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# The Decline in Attendance at Local Churches in Queens, New York: A Biblically Based Strategic Revitalization Plan to Bring Local Churches Back to Spiritual Health

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to

the Faculty of John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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Dr. Gary Moritz, Mentor

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT REPORT ABSTRACT
Marilyn A. Dolloway
Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, April 27, 2023
Mentor: Dr. Gary Moritz

The decline in church attendance is not a new phenomenon. Historical evidence shows that God has intervened to revitalize and restore the church to a healthy state. Unfortunately, attendance at churches in contemporary times worldwide has declined, as congregations at approximately ninety percent of churches have shrunk. This trend is evident in the United States, where upwards of fifty congregations close their doors permanently each week, resulting in an annual attendance decline of one to two percent.

The decline is remarkable in the New York Borough of Queens. Churches have been declining for decades, with only fifteen to twenty-five members attending Sunday worship services. The prolonged Coronavirus pandemic has also contributed to the increase in empty church pews, with fear of infection pushing many believers into virtual worship.

Despite this bleak picture, history shows that in times of crisis, people frequently turn to the church for comfort, guidance, and community. Worshippers are aging, with only thirty-three percent of the eighteen to twenty-nine age group attending worship service each week, compared to fifty-three percent of those sixty-five years and older.

There is hope that the decline can reverse. This Thesis project proposes a strategic revitalization plan to restore the local church to spiritual health. The plan suggests that the decline at local churches in Queens, New York, can reverse if the younger generations are recruited and given leadership roles.

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## Acknowledgement

I dedicate this DMIN Thesis project to the memory of my late parents, Sidney, and Gloria Blair. They would have been immensely proud that one of their twelve children pursued a graduate education at the doctoral level. I was inspired to address the decline in attendance at local churches in Queens, New York, because after having raised five children in the borough and shepherding them through regular Sunday school, worship services, and confirmation classes during their early years, it was disheartening for me when they stopped attending worship services after high school. It is worrisome that the younger generations, future leaders, are absent from church. I hope this study can contribute to the understanding and focusing of attention on the decline problem and workable solutions the Modern Church faces in member recruitment and retention.

I am grateful for God's call to ministry and the strength the Holy Spirit has imparted on me to shape my spiritual journey. Liberty University's faculty members and staff have done an incredible job in helping me throughout my educational journey and in this DMIN process, and I thank everyone involved.

I specifically acknowledge the guidance and support of Dr. Adam McClendon and Dr. James Zabloski. A special thank you to faculty mentor Dr. Gary Moritz, who guided me throughout the writing stage of this project. Dr. Moritz and I have prayed together, and he has prayed for me and helped me through the difficulties and struggles I experienced in this research process, particularly the many challenges presented by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Dr. Moritz's ongoing mantra was "you can do it," and his help, approval, and feedback gave me the strength and courage I needed throughout the research and writing of this Thesis project. He has consistently checked in on me to provide support and ensure I remained focused. Additionally, Dr. Moritz worked with the DMIN office to secure Dr. Jerry D. Hall as the faculty reader for this Thesis project. They collaborated closely to provide useful feedback to complete this project. I am grateful for Dr. Hall's input at this stage in the project's writing and editing process.

Finally, I want to thank, praise, and give God the glory for calling me to ministry and guiding me in my spiritual journey and for the love and support I received from my family, friends, and faculty members along the way.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducing Christianity demonstrates that God's mission is to forgive humanity. God introduced Christianity to the world when he sent Jesus Christ to earth to bring salvation to humanity by his redemptive quality. Christ's life, death, and subsequent resurrection made the redemption of humanity from sin and eternal death possible. Due to Satan's heavenly territorial war and rebellion and Adam and Eve's disobedience to God, sin and its consequences became a stain on human nature (Gen 3:1-24; Rev 12:7-13, New Revised Standard Version).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel to the world exemplify God's mission to redeem humanity. God desires humanity's redemption and forgiveness of sin (Matt 24:14, 28:19; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Mark 16:15, NRSV). As Pastor and Evangelist Michael Green emphasizes, sending Jesus Christ into the world was a radical and concrete plan for the reconciliation of humanity with God the Creator.[1] Christianity was a vibrant movement full of fresh, authentic, and satisfying messages and insight.[2]

Before continuing with this study, it may help to define a "Christian" and the "Christian Church." At the most basic level, a Christian is a person or entity whose belief derives from Christ's life, teachings, and ministry. Christ's teachings and the revelations and messages made possible by the Holy Spirit's inspiration set the standards for the Christian Church, whose members will eventually enjoy everlasting life in God's kingdom.

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[1] Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 289.

[2] Green, *Evangelism*, 273, 289.

Scholars define the word "church" as a gathering; in Greek, "church" means people gathering regularly.[3] The word church appears a few times in the gospels, frequently in the book of Acts and most epistles of the Apostle Paul. Luke, the Evangelist, also used the word "church" multiple times (Acts 19:32, 39, 41, NRSV). The Christian Church is a congregation of individuals who adhere to the teachings of Christianity and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is God's plan for humanity.

God commanded church leaders to seek, train, and equip disciples, who would then train and equip new disciples to spread the gospel throughout the world, to expand the church on earth (Rom 10:14-17; Matt 4:19-20; John 15:16, NRSV).[4] Sharing the gospel is a deliberate act designed for believers to bear witness to God's grace, love, and mercy, evangelize, teach, preach, and reacquaint themselves with the teachings and atonement of Jesus Christ.

The church gave many people a sense of belonging. Christianity navigated a hostile world marked by occupation, rebellion, and persecution. The church's membership needed to grow to survive those perilous times. *Christianity* is an evangelizing religion, which is only part of the story. God empowered and commanded believers to boldly proclaim the "good news" of the gospel, God's forgiveness, to testify to God's unmerited favors and unconditional love for humanity, and to share God's plan of salvation for *all* people.

Wim A. Dreyer, an Associate Professor in the Department of Historical and Systematic Theology at the University of Pretoria and a Hardenberg Fellow, believes that early Christians'

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[3] Walter A. Elwell, and Barry J. Beitzel, "Church," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 458.

[4] Andrew M. Davis, Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 29.

zeal for evangelism persisted because the gospel inspired them.[5] They wanted to share it with everyone, as Green and Dreyer point out (Matt 9:35-38, NRSV).[6] Early Christians were distinguished by their zeal for evangelism and converting people to Christianity. From these early believers, Christianity grew to become a universal phenomenon, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to every corner of the earth. The gospel spread throughout the world through evangelism. This attribute continues to characterize the Christian Church.

The zeal for evangelism did not result in a single, monolithic church, a revelation of the vast diversity God allowed in creation. Interpretations and practices diverged, resulting in disputes and opposition between holy orders. Dr. Jösef Lössl, Reader in Patristics and Late Antiquity at the Cardiff University School of Religious and Theological Studies, explains that the diversity was genuine and not surprising, given that religious praxis, such as Ecumenical rites, varies when confronted with a variety of competing ideas.[7] Lössl believes the diversity within Christianity results from cultural, social, and political realities that sometimes precede particular interpretations, messages, personalities, and denominations over others.[8]

Despite differences in interpretation and practice, all Christians know that the gospel possesses powerful transformative and redemptive capabilities, motivating them to spread the good news. The biblical approach to sharing the good news of the gospel is for church leaders to

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[5] Wim A. Dreyer, "The Amazing Growth of the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 68, no 1 (2012): 1-2, accessed July 20, 2019, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1268.

[6] Dreyer, "The Amazing Growth," 1-2.

[7] Jösef Lossl, "The Early Church: History and Memory." *Journal of Religious History 35*, no. 3 (September 2011): viii + 247, accessed July 20, 2019, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9809.2010.01035.x.

[8] Lossl, "The Early Church," viii + 247.

grow and prepare disciples for ministry work, to glorify God, to build and expand congregations, and to love and serve one another (Eph 4:12; John 4:23; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Cor 4:6, NRSV).[9]

Christ's ministry encouraged and directed leaders to develop and grow the church (Eph 4:12, NRSV). However, attendance at Modern Churches has steadily declined; it is a critical and problematic issue that challenges many church leaders. As many experts revealed, the decline is not a sudden challenge; the Coronavirus pandemic played a timely role.

For decades, churches have struggled to function according to New Testament standards (Eph 4:12-13, NRSV).[10] Thom S. Rainer, an American Writer, Researcher, Speaker, Founder, and CEO of Church Answers, an online community and resource center for church leaders, and former President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, made it clear that the commitment is between leaders and God, and God can motivate church leaders to effect change.[11] Some churches are in deep decline; many have closed their doors.[12] The decline is evident at many local churches in Queens, New York, across America, and other nations worldwide. The Rev. Dr. Gail Cafferata, a Researcher at Boston University, believes the decline is a trend in many churches and may continue for reasons not yet clearly defined.[13]

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[9] Green, *Evangelism*, 274.

[10] Rick Richardson, Foreword by Ed Stetzer, You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019). 7.

[11] Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 8.

[12] John H. Krahn, *From Surviving to Thriving: A Practical Guide to Revitalize Your Church* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, Inc., 2016), 14-15.

[13] Gail Cafferata, "Respect, Challenges, and Stress among Protestant Pastors Closing a Church: Structural and Identity Theory Perspectivism," *Pastoral Psychology* 66, no. 3 (06, 2017): 311, accessed April 15, 2019, DOI:10.1007/s11089-016-0751-z.

A biblically based strategic revitalization plan could reverse the decline in attendance and restore local churches in Queens, New York, to a spiritually healthy state. Queens is a densely populated borough of New York City with a large, diverse population (Appendix J and K). The church is vital to many Queens, New York residents. For instance, the early development of the church in North America significantly affected the identity of individuals, communities, and the nation (Appendix C).

The Coronavirus affected the population in Queens, New York. The United States Census Bureau reported a decrease in its population by 74,321 since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. On April 1, 2020, the population in Queens was 2,405,464. On July 1, 2021, the population decreased from 2,405,464 to 2,331,143. The report also showed that 5.7% were children under five years, and 20.0% were teenagers under eighteen. Adults sixty-five years and older were 17.4%.[14]

The characteristics of the population for Queens showed that Veterans were 41,318; over fifty-one percent (51.1%) were females; forty-seven percent (47.3%) were Caucasian, and African Americans were over twenty percent (20.7%). American Indian and Alaska Native (1.4%); Asians (27.3%); Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders (0.2%); persons of two races (3.1%); and Hispanic or Latino (28.1%). During that same period, foreign-born individuals were 47.0%.[15]

There were 902,824 housing units, and the owner-occupied housing unit rate was 45.4%. The median value of owner-occupied housing was $603,200. The median monthly owner costs

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[14] United States Census Bureau, "Queens County," accessed February 3, 2023, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/queenscountynewyork,queensburytownwarrencountynewyork#.

[15] United States Census Bureau.

with a mortgage were $2,777 between 2017 and 2021. The median monthly owner costs without a mortgage were $961, the median gross rent was $1,711, and the number of building permits issued during that period were 4,087.[16]

The statistics on family and living arrangements for households were 807,468, and the number of persons per household was two or more. The Bureau reported households with a computer as 93.3% and households with broadband Internet subscription as 87.7%. Living in the same house one year earlier, the percentage for people one year and older were 92.1%. The percentage of languages other than English spoken in homes by children five years and older were 55.2%.[17]

Educational achievement for High school graduates in the borough of Queens was 82.7%. The percentage of people who received a bachelor's degree or higher was 33.9%. Healthwise, the Bureau reported 5.6% for people with a disability over age sixty-five. The percentage of people without health insurance under age sixty-five was 9.7%.[18]

Additionally, statistics on the economy in Queens, New York, showed a percentage rate of 63.8% for the civilian labor force aged sixteen years and older. The percentage for females aged sixteen years and older was 58.2%. The total accommodation and food services sales were $4,593,736. The total health care and social assistance receipts and revenue were $15,735,791.[19]

Transportation and warehousing receipts totaled $20,371,315, and retail sales $19,297,120, with total retail sales per capita of $8,408. For transportation, the mean travel time

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[16] United States Census Bureau.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

to work (in minutes) for workers aged sixteen years and over was 43.8%. As for income and poverty levels, the median household income was $75,886, and the per capita income was $35,640. The percentage of persons living in poverty was 13.6%.[20]

The Bureau also reported that the statistics for businesses in Queens for total employer establishments were 49,999; total employment, 603,514; and total annual payroll, $29,388,799. The total employment percentage changed between 2019 and 2020 by 0.1%, and the total non-employer establishments in 2019 was 268,034. All employer firms' reference year for 2017 was 44,964. For men-owned employer firms, the reference year for 2017 totaled 29,262; for women-owned employer firms, the reference year for 2017 was 10,125, a difference of 19,137 between men-owned and women-owned employer firms.[21]

The reference year for 2017 totaled 20,423 for minority-owned employer firms, and for non-minority-owned employer firms, 22,039. The total for Veteran-owned employer firms were 1,032, and non-veteran-owned 41,558. The population per square mile between 2010 and 2020 showed an increase per square mile of 1,570.9. The geography of Queens, New York, was 22,124.5, with the land area in square miles for 2020 as 108.72, a slight increase from 108.53 in 2010.[22]

According to Church Angel, a search engine for churches, New York is home to 13,222 churches that include Methodist, Protestant, Pentecostal, Episcopal, Evangelical, and many more.[23] Additionally, a Google search showed that over two hundred of those churches are

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[20] United States Census Bureau.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Church Angel," accessed April 6, 2023, https://www.churchangel.com/churches-by-state/new-york/queens/.

Christian Churches of different denominations in Queens, New York.[24] Leaders of eight churches of different denominations and one non-denomination church in Queens, New York initially agreed to participate in this project.

Participating churches in this study are: Lutheran, Episcopal, Baptist, Mount Moriah AME, Catholic, and Seventh-day Adventist. All participants in Groups A, B, and C reside in Queens, New York. The researcher contacted churches in the Queens, New York areas of Richmond Hill, Rosedale, Jamaica, Laurelton, St. Albans, Queens Village, Cambria Heights, Ozone Park, Hollis, and Jamaica Estates. Seven of those churches participated in the project.

The Borough of Queens, New York, houses well-grounded, educated, working-class people. The population is diverse, with people from all over the globe. Queens is a family-oriented borough of New York City, where most families are homeowners. Affordable housing is available, and options like single-family homes, rowhouses, and condominiums line the streets. Many immigrants seeking suburban living to raise their children move to Queens, New York. It is not only one of the best places to live in all of New York's five boroughs, but the school system has proven outstanding, where children receive an excellent education from elementary through high school and college.

To understand the different denominations, their beliefs, values, and practices, the researcher became a member at some churches and attended worship services as a guest at others for many years. From those visits, the researcher recognized that the number of members attending each week was less than thirty. Although evidence shows that churches are declining, some leaders interviewed by the researcher did not acknowledge that their church is in decline.

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[24] Google, "Christian Churches," accessed April 6, 2023, https://www.google.com/christianchurches.

They provided reasons people were absent during the Coronavirus pandemic and post-pandemic. However, they could not provide evidence to support the low attendance rate before the Coronavirus pandemic.

Despite declining church membership across the United States, the church remains an important spiritual and social institution for many people, including those in Queens, New York.[25] As believers transition into the post-pandemic world, they will need the spiritual fulfillment and social bonds that the church has traditionally provided. It is frightening to think that church closures may continue.

Pastoral burnout may be a pivotal contributor to the attendance decline. Also, a financial principle may be essential. Individual churches become unsustainable and will close if their offering revenues cannot cover their expenses due to a decline in membership. Cut off from the social and metaphysical roots that the church provides, the people who need its guidance and who derive their social identity from its community might feel that their lives lack meaning and turn to destructive alternatives (e.g., anger, mind-altering drugs, and gangs).

As leaders experience burnout, there appears to be a lack of vitality within the functioning churches that may have played a role in the decline in numbers at congregations. The Barna Research Group (the "Barna Group") published an article in March 2022 stating that forty-two percent (42%) of pastors contemplated leaving full-time ministry due to burnout (Appendix F).[26] The Barna Group also found that two in five pastors (43%) felt lonely and isolated, and

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[25] Mark Granquist, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 78.

[26] "Pastoral Burnout," Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, April 27, 2022, accessed December 20, 2022, https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/.

thirty-eight percent (38%) noted that the current political division played a role in their decision to quit full-time ministry (Appendix F).[27]

According to the Barna Group, the number of pastors resigning from full-time ministry positions has increased. In their report, the Group detected and confirmed a correlation between the church's deterioration in functionality under New Testament standards and the decline in attendance (Eph 4:12, NRSV).[28] A revitalization plan is apparent. God encourages an energetic church. Andrew M. Davis, the Pastor of First Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, and a visiting Professor of Church History at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes that "God commands people to revitalize, to act powerfully by the Holy Spirit to effect notable change in declining churches.[29]

Rick Richardson, a Professor of Evangelism at Wheaton College and the Director of the Billy Graham Center Research Institute, argues that "churches are not reaching new people or bringing in fresh vision, gifts, and contributions to the life of congregations."[30] Davis believes revitalization is necessary for most declining churches; he explains that "[r]evitalization occurs when God restores a once healthy church, helping it to change course from its recent decline toward spiritual disease and death."[31] He notes that any church can return to a healthy state because God breathes life into dying churches.[32]

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[27] The Barna Research Group, "Pastoral Burnout."

[28] Krahn, *From Surviving*, 14-15.

[29] Andrew M. Davis, Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 31.

[30] Richardson, *You Found Me*, 11-14.

[31] Davis, *Revitalize*, 30.

[32] Ibid., 29.

An antidote for church decline is the technological revolution of the modern world: churches have the potential to use modern technology for a wide range of ministries. Leaders can utilize modern technology to reach new and existing members. Locally and globally, declining churches can use modern technology as a tool for redemption. They can mobilize various areas of church activities to connect with existing and potential new members via digital platforms.

The recent pandemic may have altered the course of in-person worship services as congregants stayed away out of personal precaution or in response to public health regulations. Numerous churches conducted worship services via online networks and virtual sessions. In the pandemic/post-pandemic era, virtual sessions are not novel. Some churches had experimented with live-streaming services before the pandemic. Clifford Herd, for instance, successfully implemented a plan to use modern technology to keep a local church in Ft. Payne, Alabama, alive.[33]

As the world arose from the pandemic, ninety percent of this study's participants believe virtual church services will become increasingly popular (Appendix B). Increased attendance at worship services during the pandemic demonstrates that introducing and maintaining online church services could benefit the church, particularly in Queens, New York. Additionally, Herd's study revealed that some churches, once on the verge of extinction, may continue to thrive virtually.[34]

The church's mission is always relevant. The church has always been a refuge for those whose faith in God's promise is challenging due to life's trials. Regardless, the church will

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[33] Clifford L. Herd, "Transitioning to a Televised Worship Service via the Internet to Provide for the Continued Existence for a Small, Declining Congregation" DMin diss., Liberty University, Virginia, 2019), ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global.

[34] Herd, "Transitioning," 94-98.

continue its mission of spreading the gospel's good news and providing spiritual guidance; it will continue providing the social bond that creates community among its congregants, even if these gatherings occur virtually or in-person.

In a world becoming increasingly cosmopolitan and desacralized, the church provides spiritual and social sustenance as an escape from daily life. As the world recovers from the devastation of the pandemic, the church must remain committed to its core mission of spreading the teachings of Jesus Christ, revealing God's plan for humanity's salvation, and reminding Christians and new converts everywhere of their covenant with God (Matt 10:1-13, NRSV).

Crisis management is not a new experience for the Christian Church. The church faced one crisis after another from the outset. It endured persecution from pagan Rome and Eastern potentates, the Islamic conquest of Constantinople and Jerusalem, schisms, the Reformation, and hostile monarchies. Churches are susceptible to the vagaries of the secular world. Dreyer contends that Christian missionary passion persisted and flourished during the church's complex development.[35]

After centuries since the movement's inception, the Modern Church continues to practice the Christian theology of knowing God through Jesus Christ and the values he set before it. After the pandemic-induced changes in living, working, and worshipping, expecting the church and its Christ-centered missions to continue surviving and thriving is not absurd. The church's transmission of charity, mutual support, and self-sacrifice inspired by examples from Jesus Christ's life, work, and teachings remain relevant and appealing.[36]

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[35] Dreyer, "The Amazing Growth," 2.

[36] Dreyer, "Church, Mission and Ethics," 3.

Christ's admonition that believers should love their neighbors as they love themselves is one of the overarching values that continue to motivate church growth (Mark 12:31, NRSV). The church faces diverse needs, competing ideologies, polarization, and world-weariness of contemporary cosmopolitan societies; this overarching principle is more important now than ever. To remain relevant, the church must consider the needs of its diverse communities while maintaining the standards and missionary goals that gave it life.

God's plan encompasses *everyone*. The church must direct its attention to new needs while maintaining its focus on old ones, such as providing sanctuary, aid, and counseling to immigrants and refugees; fostering social bonds between families and communities; defending the sanctity of life; ensuring the physical and mental health of all people; promoting equality among people; aiding the poor and marginalized; demonstrating God's inclusiveness; and providing overall support. The Coronavirus crisis has affected all age groups, and the church must administer welfare and evangelism with consideration for the unique needs of each age group.

David Kinnaman, Author, President, and Strategic Leader of The Barna Group, and Gabe Lyons, Author, and Presenter at Calvin University, investigate individuals' unique needs and psychological development across generations. The authors questioned whether there are fixed generational differences, life-stage issues that recur with each generation, or whether there is not a widening gap between generations fueled by distinctive modern needs and stimuli.[37] The younger generations are vitally important to the life of the church. Kinnaman and Lyons observe

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[37] David Kinnaman, and Gabe Lyons, UnChristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . And Why It Matters (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 15, 47.

that the younger generations are primarily concerned about unique individual identities, while the older generations focus more on lifestyle.[38]

Church leaders can use the distinctive values these younger generations exhibit to encourage their participation in church activities and worship services. Kinnaman and Lyons concur that recruiting the younger generations could rapidly increase congregations, which Dreyer predicts in later years could seem miraculous.[39] However, attracting and retaining younger congregants presents church leaders with unique challenges. After high school, the younger generations drift away from the church.

Kinnaman and Lyons argue that perceptions and approaches must change for the church to become appealing to the younger generations.[40] The authors point out that some older generations view the culture and lifestyle of the younger generations negatively; they create moral stereotypes based on the lifestyle choices of the younger generations, and this prejudicial attitude may have contributed to the younger generations' mistrust of the Christian Church.[41] The authors believe a point often overlooked in the study of church attendance is the younger generations feel judged for their life choices, different mindset, culture, and approach to life events.[42]

Remarkably, Kinnaman and Lyons found that the younger generations believe contemporary Christianity and Christians do not reflect the diversity and inclusiveness of the

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[38] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 21, 40, 42, 47, 89-91, 179-80.

[39] Dreyer, "Church, Mission and Ethics," 3.

[40] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 13, 139, 204.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 120.

New Testament (Rev 22:16-18, NRSV).[43] They determined that the younger generations perceive Christianity and Christians as out of step with real-world challenges and lifestyle choices.[44] The church faces a challenge in reaching the younger generations through technology-based communication.

Technology-based communication is altering lifestyles, behaviors, and communities. The younger generations (Generation Z and Alpha) primarily communicate via social media platforms and Meta. They may have been inaccessible to local churches with inadequate social media presence or the lack thereof.[45] Also, as Meta evolves, the new digital landscape will become a significant obstacle for local churches to connect with people.

The digital landscape has changed since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. Organizations, institutions, and individuals who turned to digital space to conduct business, worship services, classes, and personal matters experienced challenges beyond their control; however, Alpha provided digital space to meet the needs of all who sought it.

Suppose local churches were to engage the new culture and innovative communication styles of the younger generations. Some local churches in Queens, New York, lack or have insufficient social media presence, making it difficult to connect with new and active members who are ill, housebound, or otherwise unable to attend in-person services. Attendance decline could cease, the quality and diversity of services might evolve positively, and new and vibrant leadership roles might emerge.

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[43] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 13, 41, 59, 65, 120.

[44] Ibid., 13.

[45] Ibid.

Social media platforms have existed since the mid-to late-1990s, gained popularity in the early 2000s, and are valuable resources for businesses, organizations, and individuals. The younger generations can use social media to introduce and maintain change in the church if properly motivated, as the church can use social networking to maintain relationships with members of all age groups. God has endowed *spiritual gifts* upon *all* people. Younger individuals could utilize their spiritual gifts, accept the promise of Christ and the Christian Church, and assume leadership roles in church.

The younger generations are not alone: Dr. Ken Blanchard, a well-known Author, Speaker, and Business Consultant, and Phil Hodges, Ph.D., Managing Director, Chief Investment Officer, and Head of Investments at BlackRock Factors Sustainable and Solutions Group, believe "that if [leaders] apply what it means to lead like Jesus to [their] hearts, heads, hands, and habits, [they] will be in a position to transform [their] leadership radically."[46] The authors write that principles of establishing clear and measurable goals are concepts essential in leadership and must pertain equally to all leadership roles.[47]

Blanchard and Hodges assert that God oversees all things divine and can attract the younger generations to churches.[48] People are encouraged to be transformed by "renewing [their] minds, so that [they] may discern the will of God—what is good and acceptable" that could benefit the church and all people for the glory of God (Rom 12:2, NRSV).[49] The difficulties that

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[46] Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, Lead Like Jesus: Lessons for Everyone from The Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 33.

[47] Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 33.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 12.

the younger generations face or may face are not new. There are numerous accounts in the Bible of young people facing and overcoming adversity.

Recall, for instance, the young David's encounter with the giant Goliath or the young Jesus' confrontation with the elder Pharisees. Since God is always with individuals, the Bible commands that people be strong and courageous and not be frightened or dismayed (Josh 1:9, NRSV). Blanchard and Hodges remind people that when Christ faced internal obstacles and realized he could not overcome them due to his human nature, he cried out to God for assistance. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want" (Mark 14:36, NRSV).[50]

To reverse irrelevance and decline, leaders of the Christian Church must engage intentionally and deliberately with God, as the biblical figures, including the Son of God, did for guidance. Within the context of biblical examples and biblical history, the church may devise answers to the attendance crisis. The Christian past is replete with examples of overcoming obstacles. The cliché that people must repeat history if they forget it is not irrelevant to the current problem of declining church attendance.

One should maintain an awareness of historical experiences. Understanding context is essential because it helps to comprehend contemporary problems by situating them within the modern-day realities that shape them and historical writings within the realities of their time of publication and location. Therefore, any study of contemporary church problems should include examining church history, as both the problem and the solution connects to the church's past. (Appendix C).

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[50] Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 90.

## Ministry Context

The researcher sought to understand and adapt in her ministry the conduct of early Lutheran Christians in New York, formerly known as New Amsterdam. Rev. Sabourin, the Founder and first Pastor of Mount Zion Lutheran Church in New York City during the mid-to-late 1960s, grew the congregation to over 1,200 members through neighborhood outreach campaigns and outdoor meet-and-greet in the church's community. His success can be instructive for local churches attempting to stem the tide of declining attendance.

One lesson from the ministry of Rev. Sabourin is highlighting aspects of the local church that could appeal to the younger generations. Many local churches in Queens, New York, have a full-time pastor who leads their congregations' Sunday morning worship service. Perhaps work schedules, family responsibilities, unforeseen challenges, and life circumstances have affected worship attendance.

The inability of older worshippers, who constitute a sizable portion of congregations in most local churches, to attend worship services due to age-related illnesses plays an unfortunate but significant role in low attendance and rising overall decline statistics (Appendix B, D, E). However, the researcher believes that declining attendance can reverse if the younger generations and their use of social media play a significant role in reviving participation and keeping those unable to attend connected through social media platforms.

The attendance problem for Sunday worship services is not new. The late Dr. Fred L. Precht, former Executive Director of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's Commission on Worship and the LCMS Foundation, writes that worship service renewal has been a concern

since the Reformation.[51] Significantly, rarely do members of the younger generations attend Sunday worship services. There are churches in Queens, New York residential areas, where people of diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds work and live (Appendix J and K).

Most churches can accommodate many congregants and have separate fellowship halls, kitchens, gathering areas, areas for Sunday school and Confirmation classes, restrooms, and sufficient space for secular and religious programs and events. Leaders can increase attendance and revitalize those churches using dynamic strategies to reach new converts and regain spiritual vitality with thriving congregations. The researcher believes attendance rejuvenation is possible through:

- constant and ongoing prayers to God for guidance and transformation;
- plans to embrace and transition towards technology with roles for young adults;
- engaging with existing and potential congregants through social media;
- focusing on partnership outreach strategies;
- focusing on families, recruiting new members from families of existing members;
- being creative and open to new techniques, songs, hymns, events, and programs to attract and retain young members while maintaining focus on tradition; and
- focusing on demographics whose members are the younger members of their communities.

Queens, New York, is experiencing rapid population growth, and the younger generations are on the verge of assuming societal leadership roles. However, from a Christian perspective, it

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[51] Fred L. Precht, *Lutheran Worship and Practice* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 21.

is regrettable that this growing demographic is entering and participating in a desacralized world. Alan J. Roxburgh, a famous Author, and Teacher, has researched this phenomenon and concluded that despite theological statements and confessions, denominations have lost touch with a massive cultural shift from the narrative of Jesus Christ.[52]

Younger people, Roxburgh writes, embrace a new culture that often excludes Jesus Christ, and their attendance at church services is infrequent.[53] If the Christian Church is to be revitalized and if its mission to spread the good news of the gospel is to progress, then the older generations must accept the different lifestyle choices and mindsets of the younger generations. They could mentor those young adults and include the story of Jesus Christ in those mentorships. In a new Christian mission, it is possible to rediscover and reintroduce practices that played a pivotal role during the rise of Christianity.

Mike Slaughter, Pastor Emeritus and Global Church Ambassador for Ginghamsburg Church, whose ministry initiated "small group ministry," urges Christian ministers to increase their focus on the demographic whose members are the younger members of their communities.[54] Slaughter emphasizes that "[m]ission begins by having an active faith…a faith that gives believers the strength to know that they can change the world for the better in the name of Jesus Christ.[55] He notes that lessons from Christ's ministry can guide ministers and that *Christ*

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[52] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Structured For Mission: Renewing The Culture of The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 60.

[53] Roxburgh, Structured For Mission, 61.

[54] Mike Slaughter, Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus; A Study for Small Groups; Rethink Church (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2011), 4.

[55] Slaughter, *Change the World*, 4.

*addressed the entire world*, not only particular or subaltern groups such as the blind, poor, and captive.[56]

Local church leaders can focus on the younger generations, making them aware that they also are within God's grand plan for humanity. Roxburgh believes change and transition can be confusing, primarily when change occurs rapidly.[57] However, leaders of Christian Churches can point out that God's way is the most beneficial to humanity.[58] The church is not immune to the societies in which it operates. It could present challenges that may profoundly alter the functions of the church. The current Coronavirus pandemic, for example, has changed and transformed worship service, style, and practice.

Threatening to older generations are sweeping changes, such as the lifestyles of the younger generations and those ushered in by social distancing rules and other pandemic-related practices. In addressing these challenges, the church may look to its history. The church has endured two millennia of trials, withstanding socioreligious conflicts, wars, pandemics, and other natural disasters. The researcher believes the church could replicate the same formula of evangelism, worldwide missionary endeavors, education, and community that has contributed to the Christian Church's success.

Evangelism is an area of great concern for the Christian Church. Green emphasizes that Christians faced numerous obstacles with evangelism in the early days of Christianity.[59] He stresses that the enthusiasm to evangelize should not shift the focus toward ministry but remain

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[56] Slaughter, *Change the World*, 4.

[57] Roxburgh, Structured For Mission, 36.

[58] Jeff Iorg, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 53.

[59] Green, *Evangelism*, 51.

centered on the risen Christ.[60] Today, enthusiasm to evangelize is not as vibrant as it was at the beginning of Christianity as set programs and activities within the church take over.[61]

The prescribed programs and activities leave leaders with little time to focus on and exercise their call to ministry, as explained in Mark 16:15, to spread the gospel to all nations on earth (Mark 16:15, NRSV).[62] Davis writes that a church that stops reforming is dying.[63] Mark Clifton counters that a church that has been in a state of decline for a long time should turn to God, remember, repent, and seek revitalization.[64] Clifton believes leaders and members of their congregations can embrace Christ's ownership of the Church because the greatest threat to Satan's dark kingdom is a healthy, scripture-believing, Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered, light-filled Church.[65]

Church leaders must be confident, trust in God, and let God guide their church's *vision*. Prior research revealed that the lack of evangelism is evident in the Modern Church.[66] Robert D. Stuart, President of Proclamation Ministries, Inc., points out that Jesus admonished his followers to make and equip other supporters to expand God's kingdom.[67]

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[60] Green, *Evangelism*, 273.

[61] Ibid., 51.

[62] Ibid., 283.

[63] Davis, *Revitalize*, 22.

[64] Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 14.

[65] Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 115.

[66] Krahn, *From Thriving*, 14.

[67] Robert D. Stuart, *Church Revitalization From the Inside Out* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2016), 196.

The prescription for success and continuity from generation to generation, the Apostle Paul teaches, is for the older generations to groom the younger ones to live Christ-inspired lifestyles, to encourage them towards God's way, and to show them the wisdom of embracing the Christian way of life. (Titus 2:2-8, NRSV).

God's promise may go unfulfilled for future generations if leaders do not recruit new converts, especially younger people, and individuals from families of existing members, to become future leaders and missionaries by imparting their knowledge, experience, and skills. The mere sharing of knowledge and experiences cannot ensure an increase in membership or prevent the attrition of current members (Matt 13:10-31, NRSV).

Billy Hornsby, Founder and President of the Association of Related Churches (ARC) and Teaching Pastor at Church of the Highlands, argues that churches must be attractive and create positive experiences that leave positive impressions on members and visitors.[68] He emphasizes that church leaders can make local churches appealing to compete with secular attractions for the attention of lapsed church members and potential converts, especially the younger generations.[69]

When developing and implementing congregational attraction and retention strategies, church leaders must remember the church's mission. Christianity's belief in God's authority and Jesus' redemptive and sustaining power should be central to all strategies. Henry and Richard Blackaby, Ministers and Pastors from Canada and the United States, remind people that God is

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[68] Billy Hornsby, The Attractional Church: Growth Through a Refreshing, Relational, and Relevant Church Experience (New York, NY: Faith Words, 2011), 6-10.

[69] Hornsby, The Attractional Church, 6-10.

omnipotent and capable of initiating change and that believers can rely on God's transcendent power to transform their faith into action.[70]

Blackaby and Blackaby assert that one of the many contemporary problems facing the Christian Church is that Christians do not always act under their beliefs.[71] Occasionally, they fail to demonstrate the love or power of God through their actions and commitments.[72] The authors are skeptical that a "tentative and cautious congregation" could attract people to God.[73]

Blackaby and Blackaby concluded that "growth and retention of members would go to churches accomplishing feats that explain who God [is, such a strategy] would draw a watching world to the risen Christ."[74] Stuart argues that "congregations that merely play church—that is, ones that engage in religious activities while lacking vision—has no future because [they lack discipleship making]."[75]

JR Woodward, Author, Church Planter, Activist, Missiologist, and the National Director for Church Planting with V3, and Dan White, who trains church planters, support the conclusions of Blackaby and Blackaby and Stuart, pointing out that "[d]iscipleship is the work of shaping disciples to carry the seed of [God's] entire mission."[76]

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[70] Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Flickering Lamps: Christ & His Church* (Jonesboro, GA: Blackaby Ministries International, 2015), 70.

[71] Blackaby and Blackaby, *Flickering Lamps*, 70.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 71.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Stuart, Church Revitalization, 196.

[76] JR Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities*, Foreword by Alan Hirsch (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 89.

The early Christian movement inspired Woodward and White. The authors advocated for church leaders to adopt an Ecclesiology that plants "churches that reflect the viral movement of the New Testament, fueled by the values of tight-knit communities; life-forming discipleship; locally rooted presence; and boundary-crossing missions."[77]

Church leaders may look to the lessons of the New Testament for guidance in designing a missional framework and theology that targets and directs their disciple-making efforts. In contrast to the current tendency for the church to be part of a "big box" complex emphasizing "star" ministers and elaborately scripted services, church leaders can rededicate themselves to the church as a community movement.

The key to maintaining discipleship across generations is for the church to embrace and encourage stewardship and discipleship at the local and individual levels and emphasize everyone's role in the church's internal health and missional effectiveness. Woodward and White remind their readers of Christ's lessons to his disciples and their unwavering commitment to imitating and embracing Christ's way of life and teachings.[78] Church leaders and religious institutions must allow young people to demonstrate that they, too, can answer God's call.

The same principles and fervor that motivated and guided the early Christian movement can also serve as the central impulse that sustains the Modern Church. Church leaders must emphasize the renewed world and the reign of the risen Christ. Woodward and White explain that the "[c]hurch as a movement starts with a discipleship core, hospitality, presence in [communities and surrounding] neighborhood[s], and [a calm and] inviting Spirit."[79]

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[77] Woodward and White, *The Church*, 23, 143-49.

[78] Ibid., 89.

[79] Ibid., 172-173.

Woodward and White believe church leaders would benefit from emulating Christ's disciples, analyzing the implications of Christ's teachings, and practicing them in their own lives.[80] The authors suggest that the motivating factor for churches may be a shared life and a shared story of Jesus Christ, emphasizing that Christ is the resurrected Lord, Savior, and everlasting King who will reign eternally over all of creation, and not some quaint and obscure figure, a relic from an earlier era.[81]

It is crucial to remember that from the beginning, people did not view Christianity as a personal or hermetic belief system but rather as a shared set of instructions, beliefs, ethics, and rituals. Christ clarified this; Woodward and White relate that when Christ taught his disciples to pray, he instructed them to address God with the plural possessive pronoun instead of the singular: "Our Father," not "My Father." Using the plural possessive pronoun clarified that worship was to be a communal experience and that God is to be communally and universally shared (Matt 6:9-14, NRSV).[82]

The researcher believes that if leaders actively present the story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the younger generations may become intrigued and join the Christian Church. The younger generations may join the Christian community by vividly sharing Christ's life story and supplementing it with the testimonies from people who can affirm the goodness and positive influences of Christ's philosophy.

In a world full of popular comic books and movie superheroes, Jesus Christ, the God who walked among humanity and preached the gospel, is the ultimate superhero in terms of his

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[80] Woodward and White, *The Church*, 89.

[81] Ibid., 172.

[82] Ibid., 173.

triumph over adversity, unbreakable resistance to the most alluring temptations, and victory over death (both his own and that of Lazarus). Outreach strategies that seek long-term success may be ineffective if they do not promote the idea that Christian principles can support a lifestyle.

For outreach strategies to succeed, they must consist of deliberate and ongoing actions by congregational leaders. Leaders can prioritize outreach activities that target a younger audience with engaging content for the targeted demographic. As Alan J. Roxburgh, Professor and International Consultant, and M. Scott Boren, a Teaching Pastor at Woodland Hills Church point out, leaders and members need reminders that God's redemptive plan and the restoration of life for all creation requires the realignment of human life around the resurrected Christ.[83]

Christianity involves social engineering. The Christian Church requires converts and believers to live by principles that often diverge significantly from the ideas and motivations central to contemporary secular life. Christ's essential teachings that people should love God with their mind, body, and soul and love their neighbors as themselves appear peripheral to contemporary lifestyles that place the individual at the center of the universe.

Professor Emeritus of Missional and Ecumenical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, Darrel L. Guder, contrasts the dominant strain of Christian thought with an emphasis on humility, community, and selflessness. The motivations are the central themes of the larger secular culture, where the focus for the majority, particularly the younger generations, is that happiness comes from avoiding the sufferings of others and concentrating on one's own needs and pleasures.[84] In this dominant culture, most relationships are trivial, tenuous, and conditional.

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[83] Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 101-102.

[84] Darrel L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 138.

The dominant culture in a desacralized world, viewed as primarily secular, is often short on discipline and inspiration, Guder explains.[85] He observes that the dominant culture prefers—believes in—a world obsessed with material things; the over-emphasis on materialism inevitably leads to alienation.[86] People disengaged from the metaphysical and physical ties, such as God, the church, the community, and the commandments, that traditionally provided meaning and spiritual sustenance to their ancestors, feel hopeless and overwhelmed when confronted with evil and suffering.

Those individuals may perceive evil as regular, ubiquitous, and unstoppable external forces. Absent God, it may be possible to accept that evil originates from within the heart of humanity. The absence of God creates a void that yearns for something else, which may be evil. Since grace, love, and mercy are the defining characteristics of the Christian culture, people may recognize that a life lived within Christianity is one of hope.[87] Leaders must be committed to the future of the Christian Church.

