

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP AS A PERCEIVED FACTOR OF CHANGING CHURCH  
MEMBERSHIP IN SOUTH CAROLINA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A Prospectus Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Bobby L. Dukes

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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## **ABSTRACT**

The role of a pastor comprises many duties and responsibilities within the church; some have led to chaos. Clinton et al. (2005), states many churches are mired in a significant leadership crisis (p. 10). Pastors are called to lead people in spiritual growth, with the end goal of parishioners living a mature spiritual life for the sake of Christ, not the contrary. The enormity of pastoral leadership has a lasting effect. Kristin Tabb (2017) claims that relatively minor church hurts leave people with a burned-out feeling during service, while the more serious wounds leave parishioners soul-scarred and physically sick at the thought of walking in the church doors (para. 3). Thus, many churches are experiencing a phenomenon that is misdiagnosed. Andrea Morris (2020) states parishioners are still attending the same church, but they also ‘church hop’ (CBN News, para. 4). The richest religious, geographical location in the United States, once considered as the ‘Bible Belt’ by H.L. Menchen in 1925, churches are going through a cultural change in its church membership (Brunn et al., 2011, para. 1). In this study ten former female members were interviewed from five Baptist churches in South Carolina. This phenomenological qualitative research sought to understand and shed light on pastoral leadership as the perceived attributing factor to why church members are leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. The participants in this study represented five different churches in South Carolina. Each participant suggested that their reason for leaving a church to join another was due to their lived experiences with pastoral leadership.

*Keywords:* Church Membership, Pastoral Leadership, Servant leadership

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### **Dedication**

Throughout this journey, I had tremendous support from my family. Unwavering support was provided by my wife Shanikia and my three children Javaris, Deoshe, and Alexcia. My wife was my 'Rock' during this entire process. Her patience, consistency, and understanding heart were my motivation. Her price is truly far above a ruby! Thank you! In addition, I would also like to thank the entire Ned Branch Missionary Baptist Church family for their encouragement and kind words when I wanted to give up. Moreover, a special thank you to the special group for their financial support and gracious generosity. Furthermore, I would be remiss if I did not mention my late grandmother Caletha T. Kirkland. She is my guardian angel and the one that imparted in me the love of God as a child. Granny, you are gone but not forgotten! Your wisdom, love, and guidance are still felt every day. I will always love you.

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**List of Abbreviations**

English Standard Version (ESV)

International Review Board (IRB)

King James Version (KJV)

New International Version (NIV)

New King James Version (NKJV)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

Vacation Bible School (VBS)

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

### Introduction

This research sought to understand the role pastoral leadership played in members changing church membership in South Carolina. Richard Frazer (2017) declares the primary reason churches decline and lose their sense of hope and passion is the lack of visionary leadership (Biblical Leadership, para. 7). Roinila (2005) identifies in her research found that each year one out of every seven adults changes churches (pg. 97, para. 1). Church hurt by leaders can be dramatic especially when the leader is vicious with their words or actions. Anderson (2017) church hurt can occur due to the insensitivity of church leaders (p. 3). Church hurt is the means to an end is one of the reasons why people leave a church. According to **Anderson (2017)**, church hurt may result in the individuals leaving the church where the incident occurred to go to another church (p. 3). In contrast the prophet Jeremiah wrote, “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15, English Standard Version, 2010). God’s intent for giving “pastors after His heart” was because of their obedience to their will (Falwell, 1984, p. 1435). Obedient leaders will lead or shepherd the people by the knowledge. Knowledge in its purest sense, according to Yount (2010) describes it as a knowledge that emphasizes experiential learning derived from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (p. 13). Leaders who are not aware of their calling or to God’s will unnecessarily abuse the people they are called to love and lead. Jeremiah was aware of his role and his calling. McNeal (2006) expresses the discipline of self-awareness is most important because it protects leaders from being self-absorbed or merely role-driven (p. 6).

Pastors have the ability the make or break the congregation in which he leads. Apostle Paul understood this principle thus causing him to write to Titus,



Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame having nothing evil to say about us (Titus 2:7-9, ESV, 2010).

More specifically, pastoral leadership bears a responsibility in the rapid growth in membership or rapid decline. Mark Royster wrote in his dissertation, “Leaders are responsible for taking disjointed inefficient groups and processes to properly align them to be more efficient as well as proficient. This is especially true of a pastoral leader who is experiencing stagnation or when a church has seemingly reached a plateau” (Royster, 2016, p. 15). It is obvious that every church does not have the same organizational structure; yet, within most church structures pastoral leadership is profoundly important. Before his departure, Paul wrote these words to the elders of Ephesus, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28, ESV, 2010). The church’s success sometimes hinges on pastoral leadership (1 Tim. 3:1-6, Eph. 4:11-13, ESV, 2010).

A church’s membership growth or decline are the results of progression or regression. Thus, pastors should always seek to grow in their ability to lead their congregation. McNeal (2006) made seven suggested signs of great leaders: the disciple of self-awareness, the discipline of self-management, the disciple of self-development, the discipline of mission, the discipline of decision, the discipline of belonging, the disciple of aloneness (pp. 6-7). Bailey Boyd wrote, “Leaders are learners. When they stop learning they cease to lead wisely. Continuing education is essential for leaders who want to think ahead and execute effectively” (Boyd, 2018, p. 112). Leadership is not easy especially when they have not been trained or equipped to lead in this ever-changing culture of today.

Faithful leaders are serving leaders that will not withdraw during challenging times. Barna (2020) states during disruptive and challenging times, discover the major opportunities

and obstacles facing Christian leaders (para. 1). The conundrum of leadership's misuse of their authority is not new. King David was one that gravely misused his authority and the results were catastrophic. King David was not the only one of God's leaders that used detrimental judgement, Moses did likewise. Moses' leadership was not only detrimental to his future, but it also effected the immediate progression of those that he was leading. So, today's leadership struggles are a mirror of the leaders of the past.

Examining trends in church decline and the causations of the trend can offer insights into this phenomenological qualitative research. Comparing leadership style and generational congruencies or the lack thereof has equally helped to shed light on church members leaving one church to join another. According to Pew Research Center (2014) Atheism is on the rise while Christianity is declining, correlating with Christianity's declining influence in American public life (Pew Research Center, 2014). The possibility of these trends has subsidized to the yearning to comprehend the dynamics of operative pastoral leader. Thus, this research is an undertaking to contribute to that ongoing dialog. This portion of the research will address the background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose statement, significance of the study, and summary of the design.

### **Background of the Problem**

The decline of the American Christian church did not begin recently, nor did it happen without warning. Carson (2008) rightly said, "We are not only a created race but a fallen race" (p. 46). In this phenomenological research concerning pastoral leadership as the perceived factor for church members changing churches in South Carolina centers around theological, theoretical, related, and rational for the study underpinnings. Within each parameter of the various section this research examined the plight of the phenomenon. With that being said, a close review of

pastoral leadership's education, vision for the church, lack of connectivity with membership, and disagreement between the pastor and parishioners played a role in church members departing one church to join another; also, this research sought to see if a pastor's retirement, firing, dismissal, or death was akin to the phenomenon.

### **Church Purpose and Church Decline**

Wayne Dyer, the American self-help author, and motivational speaker, once said, "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change" (Tichio, p. 35). The troubling phenomenon of people leaving one church to join another church never to return to the church they left, is real. Barna (2019) identifies nearly two-thirds of U.S. 18-29-year-olds who grew up in church have withdrawn from being involved in the church after becoming adults (para. 2). Gardner (2019) states the number of Church of Christ members shrank by over 5.6% from 2016 to 2019 (para. 3). The church was designed to be a place where people shared their goods with one another freely (Acts 4:32-37, ESV, 2010). In the early church the mission and ministry of the church was clear. Elwell (2001) states the one essential ministry of the church is, therefore, the ministry of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (p. 248). The Lord Jesus, according to Elwell (2001), gave apostles who were eyewitness of his resurrections first, prophets who proclaim the Word of God in practical life issues, evangelist to win men to Christ, and elders for local congregations (p. 248).

Seemingly, the church has done an about face from its original intended purpose. The first century church, according to Acts 2:25, "And sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, s anyone had need" (KJV, 2005). Chester and Timmis (2008) state people today want a vision of the divine or proof that God exist or to know the meaning of life or just a sense of purpose (p. 23). Therefore, if the preached messages where they attend is not sufficing

their curiosity, they seek and scout out other places of worship. According to Pew Research (2016) 83% of Americans who have looked for a new place of worship say the quality of preaching played an important role in their choice of congregation (para. 2). Paul and his constituents did not preach about themselves but they preached about Christ. In 2 Corinthians 2:5, Paul penned, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (NKJV, 2012). Pastors should preach about Christ and their focus should be on the parishioners. The absence of Christ-centered preaching can become problematic to church members, which often leads to them looking for another church; or, as it is dubbed ‘church hopping.’ When a person goes from church to church, it is considered ‘church hopping’ (Charles, para. 2). Rudy Gary (2020), Barna reported that Americans were church hopping more and church attendance was declining among young people (para 3). Carey Neiuwhof, in an article, wrote, “Drifting from church to church, consuming church like it was some product you use and dispose of, church surfing or church shopping.” Dean Taylor “There are people who think their current church is not meeting their needs. The youth ministry, singles ministry, family ministry, benevolence care, etc., isn’t fulfilling their expectations. They leave to look for a church that will meet these perceived needs” (Taylor, 2015, para. 9). Barna Group (2020) reported,

Though some of these churchgoers may be part of the minority of congregations that were still gathering for physical worship during these weeks, we can, for the most part, confidently interpret this group as those who have dropped out of church for the time being (para. 15)

The member that leaves one church to go to another may have ‘a problem,’ but does their leaving say as much about the quality of the local churches they fail to continue with as it does about the individual? Taylor (2015) asseverates many instances of church-hopping happen because of conflict (para. 15).

### **Pastor and People Connection**

There is a correlation between members leaving the church and pastoral leadership. God-fearing leaders lead in harmony with the will of God not with selfish ambitions. Ledbetter et al. (2016) states leadership is never devoid of good follower-ship. The faithful leader is a servant first, and from that emerges the desire to lead (p. 44). The lack of morality and consistency in leaders has caused many to deviate. Ledbetter et al. (2016) stresses that leadership requires intentional action, and faith compels steps toward spiritual integrity and ethical consistency (p. 44). Carman (2013) believes church leaders also function within an environment in which they pursue specific strategies while also organizing ministry and people, within formal and informal organizational structures. Finally, church leaders make decisions, communicate with stakeholders, deal with change, and manage conflict (p. 3, para. 1). Ledbetter et al. (2016) suggested, “Leadership stresses the affectionate relationship involved in leadership, and the responsibility leaders have for leading people toward a deeper understanding of God and his love for each individual” (p. 42). Pastoral leadership inability to build affectionate relationship maybe the causation for members leaving one church to join another. The shift is usually gradual. Taylor (2015) asserts they withdraw from ministry involvement, gradually stop attending various functions and services (para. 8).

The sad reality about the declining of churches and church membership is evident. Rudy Gray reported,

The Southern Baptist Convention and most state conventions have been decreasing for years. Pew Research stated that the country is in a time of “specific religious change.” The “nones” category (people who answer no to the question of which religion they embrace) has been growing, while those identifying as Christians have been decreasing (The Courier, 2020, para. 5).

In addition, Jay Hardwick, associate executive director-treasurer and chief strategist for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, said, “If something dramatic does not happen within five to ten years, many churches will close their doors” (The Courier, para. 10).

The dichotomy of leadership can be challenging. Brewster (2020) underscores when people use others for their agenda, morale is destroyed. When things are good, it is all about the team. When things are off, it is all about the leader (para 11). Internal factors such as untrained leaders, aging leaders, waning donations, and immobilized mission statements contributed to the plateauing and declining of churches, according to Christopherson (2014, para. 4). Thom Rainer (2013), offered the following enlightening responses that pastors should implement to curb church membership decline: raise the expectations of membership, because many church members don’t really think it’s that important to be an active part of the church, require an entry class for membership. By doing so, it helps members to buy-in, the class should also be used to state the expectations of what a committed member looks like, encourage ministry involvement. Many members become less frequent attendees because they have no ministry roles in the church, they do not feel like they are a part of the church, offer more options for worship times. Today’s culture is a 24/7, and some members must or are obligated to work during the times of worship services. If possible, give them options, and monitor attendance of each member, members are less likely to be absent if they know someone misses them.

### **Pastor’s Responsibility for Decline**

Declining churches and pastoral leadership are connected. The vision of the church normally is given by the pastor. A clear vision is a must for people to understand the direction of the church, but a clear vision is not always communicated. Toler (2018) advises, like most things, creating and sharing a positive vision is easier said than done (p. 40). The Journal of

Applied Christian Leadership suggested, “the lack of clear vision, purpose, and direction to unify and inspire the energy and resources of the congregation” (p. 20, para. 1). Vision of the church should not be mundane or gloomy, Visions are about hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Toler (2018) wrote, “They’re about our strong desire to achieve something great” (p. 23, para. 1). The importance of vision was so pertinent God commanded the Prophet Habakkuk, “And the LORD answered me: write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it” (Habakkuk 2:2, ESV, 2010).

Many pastors rightly wrestle with cultural and theological issues, and churches rightly plan programs and outreach missions; however, the changes may have a negative effect on some of the congregants, especially when there is a lack of participation from the church member. Northouse (2019) wrote, “Participative leadership consists of inviting followers to share in the decision making” (p. 120). There are many that resides in the congregations that do not want change that is dictated to them. Northouse (2019) continues to express followers with an internal locus of control feel participative leadership is most satisfying because it allows them to feel in charge of their work and is an integral part of the decision making (p. 121). Change can be freighting to them, and that person will have a meeting with the pastor to discuss their feelings, and the meeting can end with conflict. Moreover, some have left the church because the pastor refused to go see a family member. Rainer (2013) vividly listed several reasons why people leave churches and one of the reasons where a member asked the pastor to visit a cousin, and he did not go, so they left the church (para. 5). This seemingly minute ask can be astronomical enough to cause a member to leave the church.

Pastoral leadership holds formidable power; but great power includes great responsibility. When pastors misuse their power, the result is defined as “abuse,” which means to act in a

manner to cause bad effect or for a bad purpose; misuse. Nicholas Batzig wrote in his article, “Usually, charges of abuse come in the context of a pastor who has supposedly bullied his elders, staff, or members of the church (para. 4). Church hurt stems from experiencing someone else abusing their power. Church can be overwhelming. Salley Scammell wrote, “Frustrated and hurting, we leave our churches. Friendships are fractured. Some give up on God (para. 1). Recently in Summerville, South Carolina a church took a pastor to court, according to Harvey Jacobs of WCSC News citing, “The members of the congregation who want Foster to leave the church say he has too much control and that membership has dwindled from about 300 people to fewer than 100” (para. 4). The pastor, in the eyes of some of the congregants was misusing his power. Jacobs (2020) “They were locking the doors and trying to keep him out,” Kent said after the hearing. “This was a small group of individuals that simply have a problem with the way the church is being run” (para. 6).

### **Church Declines due to the Pastor’s Absence**

Moreover, people do not only leave a church because of the offense of the pastor. They also leave a church because of the offense to the pastor. Pastor leadership as the perceived factor of people leaving one church to join another is not only about what the pastor did to the departing members, but it also akin to how the pastor may have been forced to resign, retire, death, or other means of their departure. Jim Meyer wrote in an article about the demise of a church that his father once pastor and or was forced out. He wrote, “My dad felt forced to resign as a pastor, and after the board fired the next two pastors, the church went out of existence” (Restoring Kingdom Builders, 2011, para. 31). This happened also in a church in Florida when they dismissed their pastor without getting buy-in from some of the congregants. The outcome was mayhem. Ruth Aguantia (2021) explained that she was also upset due to the sudden change



in leadership without considering "the feelings" of the congregants (para. 9). Royster (2015) states as with any organizational leader, a pastor's leadership behavior impacts the way the congregation responds to his or her leadership and the vision" (p. 4).

The dichotomy of pastoral leadership and its effects on church membership is not singular, but it is multifaceted in many ways. Churches, in some instances, successes and failures hinges on pastoral leadership. Parishioners, for the most part, honor and respect the pastor. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:1, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (ESV, 2010).

Ministry can be messy. Pastoral leadership is important to help eliminate or alleviate confusion, and help propel members to their God-given purposes in Christ. Income should not be the main goal for pastoring, but the contrary, the outcome of people lives being transformed by and for God. Clinton et al. (2005) states pastoral care is grounded upon the centrality of healing relationships with both vertical and horizontal dimensions (p. 15).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The church is a place of change. Life is filled with changes, and so is the church. The dichotomy of the church changing has to a couple of factors. One factor is centered on the people. The other aspect is when normalcy is displaced; then people tend to change places of worship. Northouse (2019) understood the gravity of the follower's satisfaction and intent to leave are greatly impacted by a leaders' communication style (p. 118). Taylor (2015) states sometimes people leave because they disagree with changes happening in the church. This is usually not over doctrine. It is almost always about personal preferences (para. 12). Churches are purging members, but people are not leaving Christianity. H. B. Charles (2012) "Let us face it. We live in a mobile society. It is normal for people to change residences, jobs, cities, and

churches” (On Church Hopping, para. 3). Leadership can be just as liable for this problematic epidemic as the people. Churches are going around in circles trying to understand some problems that are not confronted. According to Frazer (2017), churches must directly face the reasons for decline and confront that which has been holding them back (para. 6). Pastors should confront problems without being confrontational, but hospitable. Smith (2018) wrote, “Hospitable leaders are particularly obsessed with helping followers find their place” (p. 106).

