through a United Methodist Communications bookmark)

- Using Strategic Public Relations

    - Taking part in community-wide activities (parades, special observances)

    - Classes tailored to the demands of the local area or community. As an illustration, one neighborhood's residents required information on insect management. That information was provided by the church.

- Engaging Internal and External Audiences

    - Consider benchmarks you use while evaluating and updating your website

    - Ask a team member familiar with website analytics to give a dashboard showing how visitors use your website

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

Based on this researcher's experience in working with pastors over the years, when the COVID pandemic struck and forced many churches to stop meeting in person, this stimulated interest in understanding how senior pastors could use technology to maintain personal contact

with their congregants. During the pandemic, many businesses switched from face-to-face

meetings to virtual platforms, which sparked an interest in whether pastors used these same tools

for ministry applications. This writer wanted to know the perceived advantages and

disadvantages of digital interactions. By interviewing ten senior pastors and discussing their

lived experiences in using digital technology, this qualitative study looked for common themes

those interviewed would mention regarding the effectiveness of extending telecommunications to

ministry. Certainly, larger churches already were using technology in-house to record their

services and live stream them, but this researcher's prior experience was with smaller African

American congregations. Whether these congregations could replace some of their close

interpersonal interactions with mediated ones became a matter of interest. While researching

these initial interests, this researcher came upon the theoretical framework of servant leadership

and Naisbitt's concept that the more technology is introduced, the more personalized it must

become.

Due to the recent coronavirus pandemic, numerous churches have had to modify their

ministries to have less physical touch. This study shows how technology can help replace some

ministerial functions while maintaining high interpersonal interaction levels. There is a gap in the

literature regarding these small churches and their use of technology in general, particularly in

maintaining a high level of individual contact. This gap was significant since the COVID-19

pandemic has changed how congregations minister. Having online services and meeting virtually

with individuals in the congregation has become more commonplace in larger congregations, but

there have been no studies on smaller congregations.

Arthur (2014) evaluated the use of the internet and web technologies in smaller churches.

However, his study focused on popular technology of that era, including developing websites

and church management purposes rather than streaming services or video conferencing for interpersonal communication. English's study from 2021 talked about how COVID has changed religious practices, but it does not focus on the small church experience.

Profile of the Current Study

This study interviewed ten evangelical African American small church pastors of churches in the Greenville area of upstate South Carolina. They were questioned on their use of technology to develop close interpersonal connections and communication with individual church members. This study expanded the existing literature by focusing on small, evangelical African American congregations and how their pastors could use technology to maximize personal ministry in the digital age.

This study expanded the concept that Naisbitt et al. (2001) proposed that the greater the amount of technology, the greater need for interpersonal "touch." This study's findings corroborated their concept.

Arthur (2014) evaluated internet and web technologies in smaller churches. His study focused on popular technology of that era, including developing websites and church management purposes rather than streaming services or video conferencing for interpersonal communication. English's (2021) study discussed how COVID had changed religious practices but does not focus on the small church experience. This study contributed uniquely to researching small African American congregations and using telecommunications technology.

Greenleaf's (1977) leadership theory served as the theoretical framework for the study. In this framework, the pastor seeks to know and serve each congregant individually. This study examined how pastors have already adapted and intended to adapt to this "new normal." Pastoral interpersonal ministry in the post-COVID era was investigated, including technology's role. This

study provided input and suggestions for pastors to maintain and enhance their interpersonal relationships.

This researcher used qualitative phenomenological study to explore and understand the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals who have gone through a particular phenomenon or lived experience. This type of design aimed to analyze the meanings that individuals ascribe to their experiences, and uncover the underlying structures, themes, and patterns that shape those meanings.

McLaughlin's (2022) study, *The Spiritual and Emotional Dynamics of Pastoral Transitions: A Phenomenological Study,* used the same design. The purpose of his qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the central phenomenon of how the spiritual and emotional dynamics of outgoing and incoming pastoral leadership impacted the pastoral transition and to discover common patterns in successful transitions. This approach was the best for McLaughlin's study as well as for this researcher's investigation. This approach provided a rich and detailed account of the phenomenon or experience under study, which was important for informing future research and practice. For this researcher's study, qualitative phenomenological research worked best. The study contributes to the growing body of literature that examines how digital tools can be leveraged to enhance religious experiences and strengthen congregational connections. The study also aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of personal relationships and face-to-face interactions in religious communities.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two reviewed the literature on the research problem stated in Chapter One. The first section of this chapter focused on technology and ministry. There is technology everywhere. We live in a world where everything that exists may be categorized as a work of nature or man

(McNeil, 2002). Technology, like anything, has its good and bad qualities. Young (2019) said

many preachers now benefit from online resources, including sermon outlines and full sermons.

Then Chapter Two discussed the high-tech, high-touch approach toward individuals, how to

create and maintain personal connection, and the use of technology to supplement rather than

replace contact. Then video calling connection to individuals, technology, the church, and

streaming church services were discussed. Next, it focused on the church website, social media,

staff, volunteers, and the congregation as a whole. It then discussed personal touch. Finally,

maintaining contact with each person and family was reviewed.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study used a phenomenological methodology to examine firsthand experiences of the high-tech, high-touch pastor maximizing personal ministry in a digital age. The phenomenological qualitative design was used because this method aims to understand lived experiences related to the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study analyzed the lived experiences of pastors cooperating to complete intelligent research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher aimed to fill the literature gap about the problem by utilizing interview techniques, transcribing the interviews, coding the transcriptions, and then analyzing the data to determine patterns and themes. Previous studies concentrated on churches using the internet and web technologies. These studies focused on popular technology, including developing websites and church management, rather than streaming services or video conferencing for interpersonal communication (Arthur, 2014). This study of the high-tech, high-touch pastor helped fill the literature gap by addressing the need to direct congregations toward advancement, growth, and spirituality in the Christian faith through technology.

This chapter presents the methods for asking pastors questions to learn about this high-touch, high-tech technological phenomenon. It begins with a research design synopsis. Then, it examines the setting and participants in the study. In addition, the chapter examines the role of the researcher and ethical considerations. Next, the chapter discussed data collection methods, instruments, and data analysis. Finally, procedures and data trustworthiness were addressed.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

Little is known about how pastors minister to their congregations when technology prevents them from seeing them face-to-face. Today, in many aspects, the church is only a mouse click away. It is a world of virtual religion where searchers find solutions to spiritual issues every day, replacing the weekly decision of whether or not to attend church.

Naisbitt et al. (2001) stated, "Technology is not the sole answer to the human search for inner peace, for inner faith" (p. 182). The benefits of technology allow people to hear God's Word while they are ill or unable to attend church. They can stay in touch through technology. However, technology also has several adverse effects on church life.

The desire for high-touch will persist no matter how technologically advanced the world becomes. There are many problems that technology has already resolved and there will be more. Despite technological advancements, the need for the gospel and face-to-face communication are two issues technology still cannot address. A gap in the literature indicated a need for this qualitative phenomenological study. This chapter discusses the methods used to obtain data about how high-tech, high-touch pastors maximize personal ministry in the digital era.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. Because technology can help and hinder this process, there are steps pastors take to strengthen interpersonal relationships with their church members. For this study, the definition of a high-tech, high-touch pastor was those pastors whose task of directing the people toward a more profound advancement, growth, and spirituality in the Christian faith was achieved using digital technology. The theory guiding this phenomenological study was Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership theory. While this is a

"secular" leadership theory, it was typified in Christ's and Paul's life and ministry. A servant leadership approach prioritizes others' needs first and shares power rather than wielding it from the top of a hierarchy. One of Jesus's last lessons to His disciples involved touch as he washed their feet (NIV, 2011, John 13:1-17).

Research Questions

The following research questions served as a guide for this qualitative phenomenological study of the digital ministry practices of senior pastor leaders:

RQ1. How do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for relational connections from a distance?

RQ2. What do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive to be the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology?

RQ3. What steps, if any, are high-tech, high-touch senior pastors taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society?

RQ4. How important do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry?

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological approach to examine firsthand experiences of high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who were maximizing personal ministry in a digital age. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described phenomenological research as an approach to study derived from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher recounted the lived experiences of persons concerning a phenomenon as experienced by participants. This description brought together the core aspects of the experiences of several people who all had similar encounters with the phenomena.

This study primarily focused on the personal experience of high-tech, high-touch senior pastors using virtual interviews to answer the research questions and address the research

problem. Furthermore, this qualitative research process involved emerging procedures and questions, data typically gathered in the participant's virtual environment. Data analysis involved peeling the layers back together based on the researcher's observations, building from specifics to broad themes. The researcher interpreted the meaning of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

While other methods were available, a transcendental phenomenological research design was appropriate for data collection and analysis procedures. It involved gathering information from ten pastors chosen through a criterion sampling approach who have experienced the phenomenon of high-tech, high-touch ministry. A detailed account was created of what each participant encountered and how they encountered it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Patton (2002) said any more than twenty respondents results in thematic saturation. The researcher submitted a detailed description of the findings of the ten pastors' experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This transcendental phenomenological approach used Moustakas' (1994) three-step process to investigate the data collection steps involving the study's parameters, gather information through semi-structured interviews, and develop the correct technique for recording information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher took notes regarding interpreting what was said during the interviews. Therefore, the phenomenological approach was the one that worked best for this study since it captured the ten pastors' real-world experiences, which was the concluding reason for this phenomenological investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Setting

This researcher was interested in exploring how the high-tech, high-touch pastor maximized personal ministry in a digital age in upstate Greenville, South Carolina, hoping to help similar pastors thrive in the future. This audience was comprised of ten evangelical senior

pastors residing in upstate Greenville, South Carolina. For this qualitative research study, the

researcher purposively chose settings or persons that assisted the researcher in comprehending

the issue and the research questions. The Greenville, South Carolina area was chosen for several

reasons. The researcher is the wife of a veteran now retired from the military. Although she has

traveled a great deal, she has spent the last decade residing in the Greenville, South Carolina area

and is familiar with the evangelical community associated with African Americans. The physical

settings ranged from church facilities to homes or offices. Virtual environments did not affect the

study's outcome as these pastors have experienced the phenomena.

Participants

The participants were senior evangelical church pastors in upstate Greenville, South

Carolina, who were identified based on their relationship with technology and online church

services. While twenty pastors were initially contacted, only ten participated. Purposively

choosing participants or sites helped the researcher better grasp the issue and the topic of

qualitative research (Creswell, 2016).

There was a pre-screening process to select the participants. (Appendix A). The twenty

pastors were carefully recruited using a public online search using a business directory database.

For choosing pastors to participate, the initial potential contacts were discovered in a

subscription business reference "yellow pages" directory called ReferenceUSA, which searched

for churches within the greater Greenville area that met the study criteria. The initial search was

for the Greenville metropolitan geographical area, for those entries listed as "Churches" of

various evangelical denominations with a website and 1–9 employees.

Churches with more than nine employees were eliminated since they did not fit the

"small church" category sought in this study. This database listed pastors and provided church

websites. If the church did not have a website, it was eliminated from consideration, assuming that they were likely small enough that they did not employ technology. The number of attendees versus those on the roll varied by the church. Often, membership rolls are inflated and do not reflect typical attendance.

From the list generated of small Greenville churches with websites, the author reviewed the sites to discover African American pastors who have been in their position for at least two years using the "About Us" portion of the websites. Before checking for African American pastors, over 500 results were generated from a preliminary search. Results were displayed in groups of 25. Priority was given to churches the author was familiar with or has had previous contact with until a preliminary list of twenty churches was identified. These pastors were contacted, seeking a minimum of ten to accept the initial request. If an insufficient number of pastors accepted the invitation, the list was consulted again, starting with the first church on each page to provide a more random sample.

In doing a preliminary check, the database seemed to lag in listing the current pastor, so the church website was considered more accurate. It was noted if the website was clear about pastoral years of service; otherwise, this question was asked during the interview. The website's "contact us" section was used to make the first contact, and the interviewer confirmed details when setting up interviews.

An email was sent to the pastors outlining the significance of the study and asking for their consent to participate. Qualitative researchers choose a small number of participants who may be able to shed light on the phenomenon under inquiry rather than sample a large number of people to generalize (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The pastor's goals for the congregation should align with those of Jesus (NIV, 2011, Matthew 28:19-20). They experienced the challenges of

using technology to develop close interpersonal connections and communication with individual church members. Pastors who have experienced the phenomenon were examined and chosen for the phenomenological study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They were senior pastors with at least two years of experience in ministry and using technology in their church. The pastors were selected based on a pre-screening process (Appendix A).

Role of the Researcher

The function of the researcher is crucial in phenomenological research because qualitative research is an interpretive study. The investigator was involved in a long and comprehensive encounter with the subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When it comes to qualitative research, the researcher is the most important tool (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher, as will be discussed shortly, handled unexpected problems and recognized biases, values, and personal backgrounds, such as gender and culture, that could impact their ideas during a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Regarding how high-tech and high-touch pastors might enhance personal ministry in the digital era, this researcher designed interview questions that fit the study topics (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

In a phenomenological study, the researchers attempted to delay any predetermined assumptions or lived perspectives that may unfairly impact what they heard participants say during the data-gathering procedure (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). As needed, the researcher took notes regarding their original assertion of what was seen and heard while collecting data (Leedy & Ormrod). The phenomenological approach helped the researcher answer what it was like for the high-tech, high-touch pastor to maximize personal ministry in a digital age.