Re-engineering attitudes is easier said than done (but leaders and missionaries can hold convincingly to the promise that anything is possible with God). Confronting the challenges of the dominant culture, the church's efforts to alter perceptions encountered numerous headwinds. Dreyer cites Kinnaman and Lyons, who consider Christianity to have an image problem.[88]

Dreyer continues to cite Kinnaman and Lyons, who explain that forty percent (40%) of the younger generations between the age of sixteen and twenty-nine call themselves "nones;"

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[85] Guder, Missional Church, 138.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 138.

[88] Wim A. Dreyer, "Church, Mission and Ethics: Being Church with Integrity," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies 72, no. 1* (2016): 1, accessed May 16, 2019, https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3163.

they do not trust the Christian Church and believe it lacks integrity and has lost its original purpose.[89] The younger generations lament that the Christian Church has strayed from its original mission of uniting communities and their inhabitants under the simple belief system advocated by Christ and making disciples.[90]

Leaders of the Christian Church may need to modify its approach to real-world issues, and adjustments may be needed. The church has encountered obstacles. As an example, Dreyer cites the early Church in Corinth, Greece, whose members exhibited spiritual superiority over one another.[91] The Corinthian Christians sued one another in public courts, abused the communal meal, and engaged in sexual misbehavior, behaviors evident in the Modern Church (1 Cor 6:1-11, NRSV).

The actions of the people of Corinth, Greece, were detrimental to the Church's health, tarnished its reputation, and prompted members to leave.[92] Today, the older generations struggle with the challenges and lifestyles of the younger generations, as Paul saw the Corinthian Church members. For the church to continue its mission of preparing people for the final resurrection, it must bridge the vast chasm caused by the generations' clash of lifestyles and cultural preferences.

Communities require social institutions, such as schools, libraries, and churches, to meet their educational, social, and spiritual needs and to foster cohesion. By serving as schools and libraries, Christian Churches have met the needs of their communities. It is crucial for the well-

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[89] Dreyer, "Church, Mission and Ethics," 1.

[90] Ibid., 1-2, 5.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

being of the people of those communities that churches continue to exist and function with resilient memberships and regular attendance.

Local churches in the borough of Queens, New York, can restructure their programs to be efficient and appealing to the younger generations to stem the loss of members, increase the influx of new converts, and re-attract former members. It may not be simple, but the primary mission of Christianity is to bring people into God's fold. Jesus came to earth for the same reason, and it was not effortless for him, the Son of God, but he relied on God for help. Local churches can find inspiration in the church's past if they are to survive.

History demonstrates that the Christian Church was most attractive as a missional church, with leaders and missionaries engaging directly with community members. The lives of Jesus, his disciples, and his apostles also demonstrate the effectiveness of the missional strategy. Jesus famously traveled from location to location, teaching, preaching, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, performing miracles, and numerous acts of charity.

Andy Stanley, the Founder and Senior Pastor of North Point Ministries, a non-denominational Evangelical Christian Church, writes that every teaching and sermon is unique.[93] He believes first-century teachers of the law taught from the same script Christ referred to throughout his ministry on earth; however, Christ's presence made a difference.[94] Christ came to earth to represent God, His Father and present a model for humanity to imitate, and make and grow disciples.[95]

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[93] Andy Stanley, Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 112.

[94] Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, 112.

[95] Ibid.

There is a noticeable shift from Christ's first-century teachings. In record numbers, religious institutions, and Synods responsible for churches are closing church doors rather than planning and planting new churches or finding dynamic ways of making and growing disciples. Stanley observes that the enthusiasm of first-century educators has changed drastically.[96] He adds that first-century teachers were not satisfied with spreading the truth; they wanted believers to act on the truth.[97]

Church leaders must remember that discipleship and missionary endeavors are not solely their responsibility. Jesus was involved in communities, as were his disciples (Appendix G and H).[98] To reconnect with community members and reintroduce the church to them; church leaders can implement new strategic plans, create activities and programs and conduct outreach campaigns of traditional door-to-door interactions using Christ's examples as a guide.

Once converted, younger members can bring older members into the modern technological era by sharing their social networking knowledge and experience. Again, leaders can recruit new members from the families of existing members and encourage those new members to share the gospel's message with friends and neighbors. In addition, leaders can prioritize youth ministry by creating sermons and organizing the church in ways that may appeal to this demographic.

Like other others in this project, Reggie McNeal, a Kingdom-Centric Church Ministry Consultant, Author, and Speaker, believes the church can achieve a growth shift by focusing on the younger generations and their roles, empowering, and equipping them with biblical tools,

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[96] Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, 112.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 19.

accepting them, their unique culture, and their lifestyle choices, and leaving the rest to God.[99] A crucial aspect of leaders' planning and implementation processes should include assigning leadership roles to young adults. Empowering young adults to assume church leadership positions could propel the church toward growth and halt its decline.[100]

McNeal points out that congregations should have a rich grounding in the biblical notions of worship as acts of honor in recognition of God's grace and acts of obedience to God.[101] To fulfill Christ's mission to make disciples, grow the church, and successfully and effectively share the message of the Cross and the resurrected Christ, a theological foundation is required. It should derive from the significance of Christ's life, work, and ministry and rest on a biblical perspective.

Churches can adapt to the pandemic-driven demand for remote communications. The younger generations, who inhabit a world increasingly oriented toward virtualization and interactive web platforms, can provide churches with valuable experience, knowledge, and assistance. Churches can also accept and develop "worship from anywhere" as an extension of in-church worship, a concept originated in the early church, when people worshipped in person, in one another's homes, albeit without virtual connections. The secular world embraced "work from anywhere ('WFA')."

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[99] Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 17.

[100] McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 17.

[101] Ibid., 60.

## Problem Presented

The problem is that the younger generations, who comprise most of the borough of Queens, New York's population, do not attend church regularly. Most, if not all, local churches in Queens, New York, have witnessed a significant decline in attendance at Sunday worship services and low retention of new members. The researcher is concerned about the continuous decline in attendance, as many churches may have to close their doors if the trend does not reverse. Any decision to close local churches and repurpose their physical buildings would have devastating consequences for the members of those churches, their communities, and surrounding neighborhoods.

## Purpose Statement

This DMIN action research project aims to understand the motivating factor and evolution of declining church attendance in Queens, New York, and to find a solution to halt and reverse the trend. The most crucial aspect of any solution must involve bridging the perceived generational gap and encouraging younger members in local church communities to attend church regularly. The researcher focused on declining church attendance in Queens, New York, because of the size and diversity of the population.

Queens, New York, is home to an ethnically and racially diverse population. In times of need, Queens residents have turned to the church for material assistance and spiritual guidance, which the church continues to provide. Closing or not having a church in these communities could increase fear and anxiety, leaving many helpless and hopeless. Leaving community members helpless and hopeless would go against God's mission that brings Christ to earth to provide hope for *all* humanity.

## Basic Assumptions

The Christian Church is a crucial social and religious institution within communities. Over the centuries, people have habitually sought spiritual and material assistance from the church. The church is not just the elegant Christian metaphor: it is the body of Christ. It is also a sanctuary that highlights God's grace and fosters fellowship, neighborliness, and love.

The decades-long decline in church attendance has reached a critical point, and if it continues, many local churches will disband. Such an event will leave a devastating void in the communities of these churches, negatively affect the spiritual and social well-being of the people within those communities and threaten the physical comfort of needy members who frequently rely on the church for support, assistance, and advice.

## Definitions

There are no definitions of terms in this research project.

## Limitations

The researcher must restrict the project's scope due to the size and diversity of the targeted population. The project does not represent all local churches in Queens, New York; it focuses on a sample of local churches whose attendance has declined rapidly and whose closure is imminent. Still, the researcher believes that many churches in New York share the same challenges, desires, and objectives, and this study can extrapolate to include those churches to varying degrees.

Attendance decline at local churches in Queens, New York, has gained much importance recently. However, research on attendance decline at those local churches is lacking. Often, historical materials for comparison and subsequent experiences are not readily available, so the researcher relied on hearsay and verbal information from this project's participants.

There is no assurance of the veracity of these communications, even if they were intentionally falsified or genuinely forgotten. In good faith, the researcher expected and relied on participants' genuine information sharing. Also, the Coronavirus pandemic has severely constrained the methodology phase of this project due to lockdowns and social distancing rules and guidelines resulting in an extension of the discovery time.

## Delimitations

The availability of interviewees limited this research project. Initially, two Lutheran church pastors and members of their congregations were available. Three Episcopalian pastors and church members were available for interviews; four Baptist pastors, a Bishop, and church members were available; one Mount Moriah AME Church pastor and a Catholic priest were available for interviews. Also, eight pastors, including elders and Seventh-day Adventist church members, were available for interviews.

The New York State's social distancing regulations and guidelines for the Coronavirus severely constrained the researcher's discovery efforts. However, two hundred participants agreed to the interview. There were ten church leaders, forty-two congregation members, and one hundred forty-eight outdoor campaign participants over the age of eighteen who agreed to the interview process. The interview process began in October 2020 and concluded in February 2023.

When available, many of the research materials were frequently out of date. They did not always accurately reflect contemporary church culture. However, such information remains invaluable to understanding the growth and decline of the church over the centuries. It is also worth the paucity of prior research published in books and journal articles and relevant biblical tools.

In addition, control was exercised over the delimitations by including strategic questioning and the researcher responding to statements that affected the Research Questions, which allowed her to manage responses that obscured the research problem. She established a deadline to complete the Survey to ensure proper processing time and tabulation; however, she extended the deadline due to restrictions and delays caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

## Thesis Statement

A crucial option for the longevity and survival of local churches in the New York City borough of Queens is for their leaders to design and implement outreach programs that target and connect with technologically savvy young residents of their communities. If leaders can attract and retain the targeted demographic, using modern technology such as social networking, virtual meetings, and media applications to conduct biblical studies, worship services, and outreach, and to connect with sick and shut-in members and new converts to grow the church. Then, the younger generations can reverse the decline in worship attendance by attending church regularly.

## Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

### Literature Review

Numerous potential causes for a decline in church attendance make its analysis difficult. It may apply to a subset of churches but not to others, whereas all churches may encounter similar reasons. The researcher approached declining church attendance in Queens, New York, from both a missional and attractional viewpoint, concentrating primarily on decades-long declining churches. Precht observed that numerous local churches close annually.[1] He points out that negative messages received in local church communities could harm the church's reputation, which is one of the widespread and common causes of the decline.[2]

The Christian Church is in crisis. Sometimes, the church cannot recover. As there may be a variety of causes for the decline, there may also be a variety of feasible solutions. Still, the need for revitalization within the local church is evident. Davis emphasizes that revitalization is the only option for the renewal and survival of local churches in deep decline.[3]

The church must be spiritually sound and firmly rooted in biblical beliefs and practices. Primarily, the Christian Church commemorates the life, death, resurrection, and future return of the triumphant Jesus Christ. However, due to the Modern Church's services for its communities, some people overlook or take for granted the profound metaphysical aspect of the church's existence. Leaders may want to reflect on the church's past to identify and change negative energies that may affect them, the church, their communities, and congregations.

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[1] Precht, Lutheran Worship, 14.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Davis, *Revitalize*, 22.

Dr. Tom Cheyney, the Founder of Renovate National Church Revitalization Conference and Renovate's Directional Leader, and the Author of numerous texts exploring church revitalization strategies, reminds Christians of the significance of the church in maintaining Christ's presence in the world.[4] He writes that Christ's words "are none other than the words of [God's] Spirit, and Christ dwells among the churches through the Spirit."[5]

If the decline in attendance continues ceaselessly, God's mission in the world will be in jeopardy. Dr. Cheyney observes that the number of believers of the Christian faith fell over eleven percent (11%) in a generation and has frequently fallen off the faith map completely.[6] As churches struggle to recruit and retain new members, the experiences of previous generations may have also contributed to the decline in attendance. Members of the older generations acknowledged that they had not invited members of their families, friends, or neighbors to worship services (Appendix B).

Dr. Cafferata explains that the vast majority of churches in the United States and throughout the world are in decline and projected to continue to decline by one to two percent annually.[7] Consequently, Green expresses and bemoans the modern attitudes of disengagement and indifference, leading to the attendance decline.[8] Unlike their modern counterparts, Green observed, Christians in the early church viewed the good news of the gospel with awe and the

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[4] Tom Cheyney, The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal: Biblical Foundations for Church Revitalization (Columbia, SC: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016), 4.

[5] Cheyney, The 7 Pillars of Church, 10.

[6] Ibid., 4.

[7] Cafferata, "Respect," 311.

[8] Green, *Evangelism*, 283.

promise of the final resurrection with celebratory anticipation.[9] In addition, the early Christians viewed the church as a community of grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and admiration and embarked on a mission to spread its message to all nations on earth.[10]

Green believes the Modern Church can recapitulate the successes of the early church by observing and redeploying the same time-proven methods and strategies.[11] To keep the Christian mission and faith alive, it is essential to recruit the younger generations. The younger generations bring a new blend of personality and style, which could lead to thriving congregations in churches that recruit them.

Harry L. Reeder is the Senior Pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Previously, he was Pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Dan Swaverly, explain that "[t]he church, as the body of Christ, works the same way [as the body of a person]; if a body is healthy, it will grow."[12] But growth in the church is different and do not equate to more people attending church. The authors suggest that leaders focus on the health of the church and leave the growth to God.[13] Similarly, the Apostle Paul reminds leaders that God is responsible for growth in the church when he said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor 3:6-7, NRSV). Therefore, leaders of the Christian Church must focus on planting and watering and leave the growth to God.

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[9] Green, *Evangelism*, 283.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Harry L. Reeder, III with David Swavely, *From Embers To a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2008), 29.

[13] Reeder and Swavely, *From Embers*, 29.

The younger generations can develop leadership skills if church leaders permit participation. They can become capable leaders utilizing God's gift and guidance as seasoned pastors prepare to retire. It is essential to equip them to carry the gospel's message from generation to generation to build up the body of Christ.

Over sixty-nine percent (69%) of the fifty-two leaders and congregants in Group C of this project agreed that giving the younger generations leadership roles in the church could effectively stop the decline in attendance (Appendix B). Over thirty percent (30%) believe the church could benefit from revitalization and renewal programs to steer it in a new direction in functioning, recruiting, and retaining members, and effective discipleship-making processes (Appendix B).

Recruiting younger church members is not an effortless task. Kinnaman and Lyons devoted three years to an extensive research project inquiring about the Christian beliefs of tens of thousands of young people. According to their research, most of the eighteen to twenty-nine age group's perception of Christianity was hostile.[14] The authors disclosed that what is most intriguing is the pessimistic outlook fostered by the young demographics' belief that Christians frequently practice Christianity in an "unChristian" manner.[15]

The younger generations perceived the older generations to be intolerant, judgmental, contradictory, and hypocritical, and the unwillingness of the older members to accept change in the church deters the younger generations from becoming members.[16] It suggests that the church's exclusive and judgmental stance may have contributed to the precipitous decline in

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[14] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 39-45.

[15] Ibid., 13, 27, 39-45.

[16] Ibid.

attendance. The researcher reported that when she questioned Group A participants about what concerns their local church could address, seventy participants (79%) said church leaders should not assume they do not wish to attend church (Appendix B).

The data indicate that leaders must welcome and embrace the younger generations. The consensus is seventy participants (79%) desired "an intentional open invitation to come as 'I am'/'we are,' lifestyle and everything." Sixteen participants (18%) agreed that leaders could take a greater interest in the spiritual lives of young adults, while the remaining participants (3%) wanted leadership roles in the church (Appendix B). In response to what they would expect as new or returning members, forty-four participants (50%) responded with "a welcoming attitude." Thirty-eight participants (43%) said they wanted clarity in understanding the functions of the church (Appendix B).

The younger generations may forego church attendance due to the implicit mistrust of the older generations. It creates a divide between the younger and older generations, accelerating the decline in attendance. Kati Niemelä, who studied Generation Y from confirmation experience to church leaving at the University of Helsinki, Finland, uncovered that the younger generations who have left the church in the twenty-first century do so not only because they are dissatisfied with the church as an institution, but also because leaving is a lifestyle choice tied to their desire to live lives they perceive to be authentic.[17]

The decline in attendance may have also resulted from modernization. Niemelä believes that young adults seek motivation and engaging experiences from places that provide them,

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[17] Kati Niemelä, "No Longer Believing in Belonging:" A Longitudinal Study of Finnish Generation Y from Confirmation Experience to Church-Leaving," *Social Compass* 62, no. 2 (June 2015): 173, doi:10.1177/0037768615571688.

which is outside of the church, a concern that leaders can address to bring young adults into the church.[18] She observes that the lifestyle choices to live outside of Christian fellowship connect young people with social experiences and peer influences.[19] Among those social experiences and peer influences are:

- the gravitational pull of culture and things that interest the younger generations in the secular world;
- the impact of social media in shaping one's world outlook; and
- the labels assigned to cultural and social groups.

Niemelä agrees with Kinnaman and Lyons that older adults' negative attitudes toward the lifestyle choices of younger individuals may have contributed to the adverse reactions of younger individuals toward church fellowship.[20] Chip and Dan Heath explain that misunderstandings and resistance to change by the older generations stem from a lack of clarity: older adults are often unaware of the motivations, experiences, and worldviews of younger adults.[21] This is not a new phenomenon; as Old Testament wisdom often reminds people, there is nothing new under the sun.

The Bible demonstrates that parallel behavior existed in biblical times. Matthew 15:7-8 records people speaking favorably about Jesus despite their hearts being far from him (Matt 15:7-8, Cor 1:10-30, NRSV). The church could attract and retain younger adults by offering them the opportunity for stability and hope they seek. In exchange, the younger members could

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[18] Niemelä, "No Longer Believing," 173.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Chip and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Needed* (New York, NY: Currency, 2010), 17.

provide the church with their social media expertise and utilize their God-given gifts. If the church is to survive, reconciliation between the generations is necessary.

As Precht reminds people, the gospel has transformational powers that can positively affect the lives of the younger generations.[22] Therefore, it is the Christian thing for older members to accommodate younger members, not just because it perpetuates the church. Jeff Iorg, the President of Gateway Seminary, a network of five campuses with robust distance learning programs, is a strong proponent of the notion that the older generations could readjust their perspective to reflect modern realities, stop resisting change, and accept the challenges of modern society, particularly those relating to younger adults if churches are to survive with thriving congregations.[23]

The first step in reversing the decline in church attendance is for church leaders to acknowledge and be concerned about the decline and other spiritual problems within their church. The Rev. Leah J. Hileman, a former Church Planter for both the Brethren Church (Ashland) and the Church of the Brethren, makes a general point about revitalization and renewal by stating that any church experiencing a decline in attendance, baptisms, and financial support, is experiencing signs of a severe internal spiritual problem.[24]

Hileman believes churches are most likely to succeed with the revitalization process if they have been in decline for an extended period and their leaders have acknowledged the

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[22] Precht, Lutheran Worship, 22.

[23] Iorg, *Leading Major Change*, 53, 135, 153, 173.

[24] Leah J. Hileman, "Sometimes We Plant, Sometimes We Fertilize: Making Church Revitalization a Priority," *Brethren Life and Thought* 59, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 52, accessed August 27, 2019, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&bquery=sometimes+we+plant%2c+sometimes+we+fertilize&type=1&searchMode=Standard&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

decline and requested assistance to reverse it.[25] Church leaders ought to admit to the actual state of their church, realize that their church is dying, and accept that change is necessary.[26] Hileman points out that organizations and congregations responsible for placing pastors or calling them to serve in a church permit pastors to serve in the same congregation for many years without allowing other ordained ministers with distinct spiritual gifts and vision to advance into leadership roles and answer God's call.[27]

Recognizing that the decline is ongoing and that attracting younger adults to Christianity and Christian fellowship is a crucial fork in the road is another solution that leaders can choose. Attracting the demographics will be the most significant challenge. However, there are many documented decline reversals. Local church leaders can draw on numerous examples of recent decline reversals when formulating their strategies. For example, as discussed earlier in this study, Herd successfully implemented a strategic plan that reversed attendance decline at a local church in Ft. Payne, Alabama, utilizing modern technology.[28]

Likewise, in his book *From Surviving to Thriving: A Practical Guide to Revitalize Your Church*, for instance, the Rev. Dr. John H. Krahn describes how he, as a successful interim pastor, saved many churches on the verge of extinction. Although Dr. Krahn acknowledges there is no silver bullet for overcoming the challenges leaders face in declining churches, his own experiences demonstrate that a comprehensive strategy that includes practicing good

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[25] Hileman, "Sometimes We Plant," 53.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 52-53.

[28] Herd, "Transitioning," 94-98.

stewardship, marketing the church in both traditional and innovative ways, and developing an evangelism program could help declining churches.[29]

The success of Dr. Krahn demonstrates that revitalizing and renewing a church's mission with an emphasis on evangelism can bring vitality and purpose back to local churches, their leaders, and their communities.[30] Numerous experts on church revitalization and renewal suggest that other strategies for reversing the decline would be for leaders to plan events and activities that appeal to the younger generations and include them in the decision-making process for those events and activities. The deliberate act of involving younger adults in the decision-making process for those events and activities that involve them can positively influence future generations.

Including younger adults in the decision-making process for events and activities that may interest them could ensure the continuation and sustainability of a religious enterprise where individuals of all ages can seek spiritual guidance and support. Once the attendance decline ceases, leaders should address the perception of a generational chasm between the younger and older generations to prevent future decline and demise.

If leaders assess their church and surrounding communities, they recognize that communities may have progressed and evolved with the younger generations while the local church may face challenges in keeping pace. It is imperative to cultivate an intergenerational community within and outside the confines of the church to infuse vigor and diversity into worship. There, the potential exists to restore churches to a spiritually healthy state.

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[29] Krahn, *From Thriving*, 14.

[30] Ibid.

Then, church attendance may increase as a sizable proportion of congregations may consist of the younger generations. However, there is no universally applicable solution, although experts believe targeting younger adults is the key to success. Leaders should consider distinct marketing strategies and approach for each location's specific characteristics and existential reality.

Kirstine Helboe Johansen, Director of the School of Culture and Society at Aarhus University in Denmark, examined generational groups within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. She found that "the unity of generations is constituted essentially by a similarity of the location of individuals within a social whole, but a given generation is determined not only by their similar location but also by their experience of the same events."[31]

Johansen explains that locations and shared life experiences determine the worldview of a generation. Therefore, leaders must consider their evangelistic strategies and approach to the unique characteristics of each generational unit. She cites Michael Corsten, who writes that generations are cultural circles defined by specific criteria for interpreting or articulating related topics so people in similar age groups are more likely to share similar perspectives and points of view in written or spoken communications.[32]

Johansen points out that shared perspectives within different generational strata compel leaders to focus on specific responses from different generations who participate in cultural circles at specific times and in particular ways.[33] Kinnaman and Lyons reported that despite the

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[31] Kirstine Helboe Johansen, "Does Generation Matter? - Changing the Church from the Inside," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 22.2 (2018): 214-215, https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/ijpt.2018.22.issue-2/ijpt-2017-0002/ijpt-2017-0002.xml.

[32] Johansen, "Does Generation Matter," 214-15.

[33] Ibid.

different perspectives and motivations of various generational groups, there is a shared mistrust of Christianity among the younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Zs.[34]

Kinnaman and Lyons argue that the mistrust of the older generations by the younger generations is mutual. Some members of the older generations view the younger generations as falling short of the biblically recommended Christian lifestyle standards.[35] Dr. Klaus Issler, Professor Emeritus of Educational Studies, and Theology at Biola University, warns that leaders must be cautious in rushing to judgment and subscribing to popular narratives without making thoughtful and informed analyses.[36]

Issler stresses that people need to strive anew to develop a biblical worldview, and teachers should propagate the Christian way of life using Christ as a template for living and thinking.[37] As C. Fred Smith, Associate Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary reminds people, the Bible contains a robust worldview: it is God's Revelation of God's self. It gives insight into God's way of seeing things.[38]

Smith explains that some people have incorrectly adopted false worldviews based on popular culture.[39] He believes people can reorient their worldview towards a biblical foundation, adopting the biblical worldview as the grounding for their own lives, and engaging with culture

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[34] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 39-45.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Klaus Issler, *Living Into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 30, 48, 51, 53.

[37] Issler, Living Into the Life of Jesus, 48, 53.

[38] C. Fred Smith, *Developing A Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God's Way* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 1.

[39] Smith, *Developing*, 128.

through the gospel.[40] A revitalization plan is necessary. As discussed earlier in this study, the first step towards revitalization is to acknowledge the existence of the decline problem, followed by a rediscovery of the biblical worldview as the only template for the Christian way of life.

The church can emphasize the centrality of Christ's teachings to the renewal of the church. Smith writes that the zeal for evangelism should not divert attention from the risen Christ; it must remain centered on Christ with a focus on ministry.[41] George Barna, the Founder of a market research firm specializing in the study of religious beliefs and behavior of Americans, as well as the intersection of faith and culture, explains that leaders are most effective and successful when they first clarify their God-given spiritual vision, embrace it, and make it the focus of their call to ministry.[42]

Barna defines *vision* as foresight with insight based on hindsight.[43] He insists that leaders do not ignore God's role in shaping their missions and recommends that they seek to clarify God's will for their ministry since it rests on God's perspective as the Creator and leader of both the vision process and the church.[44] Blackaby and Blackaby recommend that leaders perceive the vision process from Barna's viewpoint. The authors stress that Christ must be the central focus of all churches if congregations are to flourish and remain spiritually healthy.[45] Based on discussions throughout this study, spiritual assessment of church leaders is essential.

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[40] Smith, *Developing*, 128.

[41] Green, *Evangelism*, 273-74.

[42] George Barna, The Power of Vision: Discover and Apply God's Plan For Your Life and Ministry (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Books, 2009), 12-13.

[43] Barna, The Power of Vision, 12-13.

[44] Ibid., 26, 29.

[45] Blackaby and Blackaby, *Flickering Lamps*, 120.

Senior Pastors of Real-Life Ministries and Harpeth Christian Church, respectively, Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, argue that spiritual assessment and maturity are biblical.[46] Barna and Blackaby and Blackaby express that local church leaders sometimes lose sight of their initial missionary vision of making disciples and their role as spiritual leaders in accomplishing missions.[47] The authors suggest that leaders refocus on their primary mission, re-establish their vision, and reclaim the disciple-making process, a fundamental responsibility for all church leaders.

Church leaders can compare their spiritual maturity to Christ's disciples' maturity for clarity and comprehension. Kevin N. Flatt, D. Millard Haskell, Wilfrid Laurier, and Stephanie Burgoyne argue that spiritual maturity is essential because as societies modernize, the social influence of religion, religious behaviors, and or religious beliefs can decline.[48]

Flatt et al. point out that some church leaders do not recognize the value of being placed in positions that allow them to grow and attain spiritual maturity that enables them to advance and develop their spiritual lives.[49] In like manner, Putman and Harrington believe such an opportunity allows leaders to make and grow disciples successfully as Christ intended and that spiritual assessment and maturity are biblical and, thus, are essential.[50]

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[46] Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington with Robert E. Coleman, *Disciple Shift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 56.

[47] Blackaby and Blackaby, *Flickering Lamps*, 70.

[48] Kevin N. Flatt, D Millard Haskell, Wilfrid Laurier, and Stephanie Burgoyne, "Secularization and Attribution: How Mainline Protestant Clergy and Congregants Explain Church Growth and Decline,*" Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 1: 79, accessed February 3, 2020, doi:10.1093/socrel/srx044.

[49] Flatt et al., "Secularization and Attribution," 79.

[50] Putman and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 56.

Putman and Harrington encourage leaders to examine the spiritual maturity process of Christ's disciples. The authors believe the primary mission of the church is to make disciples in relationship with those who can make disciples and understand that believers can only grow by the grace of God.[51] Putman and Harrington argue that if the spiritual assessment of leaders is improper, those in charge risk "putting people in leadership positions they cannot handle," which may result in ineffective functioning of a church, pastoral burnout, the decision to quit the work of ministry, and declining church attendance.[52]

Quitting full-time ministry should not be an option because God's call is a life-long spiritual endeavor. Regarding leadership positions and growing disciples, Roxburgh suggests that church leaders emulate leaders of electric companies who use their imagination to grow their businesses.[53] He proposes that similar forms of imaginative shift could change how denominations discern ways to change their organizational culture.[54]

An imaginative shift would allow leaders to enhance discipleship growth in local churches, improve their strategic plans to recruit and retain members and increase attendance to achieve flourishing congregations. Some local churches that lack disciple-making strategies send a negative message about the gospel's truth. Putman and Harrington point out that for the Modern Church, some people consider leaders acting on the gospel's truth and biblical concepts and procedures contradictory to the New Testament standards.[55]

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[51] Putman and Harrington, *Disciple Shift, 57.*

[52] Ibid.

[53] Roxburgh, Structured for Mission, 130.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Putman and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 56.

The authors believe that when people view the church negatively, it is difficult for leaders to answer God's call to ministry and carry out their duties effectively.[56] The challenge is for church leaders to figure out ways of reaching individuals who view the church negatively, asking questions, and clarifying information or perceptions. Conversely, Flatt et al. assert that some leaders in declining churches believe broad social factors outside their control led to the decline.[57]

Flatt et al. point out that recognizing the causes of attendance decline can give leaders the insight to pinpoint the cause and implement strategic plans to combat possible social and environmental changes that may have directly led to the decline. Additionally, like Barna's view on vision, Todd Hudnall, the Senior Pastor at Radiant Church, believes church leaders can use the teachings of Christ as laid out in the book of Revelation as a model to re-establish insight to understand the decline and how to reverse it.[58]

Equally important is that Stuart agrees with Green, who writes that Christians displayed the expected behavior of zeal at the beginning of the Christian movement.[59] He explains that church leaders sometimes lose their "vision for accomplishing the mission of making disciples" and suggests they seek help to re-establish their vision and reclaim the mission of making disciples, as Barna discussed.[60] Leaders must seek help that can only come from God.

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[56] Putman and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 56.

[57] Flatt, et al., "Secularization and Attribution," 83.

[58] Todd Hudnall, Church Come Forth: A Biblical Plan for Transformational Turnaround (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2015), 20.

[59] Stuart, Church Revitalization, 200.

[60] Ibid., 26, 29, 200.

Stuart believes Christians are leaving their first love: the church and point out that in Revelation 2:2-4, Christ forewarns believers they are leaving their first love and calls on them to reverse their backsliding behaviors and focus on God's grace, the message of the gospel, and the meaning of Christianity (Rev. 2:24, NRSV).[61]

Correspondingly, Hudnall points out that the first love for Christians should be a love for the body of Christ. He notes that the "loss of that first love may be a key reason many churches fall into decline and may need revitalization."[62] Hudnall emphasizes that Christ identified the potentially fatal spiritual condition of decline and prescribed a solution for the church's return to health and vibrancy.[63] He believes the prescription is to repent and return to God (Acts 3:19, 2 Cor 7:9, NRSV).[64]

The fatal spiritual condition of believers losing their first love: the church, has negatively affected it and is challenging for leaders and their congregations. Kinnaman and Lyons believe the Christian faith has suffered a significant setback, another contributor to the attendance decline.[65] The authors discovered that young adults outside of the church "outsiders," have lost much of their respect for the Christian faith; they explain that "millions of young outsiders are mentally and emotionally disengaging from Christianity."[66]

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[61] Stuart, Church Revitalization, 200.

[62] Hudnall, Church Come Forth, 25.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 22.

[66] Ibid., 22, 36.

Steve Bruce, a Professor at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, United Kingdom, and Tony Glendinning, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, concur with Dreyer and Kinnaman and Lyons that the difficulties leaders face in recruiting and retaining young adults in the Christian faith may also have contributed to the decline.[67] The departure or death of older members may have also played a role in the decline. Bruce and Glendinning point out that the large, "unchurched" population outside the church can be the key to stopping the decline, along with childhood socialization in church.[68]

McNeal emphasizes that leaders must focus outside of the church because it would reflect what churches and their leaders are doing.[69] He believes a missional church is to engage its community. He explains that leaders who focus externally take cues from their church's environment and the needs of their communities.[70] External focus encourages radical change, as Chip and Dan Heath suggest. Heath and Heath believe change follows a pattern that leaders should not ignore; it is evident in the details and visible in congregations.[71]

Congregational growth may become complex if church leaders do not accept responsibility for the decline. Angela Son, a Professor of Psychology and Religion at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, and an Ordained Minister in the Presbyterian Church, argues

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[67] Steve Bruce, and Tony Glendinning, "When Was Secularization? Dating the Decline of the British Churches and Locating its Cause," *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, I 1 (03, 2010): 107-8, accessed November 10, 2020, doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.2009.01304.x.

[68] Bruce and Glendinning, "When Was Secularization," 116.

[69] McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 6-7.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Chip and Dan Heath, *Switch*, 17, 53, 257.

that looking externally for causes of decline encourages leaders to become inactive and blame others rather than proactively addressing the issue.[72]

Professor Son points out that there is a parallel between economic development and church attendance decline in countries where the decline is rampant.[73] She insists that the decline is most likely to occur in countries with high economic development.[74] Since economic growth makes diversions available to more people, it generates cultural destinations that compete with the church for congregants' attention. It is clear then that leaders consider external factors during rejuvenation strategies.

Flatt et al. agree with Son and add that leaders of declining churches and their members are more likely to attribute decline and growth to external factors, factors beyond their control.[75] This, however, does not mean that all the blame exists externally. Flatt and his fellow researchers note that a steep decline over time is a symptom of a deeper internal spiritual problem in a church.[76] A spiritual problem that could prove disastrous for the church if left unchecked.

Samuel G. Dawson, Author, and Minister among the Churches of Christ, argues that a key issue within the Modern Church is that leaders do not teach as the New Testament prescribes.[77] Dawson should know. He has written and published many insightful studies on problems facing the Modern Church. He suggests leaders may want to renew their efforts to

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[72] Angela Son, "Crisis of Church Decline in and Revitalization of Korean Churches," *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 5 (10, 2018): 573, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0803-7.

[73] Son, "Crisis of Church Decline," 573.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Flatt, et al., "Secularization and Attribution," 79.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Samuel G. Dawson, What is Wrong With Most Churches of Christ & How They Can Avoid Extinction (Amarillo, TX: SGD Press, 2010), 9.

emulate New Testament churches and the actions of Christ's disciples, expressly the Apostle Paul.[78]

David Carlin, a Professor of Sociology, and a former member of the Connecticut State Legislature, uses an intriguing analogy to illustrate the connection between the Modern Church and the fervor of its antecedent. New Testament churches emphasize unity, doctrine, fellowship, prayer, and the Holy Sacraments. The Church and fellowship founded by the early apostles and described in the New Testament are representations to emulate (Acts 2:42, NRSV).

Carlin has some advice for church leaders. He writes that "if a couple is to rekindle the love of a no longer [enthusiastic] relationship, it would be helpful for [them to revisit] what it was like when they first fell in love, and in doing so, they may quickly realize the extent of [their] lost passion."[79] All Christians, particularly leaders, can experience the same zeal that launched the Christian movement across territories of Asia Minor, the Mediterranean, and the world.

The idea is not just for the Modern Church to rekindle the zeal of the early apostles. It is also for leaders to remember the zeal that motivated them during their first call to leadership in the church and the life cycle of a church.[80] As noted by widely published Author and Pastor Peter Scazzero, leaders face internal struggles that involve understanding God, making mistakes, and experiencing failures that may challenge them.[81]

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[78] Dawson, *What is Wrong*, 9, 35-46, 114-116.

[79] David Carlin, *The Decline and Fall of The Catholic Church in America* (Manchester, OH: Sophia Institute Press, 2003), 26, 69.

[80] Hudnall, *Church Come Forth*, 7-9.

[81] Peter Scazzero, The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 21, 48.

Scazzero suggests that church leaders build their spiritual lives from the foundation up, meaning their inner core.[82] Leaders must develop their inner lives. For their congregations to be solidly healthy, they must possess a solid spiritual inner core. Longtime Christian Leader and Author J. Oswald Sanders discusses the role and challenges of church leaders. He writes there is a lack of capable spiritual leaders to serve God because of the challenges that require strength and faith beyond the average for the Modern Church.[83]

Sanders believes strength and faith beyond the average for the Modern Church is necessary because spiritual things can challenge and exhaust leaders causing them to quit their religious vocation (Appendix F).[84] Lee and Griffin explain that leaders must be balanced in Spirit and possess inner stability.[85] Balance in Spirit and inner stability are no easy tasks to accomplish. A balanced Spirit and inner stability are some of the distinguishing characteristics of Christians who will inherit eternal life and have it abundantly.[86]

Christians know that God has a specific plan for each believer. Sanders accurately emphasizes that God has equipped leaders with natural and spiritual gifts for duties and positions within the church with a defined purpose.[87] Revitalization is an essential element of any strategy for declining churches. Leaders must implement strategies that include God's plan and

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[82] Scazzero, The Emotionally Healthy Leader, 21, 48.

[83] J. Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 17.

[84] Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 17.

[85] Lea and Griffin, The New American Commentary, 110.

[86] Slaughter, *Change the World*, 39.

[87] Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 60.

unwavering guidance. The reminder to rely on God's guidance is vital for leaders prone to spiritual fatigue and inconsistent convictions (Appendix F).

Lessons from early Christians and Old Testament history can become indispensable tools for educating leaders about their indispensable relationship with God. Consider the story of young David as an example. The Philistines erroneously judged David based on his appearance and youth. However, David's faith in God was strong, and he relied on God to guide him to defeat the Philistine leader (1 Sam 17:42-54, NRSV).

Despite being young, David was confident because his faith was strong, and he knew God was with him. God calls the younger generations to be leaders too. God similarly calls them and can use them to transform declining churches into thriving congregations. The younger generations are essential to cease the decline in attendance at churches. Davis believes leaders must clarify and share God's vision for their church with their congregations, the vision that comes from scripture, and the specific calling God placed on their congregations (Eph 4:12-13, NRSV).[88]

From the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, attendance in many churches has declined, as many experts point out.[89] The researcher discovered that most churches in Queens, New York, are not growing. Cheyney, Kinnaman and Lyons, Woodward and White, and Dawson observe and argue that the Christian Church has moved away from its roots, the number of Christians has decreased rapidly, congregations continue to dwindle, and some churches have closed their doors.[90]

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[88] Davis, *Revitalize*, 24.

[89] Rainer, Autopsy of a Deceased, 5-6.

[90] Cheyney, The 7 Pillars of Church, 13.

The decline may have resulted from massive global cultural shifts.[91] One key reason is that members attend church less frequently now than before. Attendance has declined drastically, and most people only attend church on special occasions or at their discretion. Particularly at churches in Queens, New York, this phenomenon occurs rapidly. Leaders are frequently perplexed because the change in membership is evident.

However, leaders hardly notice when a four-times-per-month attendee drops to a three-times-per-month attendee. Neither do they usually notice when a two times attendee becomes a once-monthly attendee. Then, some members cease attending church due to perceived conflicts within the church. In a few decades, church attendance may be unexplainably low, as members may lose their initial motivation to attend church.[92] One's participation in and availability for church-related activities may be affected.

Dreyer and Green point out that people are less interested in the church, and congregations are undergoing rapid change (Matt 9:37-38, NRSV).[93] In most churches, attendance decline is one of the most discouraging changes. Although addressing the decline cannot be summed up succinctly, the following factors may have been contributors to the decline:[94]

1. *Many Christians no longer view church attendance, as necessary*. Most no longer believe that attending church makes them respectable community members. They appear to have

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[91] Carey Nieuwhof, "10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders are Attending Church Less Often," (Carey Nieuwhof, 2015), 16.

[92] Manfred Te Grotenhuis and Peer Scheepers, "Churches in Dutch: Causes of Religious Disaffiliation in the Netherlands, 1937-1995," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 40*, no. 4 (2001): 591-606, accessed February 22, 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1387654.

[93] Dreyer, "The Amazing Growth," 2.

[94] Te Grotenhuis and Scheepers, "Churches in Dutch," 591-606.

moved on, especially when they view what drew them to the church as out of reach, a thing of the past, and they no longer receive the benefits that drew them to the church.

2. *Members attend church less frequently*. Member participation in church may have contributed to the decline. An active church member attended church and participated in activities an average of two times per week in the past. Today, members who attend church two times a month are active members, or tithe regularly, but do not attend worship services, maintain their active membership status.

3. *Members rarely participate in activities or volunteer for ministry positions*. Previous roles in the church may have caused them to feel less significant, taken advantage of, or they may have experienced burnout.[95]

4. *Group activities are at an all-time low in the church*. All groups, including home, small, focus, and support groups, are essential for assimilation and increased commitment. Leaders should be the first to recognize the significance of groups in the church.

5. *Leaders must focus on the church and congregation members as a part of the whole when planning for all areas and functions of the church*. However, some members are more concerned with the temperature in worship than their neighbor's eternal destination. How can they receive the gospel's message when they pay attention to the mundane? (Matt 7:3, NRSV). Here, the message of the Cross and Christianity is lost, and God's voice may become silent for those members.