While members who leave a church can receive much criticism, it is usually not easy leaving a church. Margaret Minnicks wrote,

If the truth is to be told, most people do not leave the church on the spur of the moment. People have reported that they have endured many months and even years of being dissatisfied before they made the ultimate decision to leave (Minnicks, 2021, para 3).

According to Minnicks (2021) there are some signs of people leaving the church such as the following: irregular attendance, giving has stopped, not involved in ministries, not fellowshiping with other members (para. 9). However, some people have left the church because of the shift in the pastor’s vision. According to Northouse (2019) leadership generates motivation (p. 118). Taylor (2015) states the primary reason churches decline and lose their sense of hope and passion stems from the lack of visionary leadership (para. 7). Kraft (2010) states it is the leader’s role to have a vision (p. 118). Solomon wrote, “Where there is no vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18, King James Version, 2005). Nieuwhof (2021) states big vision is inspiring, it can also be threatening or intimidating. Vision threatens people because, inherently, vision challenges the status quo. It asks people to think bigger, to think beyond themselves, to push past the status quo and to sacrifice (para 2). Pastoral leadership involves invest their lives in the lives of others. As Christ said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, ESV, 2010). Likewise, pastoral

leadership exemplifies and mimics the life of Jesus. Paul penned, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5, KJV).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand pastoral leadership as the perceived factor in changing church membership in South Carolina. For this purpose, research levels of pastoral involvement are defined as the leadership within the church that sets the tone and vision for the church (Toler, p. 42). Pastoral leadership is also defined as Towns (2008) suggested a technical expression for the human leader of a church (p. 899), coupled with Northouse (2019) understanding of how leadership behaviors are measured (p. 88). In addition, Wilkes’ (1998) identifies principles on servant leadership was added to help connect the methods of the Lord Jesus’ method of leading juxtaposed to human reasoning for leading. Palusky (2021) wrote about churches are in decline because of division (para. 5). This research focused on the descriptions of leadership actions accredited to decreasing worship service attendance of parishioners in South Carolina.

### **Research Questions**

The following five research questions are presented in this phenomenological study were developed to help shed some light on the problematic epidemic of pastoral leadership as a perceived factor of church members leaving one church to join another in the South Carolina.

**RQ1.** What, if any, did the pastor’s teaching style plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ2.** What, if any, did the pastor’s education, or the lack thereof, play a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ3.** What, if any, did the pastor’s vision for the church, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ4.** What, if any, did the pastor’s dissimilarity or disagreement with you, play in parishioners leaving the church to join another?

**RQ5.** What, if any, did the pastor's termination, retirement, or death, play a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

### **Assumptions and Delimitation**

#### **Research Assumptions**

There is an assumption that followers of Christ led by the Spirit should feel a desire to be connected to a church community. Yet some are aimlessly overriding their conviction and leaving the church. It is an assumption that the church looks to church leadership to provide instructions, vision, and guidance. The relationship with the pastor may also lead to a member changing church membership. When the pastor is terminated or resigns a member that regarded the decision of the church as erroneous may leave the church. Still, a connected relationship with the pastor may affect someone leaving the church to join another.

#### **Delimitations of the Research Design**

Many vital elements exist regarding people changing church membership in South Carolina; however, the complexity and scope were too broad to cover this topic from all angles. This research focused on pastoral leadership as the perceived contributing factors to parishioners changing church membership to join another church. The following is the list of participants:

1. Participants were limited to church members who attended their former churches for a minimum of three years. Participants did not include members that attended their former churches less than three years.
2. Participants were limited to church members who have changed churches with in the past three years. However, it did not include those who changed churches over the three years period.
3. Participants were limited to Baptist churches. Limiting the research to one denomination may not satisfy or be advantageous to the end goal. However, participants were not from any other denomination other than Baptist.

### Definition of Terms

This report has various parts of a theological vernacular to its foundation. Thus, before jumping into the report's foundational principle cornerstones, some terms were shared to ease any and all ambiguity. Clarity is critical when presenting one's thoughts.

1. *Illumination*: the understanding of the hearers or reader of the Bible, bringing about comprehension of its meaning, and creating a certainty of its truth and divine origin (Erickson, 2001).
2. *Church Hopping*: Is when a person habitually jumps from one church to another (Charles, 2012).
3. *Church*: Assembly of people who are called out. An assembly of professing believers in whom Christ dwells (Towns, 2008).
4. *Cultural Intelligence*: the capability to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational culture (Livermore, 2010).
5. *Influence*: The subtle effect you have on others through your words, actions, and attitudes (Toler, 2018).
6. *Biblical Leadership*: person with God-given capacity and God-given responsibility to influences a specific group of God's people toward His purpose for the group (Clinton, 2012).
7. *Pastor*: Technical term for the human leader of the church (Towns, 2008).
8. *Vision*: The change you want to see in the world (Toler, 2018).

### Significance of the Study

The research on the phenomenon of parishioners leaving one church to join another can be tied to pastoral leadership. Reggie McNeal wrote, "Great leadership bless people. They inspire and encourage. They help people become more than what they have been, maybe even more than they thought they could be" (McNeal, 2006, p. 4). On the other hand, McNeal (2006) considers bad leaders to be evil and curse people by not helping them reach their God-given potential (p. 4). A bad leader is usually leading from disobedience. Clinton (2012) A leader must learn obedience in order to influence others towards obedience (p. 54). The Lord Jesus said, "If

the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14, ESV, 2010). Thus, pastoral leadership may lend itself as a factor for parishioners leaving one church to join another.

Factors range from the time of church services a lack of visionary and purposeful pastoral leadership, lack of evangelism and discipleship, fear of change, demographic shifts, congregational discouragement, and so forth (Frazer, 2017, para. 7). Pew Research Center (2016) identifies fully 83% of Americans who have looked for a new place of worship say the quality of preaching played an important role in their choice of congregation (para 2). The tone of the preaching of the pastor and the tone set by leaders are important (Pew Research Center, para. 1).

Churches across denominational lines are facing the shift of membership. Pastoral leadership was the cause for some parishioners shifting. Masci (2014) wrote about Pentecostal preachers tend to sound more like their congregants (para 6). Thus, pastoral leadership, when done correctly can be advantageous to membership (Royster, p. 4). This paradox is seeking to be understood in this dissertation. There is a plethora of studies on the phenomenon of church decline; however, there is a minimal amount of research on the phenomena of perceived effects of pastoral leadership as the leading cause of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. Keita (2014) suggested in her dissertation,

The leader of the church makes decisions, communicates with stakeholders, and deals with the process of change. The positive impact of the church leaders on the growth of churches has not recently been evident in churches in the United States because churches have experienced a decline in membership and a resulting closing of many churches (p. 2).

However, pastoral leadership was positively influential in membership shifting. Luckel (2013) examines Southern Baptist pastors likely do not know about different leadership styles, what their own style is, and whether it has a positive or negative influence on the growth of their churches. Church attendance declined dramatically according to Sanford (2020) “Leadership

Practice Inventory, and the change in church engagement statistics as measured through weekly worship attendance, weekly discipleship attendance, the average number of baptisms, and yearly contributions for the 2016 through 2018 church years” (p. 1).

### **Summary of the Design**

This research phenomenological research sought to understand pastoral leadership as a perceived factor of members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina, using the qualitative research method. Interviews were essential in this research. The participants were three to five people from three to five different churches who attended their former churches for less than three years, but have changed churches within the past three years. The interviews were semi-formal coupled with open ended questions. The interviews were accomplished face to face at each participant’s church.

Members leaving one church to join another is not a single denominational issue. Leadership has been displaced and perhaps objectified in the formation of the church. Certainly, the challenges that some churches are facing are opportunities to turn, change direction, and seek a new destination. With that in mind, and realizing the church members shifting, it behooves the pastoral leadership community to study church leadership as it relates to church success.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The literature review of this phenomenological qualitative research focused on pastoral leadership as the perceived factor for members changing church membership in South Carolina. This research will add to the literature on the influences of pastoral leadership on church growth and membership retention. Influence is described by Toler (2018) as, “The subtle effect you have on others through your words, actions, and attitudes” (p. 18).

Pastoral leadership is not the most sought-after job. The secular pay is not the most rewarding, but the sacred reward is unmatched, and it comes with some challenges for the pastor; according to Dilday (2013), “Ministers struggle between commitments to a self-sacrificial calling on the one hand and providing for their families on the other” (para. 2). Udem Simon Udoh (2015) plainly asseverated, “Pastoral leadership is an example of spiritual leadership which is always the most difficult type of leadership. It is difficult because in this type of leadership, people are not under any compulsion to obey your instructions or follow you” (p. 1).

Rainer (2013) wrote,

Every pastor knows the feeling. The news may have come via email, telephone, or second-hand conversation. In some cases, the person, or persons themselves told you face-to-face. They are leaving your church. They may already have another church to join, or they may just be beginning the search process (para. 1).

In some fashion of all broken relations, pastoral attrition has gravely undesirable effects for all those involved; the parishioner, the local church, the pastor, and the pastor’s family. Malphurs (2005) asserted that it takes no less than five to ten years to go from being simply the preacher to being the pastor because the title is not the same as the role and until people trust an individual, they will not follow that individual (p. 81). Out of this vein is born the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research to understand if pastoral leadership is a factor in members



leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. Moreover, in this section the theological framework focused on the spiritual nuances of pastoral leadership. The theoretical framework focused on the sacred couple with the secular nuances of religious leadership and social science. While the related, gap, and rationale for the study dealt with nuances akin to filling in the voids of other research connected to this phenomenological qualitative research.

### **Theological Framework for the Study**

Pastors are the under shepherds of the church that influences and inspires. Clinton (2012) underscores a leader is one who influences a specific group of people to move in a God-given direction (p. 86). The church is going through a change that started as a snowball, but has quickly evolved into an avalanche. This researcher refers to the relationship between pastoral leaders and members changing membership to join other churches in South Carolina. The words of Apostle Paul validated the promises of the Lord Jesus when he penned, “For all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20, New King James Version, 2012). Herbert Lockyer asseverated, “There are over 30,000 Bible promises computed in the Bible” (Lockyer, 1990, p. 10). When viewing the church through our natural eyes it seems hopeless when it comes to the promises of God. There is some good news; the Lord Jesus said of His church, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18b, KJV, 2005). With that promise in mind this literature review focused on the nature, purpose, and role of the church, biblical mandates and role of leadership, confusion, and cultural diversities that encompasses the vision of pastoral leadership.

### **Nature of the Church**

Mark Dever wrote about the sad state of the mind of some Christians when he states for some Christians, participating in church compares closely with cleaning the bathroom. It is

boring and mildly unpleasant (Dever, 2007). While this statement is true for some Christians, it does not encapsulate Christendom as a whole; nor, does it represent the mind and heart of the church. According to Jerry Falwell, the church is described as “A chosen or called-out assembly” (Falwell, 1982, p. 60). Out of the same vein, Walter Elwell illustrates the church as “The spiritual family of God, the Christian fellowship created by the Holy Spirit through the testimony to the mighty acts of God in Christ Jesus” (Elwell, 2001, p. 246). Millard Erickson has a similar view of the church, “The image of the body of Christ also emphasizes the connection of the church, as a group of believers, with Christ” (Erickson, 2001, p. 342). Without a doubt, the church is a group that God calls out for a specific purpose that He ordained. Rainer (2013) states the church is weaker because the members have turned the meaning of membership upside-down (p. 4). God used Apostle Paul to pen the picture of the church, which is detailed in 1 Corinthians 12 (Rainer, p. 11). The church is the body of Christ that consists of many members. Each part of the body has a particular function, but the entirety of its members make-up the whole body (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, ESV, 2010). Each part of the body is fitly framed together (Ephesians 2:21, KJV, 2005). Falwell (1982) states this text is an architectural metaphor. God places each one exactly where He wants him. We would be misfits anywhere else (p. 546). One’s perception is their reality. Disappointments can lead to anger which cause a person the leave and drift aimlessly. Clinton et al. (2005) identifies that behavior as, “The Cream-Puff” (p. 208). Cream Puff is like a boat drifting aimlessly on the ocean with no motor, oars, or sails. They are forced to go wherever the winds or circumstances blow them (Clinton et al., 2005, p. 208).

### **First Mention of the Word Church**

The word church is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but its concept is dripping throughout the Old Testament. Erickson (2001) connected the idea of the word church to both

the Greek and the Old Testament Background. Chester and Timmis (2008) expressed the words of John Stott about the meaning of the church

The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God's new community. For his purpose conceived in a past eternity, being worked out in history, and to be perfected in future eternity, is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build his church, that is, to call out of the world a people for his own glory (p. 39).

The literal word church was first recorded in Matthew 16:18, which states, "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" (Matthew 16:18, KJV, 2005). Falwell (1982) agrees when he suggested that this is the first occurrence of the word in the New Testament and probably is used in prophetic anticipation (p. 183). Is the church, as described in the verses above, losing membership, or the church as an organization? Church is more than a place, it is community. Nieuwhof expressed Barna's research, the Barna study points out that despite a growing epidemic of loneliness, only 10% report going to church to find community (para. 29).

The word church has some ambiguity to its concept. For instance, Falwell (1982) suggested, "It is not viewed as an external organization, denomination, or hierarchical system." The New Testament church, therefore, is a local autonomous congregation or assembly of believers which is a "church" in and of itself" (pp. 60-61). The local church is only a part of the enormity of the universal church. The church is not connected through human blood, but by God's Spirit. Chester and Timmis (2008) suggested the church is the community of the Holy Spirit (p. 29). The universal church is defined by Towns (2008), "The Universal Church is that group composed of all true believers in this present dispensation (Pentecost to Rapture, permanently united by the baptism of the Holy Spirit into vital spiritual union with all believers of this ages thus forming the mystical body of Christ" (p. 652).

### **Purpose of the Church**

The purpose of the church is clear. The power of the church is recorded in the book of Matthew. The Lord Jesus promised, “The gates of Hell shall not prevail against the church.” The promises and words of God are always infallible. For the Lord Jesus said, “For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18, KJV, 2005). Since heaven and earth are still standing, that means Jesus’ word about His church prevails. Paul wrote, “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16, KJV, 2005). The church’s purpose is to supply what is lacking to each other. According to Falwell (1982) harmoniously and closely fitted together, with no one out of place, and with each one contributing his share for the good of the whole body (p. 553). The importance of the church is taken too lightly, and lacks spiritual renewal. Spiritual experience that does not arise from God’s word is not Christian experience (Chester & Timmis, p. 31). Christian Reformed Church, “Christians are members of a living body, not an inanimate institution (Eph. 4:12-16, KJV, 2005). The source of the church’s life is Christ himself. This implies two things: First, the church as a living organism is constantly growing, changing, and adapting to changing realities around it” (Christian Reformed Church, 2005, p. 10). Towns (2008) added, the church is an organism and an organization. The church is an organism which elevates it about above the business and social organizations of our day. Secondly it is an organization because of business management and administration (p. 623).

Matthew’s gospel records what is known as the Great Commission. The commands of the Great Commission were some of the last words of Jesus to his disciples. Dave Earley and David

Wheeler (2010) adds the last words anyone speaks are considered of utmost and the highest significance (p. 21). Without controversy, the last words of the Lord Jesus, and, in a more candid tone, any words of the Lord Jesus are essential. A portion of the Lord's last words were,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18b-20, ESV, 2010).

The purpose of the church is to become something not just do something. Earley and Wheeler (2010) testify to that fact,

Interestingly, in this final giving of the Great Commission, Jesus tells them what to do (evangelize) to be witnesses. Sharing the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Jesus should so consume His followers that they literally become it (p. 21).

The church was not given a suggestion, but the Lord gave the church a command. The word commission is a military term meaning "an authoritative order, charge, or direction, according to Earley and Wheeler (2010).

The church has gone about trying to redefine its original intent. This research has found some evidence that would lead one to believe that is the case. The church has gone about trying to redefine its original intent. The church veered being the light to the word, to counting nickels and noses. Earley and Wheeler (2010) suggested the first-century church was not concerned about helping some cross the finish line of faith and repentance...but more concerned with planting, watering, and partnering with the Lord while He gave the increase (p. 283).

The church has a head--The Lord Jesus. The Bible teaches, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23, KJV, 2005). The purpose of the head is to give direction. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis (2010) states Christianity is word-centered because God rules through his gospel, and when Jesus instructed in John 14...he was reflecting the common principle of the story of salvation (p. 24).

The church is meant to be a place where a stranger will never feel strange and a place that would help heal the broken heart and lifting up Jesus so that He will draw more to follow Him.

Catchings (2021) wrote in his dissertation the church is a group that is “called out” from the world in order to do the will of God on Earth (p. 37). The book of Acts records the continuity of the church,

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness heart (Acts 2:42-46).

The body of Christ is not divided, but it is methodically put together by God for his purpose.

### **Formation of the Church**

The formation of the church was deemed to be established on the day of Pentecost. The book of Acts records this phenomenal moment in church history. The Holy Spirit fell on 120 believers tarrying in the upper room. Acts 2:1-4 records,

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (KJV, 2005).

The charismatic phenomenon of speaking in tongues did not happen in this fashion again.