This researcher ensured this research's continued reliability and established trust with the clergy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This was done by developing a clear and concise

explanation of the research study's purpose, goals, and expected outcomes. It was important to establish a relationship with the clergy members by reaching out to them directly by phone, and through email to introduce the researcher and the study. To show respect for the clergy members' time, appointments were scheduled at their convenience and started on time. To ensure the participants of confidentiality and privacy, they were told how data was to be collected, stored, and used, and informed consent was obtained from participants. Finally, the researcher was open and transparent throughout the research study, providing regular updates and sharing findings in a timely manner. This helped build trust and establish a sense of collaboration between the researcher and the participants. While conducting this phenomenological study, the researcher sought to set aside all emotions and life experiences to concentrate entirely on the study participants (Creswell & Creswell; Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting this qualitative phenomenological study, the research proposal was submitted to the institutional review board (IRB) at Liberty University (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). This researcher did not interview any participants from a vulnerable group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were allowed to provide written consent, made aware of the study's purpose, and allowed to withdraw at any time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Additionally, all participants signed a consent form that acknowledged the protection of human rights.

As according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the form included:

Identification of the researcher, identification of the sponsoring institution, identification of the purpose of the study, identification of the benefits for participants, identification of the extent and type of participant involvement, notation of risks to the participant (*which in this study were low to none*), a guarantee of confidentiality to the participant, assurance that the participant could withdraw at any time, and provision of names of persons to contact if questions arose. (p. 163)

Documentation complied with Section §46.117. Sufficient safeguards ensured the data's confidentiality and each subject's privacy. Before collecting data, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form agreeing to the study's terms and conditions after being informed of the study's benefits and problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The pastors who met the requirements and agreed to participate in this qualitative study were contacted and sent an email that included an overview of the research, acknowledgments of approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a confidentiality agreement, and a consent form using their pseudonyms.

Acting according to the directions Creswell and Creswell (2018) provided, the researcher respected the location and caused as little disruption as possible while gathering the data. During the data-gathering process, pastors were not deceived. The pastors were given instructions that served as a reminder of the study's goal. The researcher did not ask invasive inquiries nor divulge her personal opinions. No offer of incentives to participants occurred.

When reporting, sharing, and storing data, neutral language suitable for the research's target audiences was utilized. Participants and stakeholders were given copies of the report. Materials and data will be stored for three years following the IRB guidelines.

There were no ties between the research's chosen churches or pastors that would benefit the researcher or its findings. Churches in upstate Greenville, South Carolina, that offered online services were found using a simple web search. This researcher wholly and accurately reported on all data collection and analysis.

This study had minimal risk to participants; however, the researcher protected the details that the participant shared throughout the study. Pseudonyms were used in the final dissertation to protect the confidentiality of the participants and their churches, and the details shared

throughout the study. This researcher requested approval from Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following IRB rules, the researcher considered the potential danger for pastors participating in the study.

Before conducting research, the researcher followed all of the Creswell & Creswell (2018) suggestions to impose numerous ethical issues:

> Examine professional association standards, sort IRB approval, gain local permission from site and participants, select a site without a vested interest in the study, and negotiate the interviewee's authorship rites and publication interests. Ethical consideration included giving credit for work done on the project. (p. 89)

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The data collection method used interviews to understand better how the high-tech, high-touch pastor maximized ministry in the digital age. Husserl contributed significantly to the development of transcendental phenomenology, a philosophical perspective on qualitative research methodology that aimed to comprehend human experience (Moustakas, 1994), by setting the parameters of the study through sampling, recruiting, and gathering data through unstructured or semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This process created a protocol for recording information and all the steps in the data collection process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This researcher used interviews when gathering information for this phenomenological investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Audio recording was used during the interview session using a computer with a secure password to protect the data and then using a secure information management system software to collect, organize and track interviews. The researcher stored the data in a locked filing cabinet with a key at her house to prevent unauthorized access to the physical copies, thumb drives, and handwritten materials.

While taking notes, the researcher interpreted what was said and seen. The data was analyzed to look for patterns and what the researcher had personally noticed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Phenomenological researchers virtually exclusively use extended interviews that take up to two hours (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

The researcher was the vital instrument in this phenomenological investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interviewer served as the instrument for the qualitative phenomenological interview process and used a secure information management system, and electronic coding software, to help organize and analyze replies. The researcher selected pastors and study locations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A set of semi-structured open-ended interview questions related to the research topics were created as part of the data collection process using the interview guide and interview procedures. The researcher created fourteen open-ended, semi-structured questions using the Leedy and Ormrod (2016) interview methodology.

Research Approach

This transcendental phenomenological approach used Moustakas' (1994) three-step process to investigate the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). *Epoché*, a Greek term meaning to withhold without judgment, to withdraw from or keep away from the ordinary, usual manner of experiencing things, was the first step (Moustakas, 1994). The high-tech, high-touch pastors had a new insight (Moustakas, 1994) into the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A transcendental phenomenological reduction came next. It progressed from the mundane to the pure ego when everything was seen for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). The last step was imaginative variation, which aimed to understand the structural underpinnings of experiences

(Moustakas, 1994). These phases assisted the researcher in discovering the interpretations and essences of the phenomenon or research experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Collection Methods

The researcher established and implemented several methodologies and procedures that fit the criteria of an ordered, disciplined, and systematic study to derive scientific evidence from phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994). The essential processes for data collecting within the transcendental phenomenology research design were laid forth as Moustakas recommended. The stages and procedures laid out by Moustakas were a systematic approach to planning, data gathering, data organization, and data analysis.

In this phenomenological research investigation, the procedure for data collection was established using material from semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenological researchers only use in-depth interviews with a limited, carefully chosen sample of people (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Pastors were free to express their opinions without being bound by preconceived scales or instruments in all open-ended data that the researcher recorded (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Instruments and Protocols

This researcher used an interview protocol to record information while observing the participant in the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher developed and used an interview protocol (Appendix F). During the qualitative interview, the researcher followed a set interview protocol for asking questions and capturing responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Microsoft® Teams software recorded the interviews. Fourteen questions were asked during the interviews. The researcher practiced presenting the interview question several times to prepare to

demonstrate to the participant that she was knowledgeable about the study and was not just reading from a script to acquire responses. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

During the interview, audio recordings were made using a computer with a secure password to protect the data and a secure information management system program for gathering, organizing, and tracking interviews. The participants were encouraged to pick a quiet area so the researcher could hear the tape when analyzing the data. The researcher double-checked electronic transcripts and handwritten notes during the interviews to ensure the information was accurate and error-free and to maintain the cluster of themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Interviews

The phenomenological research study used interviews to collect data for this project. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative researchers acquire data by analyzing documents, watching behavior, or interviewing individuals. Thus, this researcher established how the data would be gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Transcendental phenomenology provides a distinctive light on the research problem by answering questions about human experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through discussions, other people learned about their experiences in life, feelings, hopes, and the world. The same occurs in an interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher heard people's worries and hopes, their viewpoints and ideas, and information about their family, friends, work, and school situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2018), the research interview is where people get to know each other and interact with the interviewer and the interviewee. Interviews in qualitative research can frequently yield a wealth of relevant data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Qualitative

interviewers often think they are simply talking with someone they have known for a long time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). These phenomenological interviews used Microsoft® Teams and lasted one to two hours (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The interview lasted between one and two hours to gather responses to the open-ended questions that aided in identifying patterns and themes associated with the research topic. The interview questions enabled the high-tech, high-touch pastor to freely communicate their experiences while enhancing ministry in the digital era.

The interviewing procedure adhered to the guidelines set forth by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The participants were asked a limited number of semi-structured, often open-ended questions to elicit their ideas and opinions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The sample size consisted of ten pastors. This researcher developed semi-structured, open-ended interview questions (Appendix E). Questions 1-4 aligned with RQ1. Questions 5-8 aligned with RQ 2. Questions 9-11 aligned with RQ 3. Questions 12-14 aligned with RQ 4. These questions helped the researcher better understand how high-tech, high-touch pastors: maximize personal ministry in a digital age.

Data Protection

The researcher locked up all hard copies of the notes and any data stored on the thumb drives in a file cabinet with a key. Pseudonyms were used in place of the participant names to preserve anonymity. All records, including hard copy materials, data stored on the computer, and thumb drives, will be removed, erased, and shredded after three years.

Data Quality Control

Multiple data analysis strategies were used to validate and assure the reliability of interview questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Thick descriptions conveyed the interview questions' findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Transcriptions were

used of the pastors' responses. For accuracy, a synopsis of the individual transcriptions was forwarded via email to the pastors who verified that the statements were accurate. The researcher kept a journal of the pastors' tones, inflections, and body language during the interviews.

Document Analysis

The data collection procedure, which typically entails samples, measurements, coding, entry, and verifying, was directed by the study topic (Lewis-Beck, 1995). "A qualitative approach focused on describing and tracking discourse, including words, meanings, and themes over time" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 127).

Following the methodology outlined by Leedy and Ormond (2016), the researcher performed phenomenological data analysis by reading through the interview transcripts and thematically organizing the information within them. Document analysis was a component of qualitative research that required the data to be examined and interpreted to derive meaning, improve one's understanding, and build one's empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The researcher "systematically examined criteria using a coding process (Liberty University, 2021)" as described in the section devoted to data analysis.

Procedures

After getting confirmation from Liberty University's IRB that the research study was acceptable, which included a copy of the recruitment email and the IRB's approval letter, the researcher started looking for twenty pastors to contact to consider participating in the study online.

The researcher conducted an open web search for pastors in upstate Greenville, South Carolina to implement follow-up recruiting steps and obtain individuals to participate starting with the contact names from the business database. The researcher identified and contacted

twenty pastors in the upstate of Greenville, South Carolina, by sending them an initial email explaining the research study in detail and requesting their participation. The researcher received the recruitment email from the IRB and then sent the email to the participants (Appendix C). This researcher obtained each subject's informed consent (Appendix D) and duly documented it before receiving any data.

The pastors were chosen from among the pastors in the area using a method called "criterion sampling." Participants in the study were told the reason for their selection, granted anonymity, and given information regarding the purpose of the study, all of which helped to build rapport (Creswell, 2014). The researcher had a registered email account and logged in with a username and password to access the research material. A registered email was the only way the researcher could access the material.

The public online search using a business directory database called ReferenceUSA was the foundation for a criterion sampling of pastors in the upstate Greenville, South Carolina region. Initially, an email invitation to participate in the study was sent out to various pastors in the upstate region of Greenville, South Carolina. During the process of criterion sampling, participants were allowed to give their permission to participate by signing a consent form sent to them as an email. After making initial contact with the participants via email, the researcher followed up with a phone call two or three days later to recruit and confirm participants.

Instructions to sign and return the consent form to the researcher via email were provided to the pastors who expressed interest in participating in the study. As soon as everyone signed up for the study, they were given pseudonyms. The participants were given a pseudonym not only for themselves but also for their church. After agreeing to participate in the study, the participants were identified only by pseudonyms.

To introduce the participants to the study, the first contact with them was conducted through email correspondence. The researcher contacted the pastors by phone to verify they received the email request and agreed to participate in the study. Pastors expressing a willingness to participate were given a copy of the questions to be asked to assist in their preparation for the interview.

The individual interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft® Teams software to record the interviews. For the interviews, the participants were encouraged to choose a location free of distraction for clear audio recording. The researcher's interview setting was a quiet home office with no distractions.

After receiving the consent forms, the researcher arranged to interview each participant. To compile the necessary information, the researcher interviewed each subject individually and asked open-ended questions. This study's participants were senior pastors currently ministering to their congregations using various forms of technology.

During the interviews conducted for the research, open-ended questions were asked to understand better the phenomenon being researched, which was the high-tech, high-touch pastor maximizing personal ministry in a digital age.

After the interviews, the participants' answers were transcribed verbatim. This transcription was reviewed to ensure accuracy. The collected data was analyzed using the transcendental phenomenological method established for the data gathered from the interviews. A comprehensive collection of themes was determined, and a deductive investigation of the research was carried out to ascertain whether additional information was needed. The documentation and the research were presented to the participants. The researcher actively sought feedback from the individuals who participated in the study. Only one participant

suggested a minor change. The phenomenological study was strengthened and provided a deep reflection on the topics discussed as a result of collecting evidence from various sources (Creswell, 2014). Creswell suggested that the research study use multiple methods to collect data (2014).

The following step involved reading the data from the recorded interviews thoroughly, rereading them, and transcribing them. While reading through the transcribed data, the researcher underlined significant passages and made notes in the margins to compile a short list of initial codes containing 18 different categories of information. These initial codes were used to write the concluding narrative (Creswell, 2014). In the final narrative, there was a description of what all ten pastors who took part in the study went through and an explanation of what was happening and where it happened.

Validating the interviews used in the research required data collection and analysis methods, such as data analysis spiral activities. When analyzing the data, it was critical to provide a comprehensive, textual description of what took place and a structural description of how the participants felt about the phenomenon.

This researcher has completed and passed the required social and behavioral research training through CITI because any research involving human subjects is subject to federal regulation through the Department of Health and Human Services Office for Human Research Protections. Documents needed by the IRB that were relevant to the study, such as the IRB approval letter (Appendix B); recruitment email (Appendix C); consent form (Appendix D); interview questions (Appendix E); the screening process to select participants for the study (Appendix A); interview protocol part I: introductory session and interview protocols, part II

(Appendix F); and follow-up recruitment electronic mail (Appendix G); were approved and obtained before undertaking any research with any participant.

Confidentiality and Anonymity of Data

The pastors received guarantees of complete privacy and secrecy regarding their participation in their replies to the study. Participants' relationships were unaffected whether they chose not to respond to questions or withdraw from the study at any time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). According to Wiles et al. (2008), confidentiality ensured that the data was kept separate from any identifiable persons and that the code that connected the data to those individuals was safely stored. It was essential to ensure that anyone with access to the data did not reveal it to unauthorized parties.

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Data Analysis

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In qualitative research, data analysis aimed to discern texts and images. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data analysis examines different types of qualitative data essential to conducting a qualitative investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher followed an overview of the data and analysis process as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

A secure information management system was used to code the interviews. Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five steps of qualitative data analysis were used.