6. *Most churches in Queens, New York, have no evidence of a defined discipleship process*. It is essential to have an understood and implemented discipleship process.

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[95] Bob Jackson, *Hope for the Church: Contemporary Strategies for Growth*, Forwarded by David Hope, Preface by Robert Warren (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), 27.

"Discipleship is sharing life and seeking to reproduce [oneself] in others" as shown in Christ's and his apostles' examples (1 Thes 2:8, NRSV).[96]

7. *It is understood that people are trying to save for the future and to survive, and the worsening economic crisis has reduced the rate individuals can or may give to churches*. However, the church needs its community's financial support. It presents a challenge and a dilemma for leaders when community members do not support their church financially. Also, there is strength in numbers, and congregations are dwindling; so, is the financial support.

David E. Campbell believes it is impossible to overemphasize the decline. He believes specific strategies can help increase attendance. As the value of membership declines, commitment inevitably wanes. Campbell notes that the following methods may be beneficial for church leaders:[97]

1. *Increase members' expectation of membership*. Provide a clear outline of membership. One may be surprised how many church members do not consider participating in church activities a vital part of membership. No one has ever advised them otherwise. Leaders must inform members they all support the church and are members that make up the whole of the church. They are one church body with many members in Christ.

2. *Make membership special by presenting a certificate for each milestone at the church, occasional raffles, or incentives*. The certificate may establish a sense of belonging for committed members. By doing so, the church demonstrates the significance of its members.

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[96] Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 7.

[97] David E. Campbell, "Acts of Faith: Churches and Political Engagement." *Political Behavior* 26, no. 2 (2004): 157-60, accessed February 19, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4151364.

3. *Make ministry participation a high priority*. Members without ministry responsibilities may attend church less frequently if they believe they are less significant church members.

4. *Offer flexible meeting times to speak with the pastor and leaders, as members highly regard their Pastors*. Modern societies are now populations that operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Some members work during the hours for worship services and or pastors' scheduled meeting hours. Provide alternatives. Some members are businesspeople whose jobs require them to fly to and from various locations. Members with challenging jobs may have to leave on a Sunday morning. They remember and recognize their covenant with God and know that with God, anything is possible. One pastor explained that some members of his congregation transferred to another church that offered flexible meeting hours (Appendix B).

5. *Monitor members' attendance*. Members are less likely to miss worship and meetings when they know the pastor is concerned about their welfare and misses them. They may remember their early years in church, or Sunday school, which may be a positive reflection. This approach can become challenging for leaders and may sound childish to adults; however, leaders may want to apply this strategy to all age groups.

For instance, Carol A. Cassel observes that when people desire to be a part of something in the church that is effective, church membership becomes meaningful. They want to be involved in something greater than themselves.[98] Unfortunately, the significance of church membership has diminished in many congregations.

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[98] Carol A. Cassel, "Voluntary Associations, Churches, and Social Participation Theories of Turnout," *Social Science Quarterly 80*, no. 3 (1999): 504-6, 516-17, accessed February 19, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42863926.

Attendance may continue to decline until churches return to the committed membership the Apostle Paul mandated in 1 Corinthians 12 (1 Cor 12, NRSV). When membership becomes meaningful, the church will relate to its members, and the mission of God will continue for God's kingdom and glory. Then, the story of Jesus Christ may become interesting and meaningful to the younger generations.

## Theological Foundation

The theological foundation for any discussion of the current illness within the Christian Church must begin with Genesis, as this is where the church's foundation lies. Although Christianity originated primarily with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, its metaphysics and practical guidance are derived from the laws, experiences, and prophecies recorded in the Old and New Testament.

Genesis is the foundation of the Old Testament because it documents beginnings, reveals God's character and work, and demonstrates God's creative nature. The theme of creation runs throughout Genesis, including the creation of Heaven and Earth, everything in them, and the time to create them. Genesis also emphasizes that God created humanity in God's image and likeness and that humans are the culmination of God's creative endeavors.

The first human beings rebelled against God despite their unique position within the Creator's *oeuvre*, Latin for "work." Andrew E. Steinmann, a Professor of Theology and Hebrew at Concordia University in Chicago, observes that in Genesis, the story of a perfect creation rapidly transitioned to that of a fallen people with a severed relationship with God due to Sin.[99]

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[99] Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1*, David G. Firth, and Tremper Longman, III, Eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 24.

Walter A. Elwell explains the biblical perspective of Sin as an act of wrongdoing and a state of alienation from God.[100] Likewise, Merriam-Webster defines Sin as a "transgression of the laws of God."[101]

Adam and Eve transgressed God's law by disobeying instructions and listening to and acting on the temptation of evil disguised as a serpent, bringing Sin and its repercussions into the world, signifying humanity's Fall. Adam and Eve's initial disobedience to God, symbolized by evil, stained their descendants with Sin. Steinmann notes that "Genesis directly states that Sin became permanently attached to the nature of humanity."[102]

Since Sin and evil affect all generations, pain and suffering will be a permanent, ongoing experience for all people. However, there is hope for redemption. Genesis also documents God's grace, love, and mercy for humanity by revealing God's forgiving nature and plan for humanity's redemption. Therefore, even though everyone is born with the stain of Sin, everyone receives God's grace and has an equal opportunity to experience salvation and eternal life in God's kingdom.[103]

When God saw the corruption of creation, he wiped humanity off the face of the earth but spared Noah and his family by forewarning Noah of the impending disaster. God then commanded him to rebuild the earth and assured Noah he would never again destroy the earth. God demonstrates his mercy by granting humanity a second chance, although they did not merit

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[100] Elwell, Walter A. Ed., "Sin," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1984), 1103.

[101] "Sin," Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary," accessed November 15, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sin.

[102] Steinmann, *Genesis*, 29.

[103] Ibid.

it. Steinmann explains that God's promise (following the Flood) not to destroy the earth a second time is a declaration of God's forgiveness for the Sins of humanity.[104]

God so loved the world he gave his only Son so *everyone* who *believes* in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, NRSV). It is the pardon that the gospel brings to humanity. The Great Commission, described in several passages of the gospel, prescribed a way of carrying the good news of God's pardon to all corners of the world. Matthew writes that Christ urges his apostles to make "disciples of all nations" and "baptize" them (Matt 28:19-20, NRSV). The Great Commission, therefore, lays the foundation for a traditional missional approach to the structure and functions of the Christian Church (Eph 4:16; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; John 15:16, NRSV).

Tremper Longman III, Ph.D., Author, Emeritus Professor, and Scholar of Biblical Studies, and Dr. David E. Garland, Professor of Christian Scriptures, explain that God's priority "is foundational…the saints are called to—and remain in—an impure, vulgar world, and despite overwhelming cultural obstacles, everything for life and goodness is available" because of God's graciousness (2 Pet 1:3-4, NRSV).[105] The theological basis for a healthy growing church is evident throughout scripture. The Bible discusses the church's role in sharing the gospel: Jesus Christ is the sole foundation of God's promise of redemption (1 Cor 3:11, NRSV).

Darrell L. Bock, Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, notes that the reference to Adam in the Bible "is a positive indication that all human beings have

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[104] Steinmann, *Genesis*, 32.

[105] Tremper Longman, III, and David E. Garland, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Hebrew – Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 410.

their roots in God the Creator."[106] Humanity inherited Adam's original Sin. Bock writes that the Holy Spirit is a gift and, in specific ways, a substitute for Jesus in his earthly absence to remind people of salvation if they are to accept God's forgiveness.[107]

There is a strong disconnection between the theological foundation of the church and its current health. Amy Plantinga Pauw, Professor of Doctrinal Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and the Henry P. Mobley Jr. Professor of Doctrinal Theology, explains that the books of the Bible–specifically Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Songs, and the book of Job–share a message of viewing life events from a more optimistic viewpoint.[108]

Plantinga Pauw believes that the books discuss the history, significance, and purpose of humanity's daily existence in work and loving relationships.[109] She argues that church leaders and congregants who do not actively participate in the functioning of the church are mocking God because they do not fear God's wrath enough to compel them to perform at their best.[110] In Acts 6, Christ's disciples assign various responsibilities to church leaders according to The Great Commission's approach to God's global mission (Acts 6, NRSV).

The church's structure, function, and growth must continue to adhere to biblical principles. A decline in the church's adherence to its theological foundation will diminish its efficacy and productivity. God does not call individuals to become apostles without providing them with a plan for achievement and success. The Bible explains missionary work. The late

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[106] Bock, *Acts*, 566.

[107] Longman and Garland, *The Expositors Bible*, 36.

[108] Amy Plantinga Pauw, *Belief: A Theological Commentary on The Bible; Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 9.

[109] Plantinga Pauw, *Belief*, 9, 165.

[110] Ibid.

Thomas D. Lee, Dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Professor of New Testament Studies, and Biblical Scholar Hayne P. Griffin point out that 1 and 2 Timothy and the book of Titus provide biblical tools to strengthen the faith and authority of ordained ministers to carry out God's mission in the world.[111]

Thomas G. Long, the Bandy Professor Emeritus of Preaching at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, explains that "when faith and love occur together, they refer to humanity's faith and love of church, households, [and] individuals."[112] While faith and love of church, households, [and] individuals is accurate, Lynn H. Cohick adds that given the church as the body of Christ, the expansion of God's kingdom, the penetration of God's light into darkness and steadfastness, are also connected to love and faith.[113] Therefore, the missional aspects of salvation that all Christians seek are not optional.[114]

Walther Eickmann, an expert in Lutheranism, notes that when teachers teach the Word of God in its truth and purity, the children of God lead holy lives by God's word faithfully.[115] But how does faith motivate individuals to act responsibly? If one examines Christian history, it becomes apparent that faith influences the mind in ways that promote positive decision-making. For instance, God's actions demonstrate that God acts under unbroken commitments. These

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[111] Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture; 1, 2 Timothy, Titus v. 34 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 41-43.

[112] Thomas G. Long, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Belief: a Theological Commentary on the Bible).* Eds. Amy Plantinga Pauw and William C. Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 36.

[113] Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 176, accessed June 5, 2019, DOI:10.1111/rirt.12360.

[114] Cohick, *Ephesians,* 176.

[115] Eickmann, Lutheran Doctrine, v.

commitments are Christ's exalted position, Christ's work in bestowing the Spirit, the promise of the covenant, God's mission, comfort, guidance, and protection for all people.[116]

As Lee and Griffin explain, the gospel is a fixed body of knowledge; it delivers a message about Christ and a warning about false teachings.[117] Paul's actions and writings serve as a model for ministers of the Christian Church. Paul used the gospel's truth to educate people and highlight negative spiritual behaviors, such as not loving God and neighbors. The lessons in Acts of the Apostles, especially those centered on Paul's life and works, emphasize that the gospel is solidly transformative and can shape the hearts and character of individuals (2 Cor 3:16-18, NRSV).

God gave gifts to *all* people. God ordains apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, athletes, and people for specific vocations and prepare and equip them for their role and purpose in the world (Eph 4:11-16; 2 Tim 1:6-9, NRSV). As discussed in this project, the decline in attendance at churches worldwide is unexplainable. Paul, therefore, encourages believers to utilize their spiritual and physical gifts because those gifts enrich the body of Christ, which is one body with many members (1 Cor 12:12-18, 27-31; Gal 5:22-26; Matt 28:18-20, NRSV).

Leaders must make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey God's commands. God assures believers he will never abandon them. God is always present in people's lives (Matt 28:19-20, NRSV). Correspondingly, Smith and P. Adam McClendon, Associate Professor of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries and Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at John W. Rawlings

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[116] Eickmann, Lutheran Doctrine, 33.

[117] Lea and Griffin, *The New American Commentary*, 46-47.

School of Divinity at Liberty University, hold similar views regarding "Who 'I' am" in the scriptures. Smith notes that the Bible "says [people] are created in the image of God," and that is what "Who 'I' am," represents.[118]

McClendon examined Galatians 2:20 and found that people sometimes misinterpret the scripture: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loves me, and gave himself as a ransom for me" (Gal 2:20, NRSV). Therefore, Galatians 2:20 represents "Who 'I' am" in the scriptures because believers are Baptized into the faith and live in and through Christ, and that is what "Who 'I' am" represents.

McClendon explains that if believers can develop a profound understanding of the biblical text, they may realize that Paul's use of the first person pronoun indicates not only himself "but all who are justified through faith is important for seeing the contemporary relevance of the cross."[119] Likewise, Lee and Griffin believe that understanding scripture and spiritual reality creates a continual, progressive, transformative effect when people follow Christ through faith.[120]

God calls leaders to preach, instruct, and equip other people with knowledge of the gospel, to proclaim the message of the gospel, and the second coming of the resurrected Christ, for the sanctification of the saints and the work of ministry (Gal 6:6; Matt 10:6-9; Eph 4:11-14,

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[118] Smith, *Developing*, 9, 13.

[119] P. Adam McClendon, *Paul's Spirituality in Galatians: A Critique of Contemporary Christian Spiritualities*, Foreword by Donald S. Whitney (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 5, 19, 27, 33, 39-40.

[120] Lea and Griffin, *The New American Commentary*, 46-47.

NRSV). People are commanded not to abandon but to encourage one another in fellowship to glorify God (1 John 1:7; Heb 10:25, NRSV).

God created everyone uniquely and bestowed gifts under the portion predetermined for them. It implies that people must set aside their differences and live as God's people. For instance, the church is one body with many members who function as one in Christ; therefore, believers should live as God's children and as one people in Christ (Gal 6:2; Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:17, NRSV). Christians unite through prayers; and united they stand, divided they fall.

God calls people to let go of the things that separate them from one another by turning them over to God. They must offer people they hurt forgiveness and seek forgiveness from those they hurt. Christians must work toward breaking down the racial, cultural, and denominational barriers that divide God's people. They must unite to do God's work in their churches, communities, neighborhoods, and worldwide. Imagine how powerful the Christian Church would be if God's people would unite in prayer and show love for one another.

Christ encourages people to build one another up; the strong should support the weak. (1 Thes 5:11, NRSV). He said, "[t]he grace of God is given as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon" (1 Cor 3:10, NRSV). Christ laid the foundation, the church, believers' first love. It is, therefore, God's call for believers to build thereon with love and care for each other.

Markedly, Longman and Garland agree with Stuart and Hudnall that some Christians have forsaken their first love.[121] The authors cite Revelation 2:4-6 where Christ said, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love…Remember therefore from whence

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[121] Longman and Garland, *The Expositors Bible*, 610-612.

thou art fallen and repent" (Rev 2:4-6, NRSV). The authors believe those who triumph over adversity are the most devoted to the resurrected Christ; they urge Christians not to deceive themselves by merely listening to God's Word and failing to practice it.[122] God's Word requires action. The authors recommend that people read James 5:7 to encourage them "to be patient until the Lord's second coming as a farmer waits for the land to yield valuable crops" (James 5:7, NRSV).[123]

The Bible affirms that praise and patience are Spirit-borne fruits essential for all Christians because they reveal people's faith in Christ and God's omnipotence (Gal 5:22; 1 Thes 5:14, NRSV). To analyze spiritual matters, Pettit illustrates the theological implications of spiritual formation. He notes that God's revelation requires that people "climb four prominent peaks, the Trinity, *Imago Dei* (humanity in the image of God), the God-man Jesus Christ, and salvation (deliverance from the dark valley, the Fall, and sinfulness of humanity).[124]

Pettit argues that the Trinity is the most prominent of the four peaks, and the Doctrine of the Trinity references reality.[125] He explains that *Imago Dei* is the place where the innate desire for a relationship with God lies and the beginning of spiritual formation and foundation.[126] He addresses humanity's Sin as "what was created perfect in the beginning is now corrupt and wrecked temporarily by Sin and death.[127]

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[122] Longman and Garland, *The Expositors Bible*, 610-612.

[123] Ibid., 265.

[124] Pettit, Foundations of Spiritual, 37.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid., 38.

[127] Ibid., 41.

According to Pettit, Christ came to reveal God's plan to redeem humanity, defeat Satan and his works, save the lost, become humanity's Lord and Savior, and offer salvation and eternal life to *all* people with faith in him.[128] Tremper Longman reflects on the significance of the Old Testament and point out a connection between the holy nature and sacredness of the Old and New Testament.[129] He believes the Old Testament informs and conditions the New Testament.[130]

Longman points to Psalm 78:1-8 as an example of the chain of transmission whereby knowledge and missional purpose flow.[131] He believes the psalmist imparts the accumulated knowledge of previous generations to future generations.[132] It is a lesson for church leaders and congregation members. This study demonstrates that missional and attractional efforts are vital to revitalizing and renewing the church.

God's plan for the reconciliation of God and humanity and the final destruction of evil must be central in missionary campaigns. Recognize God as the first campaign leader in history. Christ was sent to earth to save humanity from the Fall and its consequences. Christ ordained his disciples to continue this mission throughout the world while he returned to Heaven to prepare God's kingdom that will eventually replace the earth (John 14:3, NRSV). In retrospect, the older generations should hand down God's "missionary baton" to the younger generations to pass it on to future generations.

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[128] Pettit, Foundations of Spiritual, 42-43.

[129] Longman, *Psalms*, 289.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid., 168, 290.

Paul was undoubtedly the most prominent and influential Apostle who responded to Jesus' call. He traveled to numerous cities to teach and preach the gospel, reconcile people to God, and establish or rekindle their relationship with God so they could experience God's promise of salvation and eternal life through Christ (Appendix G). He campaigned in numerous cities worldwide, including two significant Greek cities, Ephesus and Philippi (Appendix H).

## Theoretical Foundation

The primary spiritual problem facing the Christian Church worldwide is low church attendance. The story of God's creative activities, found primarily in the book of Genesis, does not foresee declining congregations. It bears repeating that most local churches in Queens, New York, have experienced a precipitous decline in attendance. Attendance decline violates the foundation of the Great Commission to spread the gospel's good news through evangelism and missionary work according to the Christian theology of belief and practice.

The academic community has extensively explored attendance decline at churches globally. However, no research exists on the decline at local churches in Queens, New York. If the decline continues unchecked, many local churches will close their doors. Cheyney suggests that organizations responsible for churches, and church leaders, reorganize, readjust, and restructure how local churches function.[133] He believes that once local churches begin to experience growth, their leaders may want to set new challenges and seek new opportunities for expansion into biblically based uncharted areas.[134]

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[133] Cheyney, The 7 Pillars of Church, 13.

[134] Ibid., 19.

Similarly, Barna suggests that leaders analyze their church's vision with the contemporary world in mind and Christ at its center.[135] Cheyney believes leaders can plan renewal strategies using biblical tools, modern techniques, and technology to assist and help adapt to change in their communities.[136] For example, consider the biblical account of Ruth. According to David Strain, like most modern-day families, Ruth made disastrous decisions on complex social and economic life issues.[137]

Strain emphasizes that God governs and supervises even the most minor details of life. Therefore, Ruth's life is nothing supernatural or spectacular but demonstrates the natural flow of life.[138] He points out that Ruth's life story shows that God's promise applies to everyone in all situations, including the mundane, ordinary, and routine.[139] Most people experience situations that appear complicated or impossible; however, they must hold on to their faith because God's grace and mercy is free and grace sustains all people, plus faith in the gospel provides hope.[140]

## Summary

As the younger generations mature, communities change. Local churches struggle to cope with the dynamic needs of their diverse communities. If given the opportunity, the younger generations may play a key role in increasing church attendance. Increased attendance due to the younger generations' participation in church can help to achieve generational balance. The

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[135] Cheyney, The 7 Pillars of Church, 32.

[136] Ibid., 39, 47.

[137] David Strain, *Ruth & Esther: There is a Redeemer & Sudden Reversals* (Greanies House, Fearn Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2018), 21-22, 53-54.

[138] Strain, *Ruth & Esther*, 22.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid., 38, 95-96.

Coronavirus pandemic may have temporarily jeopardized the door-to-door campaign strategy; however, leaders can invite unchurched people and non-believers to attend Sunday worship services in person or online.

A welcoming and encouraging church community may inspire people to join their local church. Leaders may also wish to modernize the church's image to improve public perception of the church, its community, and surrounding neighborhoods. The researcher of this project agrees with the extensive findings of other researchers who discovered a generational divide between the younger and older generations. The perceived generational divide may have contributed to the attendance decline and can continue negatively affecting the church if leaders do not address it immediately.

The church is not essential to the younger generations; they decide based on their beliefs and lifestyle choices. Unlike previous generations who looked to the church for community, fellowship, and spiritual guidance, the younger generations do not seek the church's spiritual, material, or social support. Instead, they seek things that interest them in the secular world. The literature reviewed for this project revealed that the younger generations have little faith in the Christian Church and Christianity.

The younger generations do not attend church regularly as a lifestyle choice. Church attendance is not unique or essential to them, so they avoid the church. If or when they attend church, they explain that they feel challenged and judged by older members. Those challenges and judgmental stances push them toward the secular world for what they believe is deeper personal meaning and purpose.

Young adults need direction. Older adults can provide the direction that young adults need. They can use their life experiences to communicate things that only older adults can

understand, things that can enlighten and motivate younger adults. Also, by including younger adults in the business of the church, they may become acquainted with the church's purpose and current state and better understand its relevance. Leaders must include all of God's people in the church's life, functions, struggles, and accomplishments.

Awareness of the state of the church by younger adults can be an antidote to the attendance decline. One never knows; however, involving younger adults in the church's business is worthwhile. The church is Christ's body, and all believers are members. The road to righteousness, as the famous saying goes, is difficult. It takes effort that tests the body, mind, and Spirit. Even Christ, the Son of God, encountered difficulties during his life, work, and earthly ministry. If God calls people to model Christ, they will experience challenges but overcome them through faith in God's promise.

God's plan for humanity does not include giving up on younger adults; it is not an option. God provides hope for everyone. All people must be allowed to experience God's promise. The current state of the church demonstrates that when people's attention shifts away from God or when confronted with issues that do not interest them, the church becomes irrelevant. It is critical for Christians who subscribe to Christ's philosophy, to keep Christ at the center of their lives.

The current study emphasizes that all people, especially Christians, focus on Christ's teachings because it is a way of life. Christianity is the start of an action, and God expects Christians to carry the seed of the gospel in Christ until Christ returns to reign over creation as one God, King of all kings. It is crucial to heed the words of scripture. Christ directed leaders on the path of righteousness by emphasizing that they put their God-given ideas into action and devote themselves to the Christian way of life.

Christ said, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice and devote yourself to them so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:14-16, NRSV).

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Intervention Design

Chapter 3 described the project's Methodology and Intervention Design. It discussed the guidelines that determined eligibility for participation required by the Action Research approach. Action Research recommends that the researcher focuses on the eligibility for participation to ascertain the project's success, including participants' adherence to the researcher's preferred use of Action Research to investigate the research problem.

Before employing the Intervention Design using the Look, Think, Act Cycle of Action Research, the researcher ensured that all requirements for the project were met and approved by Liberty's IRB and faculty Mentor, Dr. Gary Moritz. She gathered data from participants while concentrating on their reactions to the Research Questions to understand the data collected, initial responses to the Research Questions, and their relationship to the research problem. The approach enabled the researcher to examine activities: actions, expressions, and movements that participants selected. The approach also allowed the researcher to reflect on and analyze the selected activities.

Additionally, the approach reveals how participants enact the investigative process. Evaluating the enactment allowed the researcher to accomplish practical and effective results for the selected activities. Ernest T. Stringer describes the process as a collaborative approach to inquiries or investigations that provide researchers with the means to take systematic actions to resolve research problems.[1]

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[1] Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 8, 39.

The method offers an intentional approach involving coordination between the researcher and issues and events in the participants' communities and neighborhoods, adding distinct expertise to the project. The approach also enabled the researcher to engage participants in activities related to the research problem and to explore the issues revealed by those activities that may have contributed to the problem.

Action Research's Look, Think, Act Cycle

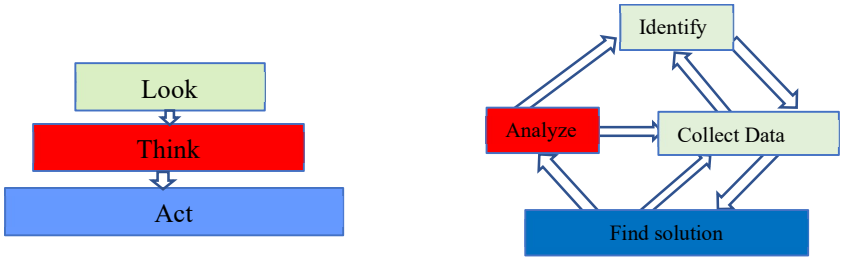


Figure 1

The Look, Think, Act Cycle was designed so the researcher can analyze the Research Questions and participants' responses to them to determine meaningful ways to implement practical solutions to the research problem.[2] The research problem is the decline in attendance at local churches in Queens, New York. Since the problem is at the core of the Christian Church, it is significant and intriguing to investigate because it can negatively affect the church, members' spiritual lives, their communities, and neighborhoods.

Chapter 3 also describes the Intervention Design and discusses the implementation of the intervention design. It describes the approach utilized by the researcher and the procedure used to find a solution to the research problem. The steps of the Intervention Design followed the

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[2] Stringer, *Action Research*, 75.

Look, Think, Act Cycle of Action Research. Additionally, the detailed description of the method and approach allowed the researcher to review and discuss the data collected to formulate an approach to generate practical solutions to the research problem.

The researcher looked for solutions to the problem by examining relevant literature from prior research, exploring data from interviews conducted, and analyzing the data gathered from the project's outdoor campaign participants. She focused on matters that may have influenced the research problem and those that could reverse it. The Look Cycle guided the investigative process, the progression of activities that moved from data gathering to analysis and from theory development to finding practical solutions to the research problem.

The following steps are necessary to investigate the research problem: the project's rationale, significance, purpose, and setting for the research; a detailed design of the project; the targeted population and participants; participants' relationship to the researcher; data collection and analysis, instrumentation, reliability, and validity of the data collected, and the implementation of the Intervention Design step that summarized the researcher's Intervention Design approach.

The steps clarify the approach and helped the researcher to find multiple solutions to the problem. Stringer points out that research problems are often "designed by people in positions of authority and defined in terms that valorize their perspective or demonize those central to the problem."[3] The steps also guided the researcher in identifying, evaluating, and interpreting activities related to the research problem to look for practical solutions to the problem.

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[3] Stringer, *Action Research*, 99.

Additionally, the approach clarified the investigative process; described connections, and outlined practical solutions to the problem and factors that may have led to it. The researcher purposefully chose participants with attributes. The primary attribute is the extent to which participants are affected by the research problem and or can influence it; for instance, church leaders may be affected by the research problem and can influence it. Leaders can also influence solutions to the problem through verbal responses or the lack of action.

The researcher monitored participants during the evaluation period to ensure that each participant contributed to exploring and interpreting the research problem. She documented the detailed procedure so other researchers using Action Research's Look, Think, Act, Cycle can replicate this study to achieve the same results. Other researchers can compare and highlight their research projects' similarities and differences.

The project's breakdown explicitly generated collaborative, constructive descriptions and explanations of the participants' events and activities, allowing the researcher to develop mutually acceptable solutions to the problem. Chapter 3 also discussed the project's urgency and ethical issues the researcher may face. She examined the problem and reflected on her objective for the problem. After careful examination, the researcher discovered multiple solutions that could enable her to choose and develop a practical and mutually acceptable solution to the research problem.

A fundamental principle of Action Research states that participants sometimes pressure researchers to decide on evaluations due to demands. Those participants want to use numbers to justify their demand for expenditure or explain their motive for participating in the project. They

exert pressure on researchers to make quick decisions during the evaluation period. Stringer explains that the evaluation process is crucial because numbers can be misleading.[4]

The researcher refrained from evaluations contrary to the principles of Action Research and focused on carefully managing the research activities. She outlined the Intervention Design to alleviate challenges during the evaluation period (Appendix I). The approach allowed the researcher to assess the worth and effectiveness of activities based on their impact on the research problem. Stringer suggests that researchers focus on the activities in a participant's evaluation but do not provide information about how those activities may affect the lives of other participants.[5]

The Think Cycle allowed the researcher to analyze and reflect on the practical aspect of the research problem and the meaningful information obtained from the data collected. The researcher examined the descriptive and explanatory activities that clarified the research problem. She focused on church communities and neighborhoods where people act and behave under established patterns and schedules.

The researcher investigated the realities that influenced participants in communities and neighborhoods targeted by this project, historical and social context, environmental, and cultural context to understand the problem and its relationship to the decline that directly affected church attendance. For example, people attend church less frequently because of the realities and activities that led to the problem. Those activities may include but are not limited to interest in things in the secular world, social influences, sicknesses, work schedules, and more.

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[4] Stringer, *Action Research*, 75.

[5] Ibid., 183.

The researcher examined books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and commentaries on church history, cultural diversity, and generational challenges. She explored the biblical foundation of the church, attendance, and decline, the life cycle and growth of the church, and revitalization and renewal processes. Examining materials is essential to the research process to evaluate participants' activities. Other Cycles in the Action Research process can confuse researchers; therefore, the researcher reserved the evaluation period for formal examination and review.

## Rationale, Significance, Purpose, and Setting for the Research

The researcher is concerned about the communities in the borough of Queens, New York, and the spiritual well-being of the residents. A grave worry is that those neighborhoods house diverse groups of people from across the globe, yet church attendance is low at Sunday worship services (Appendix J and K–Demographic and Diversity, Appendix D and E–State of the Church and Membership Statistics).

Many local churches in Queens, New York, are experiencing a steep decline in attendance. If the decline continues rapidly, those churches may close, leaving residents without a place to worship. This study examined the history of the early church and its origin in North America to understand the life cycle of the Modern Church (Appendix C). The following are the researcher's descriptions of the approach taken, findings, and suggestions for leaders of institutions, organizations, and individuals in leadership or management positions.

Pastoral burnout is detrimental to the church and its communities and neighborhoods. Appendix F is a Barna Group statistical report discussing pastoral burnout and ministry challenges. It addressed the proportion of pastors who have left or considered leaving full-time ministry due to stress, loneliness, isolation, and political division. Appendix D and E discussed

the perceived generational divide that may have contributed to the decline in attendance, demographics, and membership statistics.

The researcher examined the culture, diversity, and lifestyles of people in the target areas for this project, the significance of social media for those residents, and the potential benefits for local churches, if they recruit younger adults and utilize social media, which is impressive. She used a Phillips recording device to capture interviews with church leaders and congregation members and conducted oral interviews with eligible outdoor campaign participants during meet-and-greet interactions.

The objective of this project centered on the need to address the problem of the continued decline in attendance at local churches, to understand factors that may have led to the decline, and to implement a biblically based strategic revitalization plan to bring local churches back to spiritual health. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data collected from participants using content analysis. Appendix J and K highlighted the demographics under study.

As the research progressed, the researcher discovered statements, words, and themes that suggest a perceived generational divide between the younger and older generations. She encouraged church leaders to prioritize devising plans to bridge the perceived generational divide. She conducted outdoor campaigns, meeting, greeting, interacting, and communicating with people in the targeted communities and neighborhoods (Groups A and B participants). She contacted Group C participants to schedule interviews by telephone and Zoom conferencing. She used the following measures to collect the data that included, but was not limited to:

- door-to-door outreach campaigns, meeting and interacting outdoors with residents in the communities and neighborhoods under study;

- campaigning throughout local church communities and neighborhoods selected for this project;
- interviewing and recording data from church leaders and members of their congregations;
- gathering data from outdoor campaign participants;
- observing people in the targeted communities and neighborhoods;
- canvassing the targeted communities and neighborhoods to observe people of mixed generations and diverse backgrounds;
- observing participants in the targeted locations to look for non-verbal responses and to examine their initial responses to the Research Questions; and
- canvassing the targeted communities and neighborhoods to look for unexpected things, events, and activities that may affect the research problem, questions, or outcome.

The researcher shared the project's title with all participants: "The Decline in Attendance at Local Churches in Queens, New York: A Biblically Based Strategic Revitalization Plan to Bring Local Churches Back to Spiritual Health." The Action Research principles recommend that the researcher incorporate open- and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed descriptions and interpretations of their experiences. The closed-ended questions provided data for statistical purposes.

The researcher used the credibility method of Action Research, which encourages the researcher to persistently engage with and observe participants in their neighborhoods and communities. She observed participants in everyday settings and examined various events and activities in their communities and neighborhoods.

Observing participants in their everyday settings allowed the researcher to use data triangulation (multiple sources) to enhance the project's credibility with the information from diverse groups. Multiple participants' perspectives allowed the researcher to understand the research problem and to identify and clarify ways participants perceived the research problem. Transferability is another step. It states that this project applied to participants in this study; however, the process may be relevant in other settings used by other researchers.

The researcher ensured the dependability of the project by focusing on the extent to which other researchers could trust that the researcher followed all the steps of Action Research. She used detailed descriptions of the steps taken and confirmed that every step described in this project occurred. For clarity, she categorized the data collected into distinct groups. Group A represented outdoor campaign participants aged eighteen to twenty-nine. Group B represented outdoor campaign participants aged thirty and older, and Group C participants were church leaders and congregation members.

The IRB did not approve data recording for outdoor campaign participants' interviews because it was unnecessary. The recording device for Group C participants was turned on at the beginning of each interview and off at the end after the researcher signaled that the completion time for the interview had elapsed. The information was subsequently analyzed, transcribed into typewritten notes in preparation for analysis and evaluation by the researcher, and stored securely.

After careful examination of the work involved in this research project and the participants associated with the project, no ethical issues existed. The researcher did not know the research participants before the initial contact for consent to participate in the project, and she did not initiate contact with Group C participants until after approval.

## Detailed Design of the Project

The researcher aimed to investigate the problem of the decline in attendance at local churches in Queens, New York. The primary research tool, a Survey, followed the Likert-style format and was designed to investigate church attendance, particularly among younger adults, people who do not attend church, and those who attended during their Sunday school years, completed Confirmation classes but stopped attending church after high school. Understanding the research problem and the relationship between participants and the problem enabled the researcher to implement a biblically based strategic revitalization plan to solve the problem.

The researcher discussed local churches and spaces within those churches where leaders could conduct interviews and other religious or secular activities and events. The Survey tool included questions about factors that attracted people to church, those that may have kept them from attending, and those that contributed to the attendance decline (Appendix A). The researcher contacted church leaders and discussed meeting places and the rationale and urgency of the project with them and received their approval to conduct the interviews.

The researcher addressed the challenges leaders face in attracting and retaining young adults in churches. She planned and initiated outdoor campaigns to meet and greet people in the targeted communities to discuss the attendance decline and factors that may have led to it. The information gathered from the discussions aided in formulating an approach to the quantitative data analysis. The researcher focused on the responses of all participants, particularly those in Groups A and B, for reactions that showed their comfort level and other facial expressions and body language when responding to the Research Questions.

The idea was to provide leaders with information about modernization and the lifestyles of the younger generations. The descriptiveness of the study allowed the researcher to gather

data that statistically identified trends and patterns among leaders who face ministry challenges and pastoral burnout. She identified many approaches that leaders can take to measure their success or failure in reaching and retaining new members, the return of those who had left the church, and community members' participation in the church.

Gathering information about modernization and the lifestyles of the younger generations provided new ways for leaders to attract and retain members. It also provided information that discussed why some members were attracted and continued attending church while others stopped attending. Based on some of the Research Questions, some leaders explained that the questions and responses emphasized the urgency of addressing the decline. They believe God's guidance and evangelism must be central to their strategic plans.

## Population and Participants

New York has five boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, and Staten Island. As the largest of the five boroughs, Queens stretches across one hundred seventy-eight square miles and has the second-largest population. The population of Queens is estimated to be 2,331,143 residents, with a population density of over twenty-one thousand people per square mile. Queens consists of people from across the globe with diverse backgrounds. Attendance decline at local churches in Queens was the primary criterion for selecting participants.

The researcher selected participants regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, background, or sexual orientation. Groups A and B participants included people who reside in the project's targeted communities and neighborhoods, eighteen years and older. For Group C, she focused on participants who are current pastors, deacons, and ministry leaders serving local churches in the targeted locations. The following section discusses the researcher and participants' relationship,

data collection and analysis, dependability, reliability, and validity of the data collected, instrumentation, and the Implementation of the Intervention Design.

## Researcher and Participants' Relationship

The researcher identified the targeted population, churches, communities, and neighborhoods through an Internet-based search for churches in Queens, New York. She categorized all participants into three Groups to clarify the Sample Questions and answers. Group A included outdoor campaign participants aged eighteen to twenty-nine and numbered eighty-eight, Group B included participants thirty years and older and numbered sixty, and Group C included church leaders, deacons, and congregation members, numbering fifty-two (Appendix B). She used a sampling frame to obtain a list of churches and selected Group C participants from that list.

Before the research project began, the researcher knew none of the participants. She contacted participants after receiving approval from the IRB, completion of the CITI course, and authorization from the faculty Mentor, Dr. Gary Moritz. She e-mailed a cover letter and Consent Form to participants in Group C to introduce herself, solicit their participation in the project, and obtain informed consent. The responses were positive, and several people agreed to participate in the project. She received signed copies of the Consent Forms from those participants for record-keeping.

The researcher discussed the Consent Form and the Survey tool with Groups A and B participants. The Consent Form was for information purposes only. She extracted the Research Questions for all participants from the Survey and conducted Zoom conferences and telephone interviews with participants in Group C. Participants responded to questions regarding attendance decline at local churches. A sample of the questions includes leadership roles, styles,

the younger generations, and member expectations and participation in church (Appendix A and B).

Given the constraints imposed on the discovery process due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the outdoor campaigns meet-and-greet proved challenging; however, the researcher gathered extensive data. She interviewed a combined total of two hundred participants in Groups A, B, and C. All outdoor campaign participants in Groups A and B acknowledged they were eighteen or older. Participants confirmed their age by responding "yes" when asked by the researcher.

All participants reside in local church communities and neighborhoods in Queens, New York. There were no risks to participants in this project. All participants voluntarily gave their consent to participate in the project. They responded to questions without fear of retribution due to the concealment of their identities. Ethical considerations restricted the researcher's use of the Survey results for the current project only.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The project discussed the research settings and explained the data collected and its recording method and protection. The researcher utilized a Likert-style model for the Survey tool that focused on participants' lifestyles, beliefs, and perceptions. She gained insight from the responses to the Research Questions that clarified the research problem. The Survey disclosed basic patterns and preferences among participants.

The Survey revealed that the decline could reverse if leaders focus on recruiting and retaining younger adults. Since the study was primarily descriptive, it identified commonalities and disclosed many ways of attracting and retaining new members. As part of the project's

protocol and to ensure that participants' information remained protected, all requests for anonymity and confidentiality were respected.

## Instrumentation

The researcher used the quantitative and qualitative approaches to this research project to uncover meaningful stories with deeper insights, enabling her to construct a narrative for significant informed decision-making. She utilized the exploratory research strategy to study the answers to the Research Questions in depth. The instrumentation step includes discussions arranged thematically on the Survey tool.

The researcher designed the study with a unique structure for interpreting the results. The unique structure included an introduction to the research project, a literature review section, the methodology, the results, and the conclusion. Each section explored materials regarding the decline in attendance at churches and revealed gaps or the lack of research regarding attendance decline at churches in Queens, New York. The literature review section discussed the findings of other researchers, and the results and conclusions sections discussed the data collected and evaluated and described the findings of a biblically based strategic revitalization plan to bring local churches back to spiritual health.

## Validity, Reliability, and Dependability of the Data Collected

The researcher identified and extracted themes from the data collected to determine which participating groups shared vital information on their beliefs and viewpoint regarding the research problem. She used parameters that eliminated bias and identified factors that influenced the result negatively and positively. She focused on the consistency of the Survey questions and responses. Data collection began in late October 2020 and concluded in February 2023.

Participants in Groups A and B responded to questions, provided answers, and made statements regarding their experience with pastors and congregation members of local churches in their communities and neighborhoods. Although the responses from participants in Groups A and B regarding leaders were negative, they proved valuable to the project's outcome. The negative responses enabled the researcher to examine church leaders' actions and relationships with members of their church's community. The responses also provided insight into leaders' challenges in recruiting and retaining younger members.

The researcher also explored Groups A and B participants' lifestyles, backgrounds, and opinions of local churches. Participants in Group C responded to questions and provided answers and statements about their experience as church leaders and the strategies they used to create programs and plan events, implement meaningful and workable plans, and other approaches to encourage change in their church to attract younger adults.

Young adults aged eighteen to twenty-nine provided extensive data regarding their perception of the church and its relevance to them. The data allowed the researcher to find meaningful solutions to the research problem. Group C participants' candor encouraged the researcher to narrow the study to focus on questions regarding the activities of leaders in their church's communities, methods they used to measure the success or failure of evangelistic strategies, programs implemented, and events planned.