Unfortunately, many have misrepresented the purpose of the Holy Spirit, which is the third person of the Holy Trinity. Erwin Lutzer expressed the reluctance of Augustine to say the third person conveys a sense of individuality and separateness; mode is too impersonal (Lutzer, 1998, p. 37). Mallard Erickson wrote, “Being filled with the Spirit is to so much a matter of our getting more of the Spirit as it is a matter of his possessing more of our lives” (Erickson, 2001, p. 84).

The Lord Jesus spoke about the relationship that will come through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Petitt (2008) the relationship Jesus describes appertains after he goes to his Father and comes to them again through the power of the Holy Spirit (p. 32).

### **1st Century Church vs 21st Century Church**

The first-century church testimony was a little different from the 21st-century church. In the first-century church, “people were added daily, those that would be saved” (Acts 2:47). The church was marked by praising God, joy in the faith, and sincerity of heart (Polhill, p. 122). The church today is shifting membership from one church to another instead of adding those that are lost. Unlike today’s church, first century Christians mainly met in houses. The day the church began they were in a house. The Bible records, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled tall the house where they were sitting (Acts 2:1-2, KJV, 2005). Unity of the church ushered in the Spirit. Polhill (1992) expressed the results of the disciples gathered in one room was them being filled with the Spirit (p. 98). Believers gathered in one another houses. Paul echoed some of the same sentiments concerning churches in the houses, "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house” (Colossians 4:15, KJV, 2005). The first century church shared their goods, “And all that believed were together and had all things common (Acts 2:44, KJV, 2005). Polhill (1992) expressed the church during this period of time experienced continual growth and God-given blessing (p. 122).

Later, denominations where formed. Although denominations are not biblical, they are a part of Christendom (Towns, p. 667). The book of Acts reveals some rudiments of denominationalism within its pages. Namely, the Jewish Church and the Gentile Church that derived out of Antioch where believers where first called ‘Christians’ (Towns, p. 668). The

problems of yesterday's church came from within and without, the same is for today's church. Towns suggested, the Book of Acts ended with individual church working hand in hand for the glory of God (Towns, p. 669). Peter, James, John, and Paul were the apostolic leaders of the first-century churches. The first church met in Jerusalem and eventually spread throughout the regions, thus keeping in accordance with the command of Jesus recorded in Acts 1:8b, "And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (KJV, 2005)." Although the church started out with rapid growth, it was meet with rapid persecution.

Moreover, the church transcended traditional thinking, especially in their reluctance with the Samaritans. For instance, the persecution of disciples took them to places such as Samaria to spread the gospel. Acts chapter 8 records, the Jews were preaching the gospel there was surprising, for the Jews normally avoided Samaritans due to their mixture with Gentile blood.

The church did not stay in houses after the post-apostolic age, due to the growth of the church, the term Universal Church or Catholic Church, first used by Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (Shelley, p. 28). Then the church grew under the reign of Emperor Constantine, who made Christianity the official religion in the Roman Empire. Shelley (2008) continues, "By the reign of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, there were churches in every large town in the empire and places as distant from each other as Britain Carthage and Persia" (p. 29).

The community in the beginning of the church age went through various changes. The Book of Revelation, recorded by John the Beloved, was very instrumental in understanding the church. Chapters two and three entail seven churches. The dichotomy of the meanings of the seven churches refers to literal local churches and seven church ages (Boyer, p. 268). While the early church endured great persecution, its growth was not interrupted, and Christian's faith did



not waver. First-century Christians were so committed, according to Lane (2006) Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was asked to revile Christ in order to gain his freedom; but, he replied, “Eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, how can I then blaspheme my king who save me” (p. 9).

In 312, Constantine defeated Maxentius, wrote Noll (2012), and became the co-emperor with Licinius (p. 41). Under Constantine’s administration, Christianity became the official religion. However, the church took a turn for the worse in the proceeding years. The church’s problems were no longer coming from the outside but internal strife (Noll, p. 42). The papacy, which instituted the title of pope, gradually controlled the church. The unhealthy ideology of the papacy led to the Reformation (p. 148). However, centuries later, Lane (2006) outlines that several factors caused the Reformation to occur (p. 148). The leadership of the church was tyrannical. Lane (2006) expressed in the late medieval papacy amply illustrated the maxim absolute power corrupts absolutely, and there was considerable anti-papal feeling (p. 148). Martin Luther and John Calvin were notable for resisting the papacy. Leadership in yesterday’s church played a part in people leaving the church.

The Reformation marked a turning point in the church. The reformers started a protest against the papacy. According to Noll (2012), Martin Luther created one of the momentous changes in the history of Europe and one of the most significant in the history of the church (p. 146). The words of Luther birthed what is known today as Protestantism (p. 146). The reformation was not against God but the leadership of the church. The leadership of the church caused enormous harm.

Yesterday’s church compared to today’s leadership has some symmetry. Acts 5:14 echoes the sentiments of Acts 2:47. Hear the words recorded in Acts 5:14, “And believers were

the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women (KJV, 2005).” What is the difference between the two? God is the same. Both generations have the same savior. The Holy Spirit is still the Keeper and Guide. So, what is the difference; pastoral leadership and the people.

### **Jesus’ Command to the Church**

The church is an organism as well as an organization. Elmer Towns (2008) likens the church to both (p. 608). It is an organism because it is living, and an organization because it deals with business and administrative nuances. The role of the church is to walk in the light of God so that a sin-sick world will know God in the pardon of their sins. J. Rodman Williams penned,

The church consists of those who have been “called out.” That is the basic meaning. The word *ekklēsia* is derived from two Greek words, *ek*, “out,” and *kaleō*, “call”; hence the church is composed of “called out” people. However—and here is the great difference—the calling is not from ordinary responsibilities but from the dark situation of sin and evil (Williams, 1996, p. 17).

The church and hospital have a commonality. Both help sick people. The hospital helps people that are physically sick, and the church helps people that are spiritually sick. As mentioned earlier, the command to the church is found in Matthew 28:18-20. God commanded the church to share the gospel through words and deeds. As it is recorded,

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16, ESV, 2010).

Ben Gutierrez said, “Life is too short and God’s truth too precious to keep His message contained with us or to squander our testimony by pursuing sin” (Gutierrez, 2012, p. 128). The vision of the pastor for the church should encompass Jesus’ command to the church. The danger of the importance of a pastor’s education is to know so they can lead according to the commands of Jesus. The Bible teaches, “God is love” (1 John 4:8b, KJV, 2005). The Bible also declares,

“God is light” (1 John 1:5, KJV, 2005). Christ is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4 teaches, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Jesus’ command the church to love one another. John the beloved penned, “A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (Saint John 13:34, KJV, 2005). When Christians fail to live by His standard and thereby fail to show our love to Him, it is concluded that we do not love Him (Towns, p. 641). Pastoral leadership is tasked with teaching and showing the love of God. Thus, it behooves the pastoral leadership to be educated in the commands of God.

### **Biblical Mandates of Leadership**

Too often, pastoral leadership is seen as a job and not a calling. According to Towns (2008) the pastor has the following roles:

1. Lead the flock (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2)
2. Ministry of Feeding (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2)
3. Tending to the sheep (Ephesians 4:12) (p. 686).

The misnomer about pastors is that they are perfect beings. Every leader in the Bible, except the Lord Jesus, sinned. David expressed it plainly, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalms 51:5, ESV, 2010). Paul added, “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate, so now it is no longer I who do it but sin the dwells within me” (Romans 7:15, 17, ESV, 2010). A member’s relationship with the pastor should not depend on the leader’s faults, but should hinge on the leader’s relationship with the Lord Jesus. The definition or description of leadership is many. Ndimande (2007) leadership is commonly

understood to refer to the capacity that some people must influence the lives of individuals, groups, and even the entire nation. When the pastor falls or makes mistakes, members leave and join other churches. Instead of finding fault in those that leave churches for another, the pastor should genuinely seek to know why they left. According to Idleman (2015) a noteworthy number of people are switching churches, discarding relationships, and found that judging instead of loving often plays a role (para. 1). There are numerous leaders in the Bible that had to grow in their relationship with the Lord and with people.

Paul is an example of a spiritual leader in a growing relationship. However, he was one that had to grow in his relationship with the Lord and with people. For Paul was hard on John Mark and did not want him to go on one of their missionary journeys (Acts 15:37-40, ESV, 2005). Paul was sent by God to the Gentiles (Acts 8:15-16, ESV, 2010). Paul wrote almost half of the New Testament. Reggie McNeal wrote, “Great leaders bless people. They inspire and encourage. They help people become more than what they have been, maybe even more than they thought they could be” (McNeal, 2006, p. 4). Paul was that type of a leader. Christian leaders today should embrace their call by God, thus inspiring people and thinking less about themselves. Paul penned a letter to the Thessalonians,

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, ESV, 2010).

Paul was a self-aware leader. McNeal (2006) expresses no one can cultivate self-awareness without understanding how we have become who we are (p. 67). Authority can be the worst tool of a leader, especially when the leader has the wrong motives. Briner and Pritchard (2008) discussed leadership is largely about authority—how to acquire it, use it, and invest it in others.

Leadership is not about issuing directives as a sort of traffic cop controlling the flow of action (p. 41).

Paul faced much opposition because of his teaching, and some even left him. 2 Timothy 4:10, “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia” (ESV, 2010). Paul wrote and warned succeeding generations not to be dismayed when troubling times arises; but find comfort in the scriptures. Romans 15:4, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (ESV, 2010). Apostle Paul did not allow separation or persecution stop him.

Paul’s driving force was not in his past as a Pharisee, his Jewish background, or keeping the Law of God blameless (Philippines 3:4-6, ESV, 2010). For he counted those things loss, and his dependance was in the Lord Jesus the Christ (Philippines 3:7, ESV, 2010). Gutierrez (2012) expressed the scriptures makes it innately clear that a person’s heart must be spiritually prepared prior to doing the work of ministry (p. 88). As a leader, Paul’s heart was divinely whole he wrote, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Forrest and Roden (2017) suggested that this passage of scripture is the superlative text for servant leadership (p. 88).

Paul’s education, humility, and understanding of the Law helped to guide him to the truth about Christ. He did not take his calling lightly. Earley and Gutierrez (2010) said Paul understood being in ministry was a privilege (p. 139). While Paul held to traditions, he was missing the mark. His education under the tutelage of Gamaliel was a blessing and a cursing. Blessing because it afforded him the opportunity to understand the letter of the Law. A cursing because it caused him to lose family and friends. Paul never considered turning around from

following Christ. Earley and Gutierrez wrote, “Paul endured in ministry because he had no sense of entitlement. He was grateful for the privilege of serving Jesus in ministry” (p. 139)

### **Calling of a Pastor is Vital**

God has called ‘pastors after His heart, not theirs. Earley and Gutierrez (2010) describe call to church ministry is an inner conviction from God confirmed by the church, verified by giftedness, and supported by results (p. 118). True leadership starts with a heart, humility, and with hubris. Wilkes (1998) contends we who lead often overlook that the proper place of Christlike leadership is out in the crowd rather than up at the head table (p. 13). The leaders are called to lead with a godly example. Wilkes (1998) if all you have to offer are words, few people will follow you. Your example will give them a picture of what you are talking about” (p. 171). Unfortunately, some pastors are selfish which leads to inconstancy from parishioners. Lynn Pryor wrote, “We will never be happy or content in any church so long as the focus is on what is in it for me” (2015, para. 15). The essential divinatory nature of a leader can keep members focused and committed to the church. Leaders can develop visions that inspire and direct the enthusiasm and allegiance of others. When parishioners are not motivated or inspired, they usually leave one church to join another in the presence of not being fed. Idleman (2015) echoes one of the reasons that people use for leaving a church,” I am just not being fed at church!" On occasion, this is very valid, but it deserves a closer look (para. 15). Briner and Pritchard (2008) express the difference between management and leadership is chiefly in the way those being managed or led are motivated (p. 7). King David echoed, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way” (Psalms 37:23, ESV, 2010). Falwell (1982) said if a man lives righteously, he is a good man and has committed his way unto the Lord, the steps he takes will lead to his purpose (p. 1028). When God has His hands on a person, then their lives are

set on the path of destiny, and the destiny may not be what they thought. Boyd (2012) stated a sense of destiny is an inner conviction arising from an experience or a series of experiences in which there is a growing sense of awareness that God has His hand on a leader in a special way for social purpose (p. 207). This experience happened to Apostle Paul. He recorded in the book of Galatians,

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers, but when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:13-16a, NKJV, 2012).

Paul was commissioned by God to be a witness unto the Gentiles (Forrest & Roden, p. 369).

Falwell (1982) suggested that Paul's calling was in the present tense (Gr *euaggelizomai*), which speaks of a continued effort (p. 509).

### **Confusion and Conflict**

Confusion in the church is nothing new. Paul and Barnabas had a heated dispute (Acts 15:36-40, NKJV, 2012). Their disagreement caused them to separate. Falwell (1982) wrote the disagreement over John brought about the division of the first missionary team (p. 303). Paul and Peter had a disagreement (Gal. 2:11-14, NKJV, 2012). Apostle Paul was a man that did not have a problem with confrontation, for he set himself against Peter, resisting and reprimanding him (Falwell, p. 513). Peter's leadership displayed the example of one that was concerned about what man would say rather than what God would say (Falwell, p. 514). God is not the author of confusion, but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33, ESV, 2010). Apostle Paul implies Satan is the one that causes confusion, therefore, when tensions arise that are counterproductive to the mission of God, beware. Falwell (1982) states leaders must be aware that disorderly, confusing, and disruption is not of God, for God is the author of peace (p. 459). Martin (2020) asseverated,

It is clear that we are living in a time of confusion and division, both in the Church and in the world. I am not qualified to evaluate whether this is the worst confusion the Church has seen or not—we have been through some pretty bad times over the centuries—but it is serious. And it is our time and our confusion, so it is something we must deal with (para. 2).

Since the world is full of people there will be some type of confusion. Pastoral leadership should always seek to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem. Ndimande (2007) underscores when a society cannot resolve the tensions of conflicting interests produced by too wide a gap in the participation of all persons in a culture, a revolution is inevitable.

Confusion caused Paul and Barnabas to separate. These same types of separation exist between pastors and parishioners in today's generation, especially when unadulterated preaching is involved. Charles (2014) states faithful preaching will drive some away from the church (para. 9). When members leave it can be a hard pill to swallow as well as challenging. Rainer (2013) states pastoral ministry has great challenges, and exiting church members are certainly among those challenges (para. 9). Going from church to church has several lasting effects on one's Christian life. The position of pastor is essential to the body of the Church. The connection between the pastor and parishioners can be formidable. Zechariah wrote, "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Zechariah 13:7, KJV, 2005). Falwell (1982) suggested that the interpretation of Shephard in this scripture is Jesus, but the application should not be limited to the disciples of Jesus (p. 1839). The Lord Jesus quoted this scripture during His earthly ministry in reference to the scattering of His disciples during His arrest and suffering. Burnette (2016) suggested, "Pastors represent a unique vocation with a unique set of required emotional demands and job skills" (Burnette, 2016). The psychological demands can leave the pastor bewildered due to the demands of the position.



Confusion is more than being unaware or feeling faintly vague about a situation. It is not good to eat from too many tables. Solomon wrote, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23, New International Version, 2007). Solomon’s wisdom about guarding the heart is because the heart is the center for all of life (Falwell, p. 1206). Parker (2015) wrote about the confusion that may arise due to unclear teaching,

Here is one area that I think many churches have dropped the ball. Pastors should be intentional about giving their people a right understanding of church. When congregations see church as something they go to and not something they are, community relationships take a hit. Instead of being one unified body, we are pieces of the body who just so happen to see each other on Sunday. (All the fingers gather over here and all the toes over there.) Church hopping adds fuel to this fire. There is no community when people are constantly moving in and out. Not only that, but how is a Pastor supposed to care for a person who has no commitment what-so-ever to their church? When most pastors are faced with a time sensitive choice of ministering to a committed member or a come-and-go attendee, 9 times out of 10 the pastor will serve the committed member first. The hopper will usually see that as unfair, but, it is unfair to demand the attention of a Pastor whom you have no loyalty to. A community looks out for each other. The body feeds the body so that it has the strength to sustain impact in the greater community (para 9).

According to Maxwell, “Everything rises and falls on leadership” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 123). If that is true, that everything rises and falls on leadership and the leader’s influence, it will logically follow that pastoral leadership can help offset some confusion. Applying this to church growth and decline, it will mean that the growth and decline of the Church rises and falls on pastoral leadership’s influence. Therefore, at the end of this research, one should will able to know that pastoral leadership is, its cardinal factor, of membership leaving one church to join another.

### **Summary of Theological Framework**

Churches in America are in decline, and leadership lacks vision. Thom Rainer wrote, “A church that was probably born out of vision. A church that died because she no longer had a vision” (p. 4). Several factors have been noted that contribute to pastoral leadership as the

perceived factor of church members leaving one church to join another. There is crisis that is taking place. One is a leadership crisis. The other is a church membership retention crisis. Both crises are counterproductive to the purpose of the church's God-given purpose.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

In the above section of this literature view, this researcher laid out the framework that helped to undergird his research concerning the pastoral leadership is a perceived factor contributing to church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. This section will cover the theoretical framework. Joshua Strunk (2015) in his dissertation quoted Wolcott, "The theoretical framework is the guiding theory or theories that form the raw structure of a research study" (p 27). Exploring a phenomenon without understanding its origin can be daunting and counterproductive. Thusly, this section shall focus on necessities that model the framework of C. Gene Wilkes. Concepts for future academic consideration of the servant leadership philosophy are intended to be suggested. According to Wilkes' ideologies, the imminent application of the servant leadership philosophy for pastoral leadership shall be offered.