Step one of the qualitative data analysis processes was for the researcher to transcribe interviews, scan material, type field notes, and sort and arrange data by its sources. In step two the researcher read the data to allow meditation on the complete meaning of the data. Step three was coding of all of the data. Step four generated a description and themes. And in step five, a representation of the description and themes was given.

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) stated that qualitative research methodology frequently involves an iterative process in which the researcher moves back and forth between data collection and data analysis/interpretation, with initial analyses and interpretations driving later data collection. The researcher used a secure information management system to arrange and analyze the data by transforming it into one or more simple forms (Leedy & Ormrod), 2016). For some or all of the codes, a secure information management system identified themes and subthemes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The information was then separated into sensible chunks and individually coded (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The researcher next reviewed a final list of themes and subthemes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The researcher found patterns and connections between the codes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

According to Moustakas (1994), bracketing, also known as *epoché*, was a crucial initial step in data analysis since it requires adopting a fresh perspective on the phenomenon described putting any prejudices, shared knowledge, and judgments aside. Creswell and Creswell (2018) reported that bracketing was a reflective technique in which the researcher chose how to include personal understandings into the study.

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) suggest that the researcher use five methodologies linked to data processing and interpretation while addressing validity and reliability in the study. This researcher utilized a sample size of ten persons who have had firsthand experience with the phenomena being examined as the sample size for their investigation.

Analysis Methods

The researcher made observations on a select number of unique occurrences or circumstances, assigned particular meanings to them by coding them, and then derived

inferences about an overarching state of things. (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The researcher used

Leedy and Ormrod's (2016) ten procedures to organize and evaluate qualitative data.

Identifying Themes, Patterns, and Relationships

The presentation of significant themes, backed up by quotations from participants' texts,

was the principal method of analysis and reporting for qualitative researchers (Bazeley, 2009).

The starting points for meaningful analysis included gathering, reading, and interpreting the

interviews (Bazeley, 2009). The researcher wrote up field notes, transcribed interviews, and

classified and organized the data into various sorts based on the information's sources (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018). The information was coded by grouping pieces of information into brackets

and inserting a word representing a category in the margins (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Validity

Good qualitative researchers take various safeguards to increase the validity and

trustworthiness of their results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The audio recordings were used to

crosscheck and verify the data to ensure the codes accurately reflect the interviewees' statements.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research's advantage is validity,

which is based on assessing whether the results are correct from the perspective of the

researcher, the participant, or the readers. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argued that the findings

become more realistic and profound when qualitative research gives extensive descriptions of the

context or offers multiple opinions of a subject.

Consent

The pastors who participated in the interview gave their written consent to the researcher.

The exchanges were recorded verbatim. Because she might not get all the details, the researcher

kept her reaction to herself. The researcher ensured the pastors were at ease out of respect for

their needs. The open-ended questions aimed to elicit participants' responses to help solve the

research challenge. The researcher thanked each interviewee for donating their time after the

interview.

Summarizing the Data

Direct quotation was used in summarizing the data. Meaningful data chunks were

identified, retrieved, isolated, grouped, and regrouped for analysis. Significant data chunks were

located, retrieved, segregated, sorted, and regrouped to facilitate research (Creswell & Creswell,

2018).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are the standards that validate whether the

research findings are accurate from the researcher's perspective, the samples, and the readers

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In a qualitative study, the researcher defined trustworthiness as

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The

reliability of research was established by implementing these four checks and balances.

This researcher used rich, thick description validity strategies through interviews, as

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested, to ensure trustworthiness in this study. Based on the

accurate data collection and analysis of the interviewees' actual answers and responses before,

during, and after interviews, the researcher aimed to achieve credibility, dependability,

confirmability, and transferability (Liberty University, 2021). These goals were based on the

transferability of the findings.

Credibility

In quantitative research, credibility was the counterpart of internal validity, and it was

concerned with the feature of truth-value (Kortjens & Moser, 2018.) Credibility was established in this qualitative phenomenological investigation by using detailed descriptions to convey the findings. The data source employed was interviewing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study established credibility by asking the pastors to verify their comments for correctness after the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Dependability

Ali and Yusof (2011) reported that dependability is the deployment of overlapping procedures and in-depth methodological descriptions to enable the research to be repeated. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), dependability may be defined as the consistency of results across time. Dependability refers to the appraisal of the research's results, interpretation, and recommendations by the participants in the study, with the expectation that these aspects were all supported by the data collected from the participants in the study. A protocol was followed so the study can be replicated. The researcher provided thorough documentation of the research and followed all IRB requirements.

Confirmability

The goal of proving confirmability was to demonstrate that the facts and interpretations of the results are not the product of the investigator's imagination but instead are obtained from the data. Confirmability was the degree to which the research study's conclusions were validated by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This study showed confirmability because the interpretation of the data was supported by the evidence rather than this researcher's personal preferences or world perspective (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested, an audit trail helps the readers follow a researcher's reasoning and decide whether the

study's conclusions are trustworthy as a foundation for more research. A rich, thick description to convey the findings was used in the study.

Transferability

Transferability was defined as the ability to fit inside scenarios beyond the research environment (Ali & Yusof, 2011). This is the extent to which qualitative research findings may be used successfully in various settings or situations with different groups of respondents. By providing a detailed description, the researcher helped a prospective user evaluate the transferability of the information (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A rich, thick description strategy was given to ensure transferability in the qualitative sense. The provision of an appropriate database for readers to judge how closely their conditions match and whether results may be transferred was required for this purpose (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three described the qualitative research methods used in this transcendental phenomenological study to examine firsthand experiences of the high-tech, high-touch pastor maximizing personal ministry in a digital age. The four research questions aimed to comprehend how the high-tech, high-touch pastor experienced the phenomenon of maximizing personal ministry in a digital age.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology**.** Transcendental phenomenology was used to focus on senior pastors who practice servant leadership, establish, and maintain personal contact with their church members, and lead them using digital technology. Data was organized and analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological analysis approach and Creswell's (2018) data analysis spiral activities. This researcher used rich, thick description validity strategies through interviews, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), to ensure trustworthiness in this study. Ten experienced pastors were interviewed to determine how they balanced the impersonal nature of streaming worship services while maintaining personal contact with their congregations. The following research questions were developed to understand the lived experiences of how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology**:**

RQ1. How do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for relational connections from a distance?

RQ2. What do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive to be the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology?

RQ3. What steps, if any, are high-tech, high-touch senior pastors taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society?

RQ4. How important do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry?

Chapter Four contains the results that answered the research questions. The chapter begins with a description of each participant. An overview of the data collection instrumentation will be presented. The demographic and sample data will be shown. The outcomes of the thematic analysis will then be investigated. The data gathering and data analysis procedures are discussed in depth to demonstrate how the data was used to produce universal and transferable themes. The results, which answered each research question, are given as themes, syntheses, summative tables, and excerpts from the data. Finally, the research design is evaluated after a summary of key themes.

<div align="center">**Participants**</div>

Twenty African American senior pastors of small churches that use technology were initially contacted, but only ten agreed to be interviewed. These ten senior pastors live in the upstate of Greenville, South Carolina. These ten senior evangelical pastors were found using criterion sampling. These pastors were selected based on their use of technology and participation in online church services. Nine African American males and one African American female with at least two years of pastoral experience were among the participants. To safeguard their identities and the confidentiality of the church they pastored, the researcher gave each participant a pseudonym utilized in the descriptions and throughout the findings. The senior pastor overview is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Senior Pastor Overview

Pastor	Church affiliation	Gender	Ethnicity	Role
Bob	Church A	Male	African American	Senior Pastor
Mary	Church B	Female	African American	Senior Pastor
Darius	Church C	Male	African American	Senior Pastor
Denzel	Church D	Male	African American	Senior Pastor
Frederick	Church E	Male	African American	Senior Pastor

James	Church F	Male	African American	Senior Pastor
Jimi	Church G	Male	African American	Senior Pastor
John	Church H	Male	African American	Senior Pastor
Lance	Church I	Male	African American	Senior Pastor
Lionel	Church J	Male	African American	Senior Pastor

Bob

In Greenville, South Carolina, Church A's senior pastor is Bob. He has 25 years of pastoral experience. He had known he would become a preacher since he was five. He had his own church in mind when it came to ministry. He cherishes people. He said that you cannot be in the ministry if you do not love people. Pastor Bob enjoys watching people succeed. He argued that everyone's mission statement should be "The Great Commission." "Go, teach, and proclaim the gospel to everyone, and the way we minister to our young people needs to altar in particular." "Jesus possesses the best mode of servant leadership," he said. To clean the filthy feet of those who would betray Him, He bathed the feet of His followers. Jesus was setting an example of a servant. When it comes to picking up the garbage and sweeping the floor, we are all equal. According to Pastor Bob, we sit high and give low.

Mary

Mary is the senior pastor of Church B in Greenville, South Carolina. She has been in pastoral ministry for 25 years. She has an unconditional love for ministry that drives everything she does. She stated that the Great Commission is the church. She continued by saying that to earn people's respect, we must place ourselves in the position of a servant to be a leader.

Darius

Darius is the senior pastor of Church C in Greenville, South Carolina. He has been in pastoral ministry for 17 years. Out of the 17 years, he has been the senior pastor for 12 years. His love for the church came from his love of service to God. The Bible says, "If you love me, feed

my sheep." His obedience to God fuels his love for the church. Matthew 28 is evident to him. Go, teach, preach, and make disciples. Pastor Darius said we cannot decide which part of the commission to do or not do. Some go and preach, while others preach and do not go anywhere. "We must be engaged in all areas of the Great Commission to please God," said Pastor Darius.

Denzel

Denzel is the senior pastor of Church D in Greenville, South Carolina. He has been in pastoral ministry for 22 years. He was raised in a Christian home, so his love for God and the church is ingrained in him. Pastor Denzel stated that the Great Commission orders us to go. As God's servants, it is our responsibility to carry out God's instruction to "go ye hence" to reach individuals outside the boundaries of the church. He continued by saying that serving God's people is not only his calling but also his duty. He thinks that becoming great requires service. Jesus' service to the disciples by washing their feet was his model.

Frederick

Frederick is the senior pastor of Church E in Greenville, South Carolina. He has been in pastoral ministry for 19 years. According to him, the church should focus on making disciples. He supports fostering ties within the church. He believes pastors should deeply love the entire church and the Body of Christ. He views the church as his family. He claims that although the church is lovely and chaotic, it is great when we get on board with what God is calling us to do.

James

James is the senior pastor of Church F in Greenville, South Carolina. He has been in pastoral ministry for 37 years. He has a strong faith in the Great Commission. Instead of only preaching to our people, we are required to disciple them, says Pastor James.

Jimi

Jimi is the senior pastor at Church G in Greenville, South Carolina. He has extensive experience as a pastoral leader. According to him, letting people know that you love and care about them is the heartbeat of any organization. They will follow your leadership because they will be more attuned to it. Making disciples and exerting significant effort to impart its principles are both parts of the pastor's Great Commission. Following Christ and not themselves makes the people joyful.

John

John is the senior pastor of Church H in Greenville, South Carolina. He has been in pastoral ministry for 37 years and has pastored two churches. Pastor John has been at the church he presently pastors for 32 years. Every church, he said, ought to be a model church. According to him, the Great Commission fulfills the needs of God's people. He effectively communicated that every member should be viewed as a servant leader. They could assist with running and serving in the church. A lot of times, he continued, people sit in the pews when they need to be acting as servant leaders.

Lance

Lance is the senior pastor of Church I in Greenville, South Carolina. He has served in pastoral ministry for 30 years. His calling is beyond love; it is a pulling that the nature of man cannot resist. It comes from love and being obedient. He stated that we were brought in to go out in the world and make disciples. God gave us the ability to share our everyday lives. We frequently fail to assist family and friends. He expressed the Great Commission as a universal commission. God has given us the responsibility of serving and guiding the people he has placed in our care.

Lionel

Lionel is the senior pastor of Church J in Greenville, South Carolina. He has a strong appreciation for the church that dates back to his early years. Pastor Lionel fell in love with God. In 1995, he was created as a result of teaching Sunday school. He would simplify words so that people might understand them. It was a move he resisted making when he became a pastor in 2007. He teaches individuals that the Great Commission designates everyone's ministry as outreach. Leadership involves taking care of people where they are, no matter what. Serve at the house of God but do it outside the building so others can excel.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The researcher collected all the data through virtual, semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol consisted of 14 questions, divided into four questions for research questions one and two and three questions for research questions three and four (Appendix E). To be consistent, each participant was asked all 14 questions. All of the questions were written to obtain detailed data from participants because this information was necessary to answer the research questions.

After gathering the data, the researcher used Microsoft® Teams software—a reputable and dependable transcription service—to convert the data into text. The data was uploaded to the researcher's personal computer after a review. The researcher was the only person with access to this computer, which required a password to log in.

The researcher relied on interviewing suggestions from current literature to minimize any bias. To avoid any nodding or smiles that would encourage the interviewee to provide a discussion that might seem to appeal to the researcher, she did not appear on the camera during the interview to avoid giving any non-verbal cues, either positive or negative.

Demographic and Sample Data

Ten senior evangelical pastors from upstate Greenville, South Carolina, made up the sample for this study. These pastors were selected based on their use of technology and participation in online church services. The participants were selected through convenience sampling with the criteria of ReferenceUSA, which searched for churches within the greater Greenville area that met the study criteria. The initial search was for the Greenville Metro geographical area, for those entries listed as "Churches" of various evangelical denominations with a website and 1–9 employees.