The researcher examined and evaluated the data collected from all participants. The data seemed valid, and the researcher relied on it based on observation and the expected honesty of data sharing. However, there is no assurance of the integrity of these communications, even if they were purposely fabricated or genuinely omitted. In good faith, the researcher expected and relied on participants' genuine information sharing.

All participants met the criteria established by the researcher based on the research problem. The researcher prepared the questions and statements for each group to gather data about their perception of the church. The responses allowed the researcher to identify commonalities and fundamental patterns described in the data collected, and she relied on the data. There was specificity in church selection, as only some local churches in Queens, New York, were selected for this project.

The researcher interacted with participants in their communities and neighborhoods to observe them and documented their reactions to questions that may influence the research results. The questions include church growth, decline, member retention, the younger generations, evangelism, volunteerism, participation in church activities, and more (Appendix A). Selecting churches only in Queens, New York, demonstrated that local churches in Queens, New York, were the focus of this project.

The Survey responses showed similarities in answers across all Groups. The researcher relied on the truthfulness of all participants and believed the results because participants willingly shared their experiences, beliefs, views, and ideas. She explains that the data collected is believable, and the results could benefit ministry leaders seeking to reach young adults, stop attendance decline, grow their congregations, and understand people's perceptions of the church.

The effectiveness of the Survey revealed social and spiritual realities, appropriateness, and acceptance by participants in all Groups and may be relevant to people outside of this research project. The responses confirmed the principles and relevance of Action Research Cycles. Finally, the researcher interpreted the data, identify patterns in the answers among church leaders, and measured the information on variables of interest. Also, the systematic strategy enabled the participants to reflect on and willingly answer the Research Questions.

## Implementation of the Intervention Design

The researcher used open- and closed-ended questions recommended by the Action Research approach. The technique allowed participants to provide comprehensive data about themselves when responding to the open-ended questions, and the closed-ended questions provided data for statistical analysis. The researcher reviewed the steps of the intervention design and utilized a four-month trial period to interpret and discuss the data collected with the faculty Mentor. She explored, assessed, and considered the integrity of the answers and statements received from participants and their connection to the Research Questions.

Chapter 1 explained God's purpose for the church. It discussed historical biblical events that affirmed the church's relevance; however, considerable research revealed that the church has declined for many decades despite its relevancy. The life cycle of a church likewise indicates that churches and congregations lose their influence and social status. Chapter 2 is the literature review section. The researcher reviewed relevant literature that gave her a better understanding of the research problem in Queens, New York, and globally.

The researcher studied the literature and analyzed the data received to find a solution to the research problem. The findings unveiled strategies that leaders could utilize to reverse the attendance decline. The strategies included but were not limited to revitalization and renewal, expanding the recruitment process to include the younger generations, including all people within the local church's communities and neighborhoods, addressing the perceived generational divide, and an initiative-taking leadership standpoint.

Chapter 3 clarifies the Intervention Design and the Implementation of the Intervention Design. The researcher documented the Action Research approach in this chapter. Chapter 4 described and summarized the research results. A comprehensive review and literature analysis

revealed practical solutions to reverse the decline if church leaders accept the younger generations, train them, and give them leadership roles because they also receive gifts from and are called by God.

In addition, Chapter 4 showed that leaders could refocus their vision and mission for their church, their leadership style, evangelism efforts, communication with church members and the church's communities and neighborhoods and capitalize on recruiting children of existing members. The outdoor campaigns allowed the researcher to observe and become acquainted with the residents who agreed to participate in this project and those who showed interest in attending church (Appendix B).

Chapter 5 discussed the conclusion. It explained the findings and summarized a biblically based strategic revitalization plan to bring local churches back to spiritual health as follows: revival and renewal strategies, the importance of evangelism, cultural differences, utilizing spiritual gifts, and young adults. Chapter 5 also discussed application of the results to other settings, recommendations for future research, and comparative studies. The comparative analysis section explained that the results could apply to other research settings. The researcher recommended future research because of the lack of prior research on attendance decline at local churches in Queens, New York.

The findings in this project could encourage leaders to concentrate on renewing their evangelistic strategies, addressing the younger generations perceived generational differences, low recruitment rate, focusing on the non-recruitment of families of existing members, and the inadequacy or absence of modern technology. It discussed statistical reports that showed communities and neighborhoods in Queens, New York, had grown and moved on as the population changed.

The researcher's conclusions suggest that local churches may struggle to keep up with their community's growth. Financial hardship may have also contributed to the decline. The church's inability to pay pastors, building maintenance, and events that may attract new members could be motivators for attendance decline. Finally, the inflow of new converts from the younger generations and new strategies may curb the financial hardships that declining churches experience.

## Chapter 4: Results

The project produced varied results from the younger and older generations regarding the decline in attendance at local churches in Queens, New York. However, articles and books written by Dreyer, Bruce and Glendinning, and research conducted by the Barna Group, Kinnaman and Lyons, and this project, supported findings that recruiting, retaining, and equipping younger adults for ministry work could reverse attendance decline and lead to flourishing congregations.[1]

Although this project focused on local churches in Queens, New York, the results could benefit churches worldwide because the church is a sanctuary established in communities and neighborhoods where people gather for social support and spiritual guidance. The decline had been evident before the Coronavirus pandemic. It had been ongoing for decades, and church closures had become a global trend.[2]

The devastation caused by the pandemic had negative and positive effects on the church. Positive because it motivated leaders to explore and utilize social media platforms to conduct worship services virtually. By conducting worship services virtually over social media platforms, church leaders witnessed an increase in attendance as members who could not attend in-person services attended virtually, thereby increasing the attendance rate. The pandemic has negatively affected people worldwide because of the many lives lost (Appendix D and E).

The increase in attendance during the pandemic's peak demonstrate that leaders can conduct worship services in person, virtually, or through a combination of the two (Appendix D

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[1] Bruce, and Glendinning, "When Was Secularization" 107-8.

[2] Krahn, From Surviving to Thriving, 14-15.

and E). The pandemic-induced increase in attendance suggests that a solution to the decline problem may already exist (Appendix B, D, and E).[3] The results indicated that the pandemic may have uncovered a practical solution to the research problem by motivating leaders of institutions and organizations worldwide to conduct business, school, and worship services virtually using social media platforms.

In times of crisis, people seek comfort from the church's togetherness. All fifty-two leaders and congregation members in Group C agreed that church attendance increased during the pandemic (Appendix B). For example, Pew Research reported in July 2020 that thirteen percent of adults in the United States attended in-person worship services in February 2020, shortly before the pandemic began. A new report from Pew Research revealed that attendance increased by four percent in March 2021, reaching seventeen percent.

By September 2021, attendance increased by nine percent, bringing the total to twenty-six percent; however, in 2022, the percentage rate increase began to decline. Pew Research reported an increase of only one percent in 2022.[4] Likewise, the Barna Group explained that most churches experienced a pandemic-induced increase in attendance (Appendix D and E).[5] The consensus is that church attendance increases during challenging times as people turn to the church for material support and spiritual guidance. According to the Barna Group, attendance by Millennials increased from twenty-one percent in 2019 to thirty-nine percent in 2020.

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[3] Herd, "Transitioning," 94-98.

[4] "Attendance," Pew Research Center, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015), accessed February 3, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/22/more-houses-of-worship-are-returning-to-normal-operations-but-in-person-attendance-is-unchanged-since-fall/.

[5] "Church Attendance," Faith and Christianity, Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, February 4, 2022, accessed February 3, 2023, https://www.barna.com/research/church-attendance-2022/.

The pandemic-induced attendance rate for Generation X increased from twenty-four percent in 2019 to thirty-two percent in 2020, while the numbers for Boomers decreased from thirty-one percent in 2020 to twenty-five percent in 2022 (Appendix E).[6] Reports from the Barna Group, Pew Research, and this project indicate that individuals seek reassurance from the church during uncertain times.[7] Additionally, the Barna Group reported that a recent decline began in 2021. The Group suggests that unknown factors may have contributed to the recent decline.[8]

Pew Research, the Barna Group, and Gallup completed their research in March 2021 and point out that church membership in the United States plunged below fifty percent for the first time.[9] Church membership has steadily declined for decades and has reached an all-time low. Gallup found that Americans who attended church or belonged to a religious institution dropped from seventy percent (70%) to fifty percent (50%).[10]

Researchers at Gallup believe the decline began six decades ago and has continued. They found that membership increased by sixty-two percent (62%) between 2008 and 2010 and by forty-nine percent (49%) between 2018 and 2020. The data from Gallup revealed a connection between attendance decline and the number of young Americans who do not affiliate with a religious institution.[11]

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[6] "Church Attendance," Faith and Christianity, 2022.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Jeffrey M. Jones, Gallup, Inc., accessed February 18, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx.

[10] Jones, Gallup, "Church Membership," 2022.

[11] Ibid.

An increasing number of young Americans are less interested in the Christian Church. Gallup found that sixty-six percent (66%) of the older generations attend worship services or affiliate with a religious institution.[12] Dreyer and Kinnaman and Lyons agree with the findings of Gallup and add that fifty-eight percent (58%) of the younger generations (Generation X and Millennials) do not attend church or belong to religious institutions.[13]

Populations worldwide have increased and many younger adults who do not belong to religious institutions have assumed their place in society. Revitalization experts believe that change in church attendance occur with changing circumstances as people attend worship service during uncertain times and cease to do so otherwise. There is an apparent generational gap. The younger generations' absence from church significantly affected attendance.[14]

The researcher interviewed and evaluated seven local church leaders, their church, and members of their congregations of different denominations as the pandemic slowed and lingered. Like the revitalization experts, she found that considerable change in church attendance occur with changing circumstances, and people attend worship service depending on their situation and stop at their discretion, another contributor to attendance decline.

Before the pandemic, the average number of congregants attending Sunday worship services in Queens, New York, numbered ten to thirty members. During the pandemic, that number grew to over fifty members for many churches due to virtual worship services. The increased numbers indicate there is a solution to the decline. Virtual church services allowed sick

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[12] Jones, Gallup, "Church Membership," 2022.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

and shut-in members and younger adults to attend worship services. Using virtual media platforms for church services is beneficial for the church.

In most instances, the temporary suspension of in-person worship services hindered communication among worshippers and proved difficult for members who usually embrace each other at in-person services. Leaders anticipate the return to be a slow process as new variants of the Coronavirus continue to emerge. However, the anticipation of returning to in-person worship services may encourage members, their families, and friends to return to gathering and fellowship in the sanctuary with excitement and renewed hope.

Christians have always viewed Christianity, the Christian Church, and the story of Christ with amazement and hope. Threatening to the Christian Church is that many researchers reported that individuals under twenty-nine viewed the church differently in recent decades and did not attend church regularly. Using social media platforms to conduct worship service virtually revealed that it is possible to motivate younger individuals to attend worship services by maintaining online access after the sanctuary has restarted in-person worship.

In the Twenty-first century, people view the Christian Church differently than their ancestors, especially the younger generations who struggle to understand the story of Christ and the church's relevance. Some are irregular churchgoers, and others have left the church after high school. Beliefs and values have shifted, alienating people from the central message of Christianity, particularly the younger generations whose values do not align with those prescribed by Jesus Christ.

Christ's philosophy and the significance of the Christian Church have lost their impact on young adults who believe the church is a historical institution. The younger generations believe in and seek independence to live unique lifestyles that include the self, and they make lifestyle

decisions that challenge the older generations. The younger generations do not believe in loving their neighbors as themselves, find the church's tradition and culture tedious, boring, and tiresome, and are not motivated to become members (Appendix B).

Young adults are unashamed to express their views. They do not attend church because they believe it is a lifestyle choice. The findings of this project described a fraction of the younger generations. Samplings indicate that the younger participants felt alienated from the church due to the older generations' critical behavior and mistrust of them. It gives them the sense that the church is not essential to their lives. They believe the behavior of the older generations toward the younger generations would have been positive if the older generations believed in Christ's philosophy and the relevance of the Christian Church.

The church is relevant, the gospel is all-inclusive, and believers must share it with all people. Leaders can invite younger adults to church by establishing and developing intentional social relationships with them in their communities and neighborhoods. The younger adults can then invite members of their families and friends to church. The watching world desire leaders of the Christian Church to recruit new members and grow disciples.

The perspective and opinions of younger adults are crucial and could benefit the church. The older generations could suggest changes that will involve the younger generations. They can pass on to the younger generations their experience, skills, and knowledge gained from preceding generations. For instance, they can offer and recommend changes that could positively influence the church's functions and inspire the younger generations to attend church and utilize their spiritual gifts and technological skills in the church.

The younger participants' response to this project's Research Questions regarding local churches in the targeted communities and neighborhoods are beliefs, perceptions, trends, and

themes. They indicates that views and opinions differ across generations. People from one generation have different lifestyle choices and make different life decisions than those from the previous or future generation. The decline could halt and reverse in Queens, New York, and globally if leaders intentionally reach the younger adults. In their efforts, leaders may want to consider the following:

- improving the image and environment of churches to make them attractive, appealing, and exciting to younger adults;
- including music and hymns suitable to younger adults;
- adding youth sermons that contextualize and effectively communicate the relevance of God's word, the resurrected Christ, and the Christian Church;
- focusing on modernization with focus groups and think tanks that involve younger adults;
- explaining the liturgy and the different areas in the sanctuary to younger adults; for example, younger adults may not be familiar with the liturgy or the names of specific areas in the church aside from the pews;
- involving their church's community by holding events in the church's fellowship halls to allow people to socialize;
- creating an environment to meet the needs of diverse groups in the church's community, specifically targeting younger adults and people with specific needs; for example, American Sign Language (ASL) and wheelchair accessibility;
- creating ministries to specifically address the church's culture, diversity, and particular interest to engage people to build relationships and widen the church's scope in communities and neighborhoods;

- hosting religious and secular events in the church's building and create space to accommodate those events, space that do not give people the feeling of being at church during those events;
- including younger speakers, singers, and performers to draw younger listeners of and hearers of music in general to the gospel, its message, and to become members of the church; and
- teaching and equipping younger listeners and hearers of the gospel to be role models for future generations.

If the older generations cease being judgmental, critical, and entitled church members, many younger adults may consider becoming church members and seeking leadership roles. Leaders have the opportunity and should not hesitate to approach younger adults and invite them to worship services, activities, and events at their local church.

When asked about their comfort level during worship services if or when they attend church, seventy-five participants (85%) from Group A felt uncomfortable. Eleven percent (11%) felt nervous, and three percent (3%) felt anxious. Among participants who were not local church members, fifty participants (56%) said they would give their local church a good rating, forty-five participants (51%) were interested in and believed they would enjoy fellowship, and thirty-eight percent (38%) would enjoy worship service.

Eighty participants (91%) believe leaders could try to improve the church's image to blend in with their communities, while over six percent (6%) express that the church could have a more "homey vibe." Thirty-eight participants (43%) believe leaders could encourage younger adults to attend church by inviting them, and thirty-six participants (41%) believe church leaders

must be visible in their communities, meeting their neighbors and introducing or reintroducing themselves and their church.

Many of Group A participants explained that they were not current church members. Additionally, seventy-three participants (82%) would attend worship services weekly if they had leadership roles. Despite the state of the church and the low attendance rate, forty-three participants (71%) would consider recommending their local church to friends and family if they become members. The researcher learned that eighty-six percent (86%) of Group A participants are life-long community members, and one participant explained that his family had moved to another location, and he was visiting cousins.

Another participant said her family are third- and fourth-generation community members. Considering God's plan to reconcile with humanity, the responses to church attendance are frightening. Sixty-five participants (73%) responded that they did not attend church, and twenty-three (26%) did not answer the questions. The church must grow its membership (Matt 18-20; Gen 1:28; 12:3; Isa 11:9). The current lack of growth in the church could affect God's plan. God commanded people to spread the gospel worldwide to share its good news, increase membership in the church, and grow and groom disciples.

Eighty-five participants (96%) would attend worship services each week. Likewise, eighty-five percent (85%) are interested in children's ministry, and fifty-one percent (51%) are interested in Bible study. Like Group A participants, eighty-one percent (81%) of Group B participants want church leaders to improve their church's image to make it appealing. They want to see leaders interacting with members of the church's community, introducing themselves to members of the community, and re-introducing the church in new ways.

Many studies discuss the lamentation of the younger generations and their absence from the body of Christ. The deficiency in membership does not reflect Christ's teachings. God's plan includes all people, not just a particular group. In his ministry, Jesus emphasized the inclusiveness of God's plan in all aspects inside and outside of the church. Stories after stories in the Bible show Jesus helping and encouraging people to see God in everyone and everything and to put differences aside. He described all of humanity as God's people. The church must grow.

Local churches in Queens, New York, are not meeting God's mandate to make disciples and grow the church. God included all people in his plan (John 3:16). Many churches lack inclusiveness. As seen among local churches, diversity is missing or, at a minimum, challenging. Most church communities house diverse groups of people, yet research findings and statistics disclose the non-inclusiveness at many churches. They seem to operate in cliques; they do not include all people.

Leaders must take God's word seriously, correct the spiritual deficit, and improve the current state of the church. In Jesus' ministry, he emphasized growth in the body of Christ. Jesus used parables, actual situations, events, and conditions to demonstrate God's inclusiveness. For instance, the commandments suggest inclusiveness. Christ healed a demon-possessed man; engaged in a discourse with a Samaritan woman (unheard of in his time); healed a man sick with leprosy; and proved that ethnicity, race, physical or mental conditions, or ailments do not matter; because with God, anything is possible (Matt 19:17; Mark 5:1-10; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:12-13; John 4:1-42, 1:40-45).

Some younger participants acknowledged that they do not understand Christ's philosophy and believe discipleship-making is unbalanced in the Christian Church. Fifty percent (50%) of Group B participants believe the church is an excellent place to fellowship, and sixty-six percent

(66%) considered becoming leaders. Like Group A participants, sixty-six percent (66%) of Group B participants said they would attend worship services weekly, virtually, or in-person if they had leadership roles. They believe listening to, understanding, and learning from the gospel's message gives them peace and hope.

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of Group B participants are interested in amenities at church before or after worship services. While fifty-six percent (56%) want to socialize, fifty percent (50%) want leaders to concentrate on missionary work. It is worth repeating that leaders teach according to Matthew 28:19-20: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt 28:19-20).

Prayer is a meaningful and intentional way to experience or establish a relationship with God. Jesus Christ expects his followers to communicate through prayers with God, himself, and the Holy Spirit. They are encouraged to bring their problems and challenges to God and ask for forgiveness, help, and guidance. Jesus asked believers to pray to God for everything in life. Early Christian believers were unsatisfied with only hearing God's truth; they acted on it. They used apostolic teachings that transformed people's lives. Leaders must prayerfully seek God. The current state of the church implies that God is not central in the Modern Church.

Recall what Jesus said in response to unbelief, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it

because it had been well built" (Luke 6:46-48, NRSV). Leaders must build from the foundation, their inner core.

One hundred percent (100%) of Group C participants agreed that they must be visible and interact in their church's communities and neighborhoods, encourage members to invite friends and families to church, create an inviting atmosphere in the church, and accept younger adults "just as they are," particularly Millennials and Generation Zs who are cynical about Christianity and the Christian Church. In his ministry, Jesus emphasized inclusiveness through his actions. The reason God commanded people to spread the gospel across the world is to increase membership in the Christian Church, a membership that includes all people.

Over eighty-eight percent (88%) of Group C participants agree that the most challenging areas in their church are low attendance rates, making disciples, and creating new ministries. It was surprising to hear and observe that ninety-five (95%) of leaders pray constantly and not one hundred percent; however, they all believe they are ministering according to God's call. Ninety-four percent (94%) point out that they have confidence, trust, and respect for their council members; likewise, ninety percent (90%) of council members feel the same towards their leaders.

Additionally, one hundred (100%) of leaders are confident that their church's mission commitment is on par, and one hundred (100%) believe and acknowledge that God wants them to serve all people. However, only ninety-six (96%) would openly welcome the LGBTQIA+ community in their church. The remaining four percent (4%) will not turn them away, but the invitation is not fully open to them. There are many church leaders who take a traditional view of God's law in the Old Testament.

Although Jesus Christ came to earth to represent God the Father and introduce the New Testament and its inclusive nature, some leaders hold on to their traditional views, leaving people who struggle with sexuality and gender issues feeling excluded from God's plan. Sadly, those people face fear and condemnation. God's people must all strive to be more inclusive and loving towards all people and as one people—God's people—one nation—God's kingdom nation—with the opportunity for one destination: eternal life in God's kingdom.

(Participants responded in groups for some Sample Questions and Answers)

See Appendix B for the Percentage Breakdown

Group A

Outdoor Campaigns Sample Questions and Answers

Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-nine Years

Are you a member of a church?

No.

What concerns would you like the church to address?

Ask for our opinion.

What would you like the church to do for you?

We want a welcoming environment where we can approach people without feeling judged.

What do you think about this project?

The project is overdue because no one has ever approached us to ask about our feelings about the church or what we would like the church to do for us.

What would you expect from a congregation, either as a new or returning member?

We would expect the church to welcome and show us things/programs that interest us, not just Sunday school, Confirmation class, or Bible study.

How would you describe God's work in your community?

I believe in God and know he works in our community, but we do not get that feeling when we think about the church.

How important is the church to you?

The church plays a vital role in our lives.

Who or what is your go-to spiritual source?

I do not have one.

What would you expect from the pastors/leaders of a church?

I would expect them to listen and give us advice, a chance.

Most young people grew up in church and left after high school.

Why did you leave the church after high school?

There is nothing there for us. There are no scholarships to help with school costs or nothing to do; most of our friends feel the same way.

How has the Coronavirus pandemic affected your thoughts and feelings about the church?

I feel sad, like my back is against a wall and has nowhere to turn. Do you know that feeling? I don't feel comfortable about calling the church in my area.

We don't feel comfortable calling the church.

Covid was devastating, but it became frightening when people died in record numbers.

How would you describe a negative or positive experience at your local church?

Take, for example, COVID. I do not have many friends who could say the church offered them anything, a word of comfort or reassurance.

What is your relationship like with church leaders?

I do not know them.

We see them sometimes, but we do not know them.

We never attended.

What would make you feel like your local church meets your/the community's needs?

I don't know.

What would church leaders have to do to make you feel the church is meeting your needs and that of your community?

Create an exciting and inviting environment.

Why do you think the church exists in your community?

The church exists in communities to meet the spiritual and social needs of the people.

Have you visited a church recently or in the past?

I believe once or twice in the past.

What would make you consider attending church again?

"I/We" want an open invitation to come as "I/we am/are."

Can you describe a change you would like to see in the church?

Changes where they treat young people respectfully could make us feel like we belong.

What do you think about the music choices in a church you have attended?

The music should be updated.

I don't know the words to some.

Sometimes the church seems solemn, like a funeral.

Group B

Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers

Older Adults Thirty and Older

What do you expect from the church?

Fellowship.

A spiritual connection with God.

Would you like the pastor to visit you regularly?

Yes.

How often would you like someone to visit you?

At least once a month.

Do you prefer a telephone call?

Yes.

Do you feel connected to the church? If yes, in what way?

Yes.

Do you have any problems attending worship services?

Yes.

No.

How often do you attend worship?

Once a month.

Twice a month.

Would you prefer a traditional service? Or a contemporary one?

Traditional.

Contemporary.

Would you be interested in transportation to and from church?"

Yes.

What is your opinion on the perceived generational gap in the church?

No response.

Are you aware that the younger generations believe the older generations do not accept their life choices?

Yes.

Do you struggle with accepting the younger generations in church?

Sometimes.

Group C

Sample Questions and Answers

Interviews with Leaders and Congregants

Do you have an unobstructed vision of your church? If so, what is your vision?

Yes, I have a vision for my church.

What do you mean by functionality is as good as expected?

No answer.

Have you groomed and equipped disciples?

Yes, we have groomed and equipped disciples.

How many have sought leadership roles in the church?

Two.

Should you be aware of the role the disciples you have groomed and equipped play in the church?

Yes.

What do you think motivates young people to leave the church after high school?

I don't know.

Is there a visible place in the church for young people??

Yes.

Are there roles for young people in the church?

No.

What advice would you give another church leader on grooming and equipping disciples?

Focus on young adults.

Do you have a strategy to ensure your church is healthy and consistently growing?

Yes.

How do you describe your relationship with your church's community?

I can't; it's a challenge.

What do church leaders you associate with think about the decline?

We do not discuss it.

What do you expect from other leaders of the church?

Their church's vision, mission, and focus on the risen Christ.

What about Sunday school?

Some churches are dropping their Sunday school programs and seeking other ways to groom young people.

Do you have a Sunday school program at your church?

No.

We have a Youth Ministry program.

## Summary

**A biblically based strategic revitalization plan to bring local churches back to a healthy state.**

Strategic planning in organizations and institutions is vital. Aubrey Malphurs explains that "[s]trategic planning is a fourfold process to appoint leaders who continually work with teams. [The process allow] leaders and their [team members] to envision or re-envision strateg[ies] to [restructure their] organization, institution, or company. [They could re-develop] a compelling vision, discover [their] core values, and craft strategies [to] implement unique, authentic models."[15]

Strategic planning is critical because it provides measured directions and reveals differences in an institution, organization, or company's efficacy approach.[16] A strategic plan discloses the significance of executing plans that enable leaders to identify problems and ask questions.[17] Strategic plans clarify the mission, vision, and procedures to help leaders gain and maintain focus on their mission and vision.

Malphurs points out that "strategic planning is a process that involves crucial alignment of several factors, such as [a company, organization, or institution's] values and mission," and

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[15] Aubrey Malphurs, Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 26.

[16] Malphurs, Advanced Strategic Planning, 26.

[17] Ibid., 27.

assists leaders in establishing methods that could lead to success.[18] Acknowledging that strategic planning is biblical, God is a supernatural strategic planner. Look at creation: a perfect plan, a massive undertaking, and flawless time management. A wise builder creates a plan, an example for all leaders to imitate.

Malphurs believes strategic planning enables leaders to find their institution, company, or organization's strengths, limitations, and weaknesses. He writes that to achieve effectiveness, leaders must first realize their company, organization, or institution's strength and weakness and lay out a basis to emphasize the strength and target the weakness, encourage communication, build trust, gather team players, clarify the leader's God-given vision and mission plan, and communicate an inspiring and stimulating mission centered on team players and prevailing support and guidance.[19]

**Congregational Theology, change, and Culture**

Craig L. Nessan warns leaders that "failure to reflect carefully on the entire scope of their ministry can leave congregations ill-equipped to engage in the mission God sets before it."[20] He agrees with Green that it is difficult to recapture the dynamics inherent of the early Christians' zeal for the risen Christ.[21] He believes "it is essential to communicate the role of a particular congregation in ministry" and points out the necessity to learn how congregations perform the work of the ministry.[22]

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[18] Malphurs, Advanced Strategic Planning, 27.

[19] Ibid., 34-37.

[20] Craig L. Nessan, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 1.

[21] Nessan, Beyond Maintenance, 3-5.

[22] Ibid.

Nessan believes that inviting church members to consider leading a ministry can motivate them to ask the right questions about their congregation's identity and mission.[23] Congregation members can ask questions about their church's most significant tasks of making disciples and their role regarding stewardship so they could plan and responsibly oversee their resources. An informed congregation can be more productive and open to change and diverse needs.

Malphurs argues that change is at the heart of Christianity and suggests that the word transformation be used instead of change.[24] He explains that since every Christian's goal is transformation, ways of accomplishing it must change.[25] He points out that congregations exist in mixed cultures and cultural influences affect the life of a congregation globally, locally, or regionally.[26] He believes the word transform would be best if used.

The researcher discovered that congregational change and diverse cultures are the two most significant challenges to overcome in ministry. Many experts discussed the challenges and hindrances that change and cultural diversity ushers in that can affect strategic planning. It is often difficult for congregations to accept change. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile suggest that leaders consider the life cycle of their church when deciding on congregational participation in diverse cultural situations in the church. God expects the unity of humanity through the Spirit, and it must be observable in the church among all people.[27]

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[23] Nessan, Beyond Maintenance, 1, 3.

[24] Malphurs, Advanced Strategic Planning, 70.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Nessan, Beyond Maintenance, 18.

[27] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, Foreword by Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping The Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 139.

Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk believe that navigating the challenges of change and transition is complicated. They argue that "congregation[s] can transform into missional communit[ies]; there is no need to remain in a cycle of growth, plateau, and decline because there are innovative ways to create missional identity and awareness."[28] Therefore, clarity is necessary for the health of congregations.

**The gospel**

The gospel clarifies God's covenant faithfulness to all people. The power of God's Spirit is always on display for all to see and wonder. It encompasses the entire universe. Some people may say things are impossible, but with God, anything and all things are possible. At the core of the gospel's message lies the foundation of God's mission in the world and God's grand plan of forgiveness. Nessan believes the "language Jesus used to describe God and God's activities, especially in his parables, [clarified] God's continuing involvement in the world today" and emphasizes the relevance of the Christian Church.[29]

Nessan points out that "the Holy Spirit [discloses] the catholicity of the [Christian Church] that breaks the barriers of language, ethnicity, nationality, and conventionally and enlivens humanity's understanding to unite all those gathered into one catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ."[30] Catholicity signifies universality and inclusiveness everywhere and for all people.[31] Christ's followers must share the gospel with all people in all corners of the earth.

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[28] Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk. Foreword by Eddie Gibbs. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

[29] Nessan, Beyond Maintenance, 29.

[30] Ibid., 128-29.

[31] "Catholicity," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catholicity, accessed March 4, 2023.

The gospel has transformative powers that can alter people's lives. Mark S. Hanson writes that generations after generations proclaimed the gospel's message that called the Christian Church to action.[32] The gospel encourages action. Hanson states that every generation has proclaimed the gospel's message—the unimaginable sacrifice God made to demonstrate unconditional love for all people.[33] The Apostle Paul was bursting with excitement when he described his call and announced that he wanted to share some spiritual gift to strengthen people's faith and encourage them (Rom 1:11-12, NRSV).[34]

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[32] Mark S. Hanson, Foreword. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder Eds., *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 26.

[33] Hanson and Bliese, *The Evangelizing Church*, 28-29.

[34] Ibid.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter 5 is the conclusion of this project and discusses a biblically based strategic revitalization plan to bring local churches back to spiritual health. The researcher agrees with prior investigations that churches have declined for many decades. The consensus is that the lack of evangelism, low recruitment rate, and a perceived generational gap played a significant role in the decline.[35] Also, the younger generations infrequently attend worship services; they are absent for Sunday worship (Appendix B, D, and E). Further, many members of declining congregations acknowledged they had not invited their family, neighbors, and friends to worship services with them (Appendix B).

Leaders could make the challenges of attendance decline a priority. Strategic plans to reach the younger generations and a commitment to utilizing social media to improve attendance and stop the decline are necessary. Additionally, leaders could seek, activate, and deploy younger adults as a recruitment strategy while implementing and developing social and digital media strategies to attract, encourage, and retain them. The motivation of members to invite families and friends outside the church is another option to reverse the decline.

Statistics provided by research groups suggest that using social networking for evangelism and outreach strategies is the key to maintaining contact with sick and shut-in members.[36] The pandemic has spawned a movement toward permanently implementing social media in institutions and organizations to conduct virtual business over Zoom or other video-conferencing platforms. Maintaining an online presence for worship services could increase

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[35] Bruce, and Glendinning, "When Was Secularization" 107-8.

[36] Jones, Gallup, "Church Membership," 2022.

attendance (Appendix B).[37] Conducting worship services using modern technology has proven effective and is likely to continue and increase virtual attendance.

Insufficient numbers necessitate new members, ideas, and partnerships for local churches. Leaders may want to involve congregation members in discussions regarding attendance decline by scheduling regular congregational meetings and developing retention strategies. During those meetings, they must clarify problems within the church and be transparent regarding the functions of the church. Some leaders agree they must focus more on congregational meetings to communicate the church's functions, accomplishments, success, and the needs of people in their communities and neighborhoods (Appendix B).

Involving congregants in discussions regarding the operations of their church may prepare them to accept change and overcome its challenges. Leaders may want to address the problem of young adults leaving the church after high school. Considerable studies have shown that younger adults lose interest in the church and leave to pursue alternative lifestyles that exclude the Christian Church and the risen Christ.[38] Leaders beware that tools exist to assist in implementing and developing ministries aimed at spiritual and numerical growth and member retention.

Leaders must implement programs with a theological basis to foster positive attitudes toward growth, investigate growth assumptions, and utilize growth strategies. They could seek assistance from church renewal and revitalization experts. As suggested by Clifford Herd, leaders can experiment with social media and virtual services to keep their church functioning

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[37] " Church Attendance," Faith and Christianity, Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, February 4, 2022, accessed February 3, 2023, https://www.barna.com/research/church-attendance-2022/.

[38] Niemelä, "'No Longer Believing,'" 173.

and thriving.[39] As the decline continues, leaders may wish to reassure congregants experiencing genuine feelings of loss. Some members may miss those who may have stopped attending church, and for others, those who are ill or deceased.

Additionally, leaders may want to pay special attention to church and community members who express their concerns and feelings of loss. They could implement strategic plans, programs, and events to boost morale at their church. Group or individual pastoral discussion sessions may encourage church members to act and share their renewed confidence in their local church with family and friends. The revived enthusiasm could inspire members to share their church's mission and vision and what it could accomplish in their communities and neighborhoods.

As churches begin to grow, leaders may want to hire professionals in self-care to provide information sessions to church and community members coping with demanding situations due to losing members to the Coronavirus. Worship, Sunday school, and other programs and activities in the sanctuary can regain vigor and vitality as the decline problem reverses. In addition, leaders may approach the reversal of the decline with an intentional follow-up strategy, maintain contact with absent members, teach the gospel, and establish new ministries.

Leaders of Sunday school programs could reorganize and implement new strategies that interest children. They could create and maintain a plan to recruit Sunday school teachers and encourage support and input from other staff members. They can devise plans to examine their communities and surrounding neighborhoods anew to keep them informed about the church's purpose in their communities. Further, leaders may want to plan Bible study with specific

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[39] Herd, "Transitioning," 94-98.

materials that examine biblical heroes, women, and children and references to biblical personalities relevant to all age groups.

A well-known author recommended small-group ministries. This study suggests that a biblically based strategic revitalization plan may restore the spiritual health at churches in Queens, New York. Small-group ministries can infuse the church with new life and growth and increase attendance and revenue. The lack of technology, unclear spiritual vision, disjointed systems, and a dispersed staff may have also affected the decline.

Christ provided leadership roles and equipped leaders for every aspect of the church. Issues that affect the church's functioning are apparent before they are recognized, such as low morale, financial deficit, internal conflicts, division or cliques, and the lack of prayers for God's guidance (John 15:16, 2 Tim 1:9, NRSV). The enthusiasm for evangelism, or lack thereof, communicates to the world that the Christian Church failed to spread the "good news" of the gospel.[40] The gospel provides hope, especially in times of strife and uncertainty. It is needed now more than ever.

Pastoral burnout is real. Church leadership is an arduous task but not new. Pastoral burnout and ministry challenges are significant issues facing leaders of the Christian Church, pushing pastors to quit full-time ministry. The Bible prescribed the problem of pastoral burnout, ministry challenges, and the solution to them.

The apostle Paul experienced burnout. He said, "[t]hree times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own

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[40] Green, *Evangelism*, 289.

people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches" (Cor 11:25-28, NRSV).

The difference between Jesus' disciples and the Modern Church's ministers is that Jesus' disciples did not quit. Pastors should expect pastoral burnout and embrace pastoral care. They may want to implement new ways to combat burnout. Pastoral care must provide for burnout. The prophet Elijah experienced burnout, and God stepped in and admonished him to return to what he was doing in the wilderness of Damascus (1 King 19:15, NRSV). Quitting a full-time ministry is not an option. God's call to ministry is a life-long process.

Scripture suggests that church leaders must not burden themselves with the challenges of ministry. Instead, God encourages all weary and carrying heavy burdens to come to him, and he will give them rest (Matt 11:28-30, NRSV). God suggests that ministers who suffer burnout turn to Him for support. He said, "[t]ake my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30, NRSV).

Paul suggests leaders do "not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; and persevere in prayer. He said to contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers; bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them; rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep; live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly, do not be wiser than you are and to repay no one evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Rom 12:11-17, NRSV).

## Revival and Renewal Strategies

Brian Croft argues that the Bible encourages church revitalization and provides three principles for leaders seeking the revitalization process.[41] He believes the objective is the church's health, not growth, and suggests that leaders focus on the health of their church, not on statistical growth, because statistical growth is not the objective of church revitalization but an expected consequence along with change and restoration.[42]

Croft cites Acts 6:7, explaining that the Word of God is spiritual vitality. He writes that "spiritual vitality produces functional growth in the church, evidenced by prayer, worship, evangelism, and discipleship making."[43] He believes the revitalization approach is the apostolic model to turn churches around because it is God's word and the power of the gospel.[44] He points out that the apostolic model of revitalization rests on the truth that God's spirit works through God's word to bring spiritual life to churches.[45]

Croft proposes that leaders seek the biblical approach that advocates for churches to be appealing for specific scriptural reasons.[46] He believes those specific scriptural reasons include, but is not limited to, enthusiasm, biblical preaching, loving one another, sacrificial fellowship, practical gospel application, zealous soul care, intentional evangelism, and authentic Christ-like

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[41] Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions For Dying & Divided Churches* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2016), 8-10.

[42] Croft, Biblical Church Revitalization, 8-10.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

lifestyles.[47] He believes God breathes life where there is no life and unity where there is enmity. God is not central in divided, declining, and dying churches.[48]

Croft explains that the centrality of God's word, intentional prayer, and gospel application essential for leaders who lead declining and dying churches because the gospel revealed in and through God's Word shows that church renewal and growth can only come from God.[49] Alvin I. Reid agrees with the findings that church leaders are not reaching the younger generations. He explains that "prayer matters, and young people could learn how to communicate with God personally;" they need guidance from church leaders and the older generations.[50]

## The Importance of Evangelism

Greg Stier points out that in the book of Acts, "the spirit of God enabled leaders of the early church to live and preach the truth that Jesus had modeled for them over the previous three and a half years.[51] He explains that God enable leaders of the Christian Church to live the Christian lifestyle and preach the truth of the gospel. He believes the Apostle Paul preached relational evangelism, an approach that believers of the faith used to build friendships and relationships with unbelievers to share the gospel.[52]

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[47] Croft, Biblical Church Revitalization, 24-30.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 52-59.

[50] Alvin I. Reid, Foreword by Josh M. McDowell, *Raising The Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 31.

[51] Greg Stier, *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*, Forward by Doug Fields (Arvada, CO: A D2S Publishing, 2015), 81.

[52] Stier, Gospelize Your Youth Ministry, 84.

The Bible shows that Christ's disciples emulate his life, work, and ministry. They used Christ as a model for Christian work, life, and living. Leaders must preach God's truth and make disciples. Leaders that struggle with their vocation must seek God to clarify their call because it is good for the heart to be strengthened by God's grace (Hebrews 13:9, NRSV). Additionally, Stier reminds people that Christ provides hope for all who have faith in him.[53]

## Cultural Differences

Some church leaders may have contributed to the cultivation of a church culture that is distinct and different from the dominant culture in the world. However, God called all of creation to participate in God's Kingdom culture, which differs from cultures in the modern world. For example, the culture of God is love for all creation as opposed to the dominant culture that focuses on the self.[54] God's kingdom has many cultural elements similar to the modern world but different—for example, the culture and values of God's kingdom defy all understanding and challenge humanity.

Reid believes church leaders must consider how they convey the truth of Christianity to people with unique backgrounds and from diverse cultures because popular culture treats youths as children, not as young adults.[55] Leaders need to analyze and understand the culture they preach and teach. The church is not like it used to be four decades ago. The world has modernized, and people assume that the church is irrelevant and belongs to history. Leaders must make them aware that the church is relevant and prepared to serve all people.

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[53] Stier, Gospelize Your Youth Ministry, 84.

[54] Guder, Missional Church, 138.

[55] Reid, *Raising The Bar*, 97.

Interestingly, Kent R. Hunter believes that Christians everywhere sense it is time, or past time, to change, do what Jesus says, and be whom Jesus called them to be.[56] He explains that Christians must embrace Kingdom culture because it ignites and brings courageous missions to churches.[57] He points out that "the concept of building Kingdom culture into [people's] lives is a transformational experience that changes everything, and Christians are ready to see God renew the church and bring it back to spiritual life.[58] However, there is a noticeable shift in vibrancy and attitude compared to those displayed at the beginning of the Christian Movement. Believers viewed Christianity and the Christian Church with astonishment and excitement.