Pastoral leadership is more than a position or a title that is given to a person. Maxwell (2008) expressed leadership is relational as much as it is positional. An individual who takes a relational approach to leadership will never be lonely (p. 6). Leadership approached from a positional standpoint may lose the essential of relationship. Maxwell (2008) understood that the best leaders know that leading people requires loving them (p. 7). The disconnect between pastoral leadership and parishioner could be one thing as simple as teamwork. Maxwell (2008) did not consider his employees as people who work for him but people who work with him; nor, did he feel he could be successful without them, nor could they be successful without him (p. 7).

It is not wise to be a leader that has a mindset to just climb to the top. Maxwell (2008) considers that type of leaders is solely a positional leader that plays king of the hill (p. 9).

### **Wilkes and Servant leadership**

Pastoral leadership is seen throughout the Bible. The world has never known the most excellent leader was the Lord Jesus Christ. Ken Blanchard (2016) contends that the strongest example of the servant leadership model is Jesus Christ. He defines him as the “greatest leadership model of all time” (p. 9). Wilkes (1998) expresses the leadership style of Jesus’ was servant leadership (p. 10). Wilkes (1998) wrote about seven guiding principles Jesus led by:

1. Jesus humbled himself and allowed God to exalt him (p. 11).
2. Jesus followed his Father’s will rather than starting a position (p. 11).
3. Jesus defined greatness as being a servant first (p. 11).
4. Jesus served others because he trusted that he was God’s Son (p. 12).
5. Jesus left his place at the head table to serve the needs of others (p.12).
6. Jesus shared responsibility and authority with those he called to lead (p.12).
7. Jesus built a team to carry out a worldwide vision (p. 12).

Since the Lord Jesus modeled servant leadership, it is advantageous for Christian leaders to do the same. The Bible teaches, “Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:4, KJV, 2005). Wilkes (1998) said churches need leaders who know how God has made and gifted them for service; and who are willing to serve those who Christ placed in their care (p. 14).

Not everyone that is in a church has the same problem, but everyone has a problem. Servant leadership is about serving others. Wilkes (1998) suggested servanthood is the physical symbol of servant leadership (p. 156). The church has a mission to fulfill. Wilkes (1998)

expressed servant leaders meet the needs of the group in order to carry out the mission (p. 156). Leaders encourage and motivate others to action when they themselves are sacrificing and willing to go beyond their expected job. Wilkes (1998) suggested that Jesus was not a foot washer but a teacher, yet he washed His disciple's feet (p. 156). The connections of leader and follower is vital as well as simple. Wilkes (1998) expresses the leader should be someone who considers the follower as more than a means to an end (p. 15). Maxwell (2008) understood the principle as well by conveying leaders need to remember the point of leading is not to cross the finish line first, but to take people across the finish line with them (p. 14).

### **Robert Greenleaf**

Servant leadership is not just in the sacred circles, but the secular as well. Wilkes (1998) states business people like Robert Greenleaf, Peter Block, Stephen Covey, and Max DePree have called leaders to a service-oriented model of leadership (p. 15). Jackson (2020) wrote, "Servant Leadership as a philosophy was first advanced in terminology by Greenleaf in his 1970 essay entitled *The Servant as Leader*. The author develops the term as being grounded in religious teachings" (p. 70). Servant leadership is a primary factor of an organization's successes and failures (Jackson, 2020). Greenleaf is a proponent of genuine service to others. According to Jackson (2020) Greenleaf wrote, "Building upon the foundation of being attentive to the needs of others while seeking to determine if those being led are growing as individuals, this book advances that real leadership is an internal quality of the individual" (p. 71). Amin et al. (2019) recited Greenleaf in their writing concerning servant leadership. They wrote, "Greenleaf (1977) has proposed the servant leadership model, and this model appropriately fit with the organization that strongly considers the empowerment of employees and encourage their participation" (p.

84). Leadership, whether secular or sacred, is a critical component to maintain a competitive edge and achieving a desirable outcome (Amin et al., p. 85).

Leadership styles vary. Some leaders are charismatic; however, charisma does not always lead to success. According to Amin et al. (2019), many people believe that the best leaders are charismatic, strong presence, visionary, and passionate; but unfortunately, these traits are absent in all high performing company's leaders, the people who possessed these traits are called servant leaders (p. 88). This ideology does not fit only in the secular, but it fits in the sacred. God does not call a person because of their oratorical ability. If one's oratorical ability was a key factor then God would have chosen Aaron to lead the Children of Israel out of captivity and not Moses.

### **Lead by Serving**

Pastoral leadership helps to influence others to reach their God-given purpose. Real servant leadership begins when a God-revealed mission that captures a person (Wilkes, p. 19). There must be passion. Simply put, according to Wilkes (1998), "Servant leadership is passionate service to the mission and to those who join the leader on the mission" (p. 19). To lead others, it is vitally important for the leader to display submission. Wilkes (1998) wrote, "Submission to God and to the divine mission for your life is the first step to servant leadership" (p. 22). Servant leadership forges a path to true leadership that is given by people without having to ask. Leadership is not something you pursue. Leadership is something others give to you (Wilkes, p. 27). Leadership whether secular or sacred, especially servant leadership, should not be taken by force; but one should wait for God to exalt them (Wilkes, p. 33).

Pastoral leadership is a humbling position, and a position that one should not walk in with a hubris attitude. Humility is key. Wilkes (1998) humility begins when you have a true picture of yourself before God and God's call on your life (p. 41). God is the foundation of pastoral

leadership, and God is the source of true Christian leadership. According to Wilkes (1998) the difference between pride and authentic confidence is the source” (p. 43). The attitude of the leader is important. Thom Rainer had the right idea when he wrote, “The right attitude means we recognize that no church is perfect. We expect that some church members will be irritants to us. We acknowledge that no pastor or church staff member is perfect” (Rainer, 2015, p. 14). The church is not a group of perfect people. Instead, the church is a group of imperfect people that have made up in their minds to be obedient to the call of God. Rainer (2015) summed up what the church looked like when he asseverated, “Let’s be clear. The Bible mandates us to have an attitude of unity in the church. But look at what it requires: humility, gentleness, patience, and acceptance of one another in love” (p. 15). Cloud wrote,

Immature character, or nonintegrated character, ward off new information for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is arrogance, like a know-it-all character. Sometimes it is pride, like an “I don’t want to admit I am wrong” character. Or it could be the anxiety and fear of having to adapt a new reality (p. 136).

Colossians states, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17, NIV, 2010). When actions are done out of selfish ambitions, it can lead to disruptions. Thus, people tend to leave the church never to return.

### **How Jesus Led**

The Lord Jesus was intentional in his leading. He came to do the will of the Father. His obedience led others to be obedient. Wilkes (1998) as soon as Jesus told his disciples of his intentions, two of them moved in to take advantage of the situation” (p. 67). Servant leadership is a want for the leadership of Jesus (Wilkes, p. 75).

In the information age of today’s generation (21<sup>st</sup> Century) leaders must learn how to lead from behind or follow. Wilkes quotes Douglas K. Smith,

In the twenty-first-century organization, all leaders must learn to follow if they are to successfully lead... Leaders at all levels and in all situations, they must pay close attention to situations in which their most effective option is to follow—not because the hierarchy demand they “obey,” but because their performance requires them to rely on the capacities and insight of other people (p. 75).

When leaders follow it, they can lead churches in the right direction. Wilkes (1998) wrote, “God is looking for servant leaders who are first follower of God’s mission in their own lives to lead these purposeful churches. Only purpose-driven pastors can lead purpose-driven churches” (p. 79).

### **Pride**

The opposite of Jesus’ leadership was pride. A proudful heart is counterproductive to the God’s plan for pastors, and it can lead to the fall of a good man. King Solomon wrote about the dangers of pride, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18, ESV, 2010). The pastor’s toolbox should be filled with more than scriptures, maxims, and catchphrases. It should be filled with all things that is need to meet parishioners basic physical and emotional needs. Life has many challenges. Heibert (2008),

For the most part, people around the world are concerned about life here and now. They seek meaning in this existence and want a good life on earth. They are faced with the problems of daily life such as diseases, droughts, floods, and sudden death. When food is available, all eat exuberantly. When it is gone, people bear the pangs of hunger with fortitude, just as other creatures do. They offer sacrifices to the spirits and use magic to influence nature. In the end, however, they are aware that they are dependent on the spirits and focus of nature for their lives (p. 114).

A pastor’s heart should never be filled with an attitude of ungodly pride. The Lord Jesus echoed, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6, ESV, 2010). Learning for a pastor should be a marathon, not a sprint. Education is more than what one learns in school or an academical setting. Knight (2006) states the school is only one of

society's agents for learning, education, and training. The family, media, peer group, and church are some of the other institutions that share this responsibility (p. 11).

The days of pastors picking up a Bible and preaching has some relevance, but that positional thinking is becoming more antedated. Though some pastors have gone about fulfilling what they feel they were born to do, it is not the best way of forging ahead. Clinton (2012) suggested, "The emerging leader gets into ministry as a prime focus of life. He will get further training, informally through self-study growth projects or conformally through functionally oriented workshops and so on" (Clinton, 2012, p. 27). Watt (2014),

Feelings influence how a person reacts in each situation. Generally, people's emotions are perceived as being good or bad, helpful, or destructive. It would behoove us to recognize that the emotions a person expresses are not right or wrong— it is just how the individual is feeling at that time, in that situation. Effective relational church leaders should keep in mind that for each person the feeling is real (p. 132).

Unskilled leaders are less likely to deescalate the hostile situation in the church. Moreover, there are moments when the leader is the root cause of the confusion. Clinton (2012) suggested,

Everyday affairs can lead to flesh acts if a leader is not alert and discerning in his actions. Seemingly minor decisions in daily life can affect major outcomes. Pride (wanting to show accomplishments, boast of possessions and so on) can lead to flesh acts (p. 120).

Pride is easily embraced. It is helpful for the leader first to educate themselves then educate those that they are leading. The British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli once said, "The greatest food you can give another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own." It is helpful when leaders always invest and display spiritual fruit and connection. Smith (2018) wrote, "People need to be led—want to be led—by leaders who inspire them to work together to accomplish things that they are helping to create together" (p. 155). Only skilled leaders can see past themselves to help their parishioners grow. Resane (2014) affectionately suggested,

The shepherd-leader is proactive to change. This is a leader who is on the cutting edges of the changing context and the threatening environment of the sheep. According to



Franklin 'leaders in God's mission must lead in a rapidly changing world - in social, cultural, economic, political and religious environments at local, national, and global levels'. The shepherd-leader participates in eschatological journey with the sheep, as he is also a human being still under construction (para 10).

Thus, when the pastor lacks the shepherd-leader skill set, and goes about their role as a novice then this has led to parishioners leaving one church to join another.

Moreover, the church that Christ talked about in Matthew 16:18 has never lost a member. Zahn (2005) spoke about how much a blessing it is to carry out the mission of God, while on the other hand, he spoke about the challenge of losing members (p. 18). The loss of membership is not always a negative or adverse action. The loss of membership for some churches may be a relocation of membership in another area working in the kingdom of God.

Working in the mission instead of tradition will lead to God moving according to His own will. Polhill (1992) said, "Their message also betrayed their sensitivity to Gentile concerns. They did not preach Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) but rather as Lord, a title far more familiar to Gentiles than Jewish messianic ideas" (Polhill, 1992, p. 271).

### **Church Leadership**

Church leadership is essential. Christian leadership should mimic Christ's leadership tendencies. Christ transformed culture. Carson (2008) insisted and understood that Christ transformed culture in more than one way (p. 27). The leadership and administration of the church must not be concerned about filling the pews with people as much as they are about filling the hearts of the people with God's word. Malphurs wrote, "At the very core of the Christian leader's life is his or her personal conversion. To be a Christian leader, one must first be a Christian. This is the starting place for all Christian leaders and leadership" (Malphurs, 2003, p. 15). One of the most outstanding examples of this is recorded in the book of Acts when

Saul was converted to Paul. He accepted the Lord Jesus as his Savior before accepting the call that was placed on him to lead. Acts 9:17-20 reads,

So, Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God” (ESV, 2010).

Leadership that is filled with the precious Holy Spirit will care for the people and the things of God without any selfish ambitious attachment. Humility is forged in many ways. Gene Wilkes (1998) insisted that another way to learn humility is to serve others (p. 48).

There is not a shortage in guiding theories for pastoral leadership. There is a plethora of information that teaches about the importance of pastoral leadership. Wilkes’ (1998) theories of servant leadership may be the answers to many of the problems between pastors and parishioners that leads to church decline and church members changing churches. Wilkes (1998) spiritual leadership calls for the more mature and experienced to show others the way (p. 232).

### **Summary of Theoretical Framework**

Pastoral leadership is of the utmost importance to the church, just as the Chief Executive Officer is to a corporation. The dichotomy of the two is one is driven by spiritual outcomes, and financial outcomes mainly drive the other. In this section the guiding theory was formed by the ideology of C. Gene Wilkes coupled with Robert Greenleaf’s school of thought about servant leadership. Leading according to the standards of Jesus is about serving. John chapter 13 records Jesus washing His disciple’s feet and echoed to them, “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15, KJV, 2005). Jesus’ example suggests an expression of a Chinese proverb that Maxwell (2008) asseverated, “When you see a good man,

think of emulating him; when you see a bad man, examine your heart” (p. 16). Juxtaposed to the leadership that Jesus exhibited is the leadership that derives from a selfish unrepentant nature. Thus, one should be emulated, and the other should be mortified.

### **Related Literature**

The related literature presents a discussion on the importance of how the pastor forms his team. The wrong people in the right places can be detrimental to the pastor’s vision. For instance, Eli’s sons were set up to help him minister to the people; however, his sons were vile in God’s eyes, and he (Eli) did not restrain them (1 Samuel 3:13, ESV, 2010). Eli did not commit any despicable acts, yet he was blamed. The related literature is summarized with formidable concepts regarding how the pastor sets up leaderships on his team to help him lead.

Management and leadership skills are crucial for a small or large congregation pastor. Woodruff (2004) expresses pastors are asked to fulfill a plethora of roles, and some of the roles are unrealistic (p. 1). Not only does a pastor bears the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the flock that they are called to lead, but they are also called upon to visit, counsel, console, and provide spiritual leadership (Woodard, p. 1). In the busyness of a pastor’s life, sometimes they may blur the lines of their calling and lose their effectiveness. Kraft (2010) states what will kill effectiveness is unwise choices that are not commensurate with purpose and passion (p. 58).

Pastors are facing a measure of church scrutiny; they are mismanaged. Clarence Bunch wrote in his dissertation, “Undoubtedly, pastoring a congregation is a challenging responsibility, and I have come to respect the leadership ability of African American pastors who face these challenges” (Bunch, 2013, p. 1). Bunch (2013), given its relationship to this leadership philosophy of Jesus; servant leadership may represent the ideal type of pastoral leadership (p. 4). Servant leadership is leading and living like Christ in a humble manner. Wilkes (1998), out of

those experiences, they begin to understand the difference between self-centered pride and humble confidence (p. 45).

Leadership that has pride and impatience tends typically to destroy the morale of the church. Wilkes (1998) states patience has a calming effect on everyone under its influence. Impatience does just the opposite” (p. 44). More confusion arises when a member is disgruntled with the pastor’s leadership and greets them with a temper. The Bible teaches, “A soft word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1, ESV, 2010). Wilkes (1998) expresses with a loving patient response and cool head, resists a hotheaded reaction (p. 45).

Leaders are constantly learning. Boyd wrote, “Leaders are learners. When they stop learning, they cease to lead wisely” (p. 112). A leader's education and calls will help them, especially when leading becomes too mundane. Kraft (2010) the call of the lead is vital, and experiencing a specific, personal call from God helps you to preserve (p. 80).

Leadership is vitally important in church and community. Velaphi Ndimande wrote in his dissertation, “While the researcher observed that Christians are changing from one church to the other, there are those Christians who join other religions” (Ndimande, 2007, p. 3). Ndimande (2007) examines Christians faces challenges that may lead them to change allegiance with a particular way of Christian worship (p. 5). The lack of commitment is seemingly a root cause of people changing church membership. According to Ndimande, “‘Church hopping, a disturbing trend’ as follows- “Church hopping is an example of the overall instability of our culture. It reflects a deeply troubling trend of how easily people slide in and out of commitments” (p. 8). Ndimande (2007) states the prophetic nature of a leader has the potential of keeping members focused and committed to the church (p. 13).

## Culture

Leadership style is described by Northouse (2004) “As the way the leader goes about affecting those who are set out to achieve the organizational goals” (p. 89). Carson (2008) suggested culture can be described as, “The set of values broadly shared by some subset of the human population” (p. 1). With that being said, people attend churches because of the preaching style of the pastor. The pastor’s preaching style is a part of the culture of the church. There are four preaching styles. According to Sy (2009) the following are the four styles:

1. Expository preaching – this is preaching through a book of the Bible verse by verse. I have never tried this but would really love to. Some of the pastors who use expository preaching are Mark Driscoll and Matt Chandler.
2. Textual preaching – this style falls between expository and topical preaching. Churches that offer sermon series usually have this style of preaching. Textual preaching is preaching on a section of the Bible without preaching the entire book of the Bible.
3. Topical preaching – this preaching uses several Scriptures of the Bible to address an issue or discuss a topic.
4. Narrative preaching – this style is gaining some grounds nowadays especially with the concept of storytelling being widely used in the business world today. The letters of Paul to the churches are not narratives. Example of books that are narrative are Ruth and Esther (para. 5).