The first two interviews were conducted on January 30, 2023; the third interview was conducted on January 31, 2023; the fourth interview was conducted on February 1, 2023; the fifth interview was conducted on February 4, 2023; the sixth interview was conducted on February 6, 2023; the seventh and eighth interviews were conducted on February 7, 2023**;** the ninth interview was conducted on February 8, 2023**;** and the tenth interview was conducted on February 10, 2023. A total of 267 minutes of recording was collected from the participants. The interviews had an average duration of 27 minutes. The interview data yielded 51 transcripts, with an average of 5 pages. The descriptive information about the interview data is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Interview Data Descriptive Information

Senior Pastor Pseudonym Name	Church Affiliation Pseudonym Name	Interview Date	Interview Length	No. of Pages of Transcript
Bob	Church A	January 31, 2023	16 min	4
Mary	Church B	January 30, 2023	22 min	5
Darius	Church C	January 30, 2023	24 min	5
Denzel	Church D	February 4, 2023	49 min	8

Frederick	Church E	February 7, 2023	47 min	9
James	Church F	February 1, 2023	19 min	4
Jimi	Church G	February 6, 2023	18 min	3
John	Church H	February 7, 2023	21 min	4
Lance	Church I	February 10, 2023	21 min	5
Lionel	Church J	February 8, 2023	26 min	6

Data Analysis and Findings

The data analysis methods utilized Creswell and Creswell's (2018) thematic analysis approaches. Utilizing a secured information management software for qualitative data analysis to discover emerging themes, the coding and thematizing processes were completed. The codes and concepts were extracted into a Microsoft® Word format to organize and clarify the notions. More information on each stage of the analysis is provided in the following subsections. After each research question, the emerging topics are explained.

Organize the Data

The researcher began organizing the data from the start of the data collection procedure until the conclusion. During the interviews, the researcher gave each of the 10 participants a pseudonym to identify their data and avoid using their actual names.

The researcher immediately created a verbatim transcription of the recordings following the interviews. After the transcripts were finished, the researcher put them into a safe software program for managing qualitative data. The researcher's password-protected computer was where all the digital files were saved.

The researcher wrote notes in the margins as the data was read, then reviewed and coded the transcribed data to observe the phenomenon with fresh eyes and identify the themes that arose in the participants' comments. The researcher had no prior experience with pastors maximizing their ministry in the digital age and had no preconceived notions about the study's

participants. The five-step qualitative data analysis process developed by Creswell and Creswell (2018) was utilized to examine the data while reading and rereading the data sources. Transcribing interviews, scanning documents, typing field notes, and organizing data by sources were all steps in the qualitative data analysis process. The second step was to read the data and give the researcher time to reflect on its significance. In step three, all of the data was coded. The descriptions and themes were created in step four. A visual representation of the description and themes was provided in step five.

Participants' experiences were exposed and interrelated as the themes arose throughout the examination of the interview transcripts. By going through and classifying the data, the researcher learned more about how pastors used technology to minister in the digital age and got a better idea of their actual experiences.

The researcher read and reread the transcripts multiple times as part of the coding procedure. In the initial data reading, the researcher looked for broad patterns that might be connected to how pastors maximize ministry in the digital age. The researcher discovered the recurring patterns of relational connections from a distance, relational connections through technology, increased connections due to increased technology, and in-person, face-to-face relationships.

The researcher focused on each line of the transcript as she reread the data, highlighting significant texts that represented discrete units of meaning. Each significant text was highlighted and coded using secure information management software to identify emerging themes. A succinct description of the coded text is provided. For instance, Pastor Lionel of Church J stated, "Probably 90% of our giving is done through technology as opposed to checking and tithing envelopes." The participants attributed their successful relational connections from a distance,

which was relevant to RQ1, an inquiry about the patterns of consistent generosity. Thus, the statement was highlighted and assigned to the code "giving."

Peruse The Entire Data Set Several Times

Organizing the data into meaning-based units was the initial step of the study. The study's second stage involved reviewing the data set to regroup the information into larger groups. The researcher's interpretation of the shared patterns among the codes was the focus of this examination stage. The researcher organized lists of important categories into emerging themes using quotes from the participants and utilized them to describe the essence of the phenomenon. The researcher learned more about pastors maximizing technology in a digital age and obtained a deeper picture of their lived experiences by going through and classifying the data.

As the themes emerged from the study of the interview transcripts, the experiences of the people who took part became clear and showed how they were related. By reviewing the data and putting it in order, the researcher could learn more about each participant's ministry in the digital age and better understand how they lived. To illustrate the themes, subthemes, and codes, the researcher used Microsoft Word's comment feature. Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 show, respectively, the themes, subthemes, and codes under RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, and the results are further addressed in the following section. The order of the results for each subtheme is based on the order in which the interview questions were answered. This aligns with how the findings are presented in the next chapter.

Table 3

RQ 1 Relational Connections from a Distance

Subthemes	Code	Respondents	Percentages
COVID-Mandated Shutdown	Forced to Shut the Doors	10	100%
	Forced to Use Technology	10	100%
	Normal Worship Changed	10	100%
	No In-Person Visitations	10	100%
	Virtual Worship Experience	8	80%
	Safe from Virus	5	50%
	Young/Youth/Seniors	2	20%
	Kid's Worship Shutdown	1	10%
	Negative Worldwide	1	10%
Outdated Technology	Attendance Dropped	10	100%
	Facebook Needed Updating	5	50%
	YouTube Live	5	50%
	In Person Attendance Low	5	50%
	Forced to Update Technology	4	40%
	People Had to Find Their Way	3	30%
	Could Not See Members	3	30%
	Spending Increased	2	20%
	Need Competent Folks	2	20%
	Not User-Friendly	1	10%
	Insufficient Funds	1	10%
Digitally Challenged	Changed Everything	10	100%
	Be Prepared	5	50%
	Training	4	40%
	Rural Church	2	20%
	Teaching	2	20%
	Frustrated	1	10%
	Not User Friendly	1	10%
	Not Willing to Learn	1	10%
Consistent Generosity	Members Continue Giving	9	90%
	Online Giving	8	80%
	Online Watcher Giving	4	40%
	Sold Idea to Leadership	1	10%
Technological Skepticism	Afraid To Engage	2	20%
	Did not Understand Technology	2	20%
	Not Computer-Savvy	2	20%
	Fear	1	10%
	Apprehension of Destroying the Computer	1	10%

Fostering Community Online	Technology Added	5	50%
	Better Prepared	4	40%
	Members Added to the Church	3	30%
	97 Years Old	1	10%
	Heard Services	1	10%
	Five Generations	1	10%
	Modern Technology	1	10%

Note. Research Question 1 - How do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for relational connections from a distance? Number of participants = 10.

Table 4

RQ2 Relational Connections Through Technology

Subthemes	Code	Respondents	Percentages
Adaptation to Technology	Training	4	40%
	Willing to Learn	3	30%
	Elders Now on Facebook	2	20%
	Where We Are Now	1	10%
	57 Years Old	1	10%
Technology Resistance	Elderly	4	40%
	Five to Seven Understand Texting	2	20%
	Members Still Resisting	2	20%
	Dislike	1	10%
	Fear of Change	1	10%
	Afraid	1	10%
Computer Savvy	Median Age	5	50%
	30 to 50	5	50%
	Middle Age	4	40%
	Computer Experts	4	40%
	Diverse	2	20%
	Young	2	20%
	Engineers	1	10%
	Late 30s	1	10%
	Scientist	1	10%
	Snap Chat Savvy	1	10%
Social Media	Zoom	10	100%
	Email	10	100%
	Facebook	8	80%
	Webpage	8	80%
	YouTube	5	50%
	Website on Phone	4	40%
	FaceTime	1	10%
Technology And Digital Infrastructure	More Advanced Technology	10	100%
	Be Able to Reach	10	100%
	Contact Information	10	100%
	God	7	70%
	Pray	6	60%
	Spend Money	5	50%
	Communicate Better	4	40%
	Change	4	40%
	Be Ready	3	30%

	Be Prepared	3	30%
	Better Plan	3	30%
	Resources	2	20%
	Trust God	2	20%
	Cannot Depend on Man	1	10%
	Be Honest	1	10%
	Invest	1	10%

Note. Research Question 2 - What do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive to be the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology? Number of participants = 10.

Table 5

RQ3 Increased Connections Due to Increased Technology

Subthemes	Codes	Respondents	Percentages
Pastors Virtual Office Hours	Appointment	10	100%
	Accessible	10	100%
	Personal	7	70%
	Counseling	6	60%
	Bereavement Care	5	50%
	Regular Office Hours	4	40%
	Evenings	4	40%
	Flexible	2	20%
	Administrative Assistance	1	10%
	One-On-One	1	10%
	Convenient	1	10%
Frequency and Types of Contact	Monthly	9	90%
	Congregation	5	50%
	Leadership	5	50%
	In-Person	4	40%
	Sick-And-Shut in	4	40%
	Weekly	3	30%
	Two Wednesdays out of the Month	2	20%
	Quarterly	1	10%
	On Call 24 hours	1	10%
Face-To-Face Interactions	Counseling	7	70%
	Spiritual Matters	6	60%
	Meet and Greet	5	50%
	Socializing	3	30%

Note. Research Question 3 - What steps, if any, are high-tech, high-touch senior pastors taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society? Number of participants = 10.

Table 6

RQ 4 In-Person, Face-to-Face Connections

Subthemes	Codes	Respondents	Percentages
Demographics of Congregation	Social Media Platform	10	100%
	Tech-Savvy	8	80%
	Computer Savvy	7	70%
	Seniors	5	50%
	Diverse Congregation	5	50%
	Older Population	4	40%
	Elderly Saints	4	40%
	30 to 50 Years Old	4	40%
	Median Age	4	40%
	Middle Age	3	30%
	Children	2	20%
	Rural Church	2	20%
	Not Computer-Savvy	2	20%
	Not Tech Driven	2	20%
	Five Generations	1	10%
	Engineers	1	10%
	Small Population	1	10%
	No Internet	1	10%
Zoom or Facetime Conferences	Reach Many People	9	90%
	Accessibility and Convenience	9	90%
	Willing to Meet on Zoom	8	80%
	Virtual	8	80%
	Useful	8	80%
	Majority	8	80%
	Cost Saving	5	50%
	Flexibility	4	40%
	Easier	4	40%
	Unlimited Availability	3	30%
	There for the Congregation	3	30%
	Attract Young People	2	20%
	Wider Reach	2	20%
Advantages of Zoom or Facetime Conferences	In-Person Contact	10	100%
	Meetings Increases	7	70%
	Connect	6	60%
	Stay Connected During Pandemics	5	50%
	Receptive	5	50%
	Reach More People	5	50%

	Less Driving	4	40%
	Communicate Frequently	4	40%
	Less Travel	4	40%
	Attend Meetings	3	30%
	Connect to Families	2	20%
	Small Group	2	20%
	Not Going Anywhere	2	20%
	Keep Good Records	2	20%
	Physical Interactions Better	1	10%
	Bonding	1	10%
Disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime Conferences	Need to See You	10	100%
	Personal Touch Ascent	9	90%
	Impersonal	8	80%
	Touch Missing	4	40%
	Not Coming Back	3	30%
	Presence Absent	3	30%
	Physical Interactions Missing	3	30%
	No Pat on the Back	2	20%
	More In-Personal	2	20%
	Less Personal	2	20%
	Handshake Missing	2	20%
	Lazy	1	10%
	Body Language Missing	1	10%
	Coldly Communicated Via Technology	1	10%

Note. Research Question 4. How important do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry? Number of participants = 10.

Identify General Categories or Themes

From broad categories, the researcher developed common and transferable themes.

Additionally, the researcher visually presented the relationship between the categories and

themes. The researcher created memos outlining the similar traits between the categories and

how the themes relate to the study objectives to establish the themes.

Integrate and Summarize the Data for Readers

Once the participants had the opportunity to review the data transcripts, any needed

adjustments were made. There was only one change made to the transcribed data. The final four

themes were: relational connections from a distance, relational connections through technology, increased connections due to increased technology, and in-person, face-to-face connections.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

This section talks about the themes that came out of the analysis of interview data from ten senior pastors in the upstate of Greenville, South Carolina. The present study was guided by four research questions addressing how pastors maximizing personal ministry in a digital age in upstate Greenville, South Carolina, perceived their practice of relational connections from a distance, relational connections through technology, increased connections due to increased technology, and in-person, face-to-face connections.

As the transcribed data was read, reread, and coded, notes were made in the margins to look at the phenomenon with fresh eyes and find the themes in the participants' comments. The researcher made no assumptions, preconceptions, or presuppositions regarding the study. The data were analyzed using the five-step qualitative data analysis process developed by Creswell and Creswell in 2018. Transcribing interviews, scanning documents, typing field notes, and organizing data by sources were all steps in the qualitative data analysis process. The second step was to read the data and reflect on its significance. In step three, all of the data was coded. The descriptions and themes were created in step four. A visual representation of the description and themes was provided in step five. The researcher transformed the data into one or more simple forms and then organized and analyzed them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Themes and subthemes were developed for all codes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The data was then divided into logical groups and individually coded (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The researcher then examined the final list of themes and subthemes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The researcher discovered links and patterns between the codes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

The researcher used the participants' quotes to put lists of important categories into themes. These themes were then used to describe the essence of the phenomenon. Due to the participants' varied ideas on using technology to minister in the digital age, the interviews showed a variety of perspectives and voices. The data sources also demonstrated the link between pastors' perceptions of using technology for ministry and their activities in the digital age. As the themes emerged from the study of the interview transcripts, the participants' experiences came to light and were connected. The researcher learned how each participant maximizes personal ministry in the digital age and obtains more awareness of their lived experiences by going through and categorizing the data. The current organization of the results for each subtheme is based on the order of the interviews and the answers from the respondents. The findings will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Data analysis was used to create a composite description of the phenomenon, including textural and structural descriptions, to capture the "essence" of how senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology (Creswell, 2014).