## Utilizing Spiritual Gifts

Terry Linhart points out that leaders and teachers of the Christian faith must communicate the truth of God's word so listeners hear, understand, embrace, embody, and apply it.[59] He writes that leaders and teachers are "directed to empower others for ministry by helping them to use their spiritual gifts" to serve God and others.[60] He believes it is crucial to prayerfully seek God's help to bring people with spiritual gifts and attitudes to teach well in the church.[61] Leaders and teachers who teach away from the gospel's truth create spiritual barriers for believers and new converts.

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[56] Kent R. Hunter, and Tracee J. Swank, *Who Broke My Church?: 7 Proven Strategies For Renewal and Revival* (New York, NY: Faith Words, 2017), 9.

[57] Hunter and Swank, *Who Broke My Church?*, 11.

[58] Ibid., 11, 23.

[59] Terry Linhart, ed. Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide For Teaching Christian Formation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 67, 301.

[60] Linhart, Teaching the Next Generations, 301.

[61] Ibid., 304.

## Young Adults

Reid believes that apparent differences exist between generations, and to better understand how critical generations are in the world, leaders must evaluate and address those differences.[62] He cites Barna, who believes attitude is the most significant generational difference. Reid explains that some younger generations commit to group activities such as personal evangelism, evangelistic outreach, and mission projects as opposed to older generations refusing to accept change in the church.[63]

Church leaders may want to extend leadership roles and other church-related responsibilities to younger adults, especially those knowledgeable about modern technology. The younger generations are technologically savvy, communicate with each other through modern technology, and can be essential to the church's functions and growth. This study suggests that leaders may want to create balance in the church by prioritizing activities and events to attract people of the younger generations with diverse backgrounds and cultural differences.

Additionally, the views of the younger generations differ significantly from prior generations. For example, Kinnaman and Lyons point out that the older generations hold negative views of the younger generations because of their culture, lifestyle, life choices, different mindset, and approach to life events.[64] However, Reid writes that "every generation needs to [teach] anew," and cautions leaders it is time to wake up and realize the realities of the younger generations.[65]

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[62] Reid, Raising The Bar, 27.

[63] Ibid., 31.

[64] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 120, 139, 204.

[65] Reid, Raising The Bar, 16.

Further, Reid believes God has drawn a line in the sand for the coming generations. It is time to set aside recreational Christianity for a radical New Testament kind.[66] The church must keep pace with the secular world that vies for the attention of the younger generations. Reid writes that "[o]ver the preceding twenty years, the number of full-time youth pastors had grown dramatically, and at the same time, a superabundance of magazines, music, and ideas aimed at [the younger generations] had birthed along the way."[67]

Reid notes that young adults look to family members for support and spiritual leaders for guidance.[68] The church needs to attract the attention of younger adults, implement programs, and plan events that interest them. Large companies and organizations increase their production of things that interest younger adults who either left the church after high school or showed no interest in the church. Church leaders must be initiative-taking in reaching younger adults.

Reid argues that the teen years are the most essential years of a person's life. He believes youth ministers can target those youths because "young people are not children finishing childhood; they are young adults preparing for adulthood."[69] He notes, "Youths in the church are under-challenged and treated as children[. He suggests that leaders] raise the bar to produce challenges for biblical champions who can surrender to the lordship of Jesus."[70]

Introducing children baptized into the Christian faith to the Christian Church at an early age is essential. The introduction must start with their Christian parents, and a formal

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[66] Reid, Raising The Bar, 16.

[67] Ibid., 28.

[68] Ibid., 32, 38.

[69] Ibid., 17.

[70] Ibid., 20, 35.

introduction must begin during their Sunday school years. Many local churches no longer have Sunday school programs; instead, they have youth ministries that do not cater to kindergarten-age Sunday school children. Children as young as kindergarten must be allowed to experience Sunday school because "God does not give the same gifts and resources to everyone."[71]

As the parable disclosed, "[t]he wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them" (Is 11:6, NIV). Children are important in God's kingdom. Isaiah 54:13 reminds people that their "children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of [their] children (Is 54:13, NRSV).

How can children realize the transformative power of the gospel? Yes. Jared C. Wilson points out that the gospel is full of practical appeals and commands connected to the foundational and empowering truth of the work of Christ.[72] The work of Christ must be on display because the gospel calls for communication and action. Today, Christians celebrate artists and celebrities as opposed to Christ, who provides hope through the gospel.

The life, work, and teachings of Christ are not works of art; but life expressed in the gospel. Christians must glorify Christ with celebratory vigor and vibrancy and share him with everyone. Additionally, Christ, who brings hope and life to a watching and waiting world, receives less celebration and is rarely discussed in public. The gospel communicates to people what God has done and can do through Christ for all creation. As the message goes forth in

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[71] Jared C. Wilson, The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against The Status Quo (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 157.

[72] Wilson, The Prodigal Church, 157.

power, it is because God has done it. Wilson points out that the gospel is perfect and cannot change.[73]

## Comparative Studies

Prior research examined the decline in attendance at churches globally; however, they did not address the decline at local churches in communities and neighborhoods in Queens, New York. Experts on revitalization have explored the revitalization process for declining churches; however, no prior research shows that they identified, examined, or evaluated attendance decline at local churches in Queens, New York.

The problem of declining church attendance is multifaceted. Recruiting younger adults and giving them leadership roles in the church appears to be crucial in halting the decline, as Dreyer, Kinnaman and Lyons, and this project revealed (Appendix B).[74] Modern technology is another critical aspect of growing the church (Appendix B). This qualitative research project identified and revealed factors that contributed to the decline. No single aspect is responsible for the decline; the literature reviewed, and a theoretical foundation explains the research problem and guides the findings discussed in Chapter 4 and the additional discussions in this chapter.

Reviewing prior literature was essential because the review provided the basis for advancing the researcher's theory development and knowledge to identify research gaps. The researcher reviewed pertinent literature to find a solution to the attendance decline. She downloaded over fifty articles from scholarly journals for this review process and utilized many books at Liberty University's library. The materials showed a gap in the research. She discovered

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[73] Wilson, The Prodigal Church, 162-63.

[74] Dreyer, "Church, Mission and Ethics," 3.

issues and themes that may have contributed to the attendance decline but did not discuss the decline at local churches in Queens, New York.

Besides recruiting the younger generations and focusing on tradition, researchers suggest that church leaders focus on making disciples, making the church appeal to children, implementing programs, and planning events that interest younger adults. Another suggestion is for leaders to focus on the perceived generational gap and negative outlook discouraging young people from attending church.[75] Alasdair Crockett and David Voas argue that most of the decline in attendance is generational rather than a result of time.[76]

The Modern Church is like churches in earlier centuries. Youths in the earlier church displayed behaviors similar to those in contemporary times. All people are tested, including children. God is faithful and will test no one beyond their strength, but with the testing, God provides the way out so the individual can endure it (1 Cor 10:13, NRSV). The younger adults' unique identity, culture, and lifestyle choices clash with the traditions and expectations of the older generations. Nevertheless, God warns that "no testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone" (1 Cor 10:13, NRSV).

According to John Stewart's definition of identity, identity forms when people interact with others, and individuals seek to make sense of their identity within the context provided by others.[77] Labels such as "nones," "unChristian," "unchurched," and "outsiders" are used to

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[75] Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian,* 2017.

[76] Alasdair Crockett, and David Voas "Generations of Decline: Religious Change in 20th-Century Britain." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45.4 (2006): 567, accessed February 19, 2023, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-5906.2006.00328.x.

[77] John Stewart. *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication* (New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2012), 77, 79, 87.

describe people who do not affiliate with a religious institution, people who do not follow Christ's teachings, and people who have never attended a church or associate with a religion or religious institution.

The younger generations believe their "unique identity, culture, and lifestyle choices" are conflicting with those of the older generations. The negative perceptions and labels assigned to the younger generations may cause them to adopt "unique identities, culture, and make lifestyle choices" to live what they view as their authentic lives. Stewart points out that individuals utilize personal and shared information or knowledge from their communities.[78]

When confronted with damaging information about oneself, the reaction may be to manage the information, resulting in denial or exaggeration of its significance.[79] Negative perceptions and labels create imbalanced relationships between generations. It can affect the church, resulting in declining attendance. Despite the importance and urgency of effectively communicating the gospel, church attendance continues to decline worldwide.

The decline presents challenges for leaders to share the gospel. However, they must explore new and creative ways to reach people who may not know God or Christ or understand sin and its consequences.[80] Carson admitted the challenges of sharing the gospel with people who may not know God, understand sin and its effects, and the risen Christ, can deplete church leaders. He wondered how to communicate the gospel to those individuals.[81] The Bible provides

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[78] Stewart. Bridges Not Walls, 87.

[79] Ibid., 94.

[80] D.A. Carson, *Telling The Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 111.

[81] Carson, Telling The Truth, 111.

an answer by suggesting sharing life stories, as God called believers to witness God's grace, mercy, and power through their life experiences.

For example, the apostle Paul puts it this way, "we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also ourselves because you have become very dear to us" (1 Thes 2:1-8, NRSV). The Bible tells people that believers must come to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:13-15, NRSV).

Culture-specific values, norms, and expectations influence how individuals perceive and respond to leadership. In addition, leaders' sensitivity to cultural nuances can build trust and rapport with members. For instance, a challenge for leaders and members in declining churches may be to remain united and faithful. Gene A. Getz writes that adjusting leadership strategies to a cultural environment is essential for effective leadership.[82]

Still, reading the Bible, unity, and speaking the truth in love can help Christians increase their knowledge and grow in Christ. It also requires listening to others, respecting diverse viewpoints, and uniting toward a common objective. Christians can also benefit from a commitment to lifelong learning, personal development, harmony, and love. According to Paul, "press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [each believer] heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14, NRSV).

Effective church leadership in any cultural context requires intentionality, adaptability, commitment to unity, truth, love, and personal development. By manifesting these characteristics, Christians can overcome the challenges of declining church attendance and continue to grow in their understanding and love of Christ. Besides continually pursuing a deeper

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[82] Gene A. Getz, Elders and Leaders: God's Plan For Leading The Church; A Biblical, Historical and Cultural Perspective. Foreword by Brad Smith and Bob Buford (Chicago, USA: Moody Publishers, 2003), 215.

understanding of God's Word and applying it in their lives, Christians can become effective witnesses for Christ and productive members of their churches, neighborhoods, and communities.

McIntosh's understanding of the challenges facing leaders is relevant, considering the decline in church attendance. He believes leaders perceive themselves as working for the church, reporting to a board, and receiving a salary; therefore, they see God as their client.[83] Viewing God as a client is problematic because God is the creator of all things, and leaders must not perceive God in that manner. Further, Mcintosh notes that with fewer people attending church, leaders may feel increased pressure to focus on the desires of the remaining members of their congregations rather than seeking God's desires.[84]

Focusing on the desires of select members sends a negative message to other members, their communities, and their neighborhoods. The increased pressure may lead to pastoral burnout and prove challenging for pastors (Appendix F). Given the significant turnover in pastoral roles, pastors may feel their schedules leave them no time or the stability to engage in a revitalization process for their church.[85] However, McIntosh points out that leaders must pray for God to turn their churches around. He believes that leaders who are not willing to accept change; are not willing to change the things that brought their church to its current state.[86]

Despite the challenges, McIntosh argues that leaders must seek God's help and guidance to make the changes to reach the demographics of interest to return their church to a healthy

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[83] Gary L. McIntosh, There's Hope For Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth (Grand Rapids: MI. Baker Books, 2012), 27.

[84] McIntosh, There's Hope For Your Church, 27.

[85] Ibid., 60.

[86] Ibid.

state.[87] By embracing new ideas and strategies, leaders can turn the decline around to thriving congregations ready to weather the challenges of a changing world.[88] McIntosh explains that new churches or the renewal of a church rarely "survive without a central driving mission and a vision" that empowers their leaders to move into the future.[89]

Additionally, McIntosh believes the "first ten to twenty years of a church's existence are quite often the best years in terms of its numerical growth.[90] He observes that leaders tend to seek answers to the question, "Where do we go from here?"[91] He believes that the "greatest challenge is leading the church to embrace the necessary changes to allow God's Spirit to work anew in the life, vision, and mission of the church.[92]

There is evidence of the decline in all corners of the world as some Millennials and Generation Zs reject biblical principles. It is the opposite of what God commanded. In June 2021, the Barna Group reported that the decline could contribute to the rise of syncretism (adding or taking away) and the popularity among young people of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (having no particular religious creed).[93] As more people become disengaged from

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[87] McIntosh, There's Hope For Your Church, 130.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Gary L. McIntosh, Taking Your Church to The Next Level: What Got You Here, Won't Get You There (Grand Rapids: MI. Baker Books, 2009), 39.

[90] McIntosh, Taking Your Church, 47.

[91] Ibid., 58.

[92] Ibid,, 79.

[93] Barna Research Group, "Extent of America's Loss of Faith," Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, June 22, 2021, accessed February 20, 2023, https://www.frc.org/blog/2021/06/new-barna-research-reveals-extent-americas-loss-faith.

organized religion, they may seek alternative belief that aligns closely with their values and desires.[94]

The Barna Group explains that syncretism and the popularity of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism could lead to further fragmentation of beliefs and a lack of coherence in the broader cultural worldview.[95] Attendance decline may have played a role in religious institutions shaping public discourse and policy.[96] Niemelä and McNeal agree with prior research that Americans are losing faith; it is alarming.[97] As discussed earlier, the consensus is Millennials are "substantially more likely" than previous generations to "reject biblical principles in favor of more worldly spiritual perspectives and practices."[98]

## Application of the Results to Other Settings

The researcher believes the findings of this project can benefit churches worldwide, not just the local churches targeted in this study. The study discussed novel approaches and action plans to assist leaders in halting attendance decline and achieving substantial growth and retention of members. Researchers may apply the methodology of this study to other settings to experience similar outcomes.

## Recommendations for Future Research

The younger generations rarely attend church. Young members leave the church after high school. Despite their unique culture and individualistic attitudes, they are future church

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[94] Barna Research Group, "Extent of America's Loss of Faith."

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

leaders. Researchers can investigate the absence of the younger generations in churches in Queens, New York, and worldwide. They can address the negative perceptions of Christianity and the Christian Church. Additionally, the researcher recommends that the story of Christ and the message of the cross be clarified and properly articulated so children and younger adults may understand and know that they are part of God's plan of redemption and must be taken seriously by church leaders.

Finally, the researcher recommends further research to resolve the disconnect between generations because sharing the gospel is vital. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, most institutions and organizations permitted employees and members to conduct business from home. The Coronavirus proved that church leaders could continue providing online worship services access to members in their homes, an area that can be explored and developed. Online worship services proved promising during the pandemic and can help churches in decline. Some members were concerned that Communion is a unique and historically communal experience missing in online church attendance. It is also worth exploring.

**IRB Approval**

September 11, 2020

Marilyn Dolloway

Gary Moritz

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-261 The Decline in Attendance at Local Churches in Queens, New York: A Biblically Based Revitalization Strategic Plan to Bring The Local Church Back to Spiritual Health

Dear Marilyn Dolloway, Gary Moritz:

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

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form 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 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 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

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Survey – Research Questions

1. What is your relationship like with other church leaders?
2. What is your comfort level like when you attend church?
3. How would you rate the church in your community?
4. What can church leaders do to improve the image of the church?
5. Have you attended church recently?
6. What adjustments should church leaders make to encourage the younger generation?
7. What would you say to church leaders in your community regarding your feelings about the church?
8. What would you say your interest is in becoming more active in the church?
9. How long have you lived in your community?
10. Have you ever thought of serving in the church?
11. What would your friends say if you invited them to church?
12. Are you a member of a church?
13. What questions would you like the church to address?
14. What do you think about this research project?
15. What would you expect from a congregation as a new or returning member?
16. Who or what is your go-to spiritual source?
17. What would you expect from the pastors/leaders of a church?
18. Why did you leave the church after high school?
19. How has the Coronavirus pandemic affected your thoughts and feelings about the church?
20. How would you describe a negative or positive experience in your local church?

21. What would make you feel like your local church meets your/the community's needs?

22. What must church leaders do to make you feel the church is meeting your needs and your community?

23. Why do you think the church exists in your community?

24. Have you attended your local church in the past?

25. What would make you consider attending church again?

26. What do you think about the music choices in your local church and another church you have attended?

27. What do you expect from your local church?

28. Would you like someone from the church to visit you regularly?

29. How often would you like someone to visit you?

30. Would you prefer a telephone call?

31. Do you feel connected to the church? If yes, in what way?

32. Do you have any problems attending worship services?

33. How often do you attend worship?

34. What do you think about the music and the hymns sung at worship services?

35. Would you prefer a more traditional or contemporary service?

36. Do you need transportation to and from the church?

37. Would you be interested in transportation to and from church?

38. Do you believe there is a generational gap in the church?

39. Are you aware that the younger generations believe that the older generations do not accept their life choices?

40. Do you struggle with accepting the younger generations in church?

41. What is your comfort level like when you attend church?

42. How would you rate the church in your community?

43. What can church leaders do to improve the image of the church?

44. What adjustments should church leaders make to encourage the younger generation?

45. What would you say to people in your community about the church?

46. How long have you lived in your community?

47. Have you ever thought of becoming a leader in the church?

48. What would your friends say if you invited them to church?

49. What do you most enjoy about attending services here?

50. Have you attended a different church in the last six months? If so, did you enjoy that church?

51. Is it different from this church? Why, How?

52. Would you recommend your local church to a friend or family member? Why or why not?

53. What is your worship attendance like today as opposed to seven years ago or when you first came to this church?

54. Would you attend worship services weekly if you have a leadership role?

55. Would you attend worship services online instead of in the sanctuary?

56. Are you a member of this community?

57. Do you have any ideas or suggestions for new ministries?

58. Which activities or amenities would you like if or when you attend church?

59. Would you prefer coffee, tea, mission trips, church barbecue, or field day?

60. Which activity or amenity would you enjoy the most at church?

61. Which programs or new ministries would you be interested in as a volunteer?

Leaders and Congregants Interview Questions

1. Why do churches exist?
2. Why do churches exist in communities?
3. Can you describe your relationship with the church's community?
4. What do your peers think about the decline?
5. What led to the decline in church attendance?
6. What do you think led to the decline in church attendance?
7. What leads can utilize that could lead to church growth?
8. What do you think of the younger generation?
9. What do you think of the style and choices of the younger generation?
10. Why are Millennials and Generation Zs cynical toward Christians?
11. How long have you served as the pastor of your church?
12. What is your worship attendance like today as opposed to seven years ago or when you first came to this church?
13. What is your budget like as opposed to seven years ago or when you first came to this church?
14. What is the relationship between the church and its community?
15. What motivates young people to leave church after high school?
16. What types of conflicts do you experience, and how often?
17. Why do we exist as a church?
18. How would you explain God's call?
19. How did you get to this point in your ministry?
20. How will you ensure your church is healthy and consistently growing?
21. How would you describe a healthy, growing congregation?
22. Have you experienced an attendance decline in church?
23. What are the signs of decline?

24. What advice would you give another church leader on growing and equipping disciples?

25. What is the discipleship process like at your church?

26. What bothers you most about the state of the church?

27. What can I do for you as a church leader?

28. How would you describe your spiritual experience?

29. What questions would you like the church to address?

30. What would you like the church to do for you?

31. What do you think about research addressing local church attendance decline?

32. What are options/strategies that can lead to church growth?

33. What do you expect from the church's congregation as a new or returning member?

34. How would you describe God's work in the community through the church and its leaders?

35. How important is church to you?

36. Besides God, what or who is your go-to spiritual source in times of trouble?

37. What do you expect from other leaders of the church?

38. Do you have an unobstructed vision for your church? If so, what is your vision?

39. Have you groomed and equipped disciples?

40. How many sought leadership roles in a church?

41. Should you know the roles the disciples you have groomed and equipped play in the church?

42. How do you see your church five years from now?

43. What are the motivating factors for young people leaving church after high school?

44. Do you have a visible place in the church for young people?

45. What measures have you taken to ensure your church is healthy and consistently growing?

46. Do you think the relationship you described is sufficient as a leader in your church's community?

47. What do your peers think about the decline?

48. Do you believe attendance at churches has declined?

49. Do you have specific roles in your church for young people?

50. Why do people assume that attendance decline in church is generational?

51. What can you do to stop the attendance decline?

52. What are things/strategies that could lead to church growth?

53. Do you have a Sunday school program at your church?

54. What is the purpose of Youth Ministry?

55. Do you believe attendance has been declining?

56. What was online attendance like during the height of the pandemic?

57. How do you view evangelism?

58. How did the Coronavirus affect your church?

59. Do you believe your church is in decline?

60. Would you acknowledge that your church is in decline?

61. Have you contacted other leaders whose church is in decline?

62. Do you hold congregational meetings where you inform the congregants about the state of the church?

63. Do you hold congregational meetings where you inform congregants of the state of the church?

64. Would you prefer different or flexible worship hours?

65. How do you view evangelism?

66. Do you believe your church is in decline?

67. How did the Coronavirus impact your church?

68. What advice do you have for church leaders?

69. Do you think local churches in your area need revitalization and renewal?
70. Do you think recruiting young adults could stop attendance decline?
71. What kind of advice do you give young adults interested in the church?
72. Do you think local churches in your area need revitalization and renewal?
73. Do you think virtual church services will become popular after the pandemic?
74. Do you have any reasons why you would leave a church?
75. What leadership strategies can you utilize that could lead to church growth? new
76. What do you think of the style and choices of the younger generations?
77. Why are Millennials and Generation Zs cynical toward Christians?
78. Who did God call you to serve as a church leader?
79. Do you think your church recognizes God's personality?
80. What challenges are you currently facing in the church?
81. When was the last time you pray for God's assistance in your church?
82. Are you ministering the way God called you to minister?
83. Do your council members have confidence in your judgment?
84. Do you have confidence in your council members' judgment?
85. Do council members consult with you on decisions about the church?
86. Is your church's missions' commitments on par?
87. Would you like to change anything about your church's ministries?
88. Would you like to change anything about how you do church?

# Appendix B

## Sample Questions and Answers and Percentage Breakdown

This Thesis project shows it is possible to stop attendance decline at local churches in Queens, New York if leaders recruit members of the younger generations. The researcher focused on the trends in neighborhoods in Queens, New York, that house diverse people from various backgrounds and across many generations. The decline has been ongoing for many decades and continues rapidly. The sampling questions represent three groups of participants.

Group A represents (eighty-eight) participants from Outdoor Campaign meetings aged eighteen to twenty-nine. Group B represents (sixty) participants from Outdoor Campaign meetings aged thirty years and older. Group C represents interviews with (fifty-two participants) pastors/leaders/congregants. Almost eighty percent (80%) of the Sample Questions came from participants in Group A. Some Sample Questions include group responses, see below:

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Are you a member of a church? | | |
| No. | 61 | 69.32% |
| I cannot answer that question. | 23 | 26.14% |
| No | 4 | 4.54% |
| Do you attend church regularly? | | |
| No. | 58 | 66% |
| Sometimes | 18 | 20.4% |
| No answer | 12 | 13.6% |
| What questions would you like your church to address? | | |
| None. | 70 | 79.55% |
| Why would church leaders care what we wear to church if we dress respectably? | 9 | 10.2% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| I have no questions. | 5 | 5.7% |
| No answer | 4 | 4.55% |
| What would you like the church to do for you? | | |
| I want the church to be more community friendly. To be aware of what is going on in its community. | 52 | 59.09% |
| Ask me questions about my life. | 18 | 20.45% |
| I want a welcoming environment where I can approach people without feeling judged. | 9 | 10.23% |
| Care more about me as a person and not how I dress. | 9 | 10.23% |
| What do you think about this project? | | |
| The project is good; it shows that the church cares or is attempting to encourage young people to attend worship services. | 68 | 77.27% |
| I do not know. | 9 | 10.23% |
| No answer. | 9 | 10.23% |
| This project is overdue because no one has ever approached me and asked about my feelings about the church or what I would like the church to do for me. | 2 | 2.27% |
| What would you expect from a congregation as a new or returning member? | | |
| A welcoming attitude. | 44 | 50% |
| Help me understand the church and its programs/functions. | 38 | 43.18% |
| No response | 4 | 4.55% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| I would expect the church to welcome me and show me things/programs that interest me, not just Sunday school, Confirmation class, or Bible study. | 2 | 2.27% |
| How would you describe God's work in your community? | | |
| I know God works in my community, but I cannot describe it. | 44 | 50% |
| I do not understand the question. | 24 | 27.3% |
| If you mean through the church, I do not feel like the church represents God. | 9 | 10.2% |
| I cannot answer that question. | 9 | 10.2% |
| I believe in God and know he is working in my community, but I do not get that feeling when I think about the church. | 2 | 2.3% |
| How important is the church to you? | | |
| The church is more important than we show on the surface. | 40 | 45.45% |
| I do not attend church, so I cannot answer that question. | 30 | 34.1% |
| No answer. | 10 | 11.36% |
| No comment. | 6 | 6.82% |
| The church is foremost in my thought and life; I live how God wants me to live, so the church is vital. | 2 | 2.27% |
| Who or what is your go-to spiritual source? | | |
| No response. | 70 | 79.54% |
| I don't have one. | 9 | 10.23% |
| I don't know. | 9 | 10.23% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| What would you expect from the pastors/leaders of a church? | | |
| Spiritual advice and guidance. | 69 | 78.41% |
| I would expect them to listen and give us advice, a chance. | 9 | 10.23% |
| Most of us young people grew up in the church and left in our high school years. | 5 | 5.68% |
| I want someone to listen to us. Support us. | 5 | 5.68% |
| Why did you leave church after high school? | | |
| There is nothing there for me. | 69 | 78.41% |
| There are no scholarships to help with school costs or nothing to do; most of my friends feel the same way. | 9 | 10.23% |
| Low levels of encouragement and satisfactory/interesting activities and programs. | 10 | 11.36% |
| How has the Coronavirus pandemic affected your thoughts and feelings about the church? | | |
| The Coronavirus was devastating, but it became frightening when people died in record numbers. | 70 | 79.54% |
| I don't feel comfortable about calling the church in my area. | 9 | 10.23% |
| I feel sad, like my back is against a wall and has nowhere to turn. Do you know that feeling? | 5 | 5.68% |
| Helpless and hopeless. | 4 | 4.55% |
| How would you describe a negative or positive experience in your local church? | | |
| Negative: The devastation of Covid and the closing of churches. | 35 | 39.77% |
| Negative: No way to turn for information or help. | 34 | 38.64% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Positive: The pastor of my local church checked in with my parents during the height of Covid. | 9 | 10.23% |
| No words to describe the Covid situation. | 8 | 9.09% |
| Negative: Take, for example, COVID. I do not have many friends who could say the church offered them anything, a word of comfort or reassurance. | 2 | 2.27% |
| What is your relationship like with church leaders? | | |
| I missed church. I left after high school. | 70 | 79.54% |
| I want to rely more on the church and its leaders in challenging times. | 13 | 14.77% |
| I would like to know them better. | 4 | 4.55% |
| I do not know them. I see them sometimes, but I don't know them. We never attended. | 1 | 1.14% |
| What would make you feel like your local church meets your/the community's needs? | | |
| Being visible in the neighborhood would go a long way. | 44 | 50% |
| Awareness of the elderly in the community and checking in on them regularly. | 33 | 37.5% |
| An invitation to attend service. | 9 | 10.23% |
| I do not know anymore; probably if I heard something nice from someone in the church. | 2 | 2.27% |
| What would church leaders have to do to meet the needs of the community? | | |
| Create exciting and inviting environments in the church. | 44 | 50% |
| Discern people's and meet spiritual needs and interest | 33 | 37.5% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Assign leadership roles to young people already in the church. | 9 | 10.23% |
| Maybe discovering what we need instead of assuming we need a few canned foods; or providing us with some way to talk about our problems. Is not that how the church is supposed to help? | 2 | 2.27% |
| Why do you think the church exists in your community? | | |
| Churches exist in communities to meet the spiritual and social needs of the people. | 79 | 89.77% |
| To take care of the people in the community. | 5 | 5.68% |
| I don't know. | 4 | 4.55% |
| Have you visited the church recently or in the past? | | |
| No. | 70 | 79.54% |
| On holidays only. | 9 | 10.23% |
| For baptism of family members. | 5 | 5.68% |
| Once or twice in the past. | 4 | 4.55% |
| What would make you consider attending church again? | | |
| We want an intentional open invitation to come as "I/we am/are." | 70 | 79.55% |
| Leaders show more interest in young adults. | 16 | 18.18% |
| Change where young people have a say in the church's functioning, where we can feel that the church needs young people. You know.<br><br>Some church people behave as though they do not need us. | 2 | 2.27% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| What change would you prefer in the church? | | |
| I don't know. | 40 | 45.45% |
| No answer. | 39 | 44.32% |
| Roles and interesting programs for young adults. | 4 | 4.55% |
| Changing where they treat young people with respect could make us feel like we belong. We want change so we can attend worship service and have roles in the church, not just sit in the pews. | 5 | 5.68% |
| What do you think about the music choices in a church you have attended? | | |
| The music should be updated to include younger people. | 70 | 79.54% |
| It should include music and hymns suitable for diverse groups. | 14 | 15.91% |
| (Laughter), some are outdated. I don't know the words to some. "They need to get with the program. Sometimes the church seems solemn, like a funeral." | 4 | 4.55% |
| What advice do you have for church leaders? | | |
| Give us leadership roles in the church. | 44 | 50% |
| Approach us about attending seminary. | 30 | 34.09% |
| Include us in decision-making. | 14 | 15.91 |
| Do you think local churches in your area needs revitalization and renewal? | | |
| Yes. | 88 | 100% |
| Do you think virtual church services will become popular after the pandemic? | | |
| Yes. | 82 | 93.18% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| No. | 3 | 3.41% |
| No answer. | 3 | 3.41 |
| What is your comfort level like when you attend church? | | |
| Uncomfortable. | 75 | 85.2% |
| Nervous. | 10 | 11.4% |
| Anxious. | 3 | 3.4% |
| How would you rate the church in your community? | | |
| Good. | 50 | 56.8% |
| Not good, but not bad. | 31 | 35.2% |
| No response. | 7 | 8% |
| What can church leaders do to improve the image of the church? | | |
| Blend in with the community. | 80 | 91% |
| A homier vibe, flowers in the yard. | 6 | 6.81% |
| Not sure. | 2 | 2.27% |
| What adjustments should church leaders make to encourage the younger generation? | | |
| Consider approaching young adults in high school. | 38 | 43% |
| Be more visible in communities. | 36 | 41% |
| No response. | 14 | 16% |
| What would you say to people in your community about the church? | | |
| I don’t know. | 79 | 89.8% |
| Nothing. | 9 | 10.2 |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| How long have you lived in your community? | | |
| All my life | 86 | 97.72% |
| Ten years. | 1 | 1.14 |
| I am one of the third generation for my family. | 1 | 1.14 |
| Have you ever thought of becoming a leader in the church? | | |
| Yes. | 75 | 85.23% |
| No. | 13 | 14.77% |
| What would your friends say if you invited them to church? | | |
| Why? | 77 | 87.5% |
| Are you serious? | 8 | 9.09% |
| I don't know. | 3 | 3.41% |
| What do you most enjoy about attending services here? | | |
| Fellowship. | 45 | 51.13% |
| The service. | 34 | 38.64% |
| The location. | 9 | 10.23% |
| Have you attended a different church in the last six months?<br>If so, did you enjoy that church? Is it different from your local church? Why, How? | | |
| No. | 80 | 90.91% |
| Yes. It's the same. | 8 | 9.09% |
| Would you recommend your local church<br>to a friend or family member? Why or why not? | | |
| Maybe. | 80 | 91% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| No. | 6 | 6.81% |
| No response. | 2 | 2.27% |
| What is your worship attendance like today as opposed to seven years ago or when you first came to this church? | | |
| The same. | 44 | 50% |
| I don't know. | 40 | 45.45% |
| No answer. | 4 | 4.55% |
| Would you attend worship services weekly if you have a leadership role? | | |
| Yes. | 73 | 82.95% |
| Maybe. | 12 | 13.64% |
| I don't know. | 3 | 3.41% |
| Would you attend worship services online instead of in the sanctuary? | | |
| Yes. | 85 | 96.59% |
| No answer. | 3 | 3.41% |
| Are you a member of this community? | | |
| Yes. | 70 | 79.55% |
| No. | 16 | 18.18% |
| Visiting friends. | 2 | 2.27% |
| Which activities or amenities would you like if or when you attend church? | | |
| Yes, activities that are interesting. | 45 | 51.13% |
| Yes, amenities before and after service. | 34 | 38.64% |

| Group A<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Young Adults Eighteen to Twenty-Nine Years (88 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| No answer. | 9 | 10.23% |
| Would you prefer coffee, tea, mission trips, church barbecue, or field day? | | |
| Yes, all of those are nice. | 75 | 85.23% |
| No. | 13 | 14.77% |
| Which activity or amenity would you enjoy the most at church? | | |
| Bible study. | 45 | 51.13% |
| Games. | 34 | 38.64% |
| Socializing. | 9 | 10.23% |
| Which programs or new ministries would you be interested in as a volunteer? | | |
| Children’s ministry/Sunday school. | 75 | 85.23% |
| Hospitality. | 13 | 14.77% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| What do you expect from the church? | | |
| Fellowship. | 30 | 50% |
| I look for comfort, hearing, and sharing God's word with others. | 9 | 15% |
| I look forward to meeting people at church and participating in different ministries. | 8 | 13.33% |
| Spiritual connection. | 7 | 11.67% |
| I feel good meeting and greeting people and talking about life. | 6 | 10% |
| Would you like someone from the church to visit you regularly? If yes, How often? | | |
| I am not sure. | 25 | 41.67% |
| Yes, once, or twice a month. | 12 | 20% |
| Yes, sometimes. | 9 | 15% |
| Yes, a call once a week. | 8 | 13.33% |
| No response. | 6 | 10% |
| Do you prefer a telephone call? | | |
| No. | 40 | 66.67% |
| Yes. | 18 | 30% |
| No. Not interested. | 2 | 3.33% |
| Do you feel connected to the church? If yes, in what way? | | |
| Yes. | 22 | 36.67% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| No. | 15 | 25% |
| Yes. I used to assist with Sunday school and my children were acolytes. | 14 | 23.33% |
| Yes, I feel connected to the church in a way because my pastor calls me every so often. | 6 | 10% |
| No response. | 3 | 5% |
| Do you have any problems attending worship services? | | |
| Yes. | 22 | 36.67% |
| No. | 10 | 16.67% |
| Yes. Sometimes I have problems going up and down the stairs. | 9 | 15% |
| Yes. I use Access-A-Ride, and it is not available. | 8 | 13.33 |
| No response. | 6 | 10% |
| Not really. | 5 | 8.33% |
| How often do you attend worship? | | |
| I attend in-person worship services twice a month but online when I am not in the sanctuary. | 21 | 35% |
| I attend in-person worship services once a month. | 15 | 25% |
| I only attend for Christenings or Baptisms. | 10 | 16.67% |
| Never attended. | 9 | 15% |
| I only attend Easter, Christmas, and holy days like All Saints Sunday. | 5 | 8.33% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| What do you think about the music, the hymns sung at worship service? | | |
| I like the music as it is. | 21 | 35% |
| I would like to see some of the music change to accommodate diverse listeners. | 20 | 33.33% |
| Church leaders could include young people in the music planning for worship services. | 15 | 25% |
| They could do better with some of the music. | 3 | 5% |
| It does not matter. | 1 | 1.67% |
| Would you prefer a traditional service? Or a contemporary one? | | |
| I would prefer the traditional one. | 21 | 35% |
| I prefer contemporary. | 21 | 35% |
| Music suitable for diverse groups. | 15 | 25% |
| No response. | 3 | 5% |
| Would you be interested in transportation to and from church? | | |
| Yes. | 21 | 35% |
| No. | 21 | 35% |
| No response. | 10 | 16.67% |
| Sometimes. | 8 | 13.33% |
| What is your opinion on the perceived generational gap in the church? | | |
| No response. | 30 | 50% |
| I do not recognize that one exists. | 15 | 25% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| One exist? | 12 | 20% |
| I am not the right person to ask. I believe you should ask the younger people that question. I like where I sit every week. I even leave my cushion in the pew. Sometimes they have the nerve to move it. | 3 | 5% |
| Are you aware that the younger generations believe the older generations do not accept their life choices? | | |
| No. | 15 | 25% |
| Yes. | 12 | 20% |
| Yes, only during the music selections. | 12 | 20% |
| Yes, but it does not bother me. | 11 | 18.33% |
| No response. | 10 | 16.67% |
| Do you struggle with accepting the younger generations in church? | | |
| (Laughter), sometimes. | 24 | 40% |
| No. | 18 | 30% |
| No answer. | 18 | 30% |
| What advice do you have for church leaders? | | |
| Offer older members leadership roles in the church. | 45 | 75% |
| Suggest educational programs for older members. | 12 | 20% |
| Include congregation members in decision-making regarding things that would affect those members. | 3 | 5% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Do you think local churches in your area needs revitalization and renewal? | | |
| Yes. | 55 | 91.7% |
| I don't know. | 5 | 8.3 |
| Do you think virtual church services will become popular after the pandemic? | | |
| Yes. | 48 | 80% |
| No. | 10 | 16.67 |
| No answer. | 2 | 3.33 |
| Do you have any reasons why you would leave a church? | | |
| Not enough members. | 17 | 28.33% |
| Limited ministries. | 15 | 25% |
| Low morale. | 10 | 16.67% |
| Loss of interest. | 10 | 16.67% |
| Unappealing conditions. | 5 | 8.33% |
| Flexible meeting and Bible study hours. | 3 | 5% |
| How would you rate the church in your community? | | |
| Good. | 55 | 91.7% |
| No answer. | 5 | 8.3% |
| What can church leaders do to improve the image of the church? | | |
| Make it look more appealing. | 49 | 81.67% |
| Make it blend in with its community. | 9 | 15% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| No answer. | 2 | 3.33% |
| What adjustments should church leaders make to encourage the younger generation? | | |
| Advertise the church. | 34 | 56.7% |
| Be more visible in communities. | 20 | 33.3% |
| Invite them to attend service online or in person. | 6 | 10% |
| What would you say to people in your community about the church? | | |
| A good place to fellowship. | 30 | 50% |
| A sanctuary for all people. | 30 | 50% |
| How long have you lived in your community? | | |
| 37 years. | 36 | 60% |
| 25 years. | 15 | 25% |
| 15 years. | 9 | 15% |
| Have you ever thought of becoming a leader in the church? | | |
| Yes. | 40 | 66.7% |
| No. | 20 | 33.3% |
| What would your friends say if you invited them to church? | | |
| Sure. | 36 | 60% |
| Ok. | 15 | 25% |
| What time? | 9 | 15% |
| What do you most enjoy about attending services here? | | |
| The people. | 49 | 81.67% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| The service. | 9 | 15% |
| Spiritual satisfaction. | 2 | 3.33% |
| Have you attended a different church in the last six months?<br>If so, did you enjoy that church? Is it different from your local church? Why, How? | | |
| No. | 55 | 91.7% |
| No answer. | 5 | 8.3% |
| Would you recommend your local church<br>to a friend or family member? Why or why not? | | |
| Yes. | 43 | 71.7% |
| Maybe. | 15 | 25% |
| No. | 2 | 3.3% |
| Would you attend worship services weekly if you have a leadership role? | | |
| Yes. | 40 | 66.7% |
| Maybe. | 20 | 33.3% |
| Would you attend worship services online instead of in the sanctuary? | | |
| Yes. | 54 | 90% |
| Sometimes. | 6 | 10% |
| Are you a member of this community? | | |
| Yes. | 50 | 83.3% |
| No. | 10 | 16.7% |
| Which activities or amenities would you like if or when you attend church? | | |
| Listen to gospel music | 36 | 60% |