For the most part, a preacher does not deliver a message in all four of these styles; and, one style maybe their preference. Minnicks (2021) wrote too often people say they left a church because they were not being fed, they believe they were not getting the teaching or preaching they needed to strengthen them spiritually (para. 25). However, the pastor’s preferred preaching style may not be the parishioner’s preference. Churches today are filled with people from multiple generations. Each generation has its own culture and genre of music and worship. Rainer (2014) describes the

Millennial Generation's preference of music, "They desire to sing those songs that reflect deep biblical and theological truths. It is no accident that hymnody of Keith and Kristyn Getty has taken Millennials by storm. Their music reflects those deep and rich theological truths" (para. 7).

Pastoral leadership is essentially important for the furtherance of the development of the those that they are leading. When pastors have cultural awareness, it helps them fashion their sermons and public speaking to their audience. Rainer (2014) states Millennial Christians, and a good number of seekers among their generation, are gravitating to churches where the teaching and preaching is given a high priority (para. 10). Briner and Pritchard (2008) express too many leaders neglect the art of inspiring public speaking. This is a mistake, because public speaking is a skill that everyone can develop (p. 153). Many people leave churches to join another without giving understanding of why they are leaving. Ndimande (2007) states many unheard voices that might be leaving the churches in the light of them not being able to come out to speak about oppression in the church (p. 17). Tensions caused by cultural differences in the church have become a real issue (p. 14). David Masci reported, "Tens of millions of Latin Americans have left the Roman Catholic Church in recent decades and embraced Pentecostal Christianity" (Pew Research, 2014, para. 1). Paul Pettit wrote, "Cultural and philosophical issues, as well as those serving in ministries where people are also forming their conviction on these issues, need to be aware of the contemporary cultural atmosphere so that they can think Christianly within it" (Pettit, 2008, p. 34). While culturally and generationally the conviction and traditions in cultures have changed. Ndimande (2007) identifies church hopping is an example of the overall instability of our culture. It reflects a deeply troubling trend of how easily people slide in and out of commitments (p. 8). Johnson (2007) crisis arises as often from within the Christian movement as from without, as we can see from our own confessions (para. 8). That leadership is impractical

and unproductive because of cultural propensities. According to Beresford Research generational eras are: The Greatest Generations (1901-1924), The Silent Generation (1925-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Generation Y or Millennial (1981-1995), Generation Z (1996-2009), and Alpha Generation (2010-2025). Each one of these generations sees the world through different lenses. Therefore, pastoral leadership cannot equate their leading or preaching style to one, but should be constantly learning to evolve to serve all those that are in their congregation.

The Silent or Traditional Generation was cultivated in a society that was sacrificing, family focused, duty before pleasure; they did not question authority, and delayed reward. The Baby Boomer Generation seen the world through different lenses. This generation mainly grew up with two incomes in the house oppose to one in the previous generation; and television and technology was coming of age. Generation X brought on a different mindset. Then the Millennial Generation, so on and so forth.

Pastoral leaders should look at leading with a holistic approach. Clinton (2012) boundaries represent a time of reflection on the past evaluating the present, and looking to future decision in light of the reflection (p. 185). Pastoral leadership and cultural intelligence are important. David Livermore (2010) described cultural intelligence as the capability to function effectively across, ethic, and organizational cultures (p. 4).

### **Leadership and Politics**

Pastoral leadership sets the vision, lead the congregation, and teaches what they have been instructed by Christ to teach. It is easy to blur the lines of secularism when the church deals with politics. Relocation was one factor for people leaving the church, Inserra (2020, para 1). However, Inserra (2020) suggested the new reason people are leaving churches today is

American politics (para 12). Carson (2008) wrote before we reflect on the ways in which democracy helps to establish a culture that is adjacent to, and sometimes in conflict with, the demands of Christ, it is worth remembering that democracy is a complex phenomenon (p.123). Barna (2017), “Church is in the epicenter of politics, it can be challenging to discern between ‘Political’ and ‘Biblical’ issues, and they often overlap” (p. 45). Rainer (2013) all church leaders need prayer. This asseveration is full of truth. Pastors need prayer.

Politics were a private issue, but seemingly it is of utmost important to some church members. Inserra (2020) wrote people vote for was once considered a private matter—between the person and the Lord. Now it has become a litmus test for one to be a respected leader—or even for a parishioner to maintain fellowship (para. 7). Taking a stand against one another is not new. A group called the Zealots did the same thing, according to Douglass et al. (2011), the Zealots was characterized by much zeal, enthusiasm, or partisanship (p. 1548). The mind of the people is defiant, and many churchgoers expect their pastor and other church leaders to be all in, all the time, or they will leave for a church where the leadership “gets it” (Inserra, para. 25). Sadly, according to Inserra, “Churches are receiving transfer growth from other churches not because of reasons of doctrine or scandal, but because of political preferences” (para. 28).

### **Authority**

The structure of each church is set according to the bylaws of the organization. Too often, churches try to build off of the charisma of the pastor. Caution should be taken by the pastor because some people are in the church only because of family ties. Minnicks (2021) wrote about two groups of church goers that leave the church, and one was those who go to church out of habit because their parents forced them to go when they were younger (para 10). This is unbiblical and counterproductive. This postulation of a church can cause its growth and demise



dependent upon the pastor. Chester and Timmis (2008) said people are often attracted to the Christian community before they are attracted to the Christian message. Also, when a church is built upon a pastor, and the pastor falls into sin, or his message is no longer relevant and disenchanting then the membership scatters. Black (2006) suggested that one of the ten common reasons adults leave the church is "disenchantment with pastor/church." The study reported 37 percent of adults cited this as a reason for no longer attending (para. 5). The words of Apostle Paul must be heeded, "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11, ESV, 2010).

### **Pastor's Vision**

The lead pastor is typically tasked with setting the agenda and vision for the church. Elwell (2001) the spiritual gift of God (pastoring) enabling the Christian to perform his extraordinary service. David Fletcher (2004) quoted Frank Minirth's description of the role of a pastor,

To fill the job description of today's pastor sounds like a job for Superman. A pastor is expected to make house calls as willingly as yesterday's country doctor, to shake hands and smile like a politician on the campaign trail, to entertain like a stand-up comedian, to teach the Scriptures like a theology professor, and to counsel like a psychologist with the wisdom of Solomon. He should run the church like a top-level business executive, handle finances like a career accountant, and deal with the public like an expert diplomat at the United Nations. No wonder so many pastors are confused about just what is expected of them and how they will ever manage to live up to all those expectations (p.18).

The church is being decimated because pastoring is a job, not a calling. It is easy to go to school to learn the Bible, theology, hermeneutics, homiletics, Greek Syntax, Hebrew Syntax, and other fundamental tools that can help someone prepare a message to preach. Lisa McQuerry (2018) wrote,

Pastors are leaders in religious organizations, charged with helping to shape the vision, direction and messaging for their congregations. A pastor's duties include providing religious, moral and emotional support for congregants. A pastor is also charged with

being the public face of his houses of worship. The qualifications of a preacher include having a background in theology, and having exceptional interpersonal skills are vital to success in this profession (para. 1).

However, it is reckless for anyone to try and lead a church without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez wrote, “Christian ministry is simply partnering with what the Holy Spirit is already doing in the other person’s life” (Earley & Gutierrez, 2010, p. 212). As suggested earlier, the church membership is on a steep decline, but the decline is not in one denomination. Luckel (2013) Southern Baptist churches in the U.S. are not growing, at least not as fast as the local population (p. 1) The decline is happening in most denominations. The leadership structures are different in most denominations. Earley and Gutierrez agreed with the description of many others when they stated, “In the Bible sometimes the “church” is called “the body of Christ.” By calling us the word body, the Lord is reinforcing in our minds that His desire for us is that we all remain unified together under him” (p. 184).

### ***Children’s Ministry***

The pastor’s vision should maximize every opportunity to help carry the gospel to future generations. Children’s ministry benefits the whole church and the body of Christ. Navales (2021) said stats show that 85% of people who come to Christ do so before the age of 18. Time and resources must be invested where the biggest harvest will be seen (para. 2). Meaning, it helps the church pass on faith to the next generation, and prayerfully they will pass on faith to the next generation of Christians. Navales (2021) suggested spiritual formation is about the transformation of the heart. So, while children are young, we should teach them to surrender all areas of their life to God (para. 4).

Also, children ministry is essential to churches because it gives parents another outlet. Like pastoring, parenting is a hard job. There is not enough time in the day to accomplish all the

demands, whether menial or exciting that parents are tasked with on a daily basis. Now, the church is one of the places where parents want to have some private time with God, without a child or children pulling on them. The nuances that come along with a children's ministry can make it very complicated. Factors such as faculty, curriculum, check-in process, and the like can be tedious. However, the pastor's vision should include a children's ministry which can be an unpopular undertaking. This may seem mean, but it is the truth for many parents. They want their children to learn about Jesus among their peers. This researcher has experienced people leaving churches solely because they did not have a children's ministry. Also, when some families move into new communities, they only seek for churches with children's ministries.

Unfortunately, some church members do not see the importance of having a children's ministry, yet, it is important for the vision of the pastor to encompass all avenues of life. On the other hand, "Many churches view children as inherently capable in age-appropriate ways of loving the Lord Jesus and wanting to be obedient to his teachings out of their love for him" (May et al., 2011). Though parents want to find churches with children's ministries, they are equally meticulous about what the ministry has to offer. Classrooms where students experience a triad of clarity, warmth, and productivity find a stable climate that maximizes motivation and learning (Younts, 2010, p. 454). Parents are looking for churches that are wholesome and safe where their children can learn about Christ. Thus, churches are losing membership when they do not offer children's ministry. Children may be the catalyst of the church growing because usually, parents become more involved in the church when their kids become more involved in the children's ministry.

### ***Community Outreach***

The days of going to church because it is ‘the family’ church is a thing of the past. People want to give their time, talent, and treasure to a mission, not to a building (church). In Matthew 25:31-46, the Lord Jesus talks about helping those that are in need. His focus was outreach. Some churches are more concerned about in-reach than they are about outreach (Rainer, 2014). Earley and Wheeler (2010) make a great observation, “Notice the last five words in this passage (referring to Matthew 25:40, ESV, 2010), “you did it to Me.” When they fed the hungry, clothed the needy, cared for the sick, and visited the prisoner, they were serving Jesus” (p. 223). People do not mind supporting a church as long as the church has an outreach. Some churches are losing members for lack of community outreach.

The epidemic of church membership decline may be oblique because people leaving the church was never reached. McRaney (2003), “If we do not reach a person for Christ by the age of fourteen, the chance of reaching the person for Christ dramatically decreases” (p. 140). Have the people that are leaving the church ever been reached or had a true conversion? This researcher will continuously seek to answer that question and countless other questions around the declining church membership problem. Church members potentially has a host of reason for changing their membership from one church to another. The pastor may play a role. The leadership of the church may play role. The church’s governmental structure may play a role. Satan plays a role. Even the person that leaves the church plays a role. Yet, it must be understood that ultimately nothing or no one have power over the church except it Head—Christ Jesus.

Moreover, pastors must not be fooled; just because a person joins the where they are pastoring is not always a blessing. Cox (2010),

There is a phenomenon entitled “church hopping” that is rampant in many places. Church hoppers are notorious for seeking the next big high in town. They want more

entertainment. They want more programs. They want you to do more for them. As you placate to them, they will reward you with their attendance (para 1).

Christians expect more from their pastor, who sets the vision. According to David Fletcher churches that are led by Senior pastors sets the vision for the church (para. 7). Can he change the inclination of those Christians who hop from one Church to the other as a robust phenomenon? Does the pastor need to exploit self-examination when members of the church he pastors' membership become unstable? Unless the pastor actions embody his actions and seeks to improve the quality of calling, then his church shall persist to purge members to other churches. Church is a place of fellowship, Rainer (2019) says to remember the reason we come to church in the first place (para 10). One significant challenge that the researcher is concerned about is the connection of pastoral leadership and the parishioner's inability to identify Satan's tricks to derail their God-given purposes in life.

### **Pastoral Leadership Personalities**

Church today is filled with people that have bonded on a spiritual level. The personality of the parishioner is usually existential to that of the pastor. The Bible teaches, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6, ESV, 2010). Anxiety symptoms are intense to the point that they cripple personal relationships, career, and quality of life (Clinton et al., p. 7). Like church members, pastors have strengths and weaknesses. Ryan French (2017) wrote, "Pastors and preachers are people with personality strengths and weaknesses, just like everybody else. They are anointed, and God called, but that does not mean they lose their distinctiveness. Pastors are not monolithic" (para. 2).

The personality of the pastor and the members can be a great duo when placed together accordingly. The Lord Jesus understood the psychology of personalities. In doing so, He put

Peter, a more assertive attitude with John, a more diffident personality. The combination of two were more dynamic. French (2017) describes fourteen leadership styles. Each style was aimed toward different personalities of people. Everyone does not like the same preaching or teaching styles. Thusly, most churches are filled with people that have the same taste in teaching and preaching styles. It is unfortunate that pastors do not consider the effects of their leadership style, or the effects their style may have on members. Luckel (2013) understands pastors are not provided information on what they, themselves, can do to better their leadership ability. In general, they are trained in the elements of theology only (p 3).

Churches that are being obedient to the Great Commission commanded by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 have a higher rate of change. Mental disorders are not superfluous. People like what they like, especially when it comes to pastoral leadership and preaching styles. Clinton et al. (2005) states one in four pew-sitters deal with mental disorders (p. 9). The leadership of the pastor can help; however, there is widespread acknowledgment that the American and Western church is mired in a major leadership crisis (Clinton et al., p. 10).

### **Pastor is Forced Out or Fired**

Regardless of who the pastor is or whatever they have done, there will always be a parishioner that has connected with them. Barefoot et al. (2005) wrote, “A forced pastoral exit is a process by which a congregation, a personnel committee, or individual leader within a church terminates or forces the resignation of a minister from a position of ministry” (p. 2). Barefoot et al. (2005) continued, “Major organizational changes promote conflict that tends to impact the growth of membership negatively...changes in worship often prompt serious congregational conflict” (p. 2). The decline of church membership, at times, hinges on the leader.

As stated earlier, this research hinges on the connectivity of pastor and people. People do not always exit the church doors because of the nefarious acts. Some have left the church because of connectivity to the pastor. Adair and Nelson (2004) consider a leader is someone who shows the way, characteristically by leading from in front, and taking people with them” (Adair & Nelson, 2004, p. 5). Trigger (2004) wrote, “When a new phase of growth engulfed the city, many of the same congregations again faced the dilemma of whether or not to move” (para. 2).

### **Pastor’s Education**

Many pastors have not been formally educated. Pastors are ordained and commissioned. Fletcher (2004) states,

Ministers are individuals who are duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed by a religious body constituting a church or church denomination. They are given the authority to conduct religious worship, perform sacerdotal functions, and administer ordinances or sacraments according to the prescribed tenets and practices of that church or denomination (p. 70).

Pastoral leadership is an evolving position. The longer a pastor leads a congregation the more changes will need to be made because of the changing cultures in the church. Pastors should not abandon development. Clinton (2012) wrote,

The leaders who terminate their development in the ministry maturing phase fall into two categories: (1) those who plateau at some level of ministry competency, and then show relatively little ongoing growth in ministry or spiritual development; and (2) those who are undisciplined in ministry, limited in ministry, or set aside from it (p. 184).

In ministry there will be some conflicts with the pastor and some parishioners. The proper training will help pastoral leadership understanding how to handle the conflict. Unfortunately, pastors handle conflict the same way with every parishioner, which may cause conflict. Without the added training, it makes pastoring difficult. Samul suggested, “While spirituality is a sense of higher-consciousness and divine existence, spiritual intelligence is related to the skills to use divine aspects to enable goals achieving and problems solving” (Samul, 2020). Problem-solving

takes wisdom and skill. The expression, “Trust God,” is a byword for I really do not know what to do or am not skilled at solving those kinds of problems. Church traditions and church rituals are not always the answer. Paul Hiebert said, “At the heart of cultural behavior are rituals...they are multilayered transactions in which speech and behavior are socially prescribed” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 82). A pastor that feels the burning of God to preach, they should apply themselves with some learning. Knight (2006) expresses education may be seen as a subset of learning. Education is defined as the deliberate attempt by the learner or someone else to control a learning situation in order to bring about the attainment of a desired learning outcome (p. 10).

### **Pastor’s Leadership Experience**

The adage, “Experience is the best teacher,” is correct. However, when the pastor has no experience in leading, it could lead to a catastrophe. On the other hand, experience brings about change. Dan Reiland wrote, “True ministry is not about perfection; it’s about the continued movement toward the vision” (Reiland, 2011, p. 66). Solomon profoundly wrote, “Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; But much increase comes by the strength of an ox” (Proverbs 14:4, KJV, 2005). An experienced leader understands there will be problems. Their focus is not on being a perfect church but on being the perfect church for imperfect people. Reiland (2011) added,

Churches resist change—some much more than others—and it takes an inspiring leader who is committed to the vision to lead a continual process of change Ministries that are not changing are slowly dying, and there are no exceptions to this fact (p. 67).