The participants shared their experiences of how technology has led to relational connections from a distance. They discussed the COVID-mandated shutdown, outdated technology, digitally challenged, consistent generosity, technological skepticism, and fostering a sense of community online. The participants' responses served as the basis for how participants regarded and recognized how the ministry has changed in a digital age.

Participants used their experiences with technology to stay in touch with their congregation as a starting point for describing how they thought technology should be used. They discussed relational connections through technology while ministering in a digital age. The

participants told of perceived practices from an individual pastor's viewpoint after discussing adaptation to technology, technology resistance, their computer savvy, social media, and technology and digital infrastructure.

The participants shared their experiences of how technology has led to increased connections, making it easier to stay connected to their congregation with pastors' virtual office hours and the frequency, types of contact, and face-to-face interactions they held.

While technology has made connecting over long distances easier, it cannot replicate the benefits of in-person, face-to-face connections. The participants discussed, from their perspectives, the demographics of their congregations and the advantages and disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences.

Most of the data analysis shows that pastors in the greater Greenville area have seen or heard about the same thing from different points of view and voices. Regarding the research goals guiding this study, pastors' lived experiences in their use of technology to minister in the digital age were analyzed as subthemes that support four primary themes: relational connections from a distance, relational connections through technology, increased connections due to increased technology, and in-person, face-to-face connections.

Theme One: Relational Connections from a Distance

The first major theme aided the understanding of research question one, which aimed to establish how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for distant relational connections. With the help of digital technology, pastors may now communicate with their congregations and forge relationships even when they are not physically present. For pastoral ministry, this has created both new opportunities and new challenges. Responses received from participants describe relational

connections from a distance based on their encounters with the COVID-mandated shutdown, outdated technology, digitally challenged, consistent generosity, technological skepticism, and fostering community online. The senior pastors talked about how they built relationships that could last even when they were not together. They did this so they could lead their church's community of believers even when they were not together. The description of relational connections from a distance revealed 44 codes divided into six subthemes. Six subthemes were parsed from the data associated with the theme of relational connection from a distance, which are: COVID-mandated shutdown, outdated technology, digitally challenged, consistent generosity, technological skepticism, and fostering community online.

COVID-mandated shutdown. The first sub-theme to emerge from the central theme of relational connections from a distance was COVID mandated shutdown. All ten participants provided an in-depth view and shared experiences of how they built relational connections from a distance with their congregation. Each participant explained how COVID-19 affected their church.

According to the pastors, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted churches, particularly those with older members who were more vulnerable to the virus. Many churches were forced to shut down for extended periods and had to adapt to using technology for live streaming and Zoom conference calls. Some churches resumed worship services with social distancing measures in place, but attendance was much lower than before the pandemic. Churches had to modify their usual practices, such as refraining from hugging or shaking hands, and some lost members due to COVID-related deaths. Despite the challenges, some pastors found that the pandemic presented an opportunity for the church to learn and adapt and to continue broadcasting services even during shutdowns.

Outdated technology. The second sub-theme to emerge from the major theme of relational connections from a distance was outdated technology**.** Four of the ten participants provided an in-depth view of their experience building relational connections from a distance with their congregation. Each participant explained the importance of ensuring the sheep received the preached Word during the crucial time of COVID-19.

The pastors stressed how hard it was to use technology during COVID-19 to meet their congregations' spiritual needs and stay in touch. They had to update their websites and Facebook pages and use platforms like YouTube Live to broadcast their services. Pastors highlighted the need for technology to cater to different age groups. They believed their congregations were ready to adapt and make the gospel accessible to all during the pandemic.

Digitally Challenged. A third subtheme to emerge from the theme of relational connection from a distance is abbreviated as "digitally challenged**."** Two of the 10 participants said one of their responsibilities was to train their congregation in using technology. In future crises such as COVID-19, their congregation will be prepared to move into the 21st century without any complications or fear of IT technology.

Pastors emphasized the importance of being prepared and training members to understand that they are the church, even if they cannot physically gather in a building. They noted the need to update their website to make it more user-friendly for those who have not returned to the church. They also expressed the challenge of getting their traditional congregation to embrace digital technology. Still, COVID forced them to adapt by having outdoor services with recorded sermons and broadcast on a radio frequency for those in the parking lot.

Consistent Generosity. Consistent generosity in giving was the fourth subtheme emerging from the major theme of relational connection from a distance**.** The majority of the

pastors discussed how, during COVID-19, the giving kept on coming. Their congregation continued to give financially through online technology.

Several pastors mentioned the importance of implementing online giving platforms and live-streaming services before the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted that it helped maintain financial stability during the shutdowns and increased accessibility to worship for those unable to attend services physically. Pastors reported that their congregations exceeded their expectations regarding giving and engagement, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Overall, pastors emphasized the importance of being prepared and adaptable to changes in technology and worship practices.

Technological Skepticism. Another subtheme discovered during the analysis of relational connection from a distance was technological skepticism of technology**.** Because some church members were still using flip phones rather than smartphones or other current technologies, three participants talked about how their congregation hesitated to use technology.

Several pastors said most people in their congregation are not tech-savvy but are willing to learn. Some members embrace technology, while others resent it. Before COVID, it was challenging for pastors to find competent, technically trained individuals to advance their ministry in technology. However, everything changed with COVID, and the pastors encouraged their flock to use technology more and go online.

Fostering Community Online. The final subtheme of analyzing relational connection from a distance was fostering a sense of community online. Several participants discussed how the Lord added new members to their church daily.

COVID brought significant changes to the church's use of technology. One pastor started having services in the parking lot and added a radio frequency transmitter to broadcast the

service to people in their cars. This technology allowed pastors to attract new members exposed

to their ministry through streaming. Although attendance has not returned to pre-COVID levels,

they are gradually seeing new faces. The church has tech-savvy and tech-hesitant members

spanning all generations.

Theme Two: Relational Connections Through Technology

The second major theme developed an understanding of research question two which

sought to discover what high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive as the pastoral advantages

or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology. Senior pastors talk about

building and leading their churches while staying in touch and keeping a strong sense of

community. The data connected with theme two, relational connections through technology, was

broken down into five subthemes: adaptation to technology, technology resistance, computer

savvy, social media, and technology and digital infrastructure**.**

Adaptation to Technology. The first subtheme revealed within the second central theme

of relational connections through technology was adaptation to technology. Several of the ten

participants adapted to technology by updating current technologies to allow them to reach their

congregation during COVID.

During COVID, when church services moved from outside to inside, they had to improve

their technology. The congregation's median age is around 57; most members use smartphones

and Facebook. The church taught its members how to use Zoom so they could join Bible study

and Sunday School meetings from afar. The training was successful, and young people helped

older members learn to use Zoom. The church has also been using Facebook and email blasts to

communicate with its members.

Technology Resistance. Under the second major theme of relational connections through technology, another subtheme was technology resistance, and several participants also discussed how they dealt with those members.

One of the pastors said most deacons in his church are uncomfortable with technology, with only five to seven understanding texting and email and preferring flip phones to smartphones. This resistance to technology is common throughout the African American community, where access to technology and the internet can be limited, especially in rural areas. This lack of access hindered children's ability to participate in online schooling during the pandemic. The church can play a role in retaining young people, but some members still resist technology despite having internet access.

Computer Savvy. Another subtheme pertained to computer savvy. Participants shared various perspectives on their members' capabilities to use technology daily.

The pastors have congregations with varying demographics, but not all have technologically savvy members. Most congregation members have smartphones and internet access, with Facebook being the most commonly used social media platform. Younger members tend to be more Snapchat savvy, and churches are adapting to reach them through social media. The younger members often teach the older members how to use technology, and churches are finding ways to offer information to those who may not be as tech-savvy.

Social Media. Social media was another subtheme within the second major theme of relational connections through technology. All of the participants discussed using some form of social media to reach their congregants.

Pastors commented that their churches shared information through social media, such as announcements, daily devotionals, and archived sermons. They primarily use Facebook,

Instagram, and YouTube to communicate what is happening in the church and stream services. They heavily rely on Facebook to reach people unable to attend in-person services, including those who live out of state or are housebound. The church also uses various clips and snippets of sermons to engage with their audiences and draw them into the worship atmosphere. Additionally, a church has an app that allows members to access all the information on its website from their phones.

Technology And Digital Infrastructure. The final subtheme within the second major theme of relational connections through technology was technology and digital infrastructure. Each participant expressed the importance of lessons learned that could improve responses to future pandemics or mandated church closures.

The interviewed pastors talked about what they learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the importance of investing in new technology to improve engagement and reach people elsewhere. They also learned to trust in God during the process and to be more sensitive to smaller churches' struggles. Maintaining communication with members through a multi-level platform is essential, and they developed a better emergency plan. They emphasize the "3 Cs": connection, communication, and commitment, which can help bridge the gap between the church and the community.

Theme Three: Increased Connections Due to Increased Technology

The third major theme aided the understanding of research question three, which attempted to understand what steps, if any, that high-tech, high-touch senior pastors are taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased connections due to increased technology. Undoubtedly, technology's widespread use and availability have improved our ability to connect. People may now communicate with others from anywhere in the world with

only a few clicks thanks to the growth of social media, messaging apps, video conferencing, and other digital communication. Pastors are strengthening their relationship with their congregations through digital technology. Due to the ongoing epidemic, remote work, and social distancing policies, people turned more to digital technology to stay connected to their religious communities. Pastors have varying perceptions of how pastoral ministry has changed due to the increased connections due to increased technology. Some pastors see this as a positive development, while others are more cautious or critical of the shift. These pastors offered much insight on this theme. Descriptions of increased connections due to increased technology revealed 24 codes which were arranged into three subthemes. The three subthemes from the data were: pastors' virtual office hours, the frequency, and types of contact, and face-to-face interaction.

Pastoral Virtual Office Hours: The first subtheme was pastoral virtual office hours. Virtual office hours have enhanced the high-tech, high-touch pastor' ministry in a digital age. All ten pastors responded regarding this topic.

The pastors discussed how their members can make an appointment to avoid conflicting meetings. The members must go through their administrative assistant or church staff to schedule a meeting anytime they wish to talk to the pastor. If the pastor is the one they truly need, the administrative staff will direct the members to the pastor.

If they prefer to talk to the pastor in person for counseling, premarital, or spiritual guidance, they can simply go to the church. The pastors maintain regular office hours. They also recognize that many members have work hours during the day and cannot come to church during typical business hours. The pastors will make appointments in the evenings to speak with them.

The pastors try to be approachable and personable to all members and to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by being able to change one life at a time. One particular thing that is constant for pastors is when they have bereavement care for members, which usually starts with a phone call from them or the deacons. Then they set up an appointment to meet with the bereaved family.

In an average year, pastors will have four to seven members pass away in the church; adding the tier of immediate family members or relatives of members makes deaths almost a weekly event. The pastors will meet with the families in person. These face-to-face meetings include hospital visits for sick and confined people and any appointments for counseling or pastoral care that members need.

Several pastors said they are very involved in meeting with their members and are available to them on Wednesday mornings between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m., or before 11 a.m. They are also available before and after Bible study.

Frequency and Types of Contact. Continuing with the third major theme of increased connections due to increased technology, another subtheme pertained to the frequency and types of contact. Several variables, including the congregation's size, the organization's objectives, and the available resources, might affect how frequently a pastor communicates with congregation members. Several participants also identified the importance of frequency and types of contact with members as an essential aspect of maximizing personal ministry in a digital age.

The pastors have a process where deacons contact individuals not attending church regularly and report to the pastor. The pastor then reaches out to these individuals after they have missed two consecutive Sundays. The church also lists sick and shut-in individuals who are visited twice a month. The pastor aims to have verbal contact with 90% of members weekly and

meets with different ministries and the deacons regularly to ensure everyone follows the vision. The elders have their groups of families that they shepherd, and they meet every other week to share what is going on. The pastor also randomly calls on people, including those in nursing homes and hospitals. While there is no formal plan to meet with the entire membership each year, the pastor still regularly visits and considers himself on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to serve the people.

Face-To-Face Interactions. Face-to-face interactions were the final subtheme to emerge within the third major theme of increased connections due to increased technology. Several of the participants expressed their perspectives on face-to-face interactions.

The pastors shared how they spend their time with people depending on the purpose of their meetings. They may talk to or greet people after church, offer counseling or spiritual advice for family problems, or participate in life celebrations or funerals. They acknowledged that they must deal with various life issues such as grief, marriage, premarital counseling, and COVID-related stress. They engage in deep discussions about spiritual matters, such as helping members understand who they are in Christ.

Most pastors said they have one-on-one meetings to mediate with families in crises. They attend social gatherings such as members' birthdays, children's graduations, and homecoming games. They also meet one-on-one with people struggling with their spiritual growth and provide counseling sessions. The participants noted that they rely on godly wisdom to know how far to go and how far not to go in their interactions with people.

Theme Four: In-Person, Face-To-Face Connections

The fourth major theme developed an understanding of research question four, which sought to understand how important high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive in-person,

face-to-face connections to pastoral ministry. A crucial aspect of human interaction is face-to-face communication. Although technology has made it feasible to contact people remotely, there are numerous advantages to physically meeting and getting to know others. Participants discussed how technology has made it possible to connect with people everywhere and the importance of the power of personal interaction. Descriptions of in-person, face-to-face connections revealed 61 codes which developed into **t**hree subthemes. The data connected with theme four, in-person, face-to-face connections, was broken down into four subthemes: demographics of the congregation, Zoom or Facetime conferences, advantages of Zoom or Facetime Conferences, and disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime Conferences.

Demographics of Congregation. Within the fourth major theme of in-person, face-to-face connections, the first subtheme was the demographics of the congregation. Several participants discussed the demographics of their flock.