| Group B<br><br>Outdoor Campaign Sample Questions and Answers<br>Aged Thirty and Older (60 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Socialize. | 15 | 25% |
| Prayers. | 9 | 15% |
| Would you prefer coffee, tea, mission trips, church barbecue, or field day? | | |
| Coffee/tea. | 35 | 58.3% |
| Mission trips/field day. | 25 | 41.7% |
| Which activity or amenity would you enjoy the most at church? | | |
| Socializing. | 34 | 56.7% |
| Mission/field trips. | 20 | 33.3% |
| Coffee/tea | 6 | 10% |
| Which programs or new ministries would you be interested in as a volunteer? | | |
| Field trips. | 30 | 50% |
| Women's ministry. | 30 | 50% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Do you have an unobstructed vision for your church? If so, what is your vision? | | |
| Yes, I have a vision for my church. | 26 | 50% |
| Yes. I envision reinstating the Sunday school program, focusing more on confirmation classes, and ensuring that young people regularly attend church. | 25 | 48.08% |
| Yes. My vision is for a flourishing congregation and functionality as good as expected in the church. | 1 | 1.92% |
| What is functionality being as good as expected in the church? | | |
| According to statistics, some churches struggle to function in most areas here in Queens. For example, Sunday school programs in most churches are lacking or barely functioning, and there is not much for teenagers to do after Confirmation classes. | 1 | 1.92% |
| I cannot answer that question. | 30 | 57.7% |
| No answer. | 21 | 40.38% |
| Have you groomed and equipped disciples? | | |
| Yes, we have groomed and equipped disciples. | 41 | 78.85% |
| Yes. | 11 | 21.15 |
| How many disciples you groom sought leadership roles in the church? | | |
| As acolytes, but none I know of pass their teenage or young adult years. | 39 | 75% |
| Two or three I can think of. | 13 | 25% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Should you know the role disciples you have groomed and equipped play in the church? | | |
| Yes. | 36 | 69.23 |
| Yes, but its challenging. | 10 | 19.23% |
| I don't remember. | 6 | 11.54 |
| What motivates young adults to leave the church after high school? | | |
| I don't know. | 18 | 34.61% |
| It could be the lack of exciting things to do after confirmation classes. We are working on that situation. | 15 | 28.84% |
| It is interesting, but few church leaders can answer that question. | 11 | 21.15% |
| I do not know. | 8 | 15.4% |
| Is there a visible place in the church for young adults? | | |
| Yes, but what do you mean by a visible place? | 52 | 100% |
| I am referring to leadership roles and senior positions in the church. | | |
| No. A lot of young people seek other interests after high school. | 36 | 69.23% |
| We are transitioning into those spaces. We are creating roles that may interest younger adults. | 10 | 19.23% |
| We have children's church and youth ministry where young people can preach on the fourth Sunday of every month. | 6 | 11.54% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| What advice would you give other church leaders on grooming and equipping disciples? | | |
| I would advise church leaders to groom and equip many disciples. Focus on young adults. | 31 | 59.61% |
| I would advise church leaders to follow up on and encourage young people, especially those interested in becoming church leaders. | 15 | 28.85% |
| I would encourage church leaders to focus on discipleship programs. | 6 | 11.54% |
| What strategies are in place to ensure your church is healthy and consistently growing? | | |
| Yes. We are still working on some strategies. It was our main concern before the Pandemic began in 2020 after noticing that few young adults were attending church. We know that most of our members have children and grandchildren though we do not see them in church. | 26 | 50% |
| We are implementing programs that focus on recruiting new members from our community, beyond, and within the church. | 20 | 38.46% |
| In our next council meeting, we will discuss various strategies that could grow the congregation and include young people. | 6 | 11.54% |
| How would you describe a healthy growing congregation? | | |
| I would describe a healthy, growing congregation as a congregation that retains its members, new members consistently joining the church, and people who are excited and happy to gather, being in the presence of each other, and loving and respecting each other. | 41 | 78.84% |
| Member participation and support. | 6 | 11.54% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Members are consistently willing to volunteer and be involved in the congregation's life. | 5 | 9.62% |
| How do you describe your relationship with the church's community? | | |
| I have a healthy relationship with my church's community. I visit the sick and shut-in, check on the elderly, communicate with young people, and am happy when they attend church. | 39 | 75% |
| I would like to see more participation, support, and encouragement from people in the community. | 13 | 25% |
| Do you think the relationship you described is sufficient for a leader in your church's community? | | |
| Probably not, but most churches face this problem. | 45 | 86.5% |
| The relationship could be better, and we are working on it. | 7 | 13.5% |
| What would be an acceptable answer about your relationship with your church's community? | | |
| I cannot answer that question right now. | 26 | 50% |
| If we have a healthy relationship, the church is flourishing, and community members will attend worship on Sundays. | 26 | 50% |
| What do church leaders think about the decline? | | |
| For me, church decline is terrible overall. My colleagues believe church decline reflects a failure in the church, and some even deny any decline exists. | 47 | 90.38% |
| It is a touchy subject for most leaders, and they prefer not to discuss it. | 5 | 9.62% |
| Why do people assume that the attendance decline in church is generational? | | |
| I don't know | 36 | 69.23% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| It is what they see and believe. | 16 | 30.77% |
| What are options you can employ to stop attendance decline? | | |
| Young people are future leaders, so we must allow them to become leaders. I believe that would be a step in the right direction. | 42 | 80.77% |
| There are revitalization programs that prove successful in many churches in decline. | 10 | 19.23% |
| What are things/strategies that could lead to church growth? | | |
| We can actively seek new members, figure out ways of retaining members, and communicate more with members about their family members and their needs. | 42 | 80.77% |
| There are many possibilities. For example, we can recruit new members by canvassing neighborhoods. | 10 | 9.23% |
| What bothers you most about the state of the church? | | |
| It bothers me that the church represents Christ, and we are not carrying out God's mission to reach people and bring them into the church. | 49 | 94.23% |
| Recruiting new members is a challenge, especially the younger adults. | 3 | 5.77% |
| What do you expect from other leaders of the church? | | |
| We should expect other leaders to be aware of their church's vision and mission, be initiative-taking, and focus on the risen Christ. | 42 | 80.77% |
| We are uniting for a better church environment. | 10 | 19.23% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| What about Sunday school? | | |
| We have Youth Ministry. | 50 | 96.15% |
| We don't have a Sunday school program. | 2 | 3.85% |
| Do you have a Sunday school program at your church? | | |
| No.<br><br>We have a Youth Ministry program. | 26 | 50% |
| Yes, we do, but few children attend. | 21 | 40.38% |
| No response. | 5 | 9.62% |
| What concerns would you like other leaders in your church to address? | | |
| Manage the recruiting process of young adults better. Asking them questions about the church and what they expect from it. | 36 | 69.23% |
| Maintaining focus on the Sunday school or youth ministry programs. | 10 | 19.23% |
| We are focusing on the children and youth programs and maintaining connections with other areas of the church. | 6 | 11.54% |
| How has the Coronavirus pandemic affected your church? | | |
| Devastation and confusion affect in-person services. | 42 | 80.77% |
| No fellowship. | 5 | 9.62% |
| Fewer community connections. | 5 | 9.62% |
| Do you believe attendance has been declining? | | |
| Yes. | 52 | 100% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| What was online attendance like during the height of the pandemic? | | |
| We experienced an increase in online attendance. Before the pandemic, our numbers were low. Sometimes ten to fifteen members on Sundays. During the pandemic we had thirty to forty members online. | 26 | 50% |
| We had better attendance with online service than in the last three years. | 26 | 50% |
| Do you believe the younger generations can have a positive impact on attendance and growth? | | |
| Yes. | 36 | 69.23% |
| Maybe. | 12 | 23.07% |
| It is possible. | 4 | 7.7% |
| Can churches benefit from revitalization and renewal programs? | | |
| Yes. | 40 | 76.92% |
| I don't know. | 6 | 11.54 |
| I am not sure. | 6 | 11.54 |
| Do you hold congregational meetings where you inform members about the state of the church? | | |
| Yes. | 45 | 86.54 |
| No. We have not had any congregational meetings since the Coronavirus started. | 7 | 13.% |
| Do you believe your church is in decline? | | |
| Yes. | 52 | 100% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| How do you view evangelism? | | |
| Important to the life of the church. | 52 | 100% |
| How did the Coronavirus impact your church? | | |
| Positively. Attendance rate was up. | 47 | 90.38% |
| Positively with our online services. | 5 | 9.62% |
| Do you think recruiting young adults could stop attendance decline? | | |
| Yes. | 48 | 92.3 |
| I'm not sure. | 4 | 7.7% |
| What kind of advice do you have for young adults who are interested in the church? | | |
| Approach your pastor and ask questions. | 39 | 75% |
| Attend worship services and interact with members. | 10 | 19.23% |
| Attend outdoor events at the church. | 3 | 5.77% |
| Do you think local churches in your area needs revitalization and renewal? | | |
| Yes. | 50 | 91.7% |
| Yes, if done correctly. | 2 | 8.3 |
| Do you have any reasons why you would leave a church? | | |
| Pastoral burnout | 50 | 96.15% |
| Scheduling. People have jobs outside of the church and sometimes it is hard to schedule around people. I can't be effective if I have no support. | 2 | 3.85% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| I had a member left for the same reason, flexibility of hours. | | |
| Do you think virtual church services will become popular after the pandemic? | | |
| Yes. | 47 | 90.38% |
| No. | 4 | 7.7% |
| No response. | 1 | 1.92% |
| What leadership strategies can you utilize that could lead to church growth? | | |
| Interact more in the church's community and neighborhoods. | 40 | 76.92% |
| Encourage members to invite friends and families. | 10 | 19.23% |
| Create an inviting atmosphere in the church. | 2 | 3.85% |
| What do you think of the style and choices of the younger generations? | | |
| Its ok. | 28 | 53.85% |
| Not bad. | 20 | 38.46% |
| I am beginning to think we should accept it and set examples with actions. | 4 | 7.69% |
| Why are Millennials and Generation Zs cynical toward Christians and Christianity? | | |
| I don't know. | 40 | 76.92% |
| Culture. | 7 | 13.46% |
| I believe generational differences. | 5 | 9.62% |
| Who did God call you to serve as a church leader? | | |
| All people. | 52 | 100% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Do you think your church recognizes God's personality? | | |
| I don't understand the question. | 26 | 50% |
| Yes. | 24 | 46.15% |
| No response. | 2 | 3.85% |
| What challenges are you currently facing in the church? | | |
| Attendance. | 46 | 88.46 |
| Making disciples. | 4 | 7.69% |
| Creating new ministries. | 2 | 3.85% |
| When was the last time you pray for God's assistance in your church? | | |
| Every day. | 39 | 75% |
| Before services and in decision-making meetings. | 10 | 19.23% |
| It is right to pray for everything. | 3 | 5.77% |
| Are you ministering the way God called you to minister? | | |
| Yes. | 52 | 100% |
| Do your council members have confidence in your judgment? | | |
| Yes. | 47 | 90.38% |
| Sometimes. | 5 | 9.62% |
| Do you have confidence in your council members' judgment? | | |
| Yes. | 49 | 94.23% |
| Not for every decision. | 3 | 5.77% |

| Group C<br><br>Sample Questions and Answers<br>Interviews with Leaders and Congregants (52 Participants) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Responses | Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
| Do council members consult with you on decisions about the church? | | |
| Yes. | 30 | 57.69% |
| Sometimes. | 22 | 42.31% |
| Is your church's missions' commitments on par? | | |
| Yes. | 52 | 100% |
| Would you welcome the LGBTQ community in your church? | | |
| I don't know. | 32 | 61.54% |
| Yes. | 10 | 19.23% |
| I can't answer that question. | 10 | 19.23% |
| Do you believe God wants you to serve all people? | | |
| Yes. | 52 | 100% |
| Do you have any ideas or suggestions for new ministries? | | |
| Yes. | 52 | 100% |

# Appendix C

## A Brief History of the Church

One explanation for the decline in church attendance is the argument that religion, not just the Christian Church, is an anachronism in a desacralized scientific world. Many see the church as an irrelevant relic of an innocent past. However, examining Christianity's history provides steady testimony of the church's resilience. The religion formed from Christ's mission has navigated and endured two millennia of strife and persecution. The ways of fellowship may change, but Christ's mission remains relevant for all generations.

Christ did not establish a formal religion during his earthly sojourn. His message and teachings proceeded from the premise of Judaism. It is not naïve to think of Jesus' earthly stay and the time that preceded it encompassing just two great belief systems: those who believed in God (Yahweh), the Jews, and those who did not the Heathens. Jesus firmly positions himself within Jewish traditions and history when he says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt 5:17, ESV).

The next verse in the gospel of Matthew emphasizes Jesus' commitment to the belief system laid out in the Old Testament: "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:18, ESV). Therefore, sending Jesus was not to invalidate the laws and revelations handed down to the children of Israel but to clarify, simplify, and exemplify them. The discussion in this section of the study is to locate Jesus within the modern religion in which he is the central messianic figure.

On the one hand, Jesus is the first Christian because the church that bears his name takes its primary curriculum from his teachings. An argument could be that what is now known as Christianity emerged after Christ's death when his teachings coalesced and syncretized with older teachings, traditions, and experiences and revelations of his followers. Christ's declarations prove his commitment to the principles relayed by God through Moses and the Old Testament prophets.

One of Jesus' most outstanding contributions to religious dogma was his simplifying the laws into great principles, the grace of God, and the love of God and one's neighbor. What distinguishes Jesus, is his universal missionary message. Unlike the Old Testament prophets, which address a specific tribe or nation (the "chosen people"), Jesus sends a message to all humanity. The Apostle John famously summed up Jesus' message: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV).

The "chosen people" in the new religious dispensation are anyone who subscribes to Jesus's mission. Through Jesus, God is welcoming back all of humanity. Scholars disagree on the foundational event that helped to form the Christian Church. Some believe that Peter founded the church at Jesus' behest, and they point to Jesus's words to support their claim: "And I also say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18, KJV).

Roman Catholic traditions lend credibility to Peter as the founding Apostle. He is the first Catholic pope. Many Schools see the first church as the Jerusalem Church, created by the disciples after "the Pentecostal explosion of the [Holy] Spirit—the event that occurred on the Jewish feast of Pentecost," by the disciples after Jesus' death and which was led by James (Jesus's earthly half-brother) until his death in 63 A.D.[1] Following this Pentecostal event, Christianity remained a small, disorganized religion for a few centuries.

New Testament writings attest to several difficulties the early church faced. Among these were organization issues: travel and communication between missions were difficult because of the constant persecution of believers, as the life stories of Jesus' disciples and apostles testify. There were many disagreements among believers, and disputes arose about the beliefs and teachings of Christianity, which writings were sacred, the relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and how Christians conduct worship.

The disagreements helped to establish various Christian sects, such as the Donatists in North Africa, Gnostics in Egypt, and Arians in Syria. Later, when an orthodox religion entered the picture, most of these sects were heretics. Christianity was, at first, just another of the many Jewish sects existing at this historical juncture. The more prominent sects included the Pharisees, who adhered strictly to the Mosaic laws and the scribal traditions and sacred writings of the prophets; the Sadducees, who rejected the writings after Moses and who worked closely with the Roman authorities; the Essenes, who lived in desert communes and kept away from temple worship because of the Roman occupation.

As the *Christian sect* had sub-sects (Gnostics, Donatists, and all the others), the Essenes had a subsect, the Zealots, who agitated for the violent overthrow of the Romans. In 66 A.D., the Zealots initiated what is now known as the Jewish Revolt, leading eventually to the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The Jewish Revolt was an actual event for developing Christianity. With the Temple's destruction, many Jews underwent self-exile, and Christians distanced themselves from Jews as they did not want to appear seditious.

Jesus preached civil compliance and the payment of taxes, famously declaring, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matt 22:22, NRSV). From this time onwards, the church developed among the Gentiles (non-Jews). Christians argued that the Temple's destruction resulted from the Jews' rejection of Jesus.[2] Christianity slowly spread out of its birthplace in Judea. Professor Madden summarizes this development by noting that:

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[1] Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (United States of America: Doubleday, 2004), 17.

[2] James Person, "A.D. 70 Titus Destroys Jerusalem," *Christian History Learn the History of Christianity*, accessed July 12, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-28/ad-70-titus-destroys-jerusalem.html.

By the second century, Christianity had spread through many cities and even sometimes into the countryside. The letter of Pliny, written in 112 A.D., describes Christians in the city and countryside, so many that the temples were full. By the third century, Christianity penetrated the Roman aristocracy, among women who learned of it from their household slaves.

Geographically, Christianity was a creature of the Roman Empire. It spread throughout its borders. There were Christians in the East and Asia Minor or Egypt because many more people lived there. Italy was also populous and had [one hundred] bishops' sees by 250 A.D. In the second century, Christianity spread slowly outside the Roman borders to the east, particularly in Armenia and Mesopotamia. There is also evidence for early communities as far away as India.[3]

The pivotal event that led to Christianity becoming a worldwide religion occurred in 313 when the Edict of Milan was issued, making Christianity a legal religion within the sparse Roman Empire.[4] One of the edict's sponsors, Constantine, a general, had become inspired by the teachings of Jesus, and had made him the patron of his army. When Constantine overcame his rivals to succeed Diocletian as emperor in 324, Christian beliefs became the dominant religious system across the Mediterranean.

Christianity's belief in one God appealed to Constantine as a way of unifying the scattered Roman Empire, divided under the rule of the *Tetrarchy* ("rule of four") during the previous two decades. However, this first Christian emperor soon discovered that Christianity was not a monolithic belief system. Constantine's calling together of influencers and leaders from congregations across the empire to work out official doctrine and worship rituals provided the basis for a unified Christian Church.

The gathering, known as the Council of Nicaea, is the foundational moment of the modern Christian Church, underpinning orthodox theology (Catholic theology) and declaring several non-conforming theologies heresies. The emperor's patronage gave this orthodox form of Christianity the power to compel Christians to adopt their doctrinal formulation. However, within a century, the church's fortunes fluctuated during the first few decades following the convening of the Council of Nicaea and the formulation of the Nicene Creed in 1530.

Declared the Roman Empire's official religion, Christianity flourished, and paganism declined steeply. The Roman Church attained a powerful position in all aspects of European life. It took full advantage of the power it wielded and reigned supreme over all aspects of life within Christendom for almost one thousand years.[5]

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[3] Thomas F. Madden, *The Modern Scholar: From Jesus to Christianity: A History of the Early Church*, 16-17, accessed March 10, 2022, https://www.audible.com/pd/The-Modern-Scholar-From-Jesus-to-Christianity-A-History-of-the-Early-Church-Audiobook/B002V1BIU2.

[4]Bokenkotter, *A Concise History*, 29.

[5] Ibid.

**The Church in North America: The Early Days**

Although this Thesis project is primarily concerned with the problem of attendance decline at local churches in Queens, New York, it is vital to locate the study within the larger historical context of Christianity's development in America to understand the present problems and needs of the church. As the arrival of Europeans resulted in an international presence, New World Christianity instantly became a plurality of denominations and systems of Christian worship.

Despite the widespread belief that Christianity came to the United States when the Puritans first arrived in Massachusetts, an Episcopalian presence already existed before the *Mayflower* landing at Plymouth Rock.[6] Since it was Europeans from the Catholic kingdoms of Spain and France who first came to America, Catholicism arrived before the inflow of any Protestant denomination. Noll notes that,

> Even before any British Protestants had appeared on the scene, there was already a substantial Catholic presence in North America. From Spain, Catholic priests converted the Native Americans of the great Southwest. In what is now Canada and along the Mississippi River, Catholic missionaries from France were pursuing their work among Native Americans before missions by English Protestants had even made a start.[7]

Following the conquest of America, one of the primary goals of the Catholic kings of Spain, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, and afterward his son, Phillip II, was the propagation of Christianity amongst the native populations of the western hemisphere. Therefore, North America's first Christian churches were Catholic missions characterized by encounters between Europeans and the Native people.

The first Catholic Churches developed in the southwestern United States, primarily in New Mexico and California, spearheaded by missionaries from Catholic congregations established in Mexico, then called "New Spain." By 1767, there were twenty-one Spanish Catholic mission settlements in California alone.[8] While the Spanish conversion was undergoing in the Southwest, French missionaries were working along the St. Lawrence River, then called New France.

French trappers had established trading posts "along the St. Lawrence River Valley and down the Mississippi River to New Orleans."[9] The third group of Catholics came from England in 1632 with George Calvert, the Lord of Baltimore, and established Maryland's colony (now the

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[6] Mark A. Noll. A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada (William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 7.

[7] Noll. A History of Christianity, 7.

[8] Peter V. Armenio, James Socías, Jeffrey Cole, and Scott Hahn, Eds. Foreword by Francis George. *The History of the Church* (Woodridge, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2010), 298.

[9] Armenio and Socías, *The History of the Church*, 299.

state). This group of Catholics fled from persecution in England following the English Reformation, when Henry VIII proclaimed the Act of Supremacy, installing himself as the head of the newly formed Church of England and usurping from the pope all authority over matters of faith, ecclesiastical appointments, and church properties in England.

From these early missionaries, Catholicism continued to expand through immigration from Catholic regions in Europe, such as Germany, Italy, and Ireland. Armenio and Socias note that "by the year 1900, Catholics in the United States numbered twelve million out of a total population of seventy-six million."[10] It is; however, Protestantism in its various denominations that eventually came to dominate American life. Most of the rest of the early Christian settlements in North America were not from an English culture and language background but from diverse Protestant denominations: the Pilgrims and Puritans in New England, the Quakers with William Penn in Pennsylvania, Anglicans, Lutherans (from Germany).

Baptists and Presbyterians sought lands where they could serve God and establish managed communities according to their beliefs and rules. The Virginia colony, established at Jamestown in 1607, was the first permanent English colony in North America, and Christian worship and ethics immediately became intertwined in its laws and culture. Noll points out that the colony's "earliest legal code made attendance at Sunday services compulsory and contained harsh laws prohibiting violations of the Sabbath, adultery, and excessive dress."[11]

Later, when the colony of Virginia was incorporated, the Church of England (the Anglican Church) became its established Church. This development gave Christian worship in the southeastern states of America a different flavor from that of the more puritanical northeast. Although early Christian experiences were significant in the areas where Catholic missionary activities and settlements reached and in the southeastern states such as Virginia that saw the earliest major Protestant establishments, it is undoubtedly the historical memory of the Pilgrims in New England that has molded present-day perceptions of America's religious past.

The early denomination celebrates its survival commemoration during the Thanksgiving holiday each year. Loosely, the Pilgrims were an offshoot of the Anglican Church. Disappointed with the direction of the Church of England, the Protestants formed their denomination, first emigrating to Leiden, Holland, in 1609 and afterward sailing to America on the *Mayflower*. Over time, the Pilgrims clung to Plymouth's rocky shores, becoming absorbed into the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who had also left England (but had bypassed the Pilgrim's sojourn in Holland) to establish what they believed to be a "New Jerusalem" in New England.

Puritanism had declined tremendously in New England by the eighteenth century. Like the Pilgrims, the Puritans believed the Church of England needed reformation. However, they elected to remain within the Church rather than separate from it. They arrived by the thousands, then the tens of thousands, building a thriving religious community that profoundly shaped

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[10] Armenio and Socías, *The History of the Church*, 420.

[11] Noll, A History of Christianity, 37.

American ideas of liberty of conscience, the nature of individual spiritual experience, and Americans as a chosen people.

The ideas of Puritanism survived in the secular form of self-reliance, moral rigor, and political localism that became the definition of Americanism virtually and reflected in the central themes of other denominations, such as Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and a wide range of evangelical Protestants, took root in communities throughout America.

**The Lutheran Church**

Inspired by the teachings and preaching of Martin Luther, Lutheranism originated in Germany. Lutherans, known as Protestant Christians in the sixteenth century, identified as evangelicals for their emphasis on the gospel and God's grace, a distinction for the Lutheran Church from the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding salvation. The word Lutheran was an epithet for Luther and his followers, but it gained prominence and started the Lutheran movement. The movement resulted from the decline of papal authority and perceived abuse and corruption. Dutch Lutherans first settled in North America in the 1620s in New Amsterdam, now known as New York. America was a by-product of seventeenth-century exploration and economic adventure by Europeans who sought opportunities in North America.

New Amsterdam was a commercial enterprise established in 1624 by The Dutch West India Company.[12] Calvinist-motivated congregations could not survive in the colony. Militant Calvinists chartered the Dutch West India Company, and all public forms of worship not adhering to the Dutch Reformed Church disbanded.[13] This policy did not sit well with religious minorities, and as the number of these minorities, such as Lutherans, increased, they petitioned the colony's government to worship publicly.

The colony's organizers believed that promoting one official would lead to religious unity, promoting social harmony for the orderly settlement progression. Although the colony's governor, Petrus Stuyvesant, was mindful of not alienating any minority, as they could be necessary for the colony's growth, he was a strict Calvinist and a hardliner for enforcing the interests of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Stuyvesant denied each request from these religious minorities (of which the Lutherans were the largest). They could practice their religions privately, but until after the American Revolution, only devotees of the Reformed Dutch Church could partake of Holy Communion, Baptism, or sermons from ordained ministers in public churches.[14] Despite this restriction on pastoral and spiritual care, the laypeople within the Lutheran minority organized themselves.

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[12] Kathryn M. Galchutt, "Lutherans in Harlem: Anglican and Episcopal History," *Historical Society of the Episcopal Church* 74, no. 1, Anglican-Lutheran Conference Papers II (March 2005): 46-48, accessed October 5, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42612464.

[13] Galchutt, "Lutherans in Harlem," 46-48.

[14] Ibid.

The laypeople established the two oldest continuous Lutheran congregations in North America, St. Matthew Lutheran Church at the northern tip of Manhattan and the First Lutheran Church in Albany, New York.[15] Lutheranism became a mainstream religion in America when England gained possession of New Amsterdam in 1664 and renamed it New York. The English administration recognized and tolerated the existing religious diversity in the colony and granted the Dutch Lutherans charter freedom.[16]

Dutch Lutheranism prevailed in the United States northeast until the second half of the seventeenth century when a new wave of Lutherans arrived from the Palatinate region of Germany (a historical region in the modern German federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate). Soon, the existing Dutch Lutherans joined Lutherans from England. Both groups worshipped in Dutch and performed the confessional practices laid out in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

The German population increased with a wave of immigrants, and tensions arose between the Lutheran groups over language and culture. Eventually, the original Lutheran Church in New York splintered into two units: a German-speaking congregation and a Dutch-speaking one. From this point onwards, the Dutch congregation diminished while the German one gained prominence. By the end of the 1700s, the Dutch congregation had dwindled. The Lutherans in New York reunited in a single congregation: the German Lutheran Church.[17]

In 1866, the leaders of St. Matthew changed its name to The German Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Matthew. As the population grew, they planted new churches to accommodate worshippers, and St. Matthew became known as the "mother church" of the Lutheran congregation. In 1881, St. Matthew contributed to the establishment of Concordia College in Bronxville, Westchester County, and supported various Lutheran institutions, including a parochial school, hospitals, orphanages, nursing homes, and an agency that served newly arrived immigrants.[18]

As the population of New York diversified with newer immigrant groups from Europe, the more established German citizens moved out to the outer boroughs, replaced in Manhattan with Italians and Eastern European Jewish immigrants.[19] St. Matthew relocated to the northern end of Manhattan in 1906 due to a decline in attendance. Eventually, in 1910, it joined the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, and the name changed to Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.[20]

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[15] Galchutt, "Lutherans in Harlem," 46-48.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

Records show that St. Matthew's location and affiliation changes were maneuvers to preserve its identity. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, it struggled again with demographic changes and moved in 1945 to Inwood, New York.[21] Around this time, another notable demographic shift occurred. African Americans who moved north from the Southern states during segregation could not worship at St. Matthews and needed to form their congregations.

African American Lutherans who moved to New York from Virginia established Bethany Lutheran Church. Rev. W.O. Hill, Pastor of St. Matthews, provided evening worship services to accommodate African American Lutherans.[22] In 1944, a young pastor, Rev. Clemence Sabourin, moved to New York from North Carolina and started Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Harlem, New York.[23] Under Rev. Sabourin's leadership, the church grew slowly through neighborhood outreach programs and door-to-door campaigns.

Rev. Sabourin traveled throughout the community and surrounding neighborhoods, inviting householders to join him for regular worship. Over time, Rev. Sabourin amassed over twelve hundred congregants. He created Sunday school programs. Aware that no congregation can advance without the inclusion and nurturing of young people, he established a Christian day school called the School on the Hill.[24]

Towards the end of the twentieth century, Lutheranism in America had developed into three central bodies: the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the Lutheran Church in America, and the American Lutheran Church. The leaders of these three groups merged and, in 1988, formed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the "ELCA"), becoming a church body organized into three executive structures—congregations, synods, and the leading governing churchwide organization.[25]

The churchwide organization administers ELCA's sixty-five synods and approximately ten thousand congregations in the U.S., the Caribbean, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.[26] Under the ELCA, Lutheran Churches continued evolving in response to changing needs and societal shifts. For example, in 2009, prompted by the debate over gay clergy, many conservative congregations lobbied to create a new Lutheran Church. Then the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (Lutheran "CORE") developed and published a vision statement for a new church.

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[21] Galchutt, "Lutherans in Harlem," 46-48.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

On August 27, 2010, CORE organized the North American Lutheran Church ("NALC") as a separate institution from the ELCA.[27] One thousand members were present at the constituting convocation. This new denomination snowballed; within three years of its birth, over three hundred seventy congregations were within its fellowship. Reflecting the emphasis of NALC on evangelism and missionary work, approximately sixty of those congregations were missionary endeavors.[28]

The ELCA oversees Lutheran Churches in the United States. It confesses the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The organization proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and its Ministers of Word and Sacrament preach, teach, and affirm the Bible as the authority of God. The ELCA's teaching or theology serves the proclamation and ministry of the faith. It prepares members to be witnesses in speech and action of God's rich mercy in Jesus Christ.[29]

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther, the Lutheran Church's namesake, championed the Reformation with his 95 Thesis that changed the direction of Christianity. Lutherans believe that justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ saves all people and provides hope for salvation and eternal life. "Throughout the history of the Christian Church, people have witnessed to the gospel, as the creeds bear testimony."[30] Christians have expressed their biblical faith in summaries since the second century. Those summaries identified the church's public message. Lutherans recognize two Holy Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Several theologians, electors, and officials carefully considered selected Lutheran documents, and they composed the Book of Concord. It documents the historic doctrinal standard of the Lutheran Church. Lutherans believe that "God establishes that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved without work, by faith alone, receiving the forgiveness of sins as a gift."[31]

A distinct and divine mysteriousness ascribed to some denominations, particularly the Lutheran denomination, is the Theology of the Sacraments: Christ is present in the Lord's Supper: the bread is Christ's body, and the wine is his blood. Christ's presence is in the bread and wine during Holy Communion. Other denominations do not understand this view.

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[27] North American Lutheran Church, "History."

[28] Ibid.

[29] Evangelical Lutheran Church, https://www.elca.org.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Robert Kolb, and Timothy J. Wengert, Eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of The Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 41.

The other denominations' view Christ's body and blood as symbolic of bread and wine and from a human viewpoint instead of a spiritual viewpoint. God's divine nature is God's Spirit, and God does things in and through the Spirit. God sent Jesus Christ to earth to bring salvation. *Ecumenical* is a term used to describe Creeds or Confessions.

Lutherans embody three Ecumenical Creeds, and each Article of the Creeds declares the Christian faith. The Creeds guide believers regarding the theology of the church and "offer believers guidance for public instruction and witness, and serve to regulate, and evaluate the public theology of the church's teachers."[32]

The Apostles Creed affirms the triune God as the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was written in the eighth century, represented a final redaction of the Old Roman Creed, and maintains its authority and use in Baptismal liturgies. The Apostle Creed forms the Christian doctrine, lays the foundation for the Christian faith, and reflects the apostolic teaching of the early church. The Apostles Creed is widely used in most Western churches, catholic and protestant. The Apostles Creed is the traditional belief affirmed by the early church. Each Confession in the Creed is known as an Article. For example, the First Article states the Christians believe in only one God, the one true God, and God's divine nature as the Creator of heaven and earth.

The Nicene Creed is Christianity's primary statement of belief in most Christian denominations. The Nicene Creed is like the Apostle Creed. In A.D. 325, the Nicene Creed was prepared and titled Nicene because of the location where the ecumenical church held the first council meeting, Nicaea; it, too, consisted of Articles of Confession.

The Athanasian Creed received its name from Athanasius. It originated from a centuries-old belief of theologians that Athanasius, a bishop, and staunched believer of Trinitarianism, penned the Athanasian Creed. The Athanasian Creed is extensive and focuses on Trinitarian doctrine and Christology.

**The Anabaptist Church**

The Anabaptists distinguished themselves from other Protestant groups by insisting that only adults who professed their faith should baptize. Van Neste rightfully described Anabaptism as a "Reformation phenomenon" that emerged out of the work of Swiss and German radicals of the Protestant Reformation, the movement initiated by Huldrych Zwingli in the sixteenth century in Zurich, Switzerland.[33] Anabaptists argued that infants and young children could not gain redemption through Baptism until they learned of good and evil and exercised their free will to repent and accept the sacrament of Baptism.[34]

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[32] Kolb and Wengert, Evangelical Lutheran Church, 19-20.

[33] Van Neste "Correcting the Record," 188.

[34] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia, "Anabaptist," Encyclopedia Britannica, 23 Aug. 2021. accessed May 3, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anabaptists.

Infants, they argued, do not understand the meaning behind the baptismal ritual. The first Anabaptist adult baptism occurred on January 25, 1525, at Zollikon, outside Zürich. Konrad Grebel baptized Jörg Blaurock by affusion (pouring of water) on his head.[35] The first minister of the Anabaptist movement was Alexander Mack. In 1527 the seven articles of the Schleitheim Confession laid out the fundamental convictions of the movement.[36] The most fundamental of Anabaptist convictions relate to their belief in "rebaptizing;" and is displayed in the name given to the movement.

The word Ana is a Greek word (πάλι) that means "again." In compounding it in their name, Anabaptists affirm their view of rebaptizing even if the parents of adult Anabaptists baptized them as children.[37] An Anabaptist baptism differed significantly from Roman Catholics and other Christian denominations in that, for Anabaptists, the pouring or sprinkling of sanctified water over the head is sufficient, opening a spiritual doorway to a life of ongoing transformation. They perceive transformation as a lifelong journey of discipleship in community with other believers of the faith.[38]

Like most other Protestants, Anabaptists believed themselves to be the true disciples of Christ, living lives separate from the world, teaching the gospel, and upholding the faith.[39] Their core values are discipleship, peace-making, acknowledging the risen Christ in their gathered communities, and Scripture as their primary source of faith. In these values, the Anabaptists aligned themselves with the spirit of the primitive church that developed centuries following Jesus' death and emphasized the Christian values of love, fellowship, communal living, the teaching of the gospel, praying, and living by faith.[40]

Anabaptists believed in the teachings of the Apostles' Creed, the Trinitarian concept of God, predestination, the incarnation, the anointing work of Christ, and salvation through Christ's death on the cross.[41] They rejected the clericalized and territorially based church system

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[35] Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 11.

[36] Lisa D. Weaver and Denny Weaver. *Living the Anabaptist Story: A Guide to Early Beginnings with Questions for Today* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2015), 10.

[37] Weaver and Weaver, Living the Anabaptist Story, 11.

[38] Ibid.

[39] William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 14.

[40] Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 196, 244.

[41] Ibid., 178-190, 245.

associated with other Christian denominations.[42] Some scholars have argued that the Anabaptists' approach to theology is existential rather than dogmatic or doctrinal.

The American theologian Robert Friedmann is a staunch supporter of existential theology. He claims that "ever since the days of the Apostolic church, Anabaptism is the only example in church history of an 'existential Christianity' where there existed no basic split between faith and life, even though the struggle for realization or actualization of this faith into practice remained a perennial task."[43] Anabaptism is a lived practice rather than a theology. Others disagree.

J. Lawrence Burkholder is a Goshen College and Harvard Divinity School professor, scholar, and interpreter of Mennonite theological ethics. He argues that Mennonites (an Anabaptist community) "while having resisted formal philosophy, have upheld values, made choices, maintained chronicles, interpreted history, and perpetuated lifestyles which, when reflected upon against a universal background, constitute a philosophy implicitly."[44]

Anabaptists encountered persecution from the inception of the movement. The movement was born out of conflict within its parent church when some parishioners within Zwingli's movement became dissatisfied with his reluctance to institute requested reforms. Despite the absence of a formal creedal system within Anabaptist communities, the Lord's Supper, known by Anabaptists as the ordinance of the Lord, is an actual Eucharistic act or ritual for them and contributes to a formalized practical theology.

The Anabaptist movement that proceeded from first adult baptism grew out of religious and political discontent, challenging not just Zwingli's religious authority. Zwingli had set up a theocracy in Zurich; however, Anabaptists pivoted towards questions about the relationship between church and state, such as whether the church fell under the state's authority.[45] The backlash was severe.

William R. Estep, a Baptist historian, and authority on the Anabaptist movement, points out that thousands of Anabaptists were victims of one of the largest-scale persecutions in Christian history for rejecting the unity of church and state.[46] Most Protestants were unwilling to envisage church and state as separate entities. Anabaptists believed the church's business should

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[42] James R. Krahill "Characteristics of Anabaptist Mission in The Sixteenth Century" in *Sixteenth Century Mission: Explorations in Protestant & Roman Catholic Theology & Practice* by Robert L. Gallagher & Edward L. Smither, Eds. Foreword by Dana L. Robert (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 7.

[43] Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism, 27-28.

[44] J. Lawrence Burkholder, "Philosophy."" Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Accessed May 8, 2022. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Philosophy &oldid=118611.

[45] Granquist, Lutherans in America, 11.

[46] Estep, The Anabaptist Story, 75.

be separate from the states. They received harsh punishments for their outlook on church and state business wherever they settled in Europe.[47]

Beginning in 1643, Anabaptists, now known as Mennonites, migrated to North America, and in 1683 they established their first permanent settlement in Germantown, Pennsylvania.[48] There, they separated themselves from society, becoming self-reliant farmers devoted to their new land as they were to their faith. The Mennonite way of life, centered on self-reliance and simple faith, came to be regarded in later years as an exemplary template for Christianity, a reminder, according to Estep, that there is "only one way, the way of the cross, for the church to become 'salt, light, and leaven' in any society, and in every age."[49]

In addition, this Mennonite template could be "the prized possession of every free society of the twentieth century."[50] The twentieth century's high regard for the legacy of the Mennonites is missing from the early beginnings of Mennonite history in America. Their relationship with the three main Protestant groups established in North America was shaky. It was challenging for them to fit in, and some clergy members of the other religious groups were uncomfortable with their presence and did not trust them.

The Anabaptists seemed to be an "annoying presence of people who look after their spiritual concern, did not 'go to church,' or take part in the official sacrament."[51] Despite the pressures; however, the Dutch, German, and Swiss-speaking Anabaptists remained steadfast in their way of life, forming solid communities across North America, where they numbered about five hundred thousand members, the largest group of the worldwide Mennonite movement.[52]

**The Baptist Church**

The Baptist movement began as a small sect in the fifteenth century in England and Holland under the pastorship of early dissenters such as John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, Thomas Jessey, and Roger Williams. The early Baptist movement emphasized the Baptism ritual as a crucial step toward redemption. It advocated for the separation of church and state.[53] The movement was so synonymous with the sacrament of baptism that a sixteenth-century opponent

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[47] Chute, et al., *The Baptist Story*, 11

[48] Estep, The Anabaptist Story, 268.

[49] Ibid., 305.

[50] Ibid.

[51] John L. Ruth, Maintain the Right Fellowship: A Narrative Account of Life in the Oldest Mennonite Community in North America (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 27.

[52] Ruth, Maintain the Right Fellowship, 27.

[53] Chute, et al., *The Baptist Story*, 11.

of the early figures of the group called them "those Baptists" or "Dippers" who called themselves "Baptized Believers" or "Baptized Churches."[54]

As the Anabaptists discussed earlier, Baptists eschewed infant baptism, believing that one can become a Christian only through a willing and conscious personal manifestation of one's faith. Unlike the Anabaptists' practice of Baptism by affusion, however, Baptists followed the strict practice of complete immersion. Two types of Baptists appeared on the scene: General and Particular Baptists. General Baptists founded their first Church in late 1611 to early 1612, and Particular Baptists founded their Church between 1633 and 1638.

The latter group of Baptists eventually became the largest and most influential Baptist denomination. The most distinctive difference between these two groups is glaringly apparent from their monikers: General Baptists believe Christ died to save the general population (all peoples). Particular Baptists believe Christ died to save only an elected few.[55]

The history of the Baptist Church in America began in 1631 when Roger Williams (ca. 1603-83) fled England for New England with his wife, Mary Bernard, to avoid arrest and prosecution for being Separatists.[56] He first settled in Boston, then moved to Salem, Massachusetts, where he found employment as a teacher's assistant. Later, he moved with his family to Plymouth, where he served as a teaching elder at the Pilgrim's First Church.[57] In 1633, Williams returned to Salem, built a home for his family, and served as an assistant to Pastor Samuel Skelton for two years at the Salem Church.

Pastor Skelton passed away in 1635, and Williams became the Pastor at the Salem Church.[58] In 1636, he met with challenges of heresy and sedition after refusing to discontinue preaching "diverse, new, and dangerous opinions."[59] Williams received an order for deportation to England; however, he fled to Narragansett Bay, and founded the town of Providence, Rhode Island, where he established the first Baptist Church in America.[60]

Williams then selected a man from the community, Ezekiel Holliman, to baptize him, and Williams baptized Holliman and others. Williams died in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1683 at eighty.[61] While his death went unobserved, his legacy lived on for hundreds of years afterward.