An experienced pastor understands how to get buy-in from the parishioners. Inexperienced leaders will drive the people away. Sadly, too many uneducated or straightforward pastors in the pulpit have led to fewer people in the pews. Church attendance is in decline. Richard Krejcir (2007) wrote the following:



1. Every year more than 4000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1000 new church starts!
2. There were about 4500 new churches started between 1990 and 2000, with a twenty-year average of nearly 1000 a year.
3. Every year, 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity. This translates into the realization that people are leaving the church. From our research, we have found that they are leaving as hurting and wounded victims-of some kind of abuse, disillusionment, or just plain neglect!
4. From 1990 to 2000, the combined membership of all Protestant denominations in the USA declined by almost 5 million members (9.5 percent), while the US population increased by 24 million (11 percent).
5. At the turn of the last century (1900), there was a ratio of 27 churches per 10,000 people, as compared to the close of this century (2000) where we have 11 churches per 10,000 people in America! What has happened?
6. Given the declining numbers and closures of Churches as compared to new church starts, there should have been over 38,000 new churches commissioned to keep up with the population growth (para. 3)

The rapidly changing landscape of the church is troubling. Frishberg (2021) states for the first time in 80 years, Gallup has found that less than half of US adults belong to a church (New York Post, para. 2). In recent years the formidable direction of the church has not changed its downward trajectory. Frishburg (2021) states membership numbers dropped to 50% by 2018, and last year slipped to 47% (para. 4). While the church is on a decline the state of the church is quite remarkable. Frishberg (2021) the United States of America still remains a religious nation, with more than 7 in 10 affiliating with some type of organized religion (para. 9).

### **Membership Disgruntle**

Hoge et al. (1993), expressed the concern that “mainline protestant churches have been losing membership and it is mainly because of the lack of young adults” (Hoge et al., 1993). May (2018) added,

My findings provide evidence that denominational growth and decline are ecological processes that reward the retention of certain organizational characteristics and the selection of certain organizational forms. This is a departure from theories of adaptation that emphasize the ability of congregations and their leaders to make adjustments in order to meet the changing demands of their environment (May, 2018).

The lack of pliability in leadership led to the lack of membership. The community's actions and the church's leadership are causation of students not returning home after college. Rainer (2014) shares a story about a church voting for the decision to purchase a new pulpit. “The “new pulpit” group defeated the “old pulpit” group in a close vote. The “old pulpit” took the pulpit and started a new church” (p. 79). This is a factual story, and this attitude has been the quietus of many churches and the reason why church members leave one church to join another in South Carolina. Rainer (2014) continued, “I resisted a series of one-liners about the possible name for the new church because the story is pathetically sad and true.” Religion Watch (2021) continued, “The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has been in the spotlight lately, not only for its national meeting in early June, but also for the way that the 14-million-member denomination is said to reflect the wide-ranging changes evangelicalism is undergoing.”

The unfortunate turn of events for Southern Baptist churches in the ‘Bible Belt’ is acknowledged by Thornbury who, “points to how the SBC faces a “long-term numbers crisis,” as shown by recent sharp drops in baptisms” (Religion Watch, 2021). While churches always have those that are solidly grounded in the church, there are also those that are standing on shaky ground.

Kapic (2012) quoted W. R. Inge, “He who marries the spirit of the age soon finds himself a widower” (p. 96). When the controversies of the world find themselves in the church, and the church is not spiritually grounded in Christ's dissension, and all manner of discord dismantle the

church's membership. Too often, the church speaks out about the things that it does not like without expressing wholly what it stands for.

Apostle Paul penned a letter to his protégés Timothy and Titus. In each of the letters he penned to them, he laid out some qualifications of the overseer. In the letter to young Timothy he wrote, "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2, ESV, 2010).

According to Rainer (2013) the word reproach means to find fault (p. 48). Thus, when people in the community speak about the pastor it should be positive and encouraging (Rainer, p. 48).

### **COVID-19**

While there is overwhelming evidence that the church is in decline; yet, there are many reasons for the phenomenon. The pandemic caught everyone by surprise. However, pastors that did not implement a plan have seen a shift in church attendance. The results of the COVID-19 Pandemic have been catastrophic to church attendance. Enoch Hill wrote,

At the peak of COVID in January of 2021, in-person attendance had fallen by 60 percent compared to January of the preceding year. This means that for every 10 people attending in-person the prior year, only four were attending in-person in January of 2021 (Hill, 2021, para. 6).

The results of COVID on church attendance has been devastating. Hill (2021) in January of 2021, in-person church attendance was a meager 40 percent of the preceding year. Just three months later that number had risen to 57 percent of the pre-pandemic crowd (para. 9).

The church has been on decline for many years. The pandemic has not made church participation any better. Jeff Brumley (2021) said when Gallup first measured church attendance in 1937, it was nearly 70% for the next six decades; before beginning a steady decline around the turn of the 21st century (para. 9). Wang and Elhage (2022) said before COVID-19 shut things down in March 2020, independent evangelical church averaged 220 people a week. Almost two

years after, the church briefly suspended in-person services because of COVID-19. Now they are averaging about 150 people a week (para. 2). Churches have not returned to normalcy due to COVID-19. Courtney Carpenter of ABC News wrote in an article, “With the start of the pandemic came the end to a lot of normalcy in all our lives, including how we worship. In many places across the country, people have not returned to church in a large number as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic hit” (Carpenter, 2021, para. 1). The pandemic plagued church in-person attendance differently in various parts of the United States. According to Carpenter (2021),

Data group showed that churches in the northeastern U.S. suffered the largest church attendance loss with 27% fewer people going to in-person services in October of this year compared to January of 2020 - before the pandemic hit. Compare that to the southern U.S., where churches saw a 20% drop (para. 5).

Church membership decline due to COVID has been a challenge. Church as it was known before maybe a thing of the past. Carpenter (2021) said there are more empty seats in churches now than before the pandemic started (para. 4). The pandemic has certainly shifted church attendance. Religion Watch,

The prevalence of virtual services during the pandemic caused a lot of people to get lost in the shuffle. “The mix of people switching churches and worshipping online has created mystery around the true number of members who have exited church permanently,” Kelley writes. Small congregations and church plants have been better positioned to keep members during the pandemic (Vol. 37, No. 3, para).

Although COVID-19 brought about many changes in church, however, the lack of pastoral planning and vision maybe related to church members changing church membership.

### **Summary of Related Literature**

Pastoral leadership is one of the most important aspects of the church. The pastor has many tasks. One of their tasks are to lead people to change. Maxwell (2008) said the growth and development of people is the highest call of a leader (p. 79). This portion of this research has

covered some of the related literature associated with pastoral leadership such as the following: culture, authority, vision, leadership personalities, and education. The list of literature that pertains to the importance of pastoral leadership is exhaustive. However, according to Maxwell (2008) the way leaders handle opportunities and crises often define them (p. 31). Pastoral leadership is about building bridges not climbing the ladder (Maxwell, p. 177).

## **Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature**

### **Rationale for Study**

The purpose of this portion of the literature review is to further present the reader with a critique of the topic that is forthrightly related to and pertinently connected to pastoral leadership perceived as the main factor of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. There was a time when people solely came to church in search for God, but in today's culture people are exiting the church in search for God (Niewhof, para. 16). The departure of a pastor from a church can be a painful transition. All pastors do not leave a church because they have engaged in some reprehensible acts. The new pastor has a new vision. Rainer (2014)

It is self-evident that pastors and their leadership are vital to churches. The church would call a new pastor with the hope that the pastor could lead the church back to health. The pastor comes to the church and leads in a few changes. The members do not like the changes and resist (pp. 5-6).

The moment resistance enters, the pastor exits, and the church decline, or according to Rainer (2014), "the churches died" (p. 61). Adding clarity to the statement "the churches died."

Burnout is real. Burnette (2016) states some pastors who were experiencing burnout syndrome also felt like they were failing in their pastoral position and feels frustrated. Kraft (2010) suggested, "If you are in leadership and feel frustrated...I urge you to take an honest look at your gifting, experience, and passion (p. 89). Too often, pastors expend their God-given talents, energies, and anointing wrongly. This leads to burnout. Kraft (2010) wrote, "It is not

wrong to expend every effort to get to know the Lord, but it is unbiblical to do so with the thought of earning God's love, favor, and acceptance through the effort" (p. 32).

The mental state of the pastor is not in question, but as Burnette (2016) states, the relationship between a pastor and individuals who follow and depend on him as part of a spiritual congregation can be challenging (p. 48). Burnout is a cause of a pastor leaving the church, and the pastor's departure is a cause for the members to leave likewise. After all, many parishioners consider the pastor as the leader. Kraft (2010) described a Christian leader as, "A Christian leader is humble, God-dependent, team-playing, servant of God who is called by God to shepherd, develop, equip and empower a specific group of believers to accomplish an agreed-upon vision from God" (p. 23). As Jesus said to his, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Matthew 26:31, NIV, 2010). This is true of the Lord Jesus and His disciples, so is it true when other leaders are removed, "then the sheep will scatter."

A pastor is certainly more connected to some parishioners. Often the life of the parishioner has been transformed by the leadership of the pastor. Dodson (2018) defined transformational leadership, "Transforming leadership as a leadership process where leaders and followers work together to advance to high levels of morale and motivation" (p. 52). Consequently, when a pastor leaves it is highly likely that some members will leave the church in hopes of finding another leader that has the same personality. All membership transferring is not because of disgruntlement with pastoral leadership, but in some instances, it is because of the positive influence. Dobson (2018) states the leader's level of influence on followers and how the characteristics and behavior of the leader impact the performance and motivation of the follower (p. 41).

Connectivity starts at the top. The pastor must preach the truth through the unction of the Holy Spirit and without the fear of man. Heisler (2007) wrote,

The fear of man may cause many preachers to avoid certain subjects. Preachers who fear men are more concerned about what people think than what God thinks. They are more concerned about failing human expectation for their preaching than failing the Spirit's expectation for their preaching. If the Spirit's empowerment brings freedom, then the fear of man brings bondage. Preachers quench the Spirit when they fear men more than they fear God (Heisler, 2007, p. 148).

The problem with people-pleasing preaching is the day will come when the pastor must correct the parishioner. The day of 'correction' can lead to a person leaving the church because they did not have the proper connection. In this case, one would wonder if the departed members were connected to God. John wrote, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:19, NKJV, 2012). Keeping context of God's writing, John was not talking about someone who leaves one church to begin attending another good church. He meant those who leave the community of God's people altogether. This reveals that they were never really part of God's people, to begin with. Some members hide behind the term dubbed 'church hurt' when they leave the church because of some disagreement, especially when they have not built their relationship on Christ.

Martin (2021) wrote, "Not to advance and grow is to retreat and stagnate" (Martin, 2021). Stagnation of a church, especially to a person that is seeking a closer relationship with the Lord, may lead to their departure. Udoh (2015) quoted Lin,

Pastoral leadership is a major factor in the growth of the Church. Liu, in his dissertation acknowledged this fact when he said that —Pastoral leadership is the key to success in the ministry of the church. Capable and skillful leaders, said he, will create an atmosphere of excitement, give directions to move forward, and develop people to grow into maturity. He also added that without leadership in the local churches, the ministries and people will suffer. This is because the pastor is the person 9 whom God has entrusted to lead the sheep. The pastor is responsible to fulfil that calling.... The church has all

kinds of problems, such as conflicts among people or coworkers, but some of them could be avoided and better handled if the pastoral leadership has the skills to handle them correctly (p. 9).

The status quo just is not good enough for some Christians. McRaney (2003) said, “We are in a battle, an actual spiritual war where the eternal destiny of generations is at stake. My fear is that in many respects, we are acting as though we are in a time of peace” (p. 5). Stagnation is like still water. Still water attract mosquitos. Mosquitos bring diseases. Diseases lead to death. The lack of growth and change in theology causes members to leave their church.

In today's rapidly spreading of information, it is a challenge for the more traditional minded churches to retain membership. Information is readily shared on many social media sites by friends, news outlets, and books. Some of the information is correct, but some of the information is questionable. However, it does not matter if the information is nefarious with a malicious and dastardly intent or whether it is top-notch with no ulterior motives; people are still exposed to it. The lack of pliability or having a heart and mind to change traditions happened during the life of Jesus. The Lord Jesus said,

He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother;’ and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death, “But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God, ‘then he need not honor his father or mother. Thus, you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition (Matthew 15:3-6, NKJV, 2012).

This strong rebuke of Jesus towards the Jews was partly the reason he was crucified. The Jews did not want to change their way of thinking; thus, causing more problems for themselves and the people they were leading. This lack of flexibility caused them to lose many people. Like today’s church is suffering a purging of membership because they want to hold fast to tradition instead of adjusting to the time. The words of Isaiah still ring true that was spoken by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 13:14-15,



In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them (ESV, 2010).

Leadership helps change the culture of the church. Livermore (2015) said a leader without followers may not be leading; or, he or she might be attempting to lead in the wrong context (p. 22). Cultural intelligence is essential. The churches mentioned previously were not willing to lead according to the relevant cultures; thus, their churches declined. Unfortunately, some churches depend on managing instead of leading. Briner and Pritchard (2008) said,

Most relationships involve elements of both management and leadership. But in a pure sense, those who are being managed are usually compensated in some way for their services, and systems and techniques play a large role. Pure leadership, on the other hand, is characterized primarily by the way followers are motivated to please their leader voluntarily, and the leader typically possesses a more spontaneous personal style (p. 7).

Leaders lead, and managers manage. There is a difference, and the difference shows in the responses of the people. Essentially churches are in the people business. So, it is essential to keep in mind that the affective dimensions are equally important in shaping how people live their lives (Hiebert, 2008, p. 85). Eymann posed the question, “If traditionalism is one of the causes of decline, the wise turnaround leader will dig a little deeper to discover the source of the traditionalism” (Eymann, 2012).

### **Gap in the Literature**

This study examines pastoral leadership as a perceived cause for church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. Church members are not the only ones that are leaving churches, but the clergy is also exiting the doors like never before. Spencer et al. (2012) stated that clergy are leaving ministry in a grave amount (p. 85). Their research on clergy leaving the church was phenomenal and enlightening. Spencer et al. (2012) said the majority of the

sample (55%) served in churches where the attendance had plateaued or declined recently (p. 87, para. 2).

This research has thoroughly scoured some existing studies on the effects of pastoral leadership, with specific emphasis on pastoral leadership's effects on membership. There are numerous amounts of information on church decline, church growth, and pastoral leadership; yet, none, if any, deals explicitly with church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. For instance, Udeme Udoh's (2015) thesis deals with pastoral leadership and the problems of church growth, but his work does not incorporate church members leaving one church to join another.

Moreover, Henry Luckel (2013) in his dissertation focuses on pastoral leadership's effect on the growth of Southern Baptist churches. While his research was phenomenal it lacked to mention the effects of pastoral and parishioner's relationship. The relationship of the pastor and the parishioner could be a positive or a negative factor that causes a member to leave one church join another.

Also, Judith Carter (2009) wrote an article about transformational leadership and pastoral leadership. This article was excellent conveying the metrics about leadership styles. In addition, the article encompassed how to measure leadership's effectiveness in personal and spiritual realms. Yet, it did not answer the question about what causes members to leave one church to join another. As suggested earlier there are numerous amounts of information on church decline and growth, pastoral leadership's effectiveness, and pastoral leadership style. However, there is a gap in the literature of pastoral leadership is the perceived factor of one member leaving one church to join another in South Carolina.

### **Profile of the Current Study**

The literature review points to pastoral leadership as the perceived factor for church members leaving one church to join another church. There are many nuances that should be coupled together. Several facets were highlighted as possible factors which include: (a) Pastor's education, (b) culture, (c) church's lack of pliability, (d) pastor being forced out or fired, (e) Church leadership, and (f) Christian church outreach.

Without question, members have been leaving one church to join another according to conclusive findings in four major studies (Pew Research Center 2019; Barna Group, 2020; Rainer, 2014). As a result, churches are left struggling to retain members that were once holistically faithful. One inch can disrupt the structure of a house. Likewise, one piece of misinformation can lead a person down the wrong road for the right answer. Pastoral leadership is tasked with presenting the right information. Huber (1998) said that the single greatest component to the relative health of a church is its Pastoral Leadership. Church turnover and decline does not discriminate. Churches and houses of worship of all denominations goes through the cycles of growing, plateauing, declining. Thom Rainer wrote, "70% of churches are subtracting/declining or plateauing (Church Matter, para. 5).

Pastoral leadership should not settle for good. Collins (2001) stated good is the enemy of great (p. 16). Corley (2018) said that any process of revitalization for the church must address the health, needs, and performance of its leadership in U.S. Christian Churches, and Christian Church Outreach in the United States (p. 65).

### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This phenomenological research examined pastoral leadership as the perceived factor of church members changing membership from one church to join another in South Carolina. For many decades the church has been purging its membership. Charles (2012) wrote when people relocated that led them to find a new church (para. 2). Some church's membership decreases because members relocate to another geographical location. Certainly, this type of church decline is not on the pastor. A. J. Smith wrote, "Among those who abandoned confessional subscription a tendency toward doctrinal decline which also led to spiritual decline" (Smith, 2008, p. 72). The dichotomy of pastoral leadership is when a preacher is preaching the truth or stepping on one's toes, or when the members hear what they want to hear from other preachers. Charles (2014) suggested people will leave one church and start attending another because they found a church where the preacher will tickle their ears (para. 9). Early and Gutierrez (2010) stated real Christian ministry is not about being over people and bossing them around. It is about getting under people and lifting them up (p. 10, para. 9). Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2003) states the flock needs good shepherds. They know their needs and weaknesses. They feed them gently and not harshly (p. 185, para. 2).