The pastors discussed having diverse congregations ranging from youth to seniors. Some members are tech-savvy, while others are afraid of technology. However, most members have mobile phones, and many uses social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube to access the church's web page. The churches have also transitioned to using technology for online donations and streaming broadcasts. Some members have been hesitant to use modern technology, but with the help of younger members, they have become more comfortable with it. The pastors expressed that, overall, the demographics of the churches are diverse, but they are attracting more young people who are more social media and technology savvy.

Zoom or Facetime Conferences. The second subtheme under the major theme of in-person, face-to-face connections was Zoom or Facetime conferences. Several participants

explored how Zoom or Facetime conferences have become a popular tool for staying in touch with their congregations.

During the pandemic, the pastors said that they had been using Zoom for Sunday school, Bible studies, and counseling sessions, among other things. The church as an organization has embraced technology, and its members have embraced using it. They use Zoom for monthly planning and annual or biannual business meetings in a hybrid format. While some members prefer in-person meetings, there are still requests for virtual appointments for counseling sessions. When the interviews were conducted in the spring of 2023, the pastors believed the pandemic was nearing its end. While some members may prefer virtual meetings, most prefer in-person meetings' personal touch and face-to-face communication.

Advantages of Zoom or Facetime Conferences. The next subtheme discussed the advantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences. Several participants expressed the benefits of using technology while ministering in a digital age.

Pastors explained how virtual communication helps churches stay involved and connected, reach more people, talk to each other more often, even during bad weather or a pandemic, and be more flexible with how they teach and talk to people. Virtual communication can also help people who cannot be there in person because they are sick or traveling. They expressed that when you meet someone in person, you can get a better sense of their spirit through their body language and facial expressions. This process makes talking to them and forming a close relationship easier.

Disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime Conferences. The final subtheme within the fourth major theme of in-person, face-to-face connections was the disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences. The pastors discussed the disadvantages of virtual communication,

including the lack of physical interactions and personal touch, the potential for cold or impersonal communication, the risk of losing the human component, and difficulty reading body language and building trust. They noted there is also concern that virtual communication may lead some people to never return to in-person worship. However, it is essential to recognize the benefits and disadvantages of virtual and in-person communication and to find a balance between the two.

Addressing the Research Questions

Four themes were gleaned from participant interview data, as was previously mentioned. The themes were relational connections from a distance, relational connections through technology, increased connections due to increased technology, and in-person-face-to-face connections. These themes will be used to answer each research question in the following section. The main concepts will then be summarized.

Research Question One

RQ1 was, how do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for relational connections from a distance? The first research question for this study sought to understand how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors might perceive that pastoral ministry has changed now that digital technology allows for distant relational connections. Six subthemes revealed aspects of this first major theme, including COVID-mandated shutdown, outdated technology, digitally challenged, consistent generosity, technological skepticism, and fostering a sense of community online. The participants believe that digital technology has fundamentally changed how they connect with people and minister to them in this digital age. The COVID-mandated shutdowns have forced many pastors and religious organizations to reevaluate how they connect with and minister to their communities.

Outdated technology and digital challenges have made it more difficult for some pastors to transition to a more digital ministry. Still, for many, the pandemic has underscored the importance of relational connections from a distance. The six themes are described below.

Concerning the first theme of COVID-mandated shutdowns, pastor Lionel, Church J asserted "When COVID shutdown the in-person visitations, we were ready to continue to broadcast." The second theme, outdated technology. Elliott (2021) asserted that pastors were required to create appropriate content for outlining services on platforms like Facebook, Zoom, YouTube, and others. Several pastors admitted they were at a disadvantage and unfamiliar with technology. Elliott's (2021) assertion was in line with what Pastor Lionel explained, when he stated they were initially just streaming on Facebook but then they added YouTube and did a little bit on Instagram, but mainly YouTube and Facebook. Regarding the third theme of being digitally challenged, Pastor Mary, Church B expressed, "The church did not provide live streaming. The church services were not streamed live during the pandemic. We basically did not have church." Pastor Darius said of the fourth theme of consistent generosity, "I had to sell the idea of online giving. But once we did, and once we took hold of it, giving immediately went up 6%." The fifth theme is technological skepticism. Pastor Mary asserted, "Seventy-five to 80% of my members are senior Saints…they are 60 to 85 years old. And they were not knowledgeable about technology." The final theme in research question one was fostering community online. Pastor Lionel expressed, "We are also watching and seeing new faces. People that were not with us prior to COVID became exposed to our ministry because of our streaming."

Research Question Two

RQ2 was, what do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive to be the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology? The second

research question for this study sought to understand how the pastors, as high-tech, high-touch

senior pastors, perceived the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections

through technology. Five subthemes, including adaptation to technology, technology resistance,

computer savvy, social media, and technology and digital infrastructure, emerged from this

second major theme. The participants' experiences showed they are interested in continuing

relational connections through technology because they would still be lost without technology,

especially during COVID.

Concerning the first theme, adaptation to technology, Pastor Jim said, "Our oldest

member is 97 years old. And we laugh all the time because every single morning she uses

Facebook to wish everybody a good morning." For theme two, technology resistance, Pastor

Denzel expressed,

> Out of those deacons, only about five to seven understand texting and email. The rest of
> the group would still rather have a flip phone than an iPhone or some type of Android.
> They simply dislike and reject them. That group said, "Hey, I am not getting on Zoom." I
> am not getting on Facebook. But you all go ahead; we will support you, but we are not
> getting on there.

Concerning theme three, computer savvy, Pastor Frederick said, "Most of our folks are

very tech-savvy, and we have a lot of engineers, scientists, and so forth. They are very tech-

savvy; they use phones all the time." Of theme four, social media, Pastor Frederick continued on

to say, "We have both Facebook and YouTube; we have Facebook pages; we have a main page;

our students have their own page." The final theme for research question two was technology

and digital infrastructure, of which Pastor Mary said,

> We also did a training with Zoom to get the members prepared to be able to have Bible
> study or Sunday school meetings, whatever needed to take place away from the church,
> and be able to reach them. We started Zoom, and we did four months of training to get
> the members used to using Zoom on their cell phones and on their tablets.

Research Question Three

RQ3 was, what steps, if any, are high-tech, high-touch senior pastors taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society? Three subthemes, including pastors' virtual office hours, frequency and types of contact, and face-to-face interactions, emerged from this third major theme. Concerning pastors' virtual office hours, Pastor Darius expressed, "I have office hours four days a week, and I make sure that whenever somebody needs to see me one-on-one, they can contact our church administrator, and she puts them on my calendar." The second subtheme, frequency and types of contact. Pastor Lance said, "I greet everybody every Sunday. Of course, in person. And if there is a life event that happens, then I will reach out to them at that point, and then again, if they need to talk to me, they just call the church office." The final subtheme is face-to-face interactions, and Pastor Lance continued to share,

> Well, I would have to say it depends on why we are meeting. If we are in the hallway, just passing would be socializing, and after church, you are greeting people. If they set up an appointment with me, then if there is a family issue that needs counseling or spiritual guidance, I will do that, so I really cannot say that there is one specific way; it just depends on the purpose of our coming together.

Research Question Four

RQ4 was, how important do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry? Four subthemes developed from this theme, including demographics of the congregations, Zoom or Facetime conferences, advantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences, and disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences. Of the first subtheme of the demographics of the congregations, Pastor James asserted,

> The median age of my congregation is about 57 years old. So, the vast majority of my congregation has mobile phones that are considered to be smart phones. The vast majority of the congregation has at least one social media platform, mainly Facebook.

Those who do not have Facebook access can virtually access our social media platforms via YouTube.

Regarding the second theme, Zoom or Facetime conferences, Pastor James continued, "We are still on Zoom, as is our entire Sunday school. We have had deacons' meetings, ministry leader meetings, and certain staff meetings via Zoom, so that would not be a problem using Zoom or some other method."

Concerning subtheme three, the advantage of technology, Pastor Jim affirmed,

The advantages would be that we would be able to communicate more frequently. We can communicate regardless of the weather outside, regardless of whether or not a particular pandemic is active, just as you can attend more meetings because you know you might be on your way home from work and could not get to church. But, thanks to social media and video technology, you can now be apart. That, I believe, will be one of the most valuable aspects of video meetings.

The final subtheme for research question four is the disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences. Research showed in-person interactions are more beneficial than technology-enabled contact (Swartz & Novick, 2020). This finding may be linked to Pastor James' perspective when he said,

The disadvantage is that you did not receive the personal touch that you would have received if you were not in a pandemic situation and there was no health risk. There is something about being in the presence of fellowship that helps us grow.

Evaluation of the Research Design

To carry out this study, the researcher employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. This qualitative design has a lot of advantages but also some drawbacks. There are advantages and disadvantages of phenomenology.

Research Design Strengths

It was appropriate to conduct this investigation using phenomenology. A researcher can thoroughly examine participant perceptions using phenomenology since a shared experience

binds them. In addition, phenomenology allows the researcher to explain the participants' real experiences more fully and truly than other qualitative research methods.

The study's focus was on the use of digital technology by high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who engage in servant leadership to build and sustain personal relationships with their congregations. Carefully crafted research and interview questions aided in investigating this phenomenon. Most participants were interested and eager to take part in this research since the researcher was able to design interview questions that centered on the participants' actual experiences. The ability of Greenville, South Carolina's upstate pastors to open up and completely respond to questions allowed for the collection of insightful data. As a result, the study questions were suitably and adequately addressed.

Research Design Weaknesses

The phenomenological design was suitable for application in this investigation. However, there were some drawbacks. Phenomenology provides detailed and comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon of interest. Still, it does not permit the researcher to delve into aspects of the phenomenon outside of participants' actual experiences. As a result, the researcher could not get information on any element of pastors using technology to preach that was distinct from the participants' perspectives. As a result, some comments might not be in the proper context or supported by sufficient evidence from other sources. Although using a different qualitative design might resolve this, the researcher would lose the depth of understanding made possible by phenomenology.

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Summary

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This chapter includes descriptions of the lived experiences of ten African American senior pastors of small churches in the upstate area of Greenville, South Carolina. Using

individual interviews, four major themes emerged. Four main themes and eighteen subthemes came out of the data analysis. The four main topics are: (1) relational connections from a distance (2) relational connections through technology; (3) increased connections due to increased technology; and (4) in-person, face-to-face connections. The research questions served as a framework for developing sub-themes for each major theme, with the integration of pastoral technology practices in ministry. Themes and sub-themes were developed as participants explored how they maintained effective congregational and interpersonal ministry while ministering in a digital age. While the participants' technology usage varied, all participants expressed how it was necessary and technology was required for staying in contact with their community. Several participants also expressed the importance of strategic planning to be ready for future pandemics or other crises that might force church shutdowns requiring updated technology and training members in its usage. The participants acknowledged the need for technology as well as the need for a high level of interpersonal touch.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The previous chapter presented the results of data analysis, specifically the study's findings of senior pastor perceptions of how those who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. This chapter will present the conclusions drawn from this data, beginning with a restatement of the research purpose and research questions. Information will also be provided on the research conclusions, implications, and the applications of the research findings in relation to both empirical and theoretical literature. The researcher will provide information on the study's limitations and potential directions for future research followed by a concluding summary.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. Because technology can help and hinder this process, there were steps pastors took to maintain interpersonal relationships with their church members. For this study, the definition of a high-tech, high-touch pastor was those whose task of directing the people toward a more profound advancement, growth, and spirituality in the Christian faith was achieved using digital technology. The theory guiding this phenomenological study was Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership theory. This secular leadership theory was typified in Christ's and Paul's life and ministry. A servant leadership approach prioritizes others' needs and shares power rather than wielding it from the top of a hierarchy. One of Jesus's last lessons to His disciples involved touch as he washed their feet (NIV, 2011, John 13:1-17).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative phenomenological study:

RQ1. How do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for relational connections from a distance?

RQ2. What do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive to be the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology?

RQ3. What steps, if any, are high-tech, high-touch senior pastors taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society?

RQ4. How important do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Data collected by interviewing ten senior pastors in the upstate of Greenville, South Carolina was analyzed. After the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews, four themes emerged. The themes were: relational connections from a distance, relational connections through technology, increased connections due to increased technology, and in-person, face-to-face connections.

A summary of the study's findings regarding each research question succinctly answers and presents conclusions to each of the study's research questions. The relationship of the study findings to Chapter Two's theological, theoretical, and empirical literature review is discussed. Implications and applications of the study's conclusions are given.

Summary of Findings

Participants included ten currently serving African American senior pastors of small churches in the upstate Greenville, South Carolina region. Each practices servant leadership, establishes and maintains personal contact with their church members, and leads them using digital technology. Through one-on-one interviews, these senior pastors described their

experiences. Research question one guiding the study asked how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology allowing for relational connections from a distance. The major theme identified by investigation of research question one was relational connections from a distance.

Participants described relational connections from a distance based on their experiences: (1) COVID-mandated shutdown, (2) outdated technology, (3) digitally challenged, (4) consistent generosity, (5) technological skepticism, and (6) fostering community online. Ten senior pastors shared their experiences from the perspective of technology and how they are maximizing personal ministry in a digital age.

All ten participants expressed the significant advantage of digital technology and how it enables pastors to communicate with people who might not have been able to attend in-person services or events and thus reach a bigger audience. Digital technology also makes it possible to communicate with congregation members more frequently and conveniently, which can improve pastoral care.

The pastors discussed the limitations of digital technology and the fact that it cannot replace interpersonal interactions and community development. Although virtual relationships can be beneficial, they cannot entirely replace the advantages of an in-person community and the sense of belonging that comes with it.

Research question two addressed what high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceived as the advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology. The major theme identified by the investigation of research question two was relational connections through technology. Participants described relational connections through technology based on their

experiences: (1) adaptation to technology, (2) technology resistance, (3) computer savvy, (4) social media, and (5) technology and digital infrastructure.