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[54] David Beale, Baptist History in England, and America: Personalities, Positions, and Practices (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2018), 351-55.

[55] Beale, *Baptist History*, 54, 75, 200-01.

[56] Ibid., 349.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 350-51.

[59] Ibid., 3-5.

[60] Ibid., 358-59.

[61] Ibid., 371.

The Baptist Church that Williams established grew to be one of the largest denominations in North America, expanding from Massachusetts to areas outside of Philadelphia. Williams' insistence on a strict separation between church and state influenced the drafters of the United States Constitution to set First Amendment limits.

The Baptist Church in America originated under several bodies, including the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA), the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA). The American Baptist Churches USA originates in the First Baptist Church, formed by Roger Williams in Providence, Rhode Island. The Triennial Convention proceeded from the effort to unite the Baptist congregations into organized evangelical missions.

The congregations that subscribed to the Triennial Convention split into two bodies following the American Revolution when Baptists from the southern states opposed the abolition of slavery. The opposition to the abolition of slavery helped to form what is now the ABCUSA (formerly Northern Baptists). The Southern Baptist Council originated in 1845 in Augusta, Georgia.[62]

In the nineteenth century, a wave of charitable enthusiasm for SBC established several institutions, including the American Baptist Publication Society and the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The institutions provided home and foreign missions, education, and publication but focused primarily on foreign missions. The SBC is now the most prominent Baptist denomination in the world and the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. The PBA is the oldest continuous association of Baptist Churches in North America.

The PBA originated in 1707 when five churches in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware united under one association to coordinate missionary activities. Decades immediately before and following the Civil War, the number of Baptist Churches and their membership grew exponentially, and by 1767, this rapid multiplication of churches compelled the PBA to constitute two subsidiary organizations: the Warren in New England and the Ketochton in Virginia.[63]

In 1795, Isaac Backus estimated that Baptist congregations rose to one thousand one hundred fifty-two. As individual churches supported themselves, various other independent associations arose to organize groups of similar churches into fraternal units.[64] By the 1800s, there were at least forty-eight local associations. The need to organize into a single national association became a much-discussed topic. The primary impulse to organize nationally emerged from the churches' interest in organized overseas missionary work.

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[62] Beale, *Baptist History*, 349.

[63] The Philadelphia Baptist Association, accessed September 9, 2020, https://philadelphiabaptist.org/history/, "History."

[64] Religion News, https://religionnews.com/2021/05/21/southern-baptist-decline-continues-denomination-has-lost-more-than-2-million-members-since-2006/.

In response to a petition from potential missionaries, the Congregationalist denomination leadership formed the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Within a couple of weeks of the Commission's formation of missionaries, Adoniram and Ann Judson and Samuel and Harriet Newell sailed for India on a ship, followed five days later by Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice.[65] Judson moved on to Burma (present-day Myanmar), while Rice returned home to enlist support from American Baptists.

Because of Judson and Rice's missionary efforts, the Baptists' General Convention in 1814 formed the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions (also called the Triennial Convention). This Missionary Convention created a structure with scope to support foreign and home missions, education, social justice ministries, and the publication of religious periodicals.[66] The Missionary Convention's efforts marked the first time Baptists in America cooperated nationally.

Baptists focused on two primary ordinances, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Their distinguishing beliefs, summarized in an acrostic acronym, BAPTIST, became famous among them for Sunday school lessons in the 1960s. These beliefs are Biblical Authority, Autonomy of the Local Church, Priesthood of All Believers, Two Ordinances, Individual Soul Liberty, Saved Church Membership, and Two offices of the Church (elders and deacons).[67]

From its beginning in the seventeenth century, the Baptist Church flourished in North America. It is now one of the largest denominations of Christians in America and has strongly influenced the fabric of American life and values. Their influence has touched on areas outside religious matters, such as championing the separation of church and state in the public school system (1901) and the Child Labor Act (1913-1915).

Baptists have exerted enormous influence in the development of the cities where they participate in civic and social life. They inspired some of America's oldest institutions or directly established them. Some of these institutions include the founding of the Baptist Home (Deer Meadows Retirement Community) in 1869 and the Baptist City Mission in 1879 by the PBA. The PBA is also responsible for the establishment in 1883 of the American Baptist Publication Society and the Baptist Orphanage of Philadelphia (The Baptist Children's Services).

Formed in Philadelphia in 1872, Grace Baptist Church grew into one of the largest Baptist congregations in the United States and the parent of several notable organizations, including Temple University and Temple Health. The former grew out of the program of evening classes set up by Grace Baptist Church's first minister, Russell Conwell. Conwell was also

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[65] Religion News, "Southern Baptists."

[66] Beale, *Baptist History*, 4-5.

[67] Ibid.

instrumental in establishing Garretson Hospital, Samaritan Hospital, and Greatheart, which eventually became part of the Temple Health System, as it is now known.[68]

Additionally, the PBA was instrumental in the establishment of the Downington Industrial School (1905), The Baptist Settlement House (1906), the New Settlement House (1911), the Philadelphia Baptist Mission Society (1920), the Good Shepherd Ministries (1947), and the Opportunities Industrialization Center (the 1960s).[69] Although the PBA, the SBC, the ABCUSA, and other Baptist organizations remain vital in both religious and secular life in the United States, and overseas, statistics show a church in steady decline.[70]

Membership in Southern Baptist congregations peaked at sixteen million three hundred thousand in 2006; however, it has declined by over two million. Reports show that Southern Baptist congregations numbered fourteen million in 2020.[71] Membership of those congregations has since declined by four hundred thirty-five thousand six hundred thirty-two, showing a fourteen-year trend of membership decline.[72]

Official denominational statistics compiled by Lifeway Christian Resources reported that attendance at SBC congregations experienced a historic high of sixteen million three hundred thousand in 2006; however, it dropped to fourteen million eight hundred thousand in 2018, and 2021 it declined further to thirteen million seven hundred thousand. Likewise, average weekly in-person worship attendance declined from four million four hundred thirty-nine thousand seven hundred ninety-seven in 2020 to three million six hundred seven thousand five hundred thirty in 2021, reflecting a decline of almost nineteen percent.[73]

In a statement announcing the report, Scott McConnell, the executive director of Lifeway Research, said that throughout 2020, churches tried to find the right balance between in-person and online events. McConnel believes the pandemic affected attendance because churches worldwide shut down their in-person services to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.[74] Although the declines were significant, more glaring still is the decline in total baptisms, a key measure for the evangelical denominations.

The decline in total baptisms plunged to a historic level in 2020, declining fifty percent each year and hitting its lowest number since World War II. 2020 was the ninth year in a row that baptism numbers had declined. As attendance declines, America's largest Protestant

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[68] The Philadelphia Baptist Association, https://philadelphiabaptist.org/history/, "History."

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Religion News, "Southern Baptists."

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

denomination continues to dwindle.[75] Many researchers have explained these severe declines by pointing to the global Coronavirus pandemic and a parallel between the current pandemic and the influenza pandemic that swept the world between 1918 and 1919 when the number of people worshipping at SBC churches reached the same levels as the present pandemic.

Ronnie Floyd, the SBC's Executive Committee chairperson, notes that reports showed a need for a renewed focus on evangelism, missions, and church planting. He believes it may take years for the denomination to know the full effects of the pandemic on its churches.[76] Even though the Coronavirus pandemic might have exacerbated membership and attendance; it might be necessary to look beyond the pandemic as the sole explanation for attendance and membership decline, evident before the pandemic.

The Church declined for decades, facing the headwind of increasing secularization among Americans. Between 2006 and 2020, SBC lost over two million members (Appendix M). The Church is not only struggling to gain new converts, as attested to by the reduction in Baptisms, but is also struggling to retain current members.

**The Episcopal Church**

The Episcopal Church originated in the United States from the established Church of England when Anglican congregations in the former English colonies organized themselves into a new church, free from the authority of the English bishops and the king of England, who was the head of the Church of England. In 1780, Dr. William Smith put together an Episcopal clergy and laity gathering. By the end of 1783, Smith and the Episcopal clergy chose Protestant Episcopal Church as the name for their denomination.[77]

The Protestant Episcopal Church obtained charter approval from the legislature. In August 1783, a government by a Synod of laity and clergy granted it title to church property. The legislature agreed to protect the Church from foreign powers, acknowledging that the Church is independent of foreign control. The favorable relationship that the Episcopal Church enjoyed with the legislature is understandable: many of the new Church's organizers, two-thirds of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence, were Episcopalians.

Episcopalian minister Samuel Provost, the first Bishop of New York and rector of Trinity Church on Wall Street conducted the inauguration services for George Washington, the nation's first president.[78] Since then, over a quarter of all U.S. presidents and many members of the social

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[75] Religion News, "Southern Baptists."

[76] Ibid.

[77] Robert W. Prichard, A History of The Episcopal Church: Complete Through The 78th General Convention (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), 114.

[78] Prichard, A History of The Episcopal Church, 114.

and financial elite have been members of the Episcopal Church. The influence of the Episcopal Church in shaping American history has been profound.

The Episcopal Church in the United States grew from 160,000 communicants after the American Revolution to about three-quarters of a million by 1900 and had approximately one million eight hundred thousand members. It is part of the Anglican Communion, comprised of forty-six independent churches. These independent churches unite with similar liturgical practices based on the English Book of Common Prayer. Anglicans live in over one hundred sixty-five countries and comprise over eighty-five million people.

The Eucharist, called Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper, is the principal act of worship in the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church participated in the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century, joined the World Council of Churches, and entered full communion with the ELCA. As a result, evangelical Lutherans and the Episcopalians now share clergy, churches, and a joint mission while retaining their structure and worship styles. The courtship between the two churches began in 1969 and led to a provisional agreement in 1982 to share the Eucharist while the dialogue to establish full communion continued.[79]

On January 1, 2001, the ELCA and the Episcopal Church formed a united front. They celebrated full communion on January 6, 2001, sharing the Eucharist and announcing their adherence to a combined liturgical tradition. The ELCA's Bishop H. George Anderson presided over the liturgical celebration and Bishop Frank T. Griswold of the Episcopal Church proclaimed God's Word.[80] The unity between the Lutheran and Episcopal Churches has been hailed as an example of reconciliation for other churches to follow. The hope is that other church bodies will work towards similar peaceful relationships.[81]

Despite the innovations and affiliations in the modern Episcopal Church, such as the cooperation with Lutherans, the acceptance of same-sex unity and priesthood, and the revision of the Book of Common Prayers, membership, and attendance have declined similar to the other denominations earlier in this study. Reports show that between 1966 and 1990, baptized members fell from over three million six hundred thousand to less than two million four hundred thousand.[82]

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[79] Catholic News Service, "Episcopalians, Evangelical Lutherans Attain Full Unity." *National Catholic Reporter* 37, no. 12 (Jan 19, 2001): 10, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Ftrade-journals%2Fepiscopalians-evangelical-lutherans-attain-full%2Fdocview%2F215317075%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[80] Catholic News Service, "Episcopalians," 10.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Prichard, *A History of The Episcopal*, 199, 222, 239, 302, 319-21.

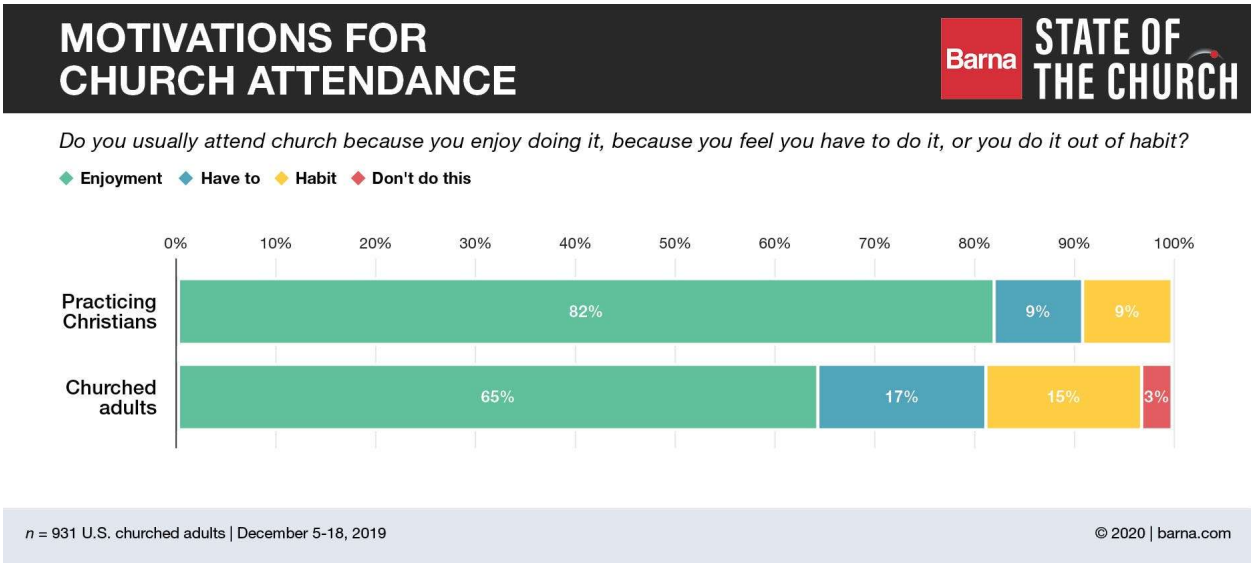
Church officials have been scrambling to find a solution to the decline. The Rev. Dwight Zscheile, an expert on church decline and renewal, sums up the situation thus: "[t]he overall picture is dire—not one of decline as much as demise within the next generation."[83] Zscheile's statement applies to Episcopal congregations in America and many other denominations in deep decline worldwide.

[83] Knox News. "Episcopal Leaders Ponder." https://www.knoxnews.com/story/entertainment/columnists/terry-mattingly/2020/12/17/episcopal-leaders-ponder-churchs-declining-attendance-terry-mattingly/6534905002/.

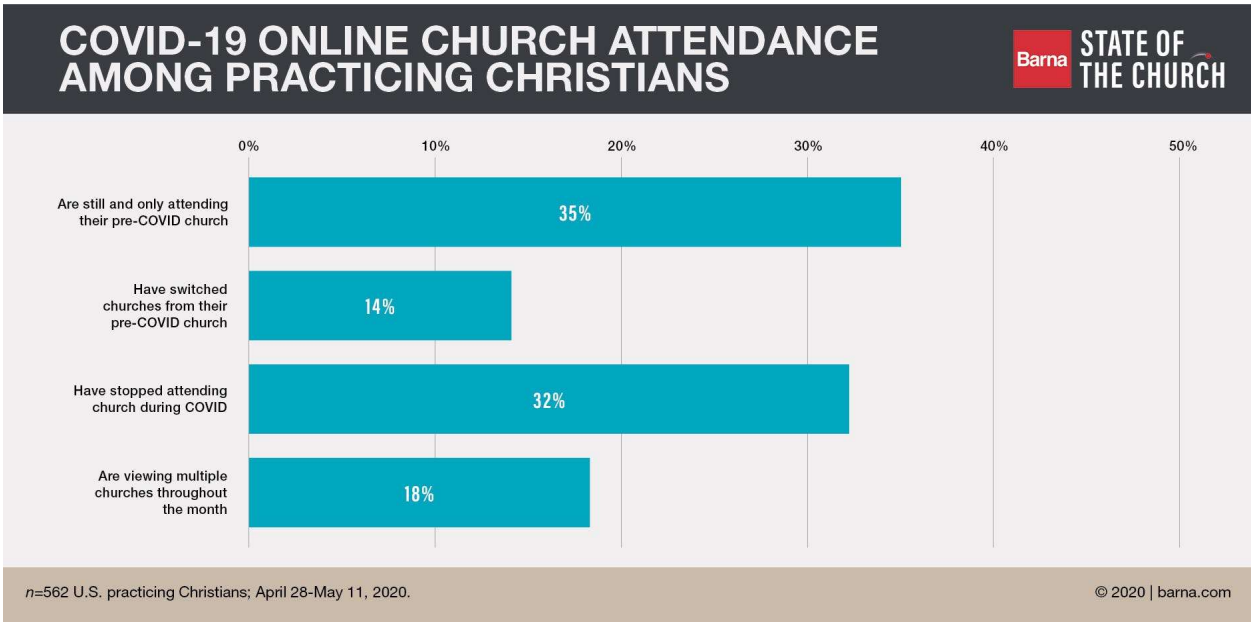
# Appendix D

## The State of the Church[84]

### Motivations for Church Attendance

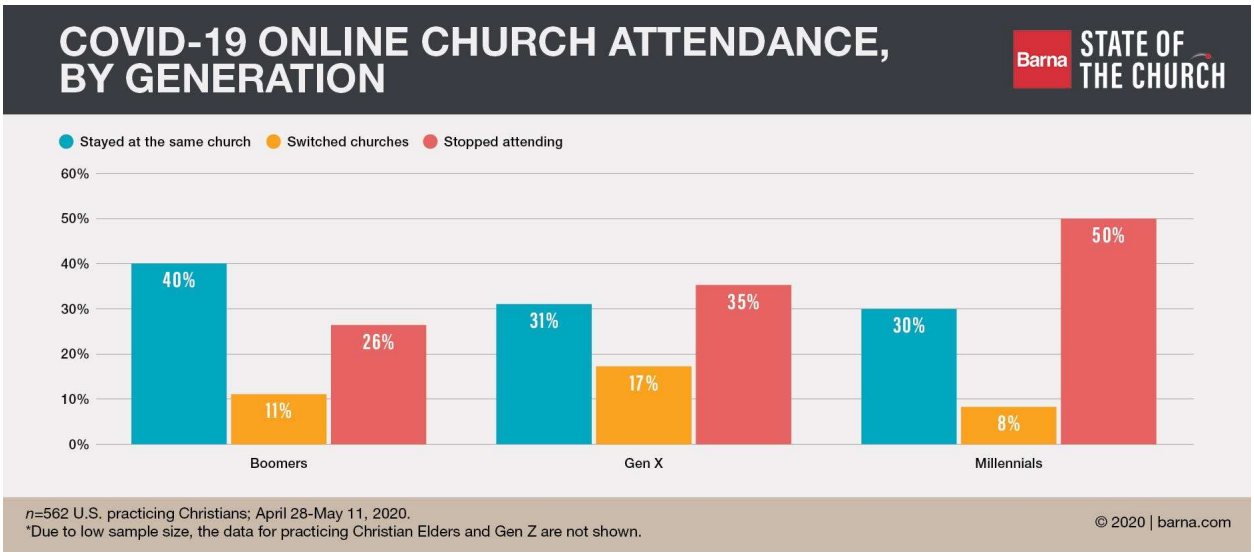



### COVID-19 Online Church Attendance Among Practicing Christians

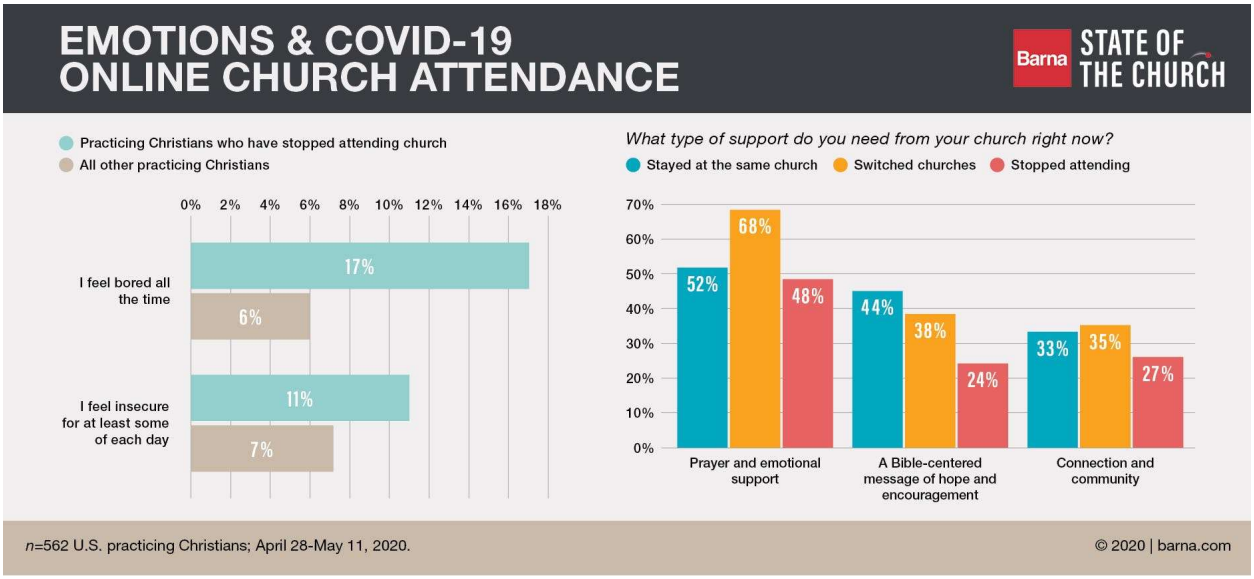



[84] "State of the Church," Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2020, accessed December 28, 2022, https://www.barna.com/research/church-attendance-2022/.

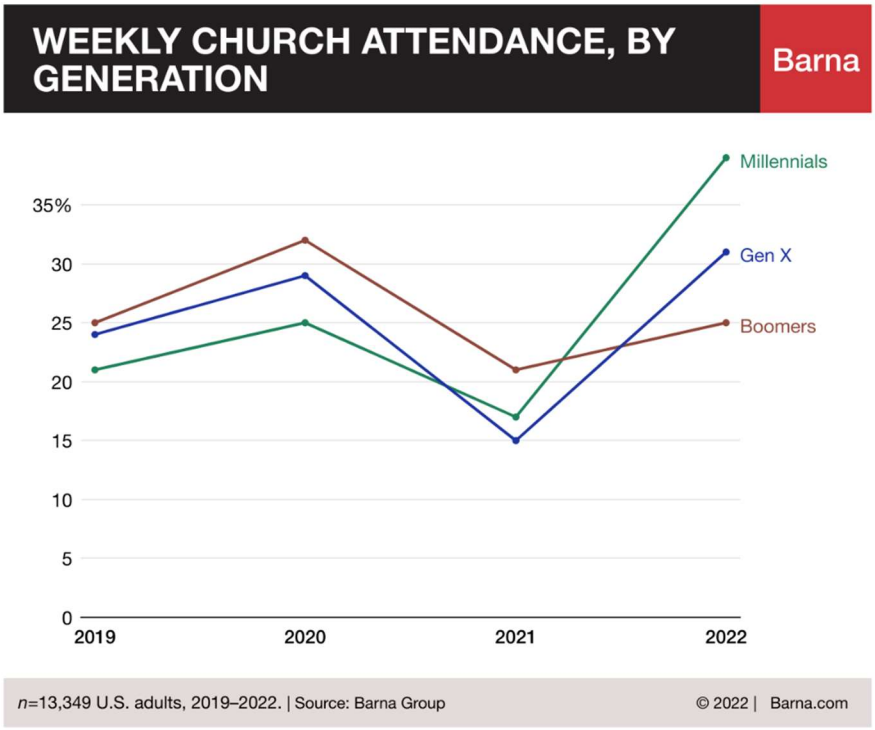
**COVID-19 Online Church Attendance, By Generation**



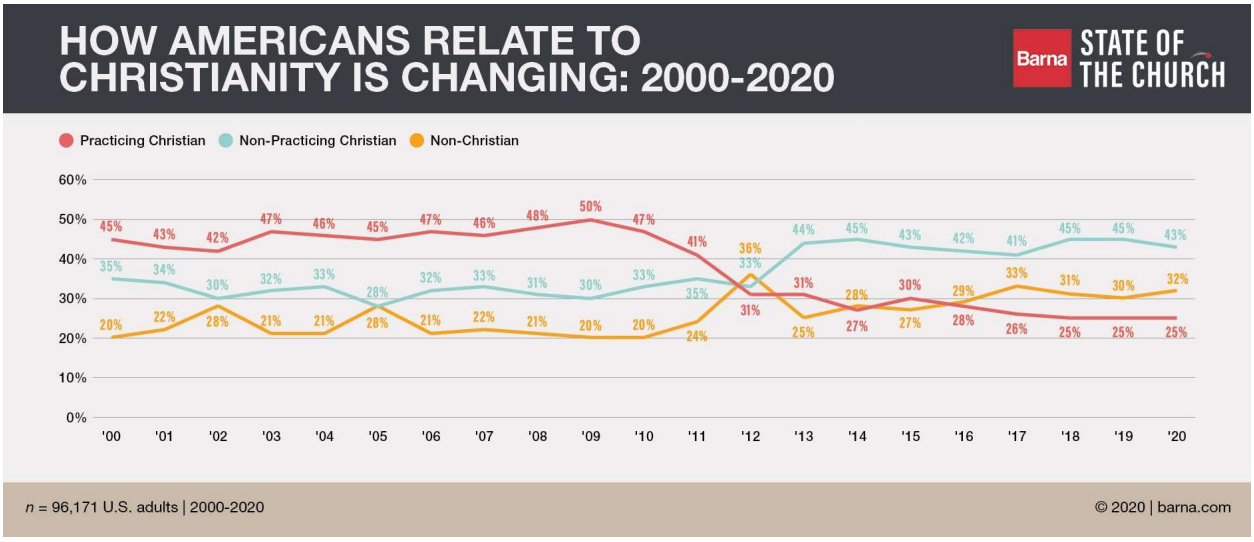

**Emotions & COVID-19 Online Church Attendance**



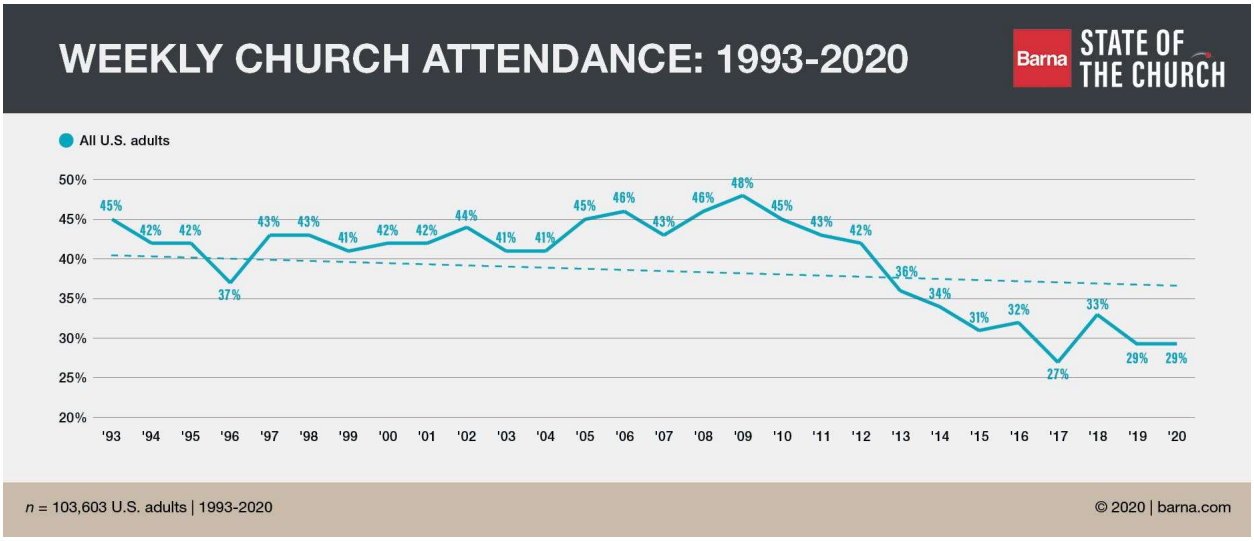
**Weekly Church Attendance, By Generation**



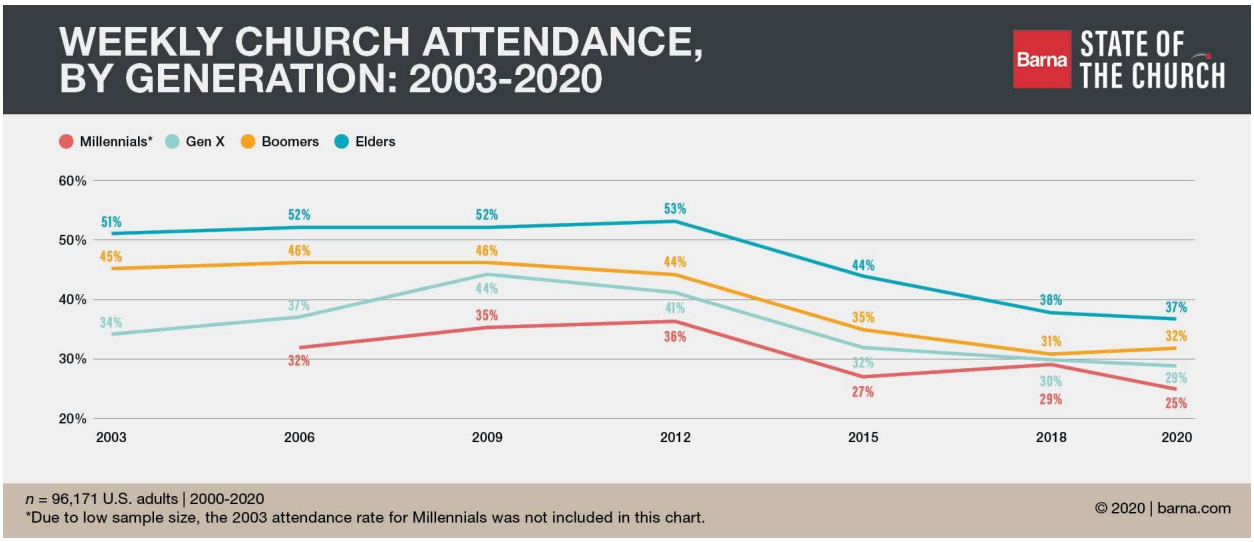

**How Americans Relate to Christianity is Changing: 2000-2020**



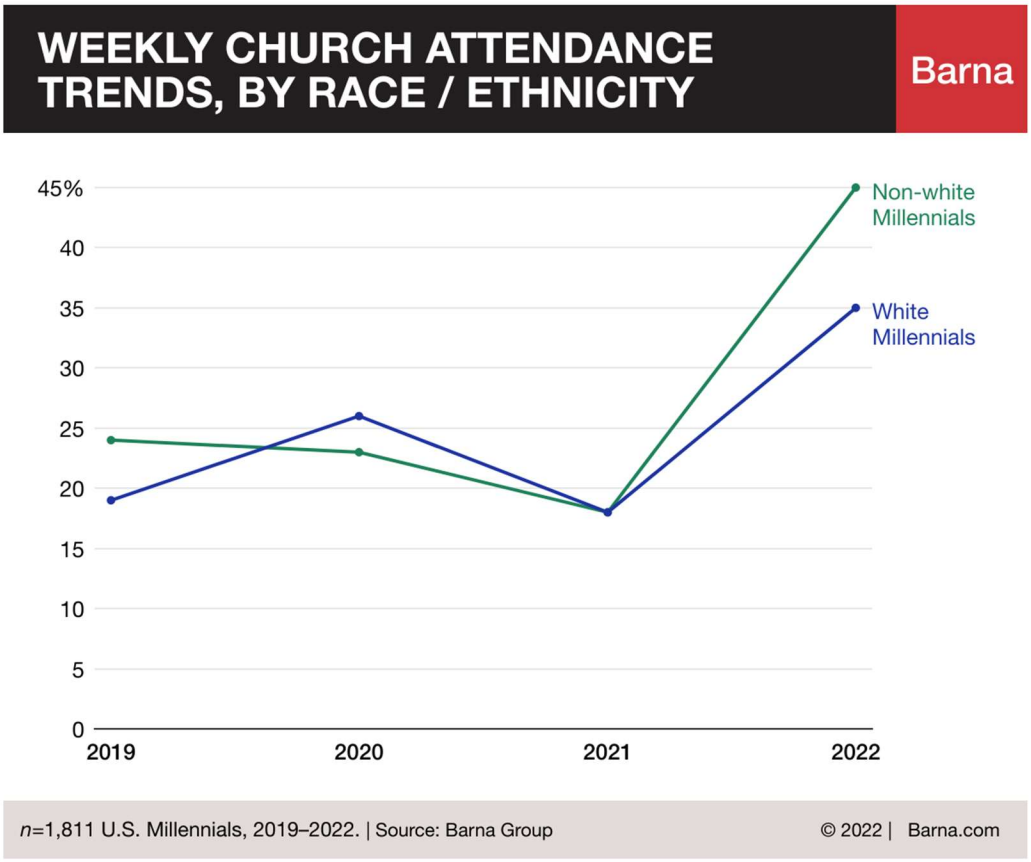
**Weekly Church Attendance: 1993-2020**



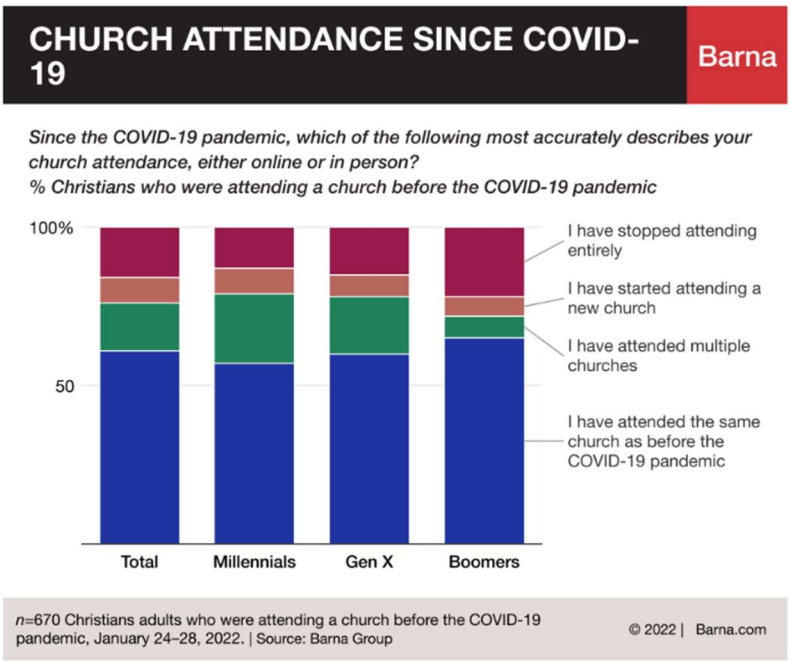

**Weekly Church Attendance, By Generation: 2003-2020**



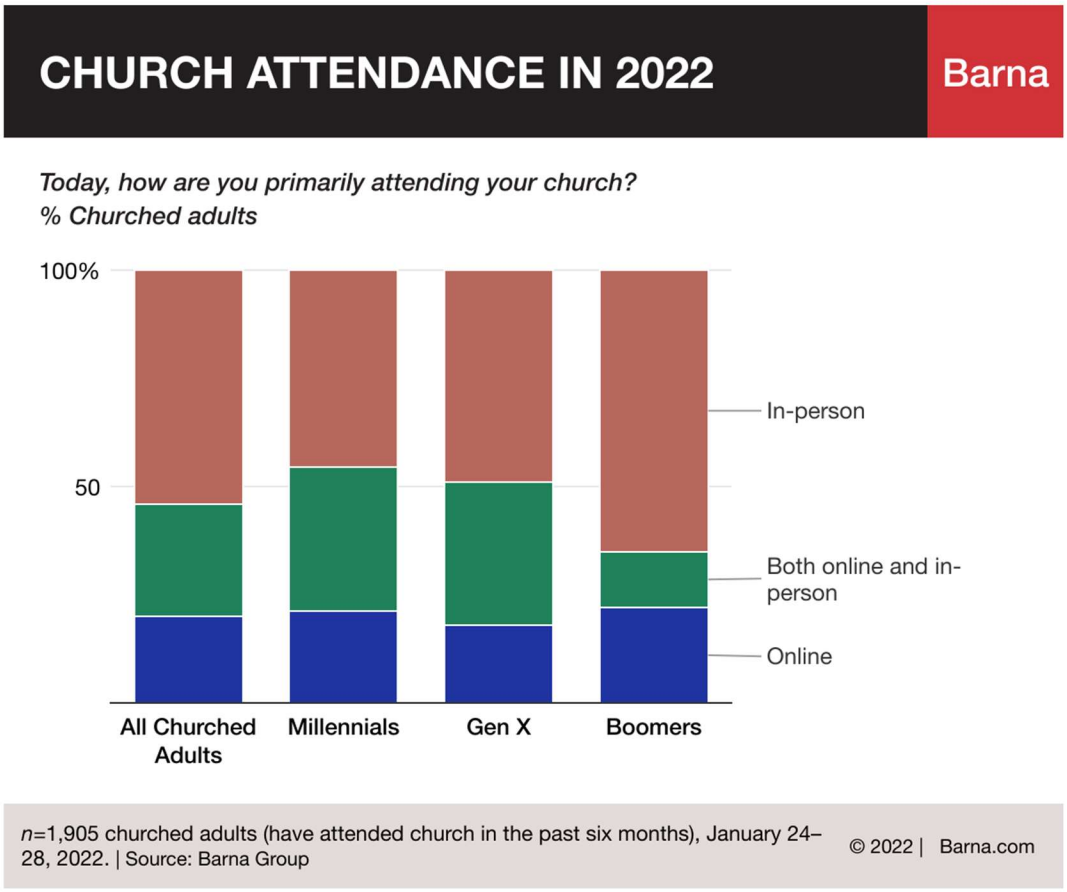
**Weekly Church Attendance Trends, By Race / Ethnicity**




**Church Attendance Since COVID-19**



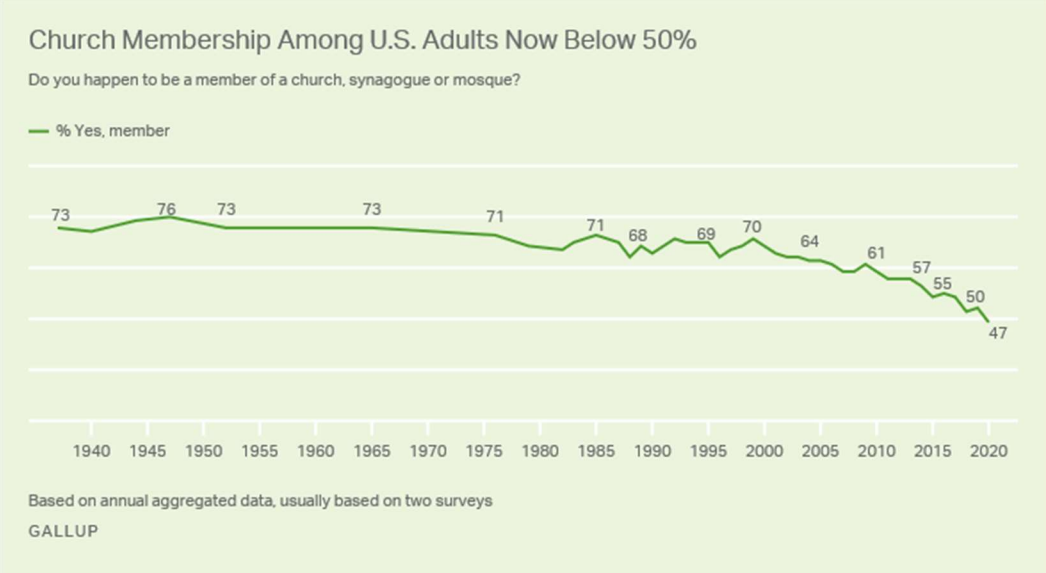
**Church Attendance In 2022**



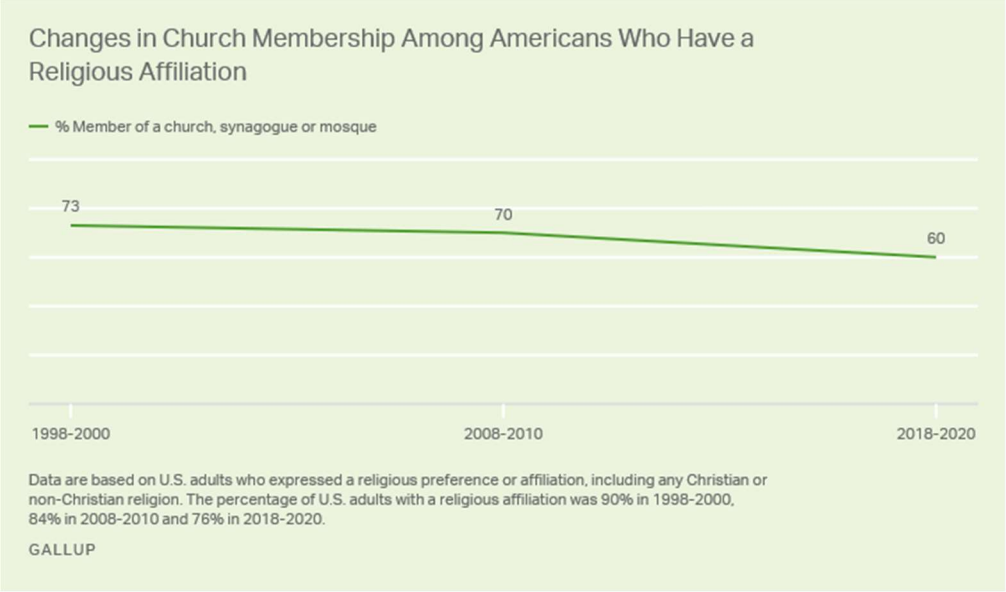
# Appendix E

## Church Membership Statistics[85]

### Church Membership Among U.S. Adults Now Below 50%




### Change in Church Membership Among Americans Who Have a Religious Affiliation




[85] Jones, Gallup, "Church Membership," 2022.