While it is not clear how much of a factor pastoral leadership is, this chapter presented the methods that were used in this study. The research design addressed the problem, the purpose statement, and the questions that guided the study. The research setting, the participants, and the researcher's role are presented that helped formulate a formidable outcome. Data collecting methods, the analysis of that data, the establishment of trustworthiness, and lastly, ethical considerations are presented to complete the chapter.

## **Research Design**

### **The Problem**

Some churches are growing at the expense of other churches, therefore other churches and places of worship membership and participation are declining. Gryboski (2019) states that 80 percent of Protestant churches were in decline or stagnant, while 20 percent are growing (para. 17). Toler (2018) mentions that leaders have influence over the leader (self), the follower, and the world (p. 35). According to Burton (2010) the influence of church leader is decreasing (p. 1). The lack of authentic spiritual experience leads to decay. Burton (2010) wrote about the effect of pastoral leadership's influence, "Dropping attendance, increasing secularism, and polarizing issues" (p. 2). Tim Chester and Steve Timmis (2008) suggested if a spiritual experience is not from God's word it may not be a Christian experience (p. 31). Burton (2010) speaks to the results of church leadership; church leadership is losing influence and followers faster than any other American institution (p. 2). Maxwell (2008) examines when leaders break trust with their people, it is like the breaking of a mirror. Strike a mirror with a stone the glass shatters. It becomes very difficult to overcome damages done in relationships when trust has been lost (p. 146). McCulley (2021) suggested,

Generally, in the Christian community, there are two different thoughts on the definition of conflict. The first is that conflict is caused by selfishness and therefore all conflict is sin. The second is that conflict is an occurrence in relationships that is not in itself sinful but can quickly lead to sin. In order for pastors and leaders to help their congregations navigate conflict successfully, they must understand their particular community's definition of conflict because this will affect how, or even if, the church works toward resolution (p. 13, para. 2).

This research focused on a number of parishioners to help shed some light on the phenomenon of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand the perceived factor of pastoral leadership as the main cause for members changing church membership in South Carolina. For this research pastoral involvement will be defined as the leadership within the church that sets the tone and vision for the church (Toler, p. 42). Pastoral leadership will also be defined as Towns (2008) suggested a technical expression for the human leader of a church (p. 899), coupled with Northouse (2019) understanding of how leadership behaviors are measured (p. 88). In addition, Wilkes' (1998) principles on servant leadership will be added to help connect the methods of the Lord Jesus' method of leading juxtaposed to human reasoning for leading. Palusky (2021) wrote about churches are in decline because of division (para. 5). This research focused on the descriptions of leadership actions accredited to decreasing worship service attendance by pastors and parishioners in South Carolina.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What, if any, does the pastor's teaching style plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ2.** What, if any, did the pastor's education, or the lack thereof, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ3.** What, if any, does the pastor's vision for the church, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ4.** What, if any, did the pastor's dissimilarity or disagreement with you, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ5.** What, if any, does the pastor's termination, retirement, or death, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This researcher accustomed the phenomenological research using qualitative research method. There is a plethora of studies on the phenomenon of church decline (Pew Research

2020, Barna 2020, World Population Review 2019, & Koom 2009). On the other hand, there is very limited amount of research on the phenomena of perceived effects of pastoral leadership as the main cause of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina.

Qualitative research is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting, according to Jeffers (2018). Mason included that qualitative research gets inside how life is experienced, why things matter, the meaning of change, and the fascinations of time and space (p. 1). Mason (2018) also described phenomenological by suggesting, “The world, consciousness, perception, and lived experience are inseparable, there is not an objective world that exists separately from our perception of it, therefore, there is a need to explore this interconnectedness” (p. 8). Thus, qualitative phenomenological is ideal for this research because life experiences between pastor and people are interconnected to the phenomenon of pastoral leadership being the perceived factor of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. Instrument that was used were interviews. The interviews were set-up in semi-structured manner.

### **Setting**

South Carolina is a state that is highly religious, and a large portion of adults identify as Christians. World Atlas (2022) shows about 70% of the South Carolina’s adult population is classified as highly religious, with Christianity being the most popular religion. Protestants are the largest religious group in South Carolina (para. 1). There are 46 counties in South Carolina, and of the 46, Barnwell County is considered to be one of the most religious. Robin Jarvis (2015) suggested Barnwell County 579.8 out of every 1,000 people are faith-based and adhere to their Christian faith (para. 5). This research focused on the Baptist Denomination. These members are

leaving one church to join another. They are not leaving Christendom. Maxwell (2008) states people quit people, not organization (p. 143).

Most of the Baptist denomination are governed by ‘Congregational’ form of government, and the Methodist denomination is governed differently (Towns, pp. 660-61). ABP News (2010) reported Baptists practice democratic church polity not because it is more efficient or more reliable or even more biblical than other forms” (para 4). Some of the additional information that the researcher received from the participants were the following: their previous church’s size, what is the tenure of the current pastor, did their church have youth ministries, and outreach ministries.

### **Participants**

The researched phenomenon dictated the type of participants needed to shed light on the study. Three sampling approaches was used: selecting participants, the sampling strategy, and the sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling was also used in this research. Palinkas et al. (2015) suggested purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (para. 1). Parishioners that were interviewed needed to have a minimum of three years of church membership at their previous church. Moreover, churches and places of worship were considered with the approval of the pastor. Approximately three to five participants from three to five churches were the goal for the research. However, because of time and the lack of interests from churches, the goal changed.

The process of acquiring participants for this study began by sending a letter to ten pastors of Baptist churches in South Carolina. The letter sought approval from the pastor for two reasons. One of the reasons was to interview parishioners from the church, and the other



reason was to seek permission to use the church or place of worship to conduct the interviews. Upon receiving approval from the pastor, the researcher sent a letter to invite various participants to participate in the research. The letter to the participants contained information about the research and their rights to withdraw without any repercussions. Finally, each participant was asked to sign the consent form. Prior to sending the consent form, the researcher spoke with each participant via telephone or, at the least, email to garner a relationship.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher was to discern the perceptions and the experiences of each of the participants, coupled with serving as the main instrument for administering interviews with each participant. This researcher aimed not to bring any presuppositions into the research by using blocking or epoché. Phyllis Daniels (2021) wrote, “Epoché, or Bracketing in phenomenological research, is described as a process involved in blocking biases and assumptions in order to explain a phenomenon in terms of its own inherent system of meaning” (para. 1). Some of the people that were interviewed were acquaintances, however some of them were total strangers. The sole purpose of the face-to-face interviews were to seek the truth about this phenomenon. The perspectives, perceptions, or experiences of all interviewees solely guided the findings of the research, not the biases or experiences of the researcher. The researcher’s goal was to be transparent with no alternative motives. The only motive was to add to the field of study. Albeit, this researcher has been on both ends of the spectrum of this phenomena; however, the researcher remained neutral while gathering the data. The interviews were recorded with the participant’s permission. Although this researcher is a pastor that has experienced the ebbs and flows of church membership influx and decline; yet, none of the researcher’s lived experiences

was coupled with the research. To keep the integrity of the research intact and wholly based on the information gathered during the interviews, the interviews were recorded. Therefore, the recorded information helped mitigate any of the researcher's preconceptions. In addition, a transcript of the interview was given to each participant to ensure accuracy.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Once the International Review Board (IRB) approved the study, participants were given a consent form that gave a detailed outline about the research and their role. The details outlined how the data was gathered and collected. The risk to the participants was minute because the information gathered was from their experiences. A copy of a consent letter is housed in a data management placeholder (computer with secured password), and the participant had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. No minors were interviewed, therefore no consent letters from parents or guardians were needed.

None of the participant's real name were used, pseudonyms were given to maintain confidentiality. If some of the participants were interconnected, the researcher used alternate pseudonyms for confidentiality. The information that was gathered was transcribed, then locked in a secure place. The secured place is on a computer secure with encryption and password. In additional external thumb drives helped to mitigate any breaches. The computer and the thumb drive are stored at the researcher's home office. The information will be kept for at least three years. Another good practice is to retain the data until there is no reasonable possibility that one will be required to defend against an allegation of misconduct (U of V, 2022, para. 1).

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

The idea of qualitative research is to explore why a specific phenomenon is happening. Chaleunvong (2009) examines data-collection techniques allow one to systematically collect

information about objects of study (people, objects, phenomena) and about the settings in which they occur (para. 1). This researcher sought to understand the phenomena of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina.

### **Collection Method**

The data was gathered from interviews. In qualitative research, Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggested to closely examine the data to find the meanings that lie within them (p. 344, para. 1). The information gleaned from the interviews was compared and contrasted. The information that is juxtaposed is sorted. There was no varying information as a result of follow-up interviews, because follow-up interviews were not needed, except with one participant. The researcher's thoughts were not interjected in the interpretation of the data. In other words, the assessment focused solely on the research problem exclusively. The researcher made a fact-based account of what transpired during the sequences of the interviews, including what became appropriately known and what presented challenges. Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggested one should engage in such an iterative data-collection-and-interpretation process, must remember that although the human mind is capable of unique insights, it can be easily influenced by expectations and biases that prejudice our understandings (p. 344). Creswell and Creswell (2017), said in qualitative research, closely examine the data to find the meanings that lie within them (p. 344).

### **Instruments and Protocols**

This research was shaped by some methods and protocols. Subjective information that was gathered to help understand pastoral leadership as the perceived factor of members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. Questions were constructed before interacting with the participants.

## *Interviews*

According to Bhasin (2019) interviews help one to get a deeper understanding about the phenomenon in question (para. 1). In addition, interviews are appropriate in those scenarios where one has basic knowledge about the research topic and wants to establish a deeper understanding of it (Bhasin, para. 2). The interviews were conducted in various locations, and COVID-19 protocols were followed. The nature of the interviews was semi-structured. Newcomer et al. (2015) wrote semi-structured interviews are superbly suited for a number of valuable tasks, particularly when more than a few of the open-ended questions require follow-up queries (p. 492). Northouse (2019), wrote Bandura Social Cognitive Theory's dubbed self-efficacy is one of the components used in the interview processes (p. 205); consequently, understanding the participants' thoughts toward pastoral leadership being the perceived factor influencing their decision to join another church. The interview questions were developed with literature associated to social cognitive theory at the forefront. Social Cognitive according to Schunk and Usher (2012) is much of the human behavior occurs in social environments (p. 11). With, several interview questions addressed the participants' perceived emotional and interactive factors coupled with environmental factors (Appendix D).

Also, semi-structured interviews allowed a little more leeway for the researcher to explore the subject matter. The interviews were recorded. The interviewees signed a consent form. The medium that was used is Qualtrics. Form Plus (2021) says interview consent form template allows interviewees to sign off their consent to use the interview data for research or report for a journalist (para. 71). Interviews allow the researcher to understand better the participants' views on the questions asked. The questions were open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to engage in the descriptive process that qualitative research requires

fully. Each interview was set-up on 45-minute intervals. Some interviews took less than 45 minutes, while others took the entire allotted 45 minutes.

### **Procedures**

The following are the data collection methods for the Interviews. Each one of these were described previously. First, a request form was sent to the IRB seeking approval. Then a letter was sent to ten pastors of Baptist churches in South Carolina. These churches were identified by word of mouth or by visiting their websites. The letter was seeking approval from the pastor for two reasons (Appendix C). One of the reasons were to interview parishioners from their church, and the other reason was to seek permission to use the church or place of worship. Upon receiving approval from the pastor, a letter was sent to invite various participants to participate in the research (Appendix C). The letter to the participants contained information about the research and their rights to withdraw without any repercussions. Finally, each participant was asked to sign the consent form that was sent by email (Appendix B). Prior to sending the consent form, the researcher talked with each participant via telephone or, at the least, email to garner a relationship.

After each participant agreed to the terms of the interview, then a site for the interviews were determined; all interviews were conducted face-to-face. Some of the interviews took less than 45 minutes, and other took the entire 45 minutes that was allotted for the interviews. The interviews were recorded with an audio recorder. Data was collected and safeguarded by putting the information collected on a secured computer. Software was added to secure the information entirely. In addition, embedded codes were used to help safe guard information.

### **Data Analysis**

The information gathered helped to guide the researcher's research direction. The above questions, coupled with the research questions guided the research. Patton (2015) stated, "Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people" (p. 573). To achieve a more comprehensive span and more profound revelations in scrutinizing the data, it was advantageous for this researcher to employ the triangulation technique. Carter et al. (2014) considers triangulation as using multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Oncol Nurs Forum, para. 1).

There are four basic types of triangulations. The four types are methodological, investigator, theory, and data. Carter et al. (2014) listed four types of triangulations: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation (para. 1). This research deployed two of the four triangulation methods: methodological and data. These two methods compared and contrasted information from the interviews. These two triangulation methods helped the researcher make sense of varying point of views from the different versions given by the interviewees. The triangulation was from participants from different backgrounds. Carter et al. (2014) suggested triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (para. 1). Transcribing data was a little challenging. Thus, this research used google documents. The coding process was divided into sub-sections.

This process was very tedious and time-consuming, coupled with much attention to the details of the data. First, an overview of the information. Next, the data was labeled according to relevant words. Sections also included the methods of gathering the information. The direction of

the research determined what was relevant, what was irrelevant and what was discarded. The more formal word for this process is coding. Things that surprise this researcher was considered relevant, repeated words or phrases were coded, and other relevant finding were coded.

### **Analysis Methods**

In addition, the researcher identified themes, patterns, and relationships that were meaningful to the research. Patton (2015) suggested phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and clarify the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people (p. 573). The themes, patterns, and relationships directed the research to the desired end, which is the truth about the phenomena that was researched. The themes were labeled according to each group that aided in differentiating each topic and subject. After completing the interviews and transcribing, each participant was asked to read their statement to review for accuracy; thusly, seeking to eradicate re-occurring information, and subsequent phenomenological reductions.

Clark Moustakas (1994) wrote a review discussing different human science perspectives and methods (para. 1). This analysis on the semi-structured interviews followed Moustakas' (1994) steps for phenomenological research in the data analysis process. An overview of the data analysis procedures included a recording of all statements. Also, Moustakas's (1994) stated phenomenological reduction comprises of horizontalizing, bracketing, epoche, and unifying the themes into a clear textural and structural description. Bracketing was used to hinder personal knowledge from bleeding into the data that was collected. Once bracketing was established, then all interviews were transcribed meticulously. Once the transcription process was completed, the transcripts were read from beginning to end several times to immerse the researcher in each participant's lived experience. Then horizontalization, which is part of

the phenomenological reduction process, whereby the researcher gives equal value to all the participants' statements (Creswell & Creswell, 2013), was conducted. Next, an in-depth reading of the transcripts was read numerous times, which led to a list of every statement relevant to the phenomenon in the study to be put into integration, deeming themes as pertinent, considering numerous outlooks, and labeling the data into what manner and what framework (Moustakas, para. 10). Some of the information that was gathered was repetitive that led to a deeper meaning in the phenomenon; however, each statement has its own perspective. Moustakas (1994) suggested textural meaning and invariant component of phenomenon will omit the irrelevant and repetitive statements (p. 97). Each invariant component was examined, and labeled as a lived moment of experience. When the statement met the criteria, it was grouped and moved to the next step. Clustering statements and identifying themes were the next step in the process.

Moustakas (1994) said after the significant statements have been identified, along with similarities of the stories of the participants, overlapping of meaning should be created (p. 87). A textual description was developed about what causes the phenomenon. The textural description was examined, and a textural-structural description represented the meaning and essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The descriptions were developed into an universal description of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Once that part of the analysis was completed then, according to Moustakas (1994) reflective analysis of the participant's account was generated (p.13). Lastly, verbatim samples from the interview transcripts were included to make the lived experiences apparent to ensure the participants' voices were heard. Also, pseudonyms were used for each participant to protect their identity. The summary of the research focused on the narratives that were expressed about the phenomena.



### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, according to Frey (2018), refers to a concept used in qualitative research to convey the procedures researchers employ to ensure the quality, rigor, and credibility of a study while the researcher with the design, implementation, and articulations of a research study (Sage, para. 1). The information that was gathered has its safeguards. The information has been scrutinized and evaluated.

### ***Credibility***

This research was built on the facts collected from a diverse group of people. The primary stage toward credibility encompasses the triangulation process for this research. This research occurred through face-to-face interviews. Triangulation enabled this researcher to provide credibility to the research findings. Triangulation is a method by which the researcher can guard against a study's results and the investigator's predispositions or biases. The triangulation function located and revealed the phenomenon from different scopes. This researcher sought the advisement of replicable outside sources. The information gathered consisted of data from parishioners. The phenomena of pastoral leadership the perceived factor for members leaving one church in South Carolina to join another church. Carter et al. (2014) suggested triangulation has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (para. 1). This research met the requirements for triangulation because the information gathered was gleaned from various people that have traveled the same path, namely having to decide to leave one church to join another. This way, triangulation helped develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Carter et al., para. 1). The triangulation purpose was to trace and divulge the phenomenon under examination from many practical trustworthy participants. The inevitable

weakness of qualitative research allowed triangulation to be advantageous to safeguard the study's trustworthiness. In addition, outside sources, like the researcher, have nothing to gain from falsifying the information that was collected.