The participants shared that the advantages were: (1) pastors can communicate with members of their congregation via digital technology, regardless of their location or the time of day, thus making pastoral care and assistance more available, (2) using social media or online forums, for example, digital technology can give pastors a chance to interact with their community in fresh and relevant ways, and (3) new communication channels like video conferencing, email, and text messaging are available to pastors thanks to digital technology.

Ten participants shared that the disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology were: (1) the amount of intimacy that can be attained through in-person conversations may not be replicated by digital technology, and (2) pastors and members of their congregation may become distracted by digital technology, which could compromise the level of participation and communication.

Research question three addressed what steps, if any, high-tech, high-touch senior pastors are taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society. The major theme identified with research question three was increased connections due to increased technology. Participants described these increased connections due as: (1) pastors' virtual office hours, (2) frequency and types of contact, and (3) face-to-face interactions.

Eight of the ten participants expressed that social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be effective communication channels for members of their congregations. Pastors can interact with folks who infrequently attend services by posting messages, prayers, and updates on various platforms. The pastors also said they could arrange online activities like Bible

studies and prayer services using video conferencing platforms like Zoom. Even if the congregations cannot interact personally, these gatherings can give members a chance to engage with one another and the pastor. They also expressed how they can effectively notify congregants of future activities and news by email and messaging applications. These resources allow pastors to regularly communicate updates, prayer requests, and newsletters. Finally, the participants expressed that a church's website can be a helpful tool for its members. A church website can be used to distribute resources, upload sermons, and announce upcoming events. Also, a website can support members of the congregation in maintaining ties to the church even when they are unable to attend services physically.

Research question four addressed how important high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceived in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry. Participants described in-person, face-to-face connections based on their experiences: (1) the demographics of their congregations, (2) Zoom or Facetime conferences, (3) advantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences, and (4) disadvantages of Zoom or Facetime conferences.

Ten pastors expressed how in-person connection can allow them to build relationships with their congregants, offer guidance and support, and better understand their congregants' emotional and spiritual needs. Through personal interactions, pastors can also provide comfort in times of grief.

All ten pastors also said that while in-person, face-to-face connections are essential, they are increasingly using technology to supplement their ministry. By leveraging social media, email, video conferencing, and other digital tools, pastors can maintain ongoing connections with their congregants and communicate more effectively with larger groups.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology. This study was especially pertinent following the COVID-19 pandemic's period of social isolation. The servant leadership idea of Greenleaf served as the study's theoretical foundation. Using the principles of servant leadership, the pastor aims to get to know and help each congregation member on an individual basis. The book of Acts has some noteworthy instances of the effectiveness of the Christian community. Just as people develop most when they form partnerships, communities experience healthy growth and development when there are exchanges that "mutually help each other" (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Some, however, criticized the virtual congregational model for preventing in-person camaraderie. Pastor John said,

> Reaching out to families and what we call a Jerusalem model, and that is starting with each family member is to reach out to their own family and bring family members that are not in church and introduce them to church, and that is the unchurched and those that are unsaved.

Technology is ubiquitous. Everything can be categorized as either a result of nature or a human invention (McNeil, 2002). There is technology all around us. Technology makes it possible to satisfy spiritual requirements in unexpected situations. According to some pastors, technology is a tool that does not exalt God. They contend that the materialism and exaltation of celebrity and televangelist self-characteristics starkly contrasted with the humility Christians anticipated experiencing (Magezi, 2015). Evidence showed that in-person contacts were more advantageous than encounters facilitated by technology (Swartz & Novick, 2020). Pastor Jim said it like this,

> To describe my interactions with individuals that I am visiting with, the first thing that I do is just be in that person's presence and allow that person to kind of control what he or she wants to talk about. That is something I have discovered numerous times. It is not what I say that individuals are looking for; the presence of me just coming and being there is what they are looking for.

According to senior pastors in Greenville, South Carolina's upstate, pastoral practices impact the minister using technology in a digital era. This supports Naisbitt's (2001) thesis that people require more human interaction as technology advances.

Empirical Literature

Limited research explores how pastors who employ servant leadership use digital technologies to connect with and lead their congregations. There has not been much real-world empirical research on servant leadership (Farling et al., 1999; Northouse, 2013). According to Whitfield (2014), servant leadership is putting the needs of others before one's own, with the goal of making those served become servants as a result. Taking a slightly different approach but reaching the same conclusion, Pastor Lionel said**, "**Leadership involves taking care of people where they are, no matter what. Serve at the house of God but do it outside the building so that others can excel." The current study adds to the body of research on how senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology.

Relational connections from a distance are essential. The pastors expressed that it allows people to maintain relationships even when they cannot be physically present with each other. Moreover, these religious experiences in online space allow people to feel "spiritually connected to others who share similar perceptions of religious interaction" (Lombaard, 2007; McCully, 2014, p. 3). Conversely, a person always connected to the digital world risks becoming hollow

and lonely over time, unable to relate to or be present with others, God, or oneself (Ocampo, 2018).

The senior pastors aim among the respondents to this study is to remain relationally connected through technology. They can offer online Bible studies and classes using video conferencing or online learning platforms to engage with congregants and continue their faith. Pastor Lance shared,

> YouTube is for members to go back and look at it later or they can do it during Monday live hour. Facebook is during live hours is where we get a chance to have dialogue with individuals that are on there. This is where we put all of our announcements on the screen during the week where individuals can go and hit a link on our website and all of those are tools that are used daily for us to communicate and then we have a communication software such as emails and tools of that nature.

The participants discussed increased connections due to increased technology. For example, Pastor Frederick asserted,

> Well, it varies. Sometimes I am very heavy on one-on-one interactions. Usually, it is like lunch or breakfast. Of course, I counsel, sometimes with a couple, and there are Zoom calls from time to time. But it really fluctuates. I am kind of in the stage right now where I have not had a whole lot of issues. I could have a number of situations come up. And I will have to meet with somebody one-on-one. It is kind of hard to pinpoint. But most of my interaction has been electronic.

The pastors expressed the importance of in-person, face-to-face connections. For example, Pastor Darius expressed,

> I actually have members who prefer to meet virtually. I make myself available for both. I personally enjoy one-on-one or in-person communication. However, I understand how Zoom or FaceTime can be useful. I believe the pandemic is nearing the end of its course. I am getting more people to meet face-to-face. But I am also seeing a lot of people who have grown accustomed to virtual meetings. So, I would say probably the majority of my congregation is now starting to get used to meeting face-to-face again.

Theoretical Literature

The servant leadership philosophy developed by Robert Greenleaf served as the foundation for this phenomenological investigation. Although this is a "secular" leadership

philosophy, Christ and Paul's lives and ministries serve as examples of it. Sendjaya (2015)

asserts that, much earlier than the writings of Greenleaf or Hesse, Jesus Christ and His followers

taught and exemplified the fundamental idea of servant leadership more than 2,000 years ago.

The term was coined by management thinker Robert Greenleaf, who drew on his extensive

Quaker religious background and practice of experiential leadership. Like the rest of humanity,

the church immediately embraced this contemporary servant leadership to comprehend Jesus'

leadership philosophies (Singfiel, 2018). Servant leadership places the needs of people first and

distributes power rather than controlling it at the top of a hierarchy. As he bathed their feet, Jesus

taught His followers one of His final lessons through touch (NIV, 2011, John 13:1–17). The

present research study affirms Singfiel's (2018) servant leadership style because each of the

pastors communicated the importance of leading their congregation during COVID-19. These ten

pastors, who used technology to continue ministering to their flocks during the COVID-19

outbreak, exhibited servant leadership. Many churches had to stop holding in-person services due

to the ban on public meetings, which was necessary to stop the virus from spreading.

Nonetheless, these pastors rapidly adjusted to the circumstance and devised inventive

methods to use technology to provide spiritual guidance and support to their congregation. For

example, Pastor Lionel said they use Facebook and YouTube to broadcast their live services

because folks still need to be taught the word of God. Likewise, Pastor Denzel shared,

> And so, I am working hard because I had to change our vision and our mission this year
> to really fit where we are going, and our vision is simply to win souls. Win one soul at a
> time. And so, we are working in areas where all of the ministries are charged with the
> task of doing something to be able to reach our people and meet their needs. That is what
> servant leaders do. They meet the needs of the community, so everyone is charged with
> that task.

God gave "some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and

teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry for the edifying of the body of

Christ" (NIV, 2011, Ephesians 4:11-12). Ephesians 4:11–16 (NIV, 2011) is made up of a single Greek sentence that is broken up into many English sentences, according to Schussler-Fiorenza (2017). Instead of objects or offices, the divine Messiah Jesus, who fills the universe, gives gifts in the form of people who do various tasks. According to the Messiah, the saints require individuals who can fill specific leadership positions. Similar lists can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:5-8 (NIV, 2011). Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers can all teach the Bible. Pastor Denzel reflected the truth of Ephesians 4:11-14 (NIV, 2011) when he expressed,

> We have recently gone out evangelizing and serving our community. I just made a move where I appointed one of our deacons, who has a love for people, as one of our evangelism ministry chairs. As a result, he will lead the evangelism effort. And I am currently doing a Bible study series on winning souls.

Pastors offer their members spiritual direction. Pastors are theologians (Gartner, 2010). Pastors try to connect the liberating and healing message of the Gospel to the lives of their parishioners in a way that is appropriate for each individual. Preaching, planning worship services, writing weekly sermons, and communicating biblical truth to the congregation are among their responsibilities. The pastor's main duties are to share God's Word with people and care for those seeking spiritual direction. They are to look after God's sheep as shepherds (NIV, 2011, 1 Peter 5:2–3). Pastors will watch over their congregations because they want to keep an eye on them.

Any query can be answered with a quick Google search. Technology is not the only way to help individuals find inner serenity and spirituality (Naisbitt et al., 2001). The same pattern holds for church congregations. Many look online for answers rather than consulting a preacher or spiritual guide. Pastor Mary said she posts clips and inserts of the Sunday service for those seeking a word and unable to attend church.

Incorporating theological considerations or biblical foundations from the Holy Scriptures to technology helps pastors understand the importance of face-to-face connections. Pastor James and the nine other participants offered the advantages and disadvantages of virtual meetings. Pastor James noted that the in-person presence is still missed by many. Five other participants also expressed the personal touch is missing due to virtual meetings.

The Barna Group (2015) released research on new religious experiences and expressions growing in popularity and attracting millions of people toward God but away from congregational church involvement. Technology is enabling more individuals to find God. As opposed to some, many are still getting together and encouraging one another (Hudgins, 2019) as the Bible says and "all the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25, NIV, 2011). Ten participants agreed with Hudgins on how technology is a way allowing the unchurched to find God. For example, Pastor Bob conveyed,

> Our church has a very valuable, updated web page. It is often viewed by church members and guests. Some of the persons who have joined our church joined because of the activity that they saw on the website, and they were able to experience the religious services on Sunday via the website, which served as a drawing card for them to come to our local church.

Implications

The current study yielded several significant findings with wide-ranging implications for senior pastors to maximize personal ministry in a digital age. The results of this study examining the lived experiences of the high-tech, high-touch pastor maximizing personal ministry in a digital age can provide other pastors with an understanding of how to remain connected to their congregations while ministering from a distance, making relational connections from a distance, making relational connections through technology, increasing connections due to increased technology, and the importance of in-person, face-to-face connections. Additionally, the

outcomes can offer senior and aspiring pastors a better understanding of using technology when the doors may be closed during crises like COVID-19. This study showed how senior pastors go beyond theory and put their beliefs into practice. Therefore, the researcher's study's findings provide senior pastors with the knowledge to consider balancing the impersonal nature of streaming worship services while maintaining personal contact with their congregations.

Theoretical Implications

The present study identified some theoretical implications for senior pastors who practice servant leadership, establish, and maintain personal contact with their church members, and lead using digital technology. Theoretical parts of the study were in line with the servant leadership theory proposed by Greenleaf in 1977 and reiterated by Whitfield (2014) and Morenammele and Schoeman (2020). All participants asked about serving others concurred that it is a fundamental component of leadership that leaders cannot overlook. Serving others, in the opinion of the study's participants, refers to the act of putting the needs and interests of others before one's own and actively working to support and help others in various ways. For example, Pastor Lionel stated that leadership involves caring for people where they are, no matter what. He said, "Serve at the house of God but do it outside the building so that others can excel." The value of helping others could not be emphasized enough by the participants. The participants described the leaders' need to serve others using words like serve, reach, connect, care, love, encourage, and help. These ideas are consistent with the theoretical framework in this study's second chapter.

Many preachers are aided by online preaching resources, including sermon plans and even finished sermons. The pastor's library used to be a bookcase in the pastor's study filled with notebooks, tapes, and other easily accessible items. Young (2019) claims that podcasts, e-books, websites, Bible software, and online college and seminary courses are increasingly replacing the

pastor's physical library. Technology advancement can be credited with every one of these shifts. The participants agreed to embrace technology and adjust to their communities' shifting demands and preferences. By doing this, they can use technology's advantages to serve their communities and followers' spiritual needs more effectively.

Empirical Implications

The current study made several important discoveries with numerous empirical implications for senior pastors who practice servant leadership, establish, and maintain personal contact with their church members, and lead using digital technology. Senior pastors' experiences demonstrated, overall, the introduction of how digital technology has altered how they approach pastoral ministry. While it has created new chances for interaction and outreach, it has also created new challenges that demand careful thought and focus. As a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor, It is critical to utilize digital technology strategically to advance their pastoral ministry and be aware of how their congregation's needs are changing in the digital era.

Participants' experiences also showed that digital technology provides both benefits and drawbacks in terms of pastoral care. Although it may improve accessibility, flexibility, and involvement, it can also lack the nonverbal cues and human touches that are important in forging solid pastoral relationships. High-tech, high-touch senior pastors must consider these implications and discover methods to use technology while acknowledging its limitations successfully.