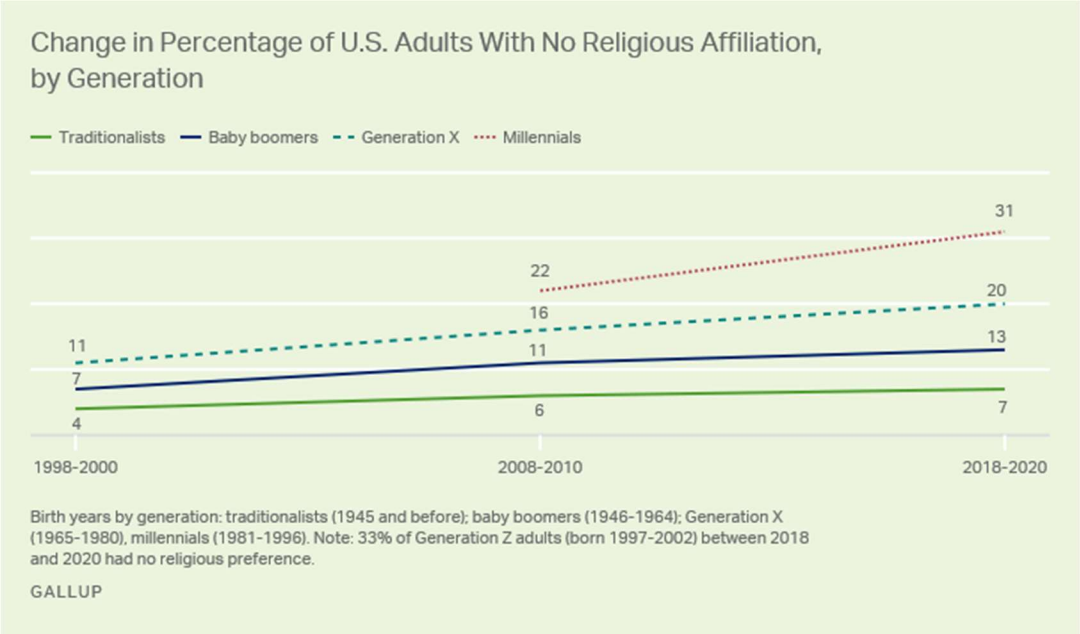
**Changes in Church Membership by Generation, Over Time**

| | 1998-2000 | 2008-2010 | 2018-2020 | Change since 1998-2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | % | pct. pts. |
| Traditionalists (born before 1946) | 77 | 73 | 66 | -11 |
| Baby boomers (born 1946-1964) | 67 | 63 | 58 | -9 |
| Generation X (born 1965-1980) | 62 | 57 | 50 | -12 |
| Millennials (born 1981-1996) | n/a | 51 | 36 | n/a |

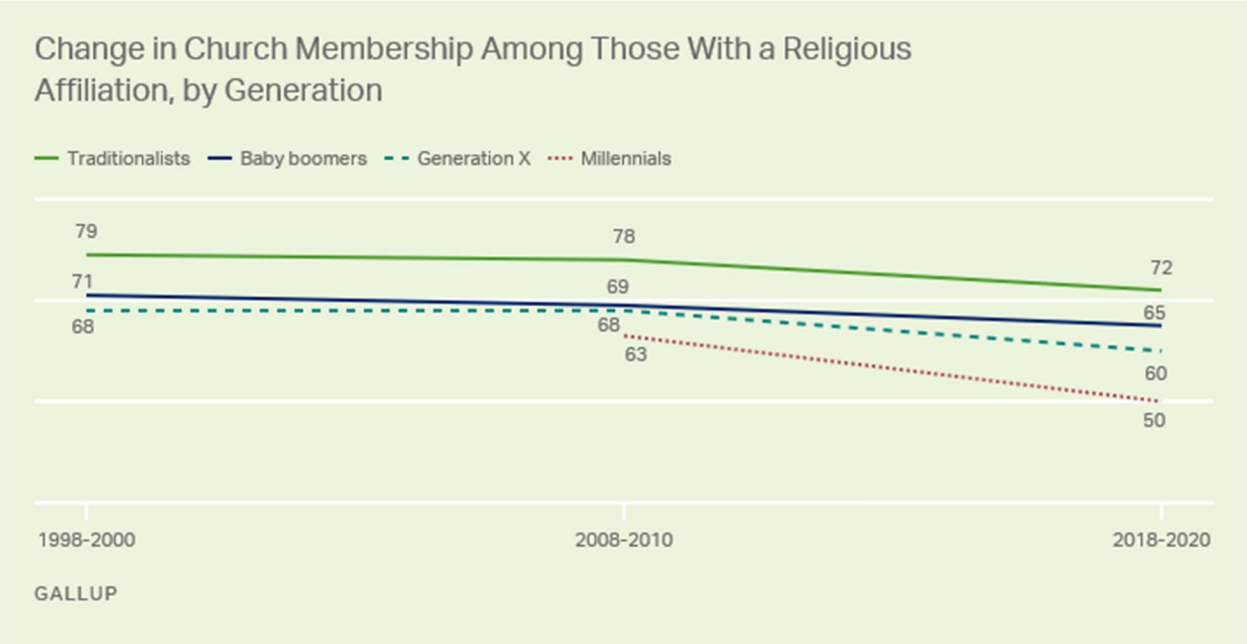
Note: Given that Gallup's polls are based on the 18+ U.S. adult population, the 1980-2000 period would have included only a small proportion of the millennial generation, and the 2018-2020 period includes only a small proportion of Generation Z (born after 1996).

GALLUP

**Change in Percentage of U.S. Adults With No Religious Affiliation**



**Change in Church Membership Among Those With a Religious Affiliation, by Generation**




**Changes in Church Membership, by Demographic Subgroup**

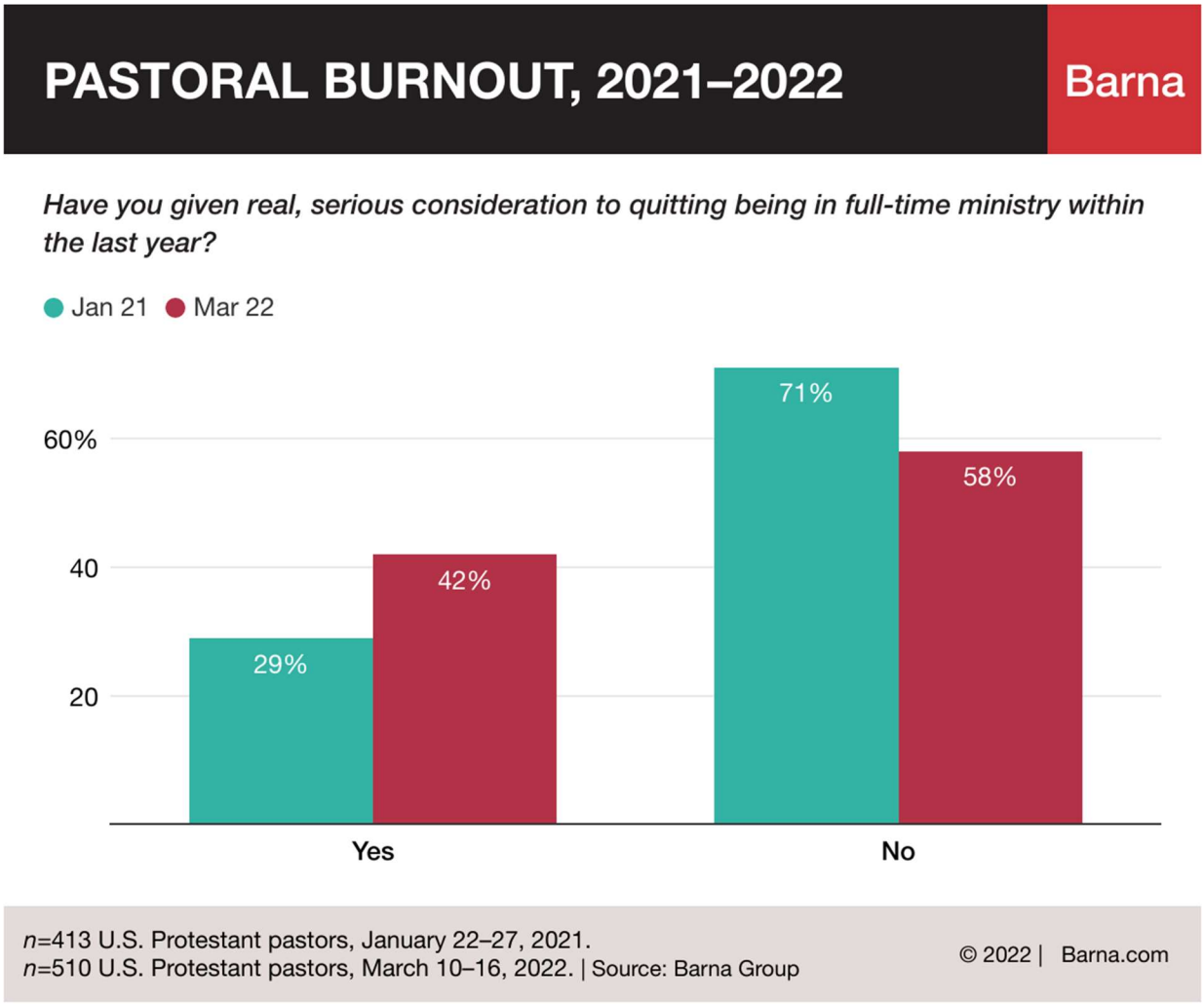
| | 1998-2000 | 2008-2010 | 2018-2020 | Change, 1998-2000 to 2018-2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | % | pct. pts. |
| Men | 64 | 58 | 46 | -18 |
| Women | 73 | 65 | 53 | -20 |
| Non-Hispanic White adults | 68 | 62 | 52 | -16 |
| Non-Hispanic Black adults | 78 | 70 | 59 | -19 |
| College graduate | 68 | 65 | 54 | -14 |
| Not college graduate | 69 | 60 | 47 | -22 |
| Married | 71 | 68 | 58 | -13 |
| Not married | 64 | 55 | 42 | -22 |
| Republican | 77 | 75 | 65 | -12 |

| | 1998-2000 | 2008-2010 | 2018-2020 | Change, 1998-2000 to 2018-2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | % | pct. pts. |
| Independent | 59 | 51 | 41 | -18 |
| Democrat | 71 | 60 | 46 | -25 |
| Conservative | 78 | 73 | 64 | -14 |
| Moderate | 66 | 59 | 45 | -21 |
| Liberal | 56 | 46 | 35 | -21 |
| East | 69 | 58 | 44 | -25 |
| Midwest | 72 | 66 | 54 | -18 |
| South | 74 | 70 | 58 | -16 |
| West | 57 | 51 | 38 | -19 |
| Protestant | 73 | 72 | 64 | -9 |
| Catholic | 76 | 73 | 58 | -18 |

Appendix F

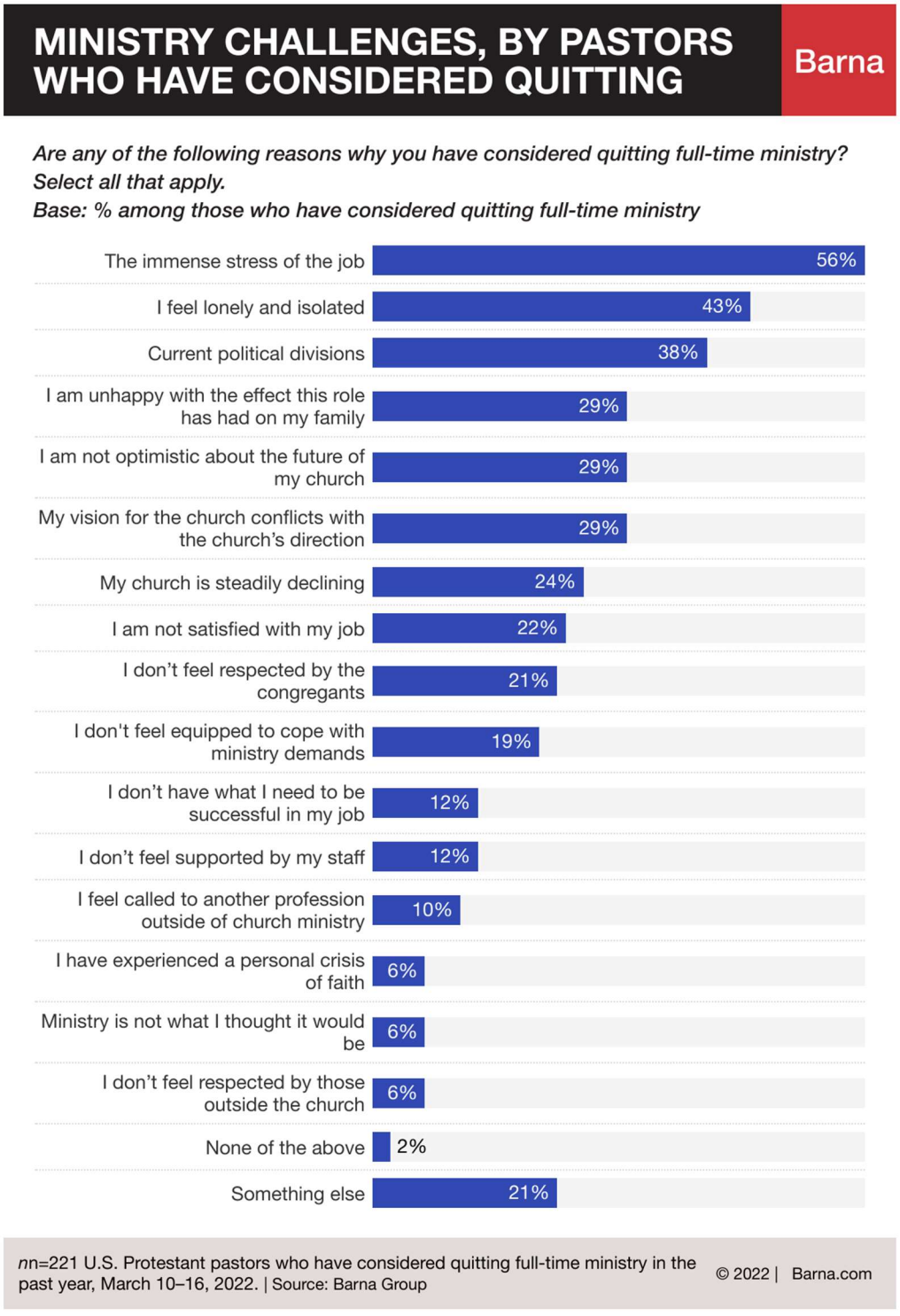
Pastoral Burnout and Ministry Challenges[86]

**Pastoral Burnout, 2021-2022**




[86] "Pastoral Burnout and Ministry Challenges." Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, April 27, 2022. Accessed December 20, 2022, https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/.

**Ministry Challenges, By Pastors Who Have Considered Quitting**



# Appendix G

## Map of the Apostle Paul's campaign locations[87]

[87] Bible Study/biblestudy.org, accessed February 16, 2020, https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/apostle-paul-all-cities-visited-map.html.

# Appendix H

## List of Places Paul campaigned[88]

| | |
|---|---|
| Amphipolis | (Acts 17:1) |
| Malta | (Acts 28:1) |
| Antioch (Pisidia) | (Acts 13:14) |
| Miletus | (Acts 20:15, 17) |
| Antioch (Syria) | Acts 11:26, 13:1, 18:22 - 23) |
| Mitylene | (Acts 20:14) |
| Antipatris | (Acts 23:31) |
| Myra | (Acts 27:5) |
| Apollonia | (Acts 17:1) |
| Neapolis | (Acts 16:11) |
| Appian Way | (Acts 28:13 - 15) |
| Nicopolis | (Titus 3:12, 15) |
| Appii Forum | (Acts 28:15) |
| Paphos (Cyprus) | (Acts 13:6) |
| Arabia | (Galatians 1:17) |
| Patara | (Acts 21:1) |
| Assos | (Acts 20:13) |
| Perga | (Acts 13:13, 14:25) |
| Athens | (Acts 17:16) |

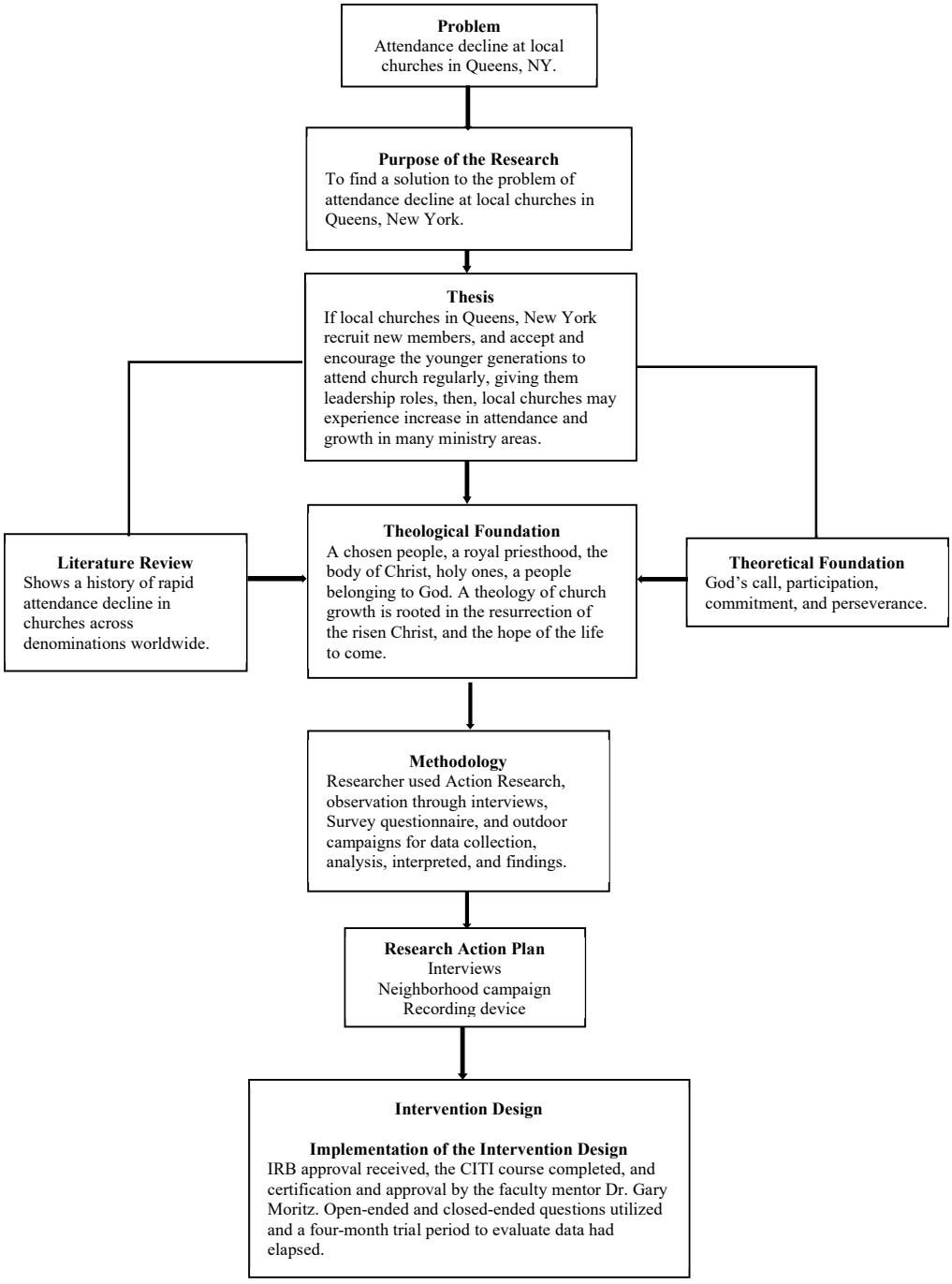
[88] "Bible Study," Bible Study.org, accessed February 16, 2020, https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/apostle-paul-all-cities-visited-map.html.

| | |
|---|---|
| Philippi | (Acts 16:12, 20:6) |
| Attalea | (Acts 14:25) |
| Ptolemais | (Acts 21:7) |
| Berea | (Acts 17:10) |
| Puteoli | (Acts 28:13) |
| Caesarea | (Acts 9:30, 18:22, 21:8, 23:23) |
| Rhegium | (Acts 28:13) |
| Cenchrea | (Acts 18:18) |
| Rhodes | (Acts 21:1) |
| Chios | (Acts 20:15) |
| Rome | (Acts 28:16, 2Timothy 1:17) |
| Clauda | (Acts 27:16) |
| Salamis (Cyprus) | (Acts 13:5) |
| Cnidus | (Acts 27:7) |
| Salmone | (Acts 27:7) |
| Coos | (Acts 21:1) |
| Samos | (Acts 20:15) |
| Corinth | (Acts 18:1) |
| Samothracia | (Acts 16:11) |
| Cyprus | (Acts 13:4, 21:3, 27:4) |
| Seleucia | (Acts 13:4) |
| Damascus | (Acts 9, 22, 26) |
| Sidon | (Acts 27:3) |
| Derbe | (Acts 14:6, 20, 16:1) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Spain | (Romans 15:22 - 25, 28) |
| Ephesus | (Acts 18 - 20, 1 Corinthians 16:8, 1 Timothy 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:18, 4:12) |
| Syracuse (Sicily) | (Acts 28:12) |
| Fair Havens (Crete) | (Acts 27:8, Titus 1:5) |
| Tarsus | (Acts 9:30) |
| Hierapolis | (Colossians 4:13) |
| Thessalonica | (Acts 17:1) |
| Iconium | (Acts 13:51) |
| Three Taverns | (Acts 28:15) |
| Jerusalem | (Acts 7 - 9, 11:30, 12:25, 15, 9:26, 21:11 - 23:31, 26) |
| Troas | (Acts 16:8, 20:6) |
| Laodicea | (Colossians 2:1) |
| Trogyllium | (Acts 20:15) |
| Lasea | (Acts 27:8) |
| Tyre | (Acts 21:3) |
| Lystra | (Acts 14:6, 16:1) |

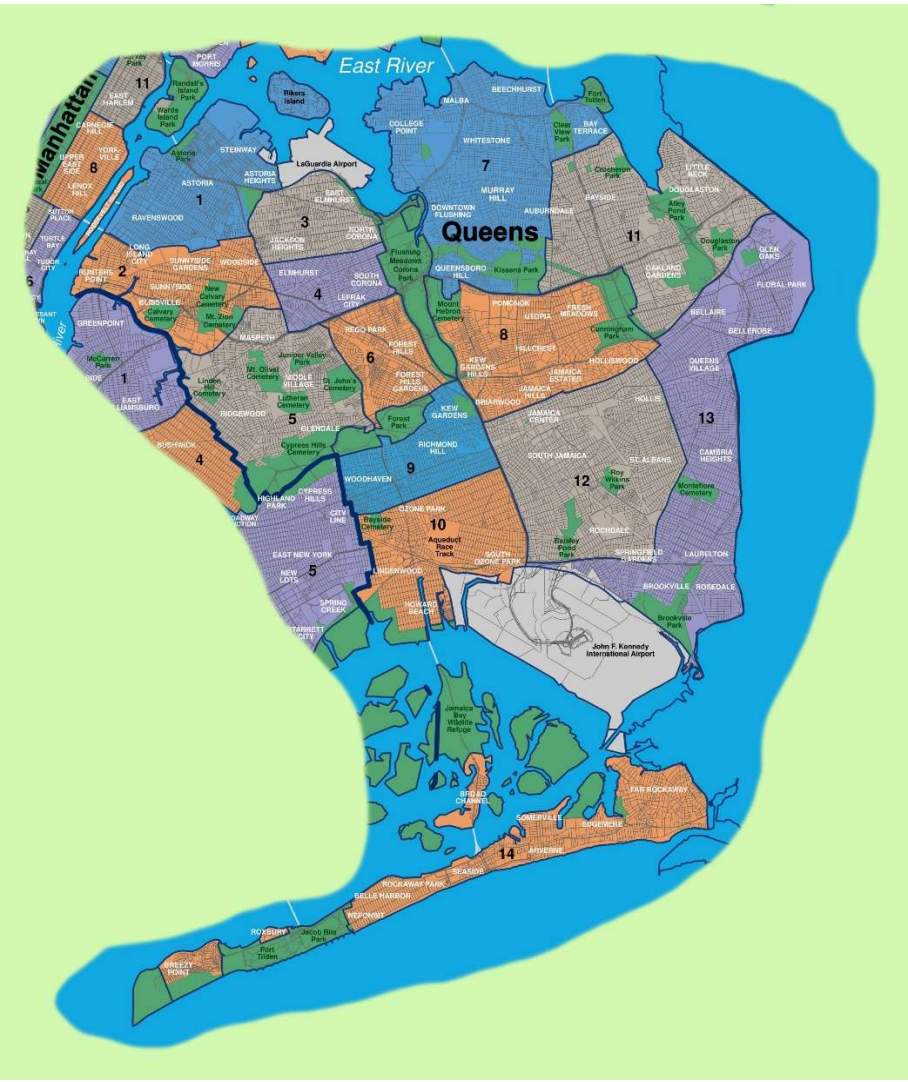
# Appendix I

## Drawing of the Intervention Design



# Appendix J

## Map of local church community and surrounding neighborhoods in Queens, New York[89]




[89] United States Census Bureau, "Map of Queens Borough, New York," accessed February 3, 2023, https://ontheworldmap.com/usa/city/new-york-city/map-of-queens-neighborhoods.jpg.

Appendix K

Queens County, New York Demographics[90]

| PEOPLE | |
|---|---|
| Population | |
| Population Estimates, July 1, 2022, (V2022) | □□<br>NA |
| Population Estimates, July 1, 2021, (V2021) | □□<br>2,331,143 |
| Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2022) | □□<br>NA |
| Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2021) | □□<br>2,405,464 |
| Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2022 (V2022) | □□<br>NA |
| Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2021 (V2021) | □□<br>-3.1% |
| Population, Census, April 1, 2020 | 2,405,464 |
| Population, Census, April 1, 2010 | 2,230,722 |
| Age and Sex | |
| Persons under 5 years, percent | □□<br>5.7% |
| Persons under 18 years, percent | □□<br>20.0% |
| Persons 65 years and over, percent | □□<br>17.4% |
| Female persons, percent | □□<br>51.1% |

[90] United States Census Bureau, "Queens County," accessed February 3, 2023, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/queenscountynewyork,queensburytownwarrencountynewyork#.

| | |
|---|---|
| Race and Hispanic Origin | |
| White alone, percent | □□<br>47.3% |
| Black or African American alone, percent(a) | □□<br>20.7% |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent(a) | □□<br>1.4% |
| Asian alone, percent(a) | □□<br>27.3% |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders alone, percent(a) | □□<br>0.2% |
| Two or More Races, percent | □□<br>3.1% |
| Hispanic or Latino, percent(b) | □□<br>28.1% |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent | □□<br>24.5% |
| Population Characteristics | |
| Veterans, 2017-2021 | 41,318 |
| Foreign born persons, percent, 2017-2021 | 47.0% |
| Housing | |
| Housing units, July 1, 2021, (V2021) | 902,824 |
| Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2017-2021 | 45.4% |
| Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2017-2021 | $603,200 |
| Median selected monthly owner costs -with a mortgage, 2017-2021 | $2,777 |
| Median selected monthly owner costs -without a mortgage, 2017-2021 | $961 |
| Median gross rent, 2017-2021 | $1,711 |
| Building permits, 2021 | 4,087 |
| Families & Living Arrangements | |
| Households, 2017-2021 | 807,468 |
| Persons per household, 2017-2021 | 2.93 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Living in the same house 1 year ago, percent of persons age 1 year+, 2017-2021 | 92.1% |
| Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2017-2021 | 55.2% |
| Computer and Internet Use | |
| Households with a computer, percent, 2017-2021 | 93.3% |
| Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2017-2021 | 87.7% |
| Education | |
| High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2017-2021 | 82.7% |
| Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2017-2021 | 33.9% |
| Health | |
| With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2017-2021 | 5.6% |
| Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent | □□ 9.7% |
| Economy | |
| In the civilian labor force, the total percentage of the population aged 16 years+, 2017-2021 | 63.8% |
| In the civilian labor force, females, percent of the population age 16 years+, 2017-2021 | 58.2% |
| Total accommodation and food services sales, 2017 ($1,000)(c) | 4,593,736 |
| Total health care and social assistance receipts/revenue, 2017 ($1,000)(c) | 15,735,791 |
| Total transportation and warehousing receipts/revenue, 2017 ($1,000)(c) | 20,371,315 |
| Total retail sales, 2017 ($1,000)(c) | 19,297,120 |
| Total retail sales per capita, 2017(c) | $8,408 |
| Transportation | |
| Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2017-2021 | 43.8 |

| Income & Poverty | |
|---|---|
| Median household income (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021 | $75,886 |
| Per capita income in the past 12 months (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021 | $35,640 |
| Persons in poverty, percent | □□<br>13.6% |

| BUSINESSES | |
|---|---|
| Businesses | |
| Total employer establishments, 2020 | 49,999 |
| Total employment, 2020 | 603,514 |
| Total annual payroll, 2020 ($1,000) | 29,388,799 |
| Total employment, percent change, 2019-2020 | 0.1% |
| Total non-employer establishments, 2019 | 268,034 |
| All employer firms, Reference year 2017 | 44,964 |
| Men-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017 | 29,262 |
| Women-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017 | 10,125 |
| Minority-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017 | 20,423 |
| Nonminority-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017 | 22,039 |
| Veteran-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017 | 1,032 |
| Nonveteran-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017 | 41,558 |

| GEOGRAPHY | |
|---|---|
| Geography | |
| Population per square mile, 2020 | 22,124.5 |
| Population per square mile, 2010 | 20,553.6 |
| Land area in square miles, 2020 | 108.72 |
| Land area in square miles, 2010 | 108.53 |
| FIPS Code | 36081 |

0-12.1
12.1-32.2
32.2-66.3
66.3-191.7
192.2-74,781.6

For places on the map, populations of 5,000 or more are shown
Selectable/Not Selectable
Value Notes
Estimates are not comparable to other geographic levels due to methodological differences that may exist between different data sources.
Some estimates presented here come from sample data and thus have sampling errors that may render some apparent differences between geographies statistically indistinguishable. Click the Quick Info icon to the left of each row in the TABLE view to learn about sampling errors.
The vintage year (e.g., V2022) refers to the final year of the series (2020 thru 2022). Therefore, different vintage years of estimates are not comparable.
Users should exercise caution when comparing 2017-2021 ACS 5-year estimates to other ACS estimates. For more information, please visit the 2021 5-year ACS Comparison Guidance page.
Fact Notes

- (a)Includes persons reporting only one race
- (c)Economic Census - Puerto Rico data are not comparable to U.S. Economic Census data
- (b)Hispanics may be of any race, so they also are included in applicable race categories

Value Flags

- Either no or too few sample observations were available to compute an estimate, or a ratio of medians cannot be calculated because one or both of the median estimates falls in the lowest or upper interval of an open-ended distribution.
- FFewer than 25 firms
- DSuppressed to avoid disclosure of confidential information
- NData for this geographic area cannot be displayed because the sample cases are too small.
- FNFootnote on this item in place of data
- XNot applicable
- SSuppressed; does not meet publication standards
- NANot available
- ZValue greater than zero but less than half the unit of measure shown

QuickFacts data are derived from: Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census of Population and Housing, Current Population Survey, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, State and County Housing Unit Estimates, County Business Patterns, Non-employer Statistics, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits.

# Appendix L

## Sacred Books Reference

| New Testament Books | Old Testament Books |
|---|---|
| Matthew | Psalms |
| 2 Timothy | Deuteronomy |
| Titus | Genesis |
| Mark | |
| Romans | |
| John | |
| Ephesians | |
| 1 Corinthians | |
| 2 Corinthians | |
| Acts | |
| 1 John | |
| 2 Peter | |
| Revelations | |
| Galatians | |
| Luke | |
| 1 John | |
| Hebrew | |
| 1 Thessalonians | |
| James | |
| | |

Appendix M

2020 Southern Baptist Convention Statistics[91]

| | |
|---|---|
| Cooperating Churches | 47,614 |
| Total membership in the SBC network of churches | 13,680,493 |
| Weekly worship attendance* in the SBC network<br>* indicates in-person attendance; online also reported; see 2022 SBC Annual, p. 124 | 3,607,530 |
| Total baptisms (reported by Southern Baptist churches) | 154,701 |
| Cooperating state conventions | 41 |
| Cooperating local associations | 1,110 |

from 2021 Annual Church Profile

Mission Board Reports
The International Mission Board (IMB) and North American Mission Board (NAMB) assist churches in evangelizing, discipling, and planting reproducing churches in our nation and worldwide in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

| | |
|---|---|
| Overseas missionaries<br>reported by IMB (imb.org/fast-facts) | 3,532 |
| Unengaged Unreached People Groups<br>reported by IMB, (imb.org/fast-facts) | 3,175 |
| Domestic missionaries<br>reported by NAMB in the 2022 SBC Annual, *see p. 133 | 2,469* |
| New churches planted<br>reported by NAMB in the 2022 SBC Annual | 600 |
| Existing churches joining with the SBC<br>reported by NAMB in the 2022 SBC Annual | 201 |

[91] Southern Baptist Convention, "Statistics," accessed February 5, 2023, https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/fast-facts/.

| Seminary Students Trained Racial Ethnic Diversity | |
|---|---|
| The Convention operates six seminaries and a Seminary Extension program to train its ministers and Christian workers. | |
| Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention | 1,995 |
| Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary | 4,723 |
| New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary | 3,056 |
| Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary | 5,909 |
| Southern Baptist Theological Seminary | 6,151 |
| Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary | 3,703 |
| Total | 25,537 |
| Seminary Extension Division, Nashville | 516 |

| From the 2020-2021 academic year, as reported in the 2022 SBC Annual | |
|---|---|
| MISSION: DIGNITY<br>Mission: Dignity, a ministry of GuideStone Financial Resources, provides financial assistance to retired ministers, denominational workers, their spouses, and widows. | |
| Individuals or couples receiving financial assistance | 1,955 |
| Distributed in 2021 | $8,834,237 |
| GuideStone Financial Resources ministry report in 2022 SBC Annual | |

| Dominant Ethnic Composition | Churches | Congregations* |
|---|---|---|
| Anglo churches | 38,297 | 39,139 |
| African American churches | 3,492 | 3,904 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hispanic churches | 2,458 | 3,368 |
| Korean churches | 792 | 882 |
| Native American churches | 393 | 418 |
| Haitian churches | 404 | 421 |
| Chinese churches | 242 | 278 |
| Filipino churches | 135 | 160 |
| Multi-ethnic churches | 242 | 348 |
| 20+ other ethnic and language groups | 1,156 | 1,502 |
| *Includes churches and church-type missions provided by NAMB from 2021 Annual Church Profile Data. | | |

| Regular Church Giving | |
|---|---|
| Total reported undesignated receipts given in Southern Baptist churches in 2020-2021<br>reported by the churches on the 2021 Annual Church Profile, April 2022 | $9,774,807,128 |
| Total Cooperative Program dollars given by Southern Baptist churches in fiscal 2020-2021<br>reported to the Executive Committee by the cooperating state Baptist conventions, May 2022 | $457,928,996 |
| Cooperative Program Allocation Budget gifts received for SBC causes<br>reported by the Executive Committee via Baptist Press, October 2022 | $200,452,607 |
| The average percentage of undesignated receipts churches gave through the Cooperative Program in 2021<br>reported by the SBC Executive Committee, 2020-2021 fiscal year | 4.68 percent |

| DESIGNATED INDIVIDUAL GIVING | |
|---|---|
| Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions—100% goes to support overseas missionaries<br>updated by IMB as of October 2022 | $203.7 million |
| Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions—100% goes to support North American missionaries<br><br>updated by NAMB as of October 2022 | $68.9 million |
| Global Hunger Relief—100% goes to fight hunger in North America and around the world<br><br>Amount received through the SBC Executive Committee, 2020-2021 fiscal year; does not include direct gifts to IMB and NAMB for GHR | $2,062,506 |

| The Cooperative Program | |
|---|---|
| The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries. | |
| In Partnership with State<br>Conventions Disaster Relief | |
| The North American Mission Board and state convention partners organize Southern Baptists' response to disasters. They contribute labor, ministry, and financial help during floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, and urban disasters. | |
| Volunteer days | 93,248 |
| Work hours | 574,710 |
| Gospel presentations | 7,617 |
| Professions of faith | 735 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Meals prepared | 966,735 |
| From NAMB ministry report in 2022 SBC Annual | |
| Children's and Family Ministries | |
| The Baptist Coalition for Children and Families represents twenty-one ministries established by state Baptist conventions to serve at-risk children and their families through residential care, counseling, foster care enlistment, and adoption assistance. | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of children in residential care | 1,581 |
| Number of others served | 435,848 |
| Spiritual decisions reported | 630 |
| From Baptist Coalition for Children and Families 2021 data | |
| Baptist Collegiate Ministries | |
| LifeWay Christian Resources and state conventions collaborate to make disciples on college campuses across the nation through Baptist Collegiate Ministries (BCM). | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of Baptist Collegiate Ministries | 768 |
| Total number of students involved | 70,472 |
| Total number of reported salvations through BCM | 7,025 |
| National Collegiate Ministries 2019–20 Annual Statistics | |

Appendix N

Consent Form/Approval Letter

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**Title of the Project:** The Decline in Attendance at Local Churches in Queens, New York: A Strategic Revitalization Plan to Bring The Local Church Back to Spiritual Health

**Principal Investigator:** Marilyn Dolloway, Liberty University School of Divinity

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years or older and a member or affiliate of _____. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research project.

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

The purpose of the study is to find a biblically based solution to the problem of attendance decline at local churches in Queens, New York.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked some questions regarding church attendance and decline. The interview should take about 15 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include growth in church attendance and a local church that can support its community and meet the spiritual needs of the people in the community and beyond.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study **are minimal.**

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 participant. 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 with 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. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected 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-protected locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a $15 gift card for participating in this study. The $15 gift card will be given to participants at the end of the interview.

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

Participants in this study will not be responsible for paying for anything relating to this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis 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 immediately 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 Marilyn Dolloway. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 516-448-1008 or mdolloway@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gary Moritz, at gmoritz@liberty.edu.

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

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

Your Consent

Before agreeing to take part in this research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher 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 Participant's Name

_____
Signature & Date

[Insert Date]

[Participant/Recipient]
[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Participant/Recipient]:

After a careful review of your research proposal entitled The Decline in Attendance at Local Churches in Queens, New York: A Biblically Based Strategic Revitalization Plan to Bring The Local Church Back to Spiritual Health, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study via Zoom conferencing, Skype, or telephone that you will provide for your interviews.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Your Title]
[Your Company/Organization]

Appendix O

Generations Defined[92]

## The Generations Defined

**The Millennial Generation**
Born: After 1980
Age of adults in 2015: 18 to 34*
Share of adult population: 30%

**Generation X**
Born: 1965 to 1980
Age in 2015: 35 to 50
Share of adult population: 27%

**The Baby Boom Generation**
Born: 1946 to 1964
Age in 2015: 51 to 69
Share of adult population: 30%

**The Silent Generation**
Born: 1928 to 1945
Age in 2015: 70 to 87
Share of adult population: 11%

**The Greatest Generation**
Born: Before 1928
Age in 2015: 88 to 100
Share of adult population: 2%

* The youngest Millennials are in their teens. No chronological end point has been set for this group.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Census Bureau population projections for 2015.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[92] "Generations Defined," Pew Research Center, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015), accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/generations_2/.