The participants' experiences showed it is critical to balance technology and interpersonal connections as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor. By properly using digital technology, they may improve their relationships with the congregation, expand the church's reach, and cultivate a sense of community even in an increasingly digital world. The participants'

experience also showed even if technology has created new channels for connection and communication, face-to-face and in-person encounters are still crucial in pastoral care.

Practical Implications

There are several practical implications for how a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor might perceive that pastoral ministry has changed now that digital technology allows for relational connections at a distance, which each participant expressed. Using digital technology may give the pastor a chance to advance their professional development. For instance, they might use online training courses and tools to pick up new skills or stay current with best practices in pastoral care. By doing so, the pastor may be better able to meet the needs of their congregation and adjust to changes in the pastoral care environment.

Digital technology has the ability to improve pastoral ties with the congregation as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor while ministering in a digital age. To ensure that the congregation's needs are being addressed, pastors must be mindful of the possible downsides and endeavor to strike the correct balance between digital technology and interpersonal interactions.

It is critical to embrace digital technology as just a tool to strengthen relationships with the congregation as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor. It may promote a sense of community and stronger relationships with church members by utilizing these techniques and continuing to value personal encounters.

As a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor, face-to-face interactions are crucial for pastoral ministry. Although it can be a helpful tool to support these encounters, digital technology cannot replace the value of interpersonal relationships. Pastors can foster a sense of community, foster deeper connections, satisfy pastoral needs, and foster accountability in the congregation by emphasizing in-person encounters.

This study proposes a model for comparing human touch and technological touch. Specifically, the research aims to explore how different technologies - such as individual videoconferencing, social media, email, and targeted messaging - are used to create connections and facilitate communication within various communities. To further clarify these concepts, the pastor's responses include a detailed description of the different technologies and tools used by participants in this study, and how they relate to different forms of technological touch. For example, participants used Zoom, Facebook, and email messages to connect with their church members. By distinguishing these tools from physical touch, such as a hug or pat on the back, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the ways in which technology is transforming human interactions and touch in today's world.

Research Limitations

The current study had a number of limitations. Ten African American evangelical small church pastors from churches in the Greenville region of upstate South Carolina were the only participants in the study. They were questioned regarding how they interacted and communicated with specific church members using technology. Additionally, only seasoned evangelical pastors who have led online services and had at least two years of pastoral experience were included in this study. To optimize personal ministry in the digital age, the study did not exhaustively examine every facet of the high-tech, high-touch pastor.

Further Research

While this study yielded valuable data concerning the high-tech, high-touch pastor, maximizing personal ministry in a digital age, future research could provide additional insights on this vital topic. As noted, this study was limited to ten senior African American evangelical small church pastors from churches in the Greenville region of upstate South Carolina. There are

several ways to replicate or expand upon this study in the future. One of the most obvious ways would be to expand beyond South Carolina, perhaps even to the entire world affected by COVID, and go beyond the cultural boundaries that limited this study. Further studies could focus on learning more about the best practices for maximizing ministry in the digital era while valuing interpersonal relationships and concentrating on pastoral care.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology**.** The participants consisted of ten evangelical church pastors in upstate Greenville, South Carolina, who were identified based on their relationship with technology and online church services. There was a pre-screening process to select the participants.

The pastors were interviewed regarding their experiences using technology to minister to their congregation while staying connected. Four themes emerged from thematic analysis. The themes were: relational connections from a distance, relational connections through technology, increased connections due to increased technology, and in-person, face-to-face connections.

As high-tech, high-touch senior pastors, they perceived that pastoral ministry has changed now that digital technology allows for relational connections at a distance. One emerging theme is that technology has solved the capacity to contact those not physically present in the church or immediate community. Pastors may communicate with people and communities worldwide through modern platforms like social networking, video conferencing, and online church services. This has made it possible for pastors to reach a wider audience and interact with people who might not otherwise be able to attend church or are reluctant to do so.

Remote pastoral care and support is another new problem that technology has resolved. Pastors can provide counseling, prayer, and emotional support to those who cannot meet in person by using video conferencing and messaging apps. This was especially beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people were alone and needed emotional support.

Even though technology has given pastoral ministry new options, it cannot replace the value of being there in person and talking to people face to face. Online relationships can be beneficial, but they cannot wholly replace the richness of relationships that result from face-to-face contact. Pastors must also be aware of the possible dangers of leaning too heavily on technology, such as the possibility of relationship dehumanization or isolation.

As high-tech, high-touch senior pastors, they are taking several steps to increase their connections to their congregation due to advanced digital technology use in society. This theme has helped solve the distance problem, allowing pastors to connect with people worldwide and offer remote support and counseling. However, in pastoral ministry, it is crucial to find a balance between the benefits of technology and the value of being there in person and talking to people face-to-face. As high-tech, high-touch senior pastors, they perceived in-person, face-to-face connections as essential in pastoral ministry. While digital technology has created new pathways for human relations, it cannot replace the depth of relationships arising from in-person interactions.

A level of closeness and trust-building that can only be achieved through in-person interactions can be developed. Pastors who are physically present with their congregations can also better comprehend their needs and problems and offer more specialized support and direction. Emerging themes in pastoral ministry show that while digital technology has solved

the problem of distance, it cannot fully replace the importance of physical presence and face-to-face interaction in pastoral ministry.

Digital technologies should never completely replace in-person conversations, even though they can help keep connections and offer support. Pastors stressed developing solid relationships with their congregation through both digital and in-person means, understanding the unique advantages and limits of each as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor.

Although this research fills an essential gap, future researchers should expand upon these findings to improve how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Screening Process to Select Participants for the Study

Recruitment letters will be sent by email or postal mail to churches in the upstate Greenville, South Carolina area that meet the following criteria:

- Evangelical
- Predominantly African American with an African American pastor
- One to nine employees
- Small churches (with an average attendance between 75-800)
- On-line service

A business directory database called ReferenceUSA will identify churches possibly meeting these criteria. As a qualitative study requiring transcription for the interviews, participation will be limited to the first ten qualifying pastors returning the interest form. If some of these initial groups are not able to participate, either because they do not meet the criteria or later decline, then additional pastors will be used to achieve a sample size of ten participants.

Appendix B

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 19, 2023

Shirley Groce
Don Bosch

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-602 The High-Tech, High-Touch Pastor: Maximizing Personal Ministry in a Digital Age: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Shirley Groce, Don Bosch,

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

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 104(d):

Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 546.1 1 1(a)(7).

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

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

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

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

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

November 10, 2022

Dear Pastors of Upstate, Greenville, South Carolina:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for an EdD degree. The proposed title of my research project is "The High-Tech, High-Touch Pastor: Maximizing Personal Ministry in a Digital Age: A Phenomenological Study." The purpose of my research is to explore how high-tech, high-touch senior pastors who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with their church members and lead them using digital technology, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are currently a senior pastor in the upstate of Greenville, South Carolina, and currently have a minimum of two years of experience using technology in your church and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one virtual, recorded private interview; using Microsoft® Teams or a similar videoconferencing platform. If you are willing, you will be asked a date and time within three weeks of signed consent to participate and engage in an interview that will last for 60-90 minutes using open-ended questions. These questions, which will focus on technology practices, will be recorded to be transcribed by the researcher for data analysis. The data will be gathered and examined after the interview, and you will need to double-check the information to make sure it accurately matches what you said. You should be able to finish the mentioned procedures in 60-90 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Print the consent form, sign it, and send it back to me via fax or email as a scanned document to (⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛. If you want to set up an interview after receiving my email confirmation, call me at ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛.

Sincerely,

Shirley Groce
Investigator/Researcher

Appendix D

Consent

Title of the Project: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study: The High-Tech, High-Touch Pastor: Maximizing Personal Ministry in a Digital Age
Principal Investigator: Shirley Groce, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University Online

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study about the perceptions of pastors maximizing personal ministry in a digital age. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a senior pastor in the upstate of Greenville, South Carolina. Your participation, if you agree, will provide valuable research literature for church pastors, and will particularly provide research that gives a voice to pastors establishing and maintaining personal contact and relationships with their church members, and the pastors' practices perceived in fulfilling the mission of maximizing personal ministry in a digital age. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of this study is to understand how the high-tech, high-touch pastor maximize personal ministry in a digital age. The study is seeking to answer research questions that focus on how do high-tech, high-touch senior pastors perceive that pastoral ministry has changed due to digital technology.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. You will e-mail the researcher with a choice of a date and time within three weeks for a total of a one-hour interview, which will be confirmed and you will be sent a link for a Microsoft Teams® meeting.
2. On your interview date and time, you will log in electronically for a recording using Microsoft Teams® to answer some important questions during a 60-90 minute one-on-one interview.
3. The data will be gathered and examined after the interview, and you will need to double-check the information to make sure it accurately matches what you said. You should be able to finish the mentioned procedures in 60-90 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit.

Benefits to society include helping pastors to understand the components of how those who practice servant leadership establish and maintain personal contact with the church members and lead using digital technology.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

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

• Participant responses will be confidential. 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.
• Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
• Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years after completing the study and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.
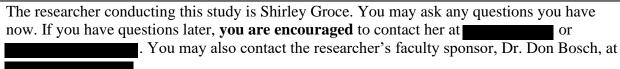
Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Shirley Groce. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Don Bosch, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

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

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

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

Your Consent

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

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

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix E

Interview Questions

RQ1. This group of questions helps me understand how you, as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor, might perceive that pastoral ministry has changed now that digital technology allows for relational connections at a distance.
1. Describe how COVID affected your church. What changed in your church ministry due to the COVID pandemic?
2. Was your church streaming your services before the pandemic, did you begin during the pandemic, or does your church not currently live stream its services?
3. Has your church returned mainly to the way things used to be (in services, practices, and attendance), and if not, what are the lingering differences?
4. What lessons did you learn that would improve your response to future pandemics or mandated church closures?

RQ2. This group of questions helps me understand how you, as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor perceive to be the pastoral advantages or disadvantages of relational connections through digital technology.
1. Does your church use social media such as Facebook or a YouTube channel? If so, describe what your church does with this.
2. Do you use email to regularly communicate with your congregation? If so, describe how often and for what purposes.
3. Does your church have a webpage? What does it contain, how often is the content updated, and how much is it viewed by church members?
4. What means, including technology, do you use to attract newcomers or visitors to your church?

RQ3. This group of questions helps me understand what steps, if any, are you as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor taking to increase their connections to their congregation due to increased digital technology use in society.
1. In addition to your weekly services or small group gatherings, how involved are you in meeting one-on-one with church members?
2. What determines how often you contact individuals? Do you try to have a personal visit with each family annually, or are there specific groups like shut-ins you see more frequently?
3. Please describe your typical face-to-face interactions with individuals or families. Would you say the time is spent socializing, discussing spiritual matters, counseling, or other purposes?

RQ4. This group of questions helps me understand how important do you as a high-tech, high-touch senior pastor perceive in-person, face-to-face connections to be in pastoral ministry?
1. Describe the demographics of your congregation and its use of media and technology. Are they technology savvy or resistant? Do they use cell phones, home

computers and internet access, and other communication technology in their daily lives?

2. When the pandemic started, many businesses switched from face-to-face communication to Zoom or Facetime conferences. If you offered to meet virtually with church members, do you think this would be well received?

3. What would be the advantages or disadvantages of communicating this way?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol Part I: Introductory Session

Hello. I will read the opening of an interview to you: Because you have been recognized as someone who is an African American pastor of a small evangelical church, you have been specifically chosen to speak with me today.

I am interested in learning more about your experiences using technology to minister. This study will give you and other pastors a forum to share knowledge on how to minister both corporately and individually and maintain relationships with your flock in today's digital era. Your answers are crucial and will be kept confidential. I want to accurately comprehend what you say throughout the interview.

To ensure accuracy and cross-referencing, I will also be taking written notes. Please be aware that your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and that you are free to end it whenever you like. At any time throughout the interview, you can say "stop." If I quote you, I will be careful to remove any personally identifiable information about you or your church, and you will be referred to by a pseudonym. No part of the tape will be kept if you decide to abandon the interview. The recordings will only be accessible to me, and all recordings will be destroyed three years after the study is published. Do you have any questions about the interview procedure or the intended use of your data?

This interview will likely last less than an hour but could last up to an hour and a half. I will start with a few background questions before moving on to four quick groups of questions about your use of technology that I have prepared in advance. Are there any questions you have before we start?

You will receive an email with a transcript of your interview, where you can add any further comments and confirm or clarify anything you mentioned. Please send me an email confirming your approval of the summary.

I appreciate you taking the time to help me finish my study.

Interview Protocols: Part 2

T4. The researcher will act professionally and with sensitivity toward the participants' non-verbal communication and replies, watching for any indications of unease, dissatisfaction, trauma, etc.

5. This interview has been determined to have minimal risk to the interviewee. There are no sensitive or triggering questions so the volunteer will not suffer any harm as a result of this investigation.

6. Interviews will be open-ended and conversational and will last 60 – 90 minutes.

Appendix G

Follow-Up Recruitment Electronic Mail

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Christian Educational Leadership Department in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Christian educational leadership with a focus on ministry. [Last week/two weeks ago/etc.] an e-mail was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to please respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants, if willing, will be asked to choose a date and time within three weeks of signed consent to participate and engage in an approximately 60-90 minute virtual, audio-recorded private interview; using Microsoft® Teams or a similar vetted audio recording instrument. The data will be gathered and examined after the interview, and you will need to double-check the information to make sure it accurately matches what you said. You should be able to finish the mentioned procedures in 60-90 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please contact me at ██████████████. Please confirm that you meet the criteria for the study by e-mail when you return the consent document attachment signed and dated and have checked the "permission box."

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign and date the consent document and return it to me by e-mail as an attachment before the scheduling of an interview. A permission box and a secure electronic signature and date box are available on the consent form, with instructions.

Sincerely,

Shirley Groce
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University