### ***Dependability***

This research aimed to shed light on pastoral leadership as the perceived factor of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. Secondly, this research's goal was to be dependable enough so that someone else could replicate its findings. Statistic Solution (2021) examines if a person wants to replicate a study, enough information should be gleaned from the report to do so and obtain similar findings (para. 5). The information underwent auditing for dependability. Thusly, this researcher developed a thorough account of the collected data to safeguard dependability. In addition, this researcher made sure the interview questions were impartial and not leading the interviewee in a presuppositional manner to address dependability. The research is free of impartiality by using the Moustakas (1994) a method of organization and analysis of data beginning with regarding every statement relevant to the topic as having equal value. The meaning units are listed and clustered into common themes (para. 13). Then a document log was established to collect the data to framework the researcher's judgements as collected and coded the research. There is no one size fits all phenomenon; yet, there were enough similarities to glean from to ensure dependability.

### ***Confirmability***

Confirmability refers to tracking the processes and procedures that were used to collect and interpret the data. Boone (2021) describes confirmability as, the degree which the findings of the research could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the imagination, but

clearly derived from the data (para 1). In other words, providing what is known as an “audit trail” is critical. Boone (2021) suggested, an audit trail is when a qualitative researcher details the process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data (para. 2). An audit trail was conducted in two manners. First, it was done personally by the researcher by keeping transcripts of reflexivity and exact data collection records. Next, by yielding to a capable outside researcher to assess the design. Confirmability was at stake if the research can only be used in this research and no other research. For the sake of credibility, the information was written down after every interview. Thusly, this researcher developed a thorough account of the collected data to safeguard confirmability. The inevitable weakness of qualitative research can lead to partisanship suspicions therefore triangulation method helped to certify the study's credibility. Credibility was established through adherent checks directed after participant interviews and the focus group interviews.

### ***Transferability***

This research can be used in other contexts, it is not on an island. Throughout the research, it is possible to transfer the findings between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this research can be foundational in different contexts. This research focused on pastoral leadership in South Carolina, but it will also be used to examine pastors in other parts of the world. While Christians are looking in the pews for answers to understand why the church is in decline, this research sought to look at the pulpit as well. The propensity of pastoral leadership as the perceived factor for members leaving one church to join another is not a South Carolina problem alone. The hope of this researcher is to present research that will be applicable to other denominations. The finding in this research is limited, thusly, leaving room for others to glean and improve upon its limited

finalities. The transferability is limited or marginalized based on the study of setting. However, this research, all being well, will have the possibility to be applicable to other distinctions to church members leaving one church to join another universally.

### **Conclusion**

This research sought to understand whether pastoral leadership was the factor to church membership leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. This research used the interviews as the instrument to fully engage the phenomena. Countless hours of research, data analysis, and data processing was afforded to the project. In the process of time, there may be some of the nuances above that will be eliminated that is not advantageous to the research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose and focus of Chapter Four in this Phenomenological Qualitative Interview-Based Study was to explore the phenomenon of pastoral leadership as the perceived factor of members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. This chapter is designed to advise the reader on the steps taken in the research. The study consisted of ten participants interviewed from five churches in South Carolina. Each participant was sent a consent form before the interviews, as well as a copy of the interview questions, to become familiar with the purpose of the meeting. The interviews took place face-to-face at the participant's current church. All participants expressed concerns about the pastor and his leadership in their former churches. Once the interviews were completed, the data analysis process began for drawing conclusions. A plethora of subthemes was garnered from the interviews that helped shed light on the phenomenon.

### **Compilation Protocol and Measures**

Letters were sent out to ten pastors of various Baptist churches in South Carolina after visiting their websites. Five of the pastors agreed to the study, two pastors did not agree, and three of the pastors did not respond. Once the Lead Pastor approved, consent forms and emails were sent out to participants coupled with the interview questions. Ten participants were chosen, and all ten interviews were conducted face to face; plus, all the interviews were audio recorded. Initially, ten emails were sent to pastors after reviewing the church's website. The responses were slow; however, pastors responded and gave the researcher permission to reach out to some parishioners. The ten participants were as follows: four from one church, two from two different

churches, and one from two different churches. The following were the criteria for the participants:

The following is the list of participants:

1. Participants were limited to church members who attended their former churches for a minimum of three years. Participants did not include members that attended their former churches for less than three years.
2. Participants were limited to church members who have changed churches with in the past three years. However, it did not include those who changed churches over the three years period.
3. Participants were limited to Baptist churches. Limiting the research to one denomination may not satisfy or be advantageous to the end goal. However, participants were not from any other denomination other than Baptist.

The data gathered from the interview transcript recording and the interviewer's notes were triangulated. The researcher carefully read, re-read, and listened to the recording of the interviews multiple times to ingest the information that was shared (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In order to transcribe the interviews conducted, the researcher replayed the interviews, and meticulously manually transcribed the interviews in Word documents.

Once the researcher was comfortable with the information gathered, the coding process began. Each participant was given a code, and each code was given according to the sequence in which each participant was interviewed. The interviews were done separately. Furthermore, to ensure privacy; no personally identifiable information was used in the coding procedures. The researcher solely relied on the perspectives of each participant as he compiled the data. The participants hinged their decision to leave their respective churches on pastoral leadership.

### **Demographic and Sample Data**

Initially, ten emails were sent to pastors after reviewing the church's website. Initially, the responses were slow; however, pastors responded and gave the researcher permission to reach

out to some parishioners. Fifteen participants were the ideal number of participants, but because of distance, scheduling, and unforeseen medical conditions, only ten were interviewed. The ten participants were as follows: four from one church, two from two different churches, and one from two different churches. The instrument used in this study can be found in Appendix D.

A preliminary question and five interview questions dealt solely with the pastor. Each of the questions were coupled with three to four sub-questions. Moreover, the first question primarily dealt with their previous church structure to better understand the church's polity. In addition, the first question was designed as a preliminary question that would prepare the participants for the questions that pertained to the pastor. Each interview was semi-structured.

Each participant received an email with the consent form and the interview questions. Once the email was received, the researcher reached out to the participant via telephone to set up a date and time to meet with them for the interview. At the start of every interview, the research started with a brief summation. It reiterated the research purpose outlined on the consent form, particularly the following items: the right to opt out or discontinue the interview at any time without repercussions, the confidentiality of the interview and their identity, and seeking their permission to continue with the interview. The security and confidentiality of the participants was important; thusly, allowing them to be more forthcoming with their feelings and experiences.

**Table 1**

***Table 1: Interview Participants Church Membership Timeline***

Participants	Years at Former Church	Years at Current Church
PA 1	30 years	2 years
PA 2	25 years	18 months
PA 3	7 years	2 years
PA 4	12 years	15 months
PA 5	18 years	27 months
PA 6	5 years	20 months
PA 7	9 years	15 months
PA 8	21 years	1 year

PA 9	6 years	20 months
PA 10	40 years	30 months

Some interviews transpired for approximately 25-35 minutes. Initially, the researcher thought all the interviews were going to take 45-50 minutes. Upon completing the interviews, the researcher shared with the participants that he would provide a copy of the interview transcript for review and would like them to return them to him expeditiously. All the transcripts were returned within eight days. Only one of the participants made minute inconsequential amendments and rectifications. Names and any identifiable information from the notes taken were edited to keep the participant, and the information that was garnered confidentially. The ten interview participants were given pseudonyms listed in Table 1 above. All participants had a wide range of church membership years in their former churches. In addition, three of the ten participants have changed churches more than once. All the participants were women. This research was not focused just on women changing churches in South Carolina, however, the research arrived here by happenstance not intentionality. Each participant was a former Baptist church member, and their current membership is at Baptist churches. Four of the ten participants served in leadership in their former churches. Thusly, upon leaving their former churches, they resigned from their duties. Two of the four were a part of the paid staff, and the other two were volunteers.

### **Data Analysis and Finding**

The recruiting process for participants for the phenomenon of pastoral leadership as the perceived factor of church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina was intriguing. The interviews consisted of one preliminary question and five questions coupled with three to four sub-questions (Appendix D). Themes were formed from the interviews, and guided by the five open-ended questions.








### Preliminary Research Question

The first question was a preliminary question that would help shed light on the participant's understanding of the church's polity. This question intended to help frame the participant's background and to provide context, such as the following: how were decisions made at the church, what were the circumstances that led them to leave their former church, and did their children influence them to leave? Figure 1 reveals how the participants understood how decisions were made in their church.

**Figure 1**

*Figure 1: Themes from Preliminary Question: Sub Question 1*

Participants	PA1	PA2	PA3	PA4	PA5	PA6	PA7	PA8	PA9	PA10
Theme										
Uninformed about how decisions are made										

There were five of the ten participant that said they understood how decisions were made for the church. There was one apparent theme: (1) congregation verses the deacons.

#### *Congregation or the Deacons*

##### *PA 1*

Participant 1 knew that in most Baptist churches, the power was in the pews. The congregation had the power to make decisions through the democratic process of voting. However, she stated, “She was from the old school.” Meaning she did not believe in arguing in the church; thusly, she went along to get along with everyone. After all, her mother would not appreciate her arguing in God’s house (the church).

##### *PA 2*

Participant 2 is the wife of a deacon that attended the former church. She admitted that she knew some of the things she did were wrong, but she wanted to keep the peace in her home.

Instead of standing for what was biblical, she held her peace and looked the other way.

Moreover, the conviction of the Holy Spirit led her to do the right thing and speak up for the sake of the ministry. She said, “I had a heart-to-heart conversation with my husband about church leadership.”

*PA 5*

Participant 5 is the wife of a deacon as well. She admits that she was not spiritual, but a lot of what she did was because of tradition. Also, her father was a church deacon for over forty years, including fifteen of the forty years he was the Chairman of the Deacon Board. She saw her father and the Deacon Board make decisions for the church, and it was an accepted norm.











*PA 8*

Participant 8 said, “I know the church should vote about decisions made in the church.” She also understood the Bylaws of the church because she helped revise them. The Bylaws clearly state that the church (body) is the one who decides for the church by voting, and it is not the deacons, according to participant 8.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 was the wife of a minister at the church. In addition, she helped him with some of his seminary courses. The courses that were taken defined the protocols for denominations. She said, “The body governs the Baptist denomination, and the body makes the decisions through the democratic voting process.”

**Figure 2***Figure 2: Theme from Preliminary Question 1: Sub Question 2*

Participants	PA1	PA2	PA3	PA4	PA5	PA 6	PA7	PA8	PA9	PA10
Themes										
Lack of Consistency										
Going to church become a chore										

Sub question 2, *what were the circumstances that led them to leave their former church?*

*Lack of Consistency*

*PA 1*

Participant 1 said, “The church was unorganized due to leadership, and she did not know what would happen from Sunday to Sunday.” One week the church would sing hymns. Then following week, hymns were forbidden. The next week the men would sing. The next week the children would sing. Then there were other weeks when no one would sing. The inconsistency in the church was out of control. The Spirit was not in the church, so she felt she should not be there either.

*PA 2*

Participant 2 said, “I was in that church for 25 years, and never was the church in such disarray as it was before she left.” She admitted that the church had problems before, but unlike the current pastor, the former pastor was never a part of the dysfunction. She said, “There were more cliques in the church, than it was ministries in the church!”

*PA 4*

Participant 4 said she was an engineer and was used to having order. However, when the church became chaotic, she left. Her idea of chaos was when the pastor stopped giving out programs for the order of services; or, when the choir did not sing in their usual place, or when the offering was taken up after the sermon. She said, “Usually, the offering was taken up after the sermon because the pastor was preaching about giving and was trying to use gimmicks to enrich himself.”

*PA 8*

Participant 8 was used to traditional Baptist customs. Such as: programs given out by the ushers, deacons leading devotional service (prayer, scripture, doxology), church secretary giving the announcements, trustees taking up the offering, the choir singing a sermonic selection, the pastor preaching the sermon, then after the message, the doors of the church were open to visitors to join, then corporate prayer, and then the benediction. The church was very traditional, as she stated, “Until the new pastor came and tried to recreate the wheel.” The order of the church has no systematic flow.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 was responsible for making the programs and helping with the church services stay organized. Once the new pastor was installed, he stopped her from her paid duties and insisted that the church did not need programs. She felt slighted, disrespected, and unappreciated by the new pastor. After all, she said, “Taking her pay was a part of her livelihood.”

**Going to Church became a Chore***PA 3*

Participant 3 was not excited about the church. She was more engaged with playing on her phone more than she was engaged in the church service. She said, “She hated going to church, but she went because she was raised in the church.” The church was a challenge because too often, the preacher preached the same sermon, and the deacons prayed the same prayers. She was not growing spiritually.

*PA 5*

Participant 5 was initially very excited about the church, but her excitement soon dwindled. She said, “She left the world for the church, but seemingly, the church, in some instances, was worse than the world.” She is a manager on her secular job, and she understands leadership can propel or hinder. She said, “The pastor was the ringleader and was the main one causing the problems in the church.”

*PA 7*

Participant 7 felt that the church was not a good place. The church never started on time, and it did not have life when it did get started. She said, “Chaos was an understatement.”

*PA 9*

Participant 9 really thought she found a forever church when she first joined her former church. However, after the first-year things began to change for the worse. The church was having meetings every month about the pastor. The pastor would miss church for weeks at a time. She said, “You did not know who was going to be preaching from week to week.” The inconsistency of leadership was problematic.

*Sub question 3, did their children influence them to leave?*

*PA 1*

Participant 1 children played a role in her leaving the church. However, her children, that had moved away from home, knew about her distaste for the church, and it began to play a role in her health. Thusly, their constant plea for her to find another church eventually led to her leaving her former church.

*PA 2*

Participant 2 was a foster parent. Her former church did not have any children's ministries. However, her current church has children's ministries and her children love interacting with the other children. This way, her children played a role in her leaving her former church.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 children played a role in her leaving church. Due to her health declining because of stress, her children encouraged her to leave. She now attends a church where her daughter attends, and her health has taken a turn for the better.

### **Summary of Preliminary Question**

The data collected from the preliminary question to seek whether the participants understood the role of making decisions in their former churches, what were the circumstances that caused them to leave their former churches, and did their children play a role in them leaving. Five of the ten participants understood how decisions were made in their former churches. The pastor has only one vote, like others in the congregation. Also, the participants were clear about lack of consistency and church becoming a chore helped them to leave their former church. Two of the participants said that their adult children played a role in them leaving

their former church, and one participant said their adolescent children played a role in them leaving their former church.














**Table 2**

**Table 2: Comprehensive Themes and Categories for Research Question 1**

Themes	Categories
Pastor Speaking too Forcefully	Pastor making demands Pastor throwing slams from the pulpit Pastor belittling other leaders openly Pastor displaying authoritarianism
Preaching with Selfish Ambitions	Pastor demanding special treatment for himself Pastor demanding special treatment for wife Pastor did not push for community outreach Pastor constantly preaching about money

**Figure 3**

*Figure 3: Themes from Question 1*

Participants	PA 1	PA 2	PA 3	PA 4	PA 5	PA 6	PA 7	PA 8	PA 9	PA 10
Themes										
Pastor Speaking too forcefully										
Preaching with selfish ambitions										

### Research Question 1

*What, if any, does the pastor's teaching style plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

This question was designed to show data that support the impact of the pastor's preaching style that led to members departing the church. While each of the ten participants did not immediately have a problem with their former pastor's preaching style, the preaching style

became more problematic. Two themes derived from this research question: (1) Speaking too forcefully and (2) preaching with selfish ambitions.

### *Speaking too Forcefully*

#### *PA 1*

Participant 1 was adamant about how disrespected she felt by the pastor's preaching style. She had a rich biblical background. She said, "The word of God should be used for correction, but it should also be used to share the love of God." The pastor would teach topical subjects on giving; however, the giving would not be for the building of the Kingdom of God but for his welfare and personal gain. The gospel, as she noted, was the good news! She believed it was a time and place for everything, and the pulpit should not be used to belittle God's people.

#### *PA 2*

Participant 2 said, "When the pastor first came to the church, he was kind, gentle, and respectful to the parishioners." Before her departure, the pastor turned bitter, and his words were no longer seasoned with salt. He used words towards members as being stupid. He also said, "The membership reminded him of rebels and heathens going to hell." However, the pastor's preaching changed after the death of his wife. Her death has been brutal on the pastor and the church.

#### *PA 4*

Participant 4 said the pastor's teaching style was more aligned with a 'hype' man. He used catchphrases to get the crowd's attention. The pastor would say, "When praises go up, blessings come down." He was too over the top and flamboyant. At first, his style was entertaining, but as she grew in the Lord, she needed more than 'fluff.' The pastor was nice, but he lacked substance, and the messages did not help her in her spiritual relationship with the Lord.



*PA 6*

Participant 6 came back to her family church. She gave her life back to the Lord. The pastor that she grew up under had retired. The new pastor's preaching style was different from the former pastors. She said the former pastor was a teacher. She said, "The new pastor's teaching was different, and she did not understand the messages." At first, she thought it was her because she was returning to the church. However, after going to a funeral with her childhood friend and she heard her childhood friend's pastor preach, she began to visit other churches. After visiting other churches and hearing other pastors' sermons, she left her church. She said her current pastor is a teacher, and he teaches verse by verse (expository). She said, "For the first time, she really understood what the pastor was talking about, and she understood the Bible." She also has been faithfully attending Bible Study for the first time.

*PA 8*

Participant 8 said, "I went to the pastor several times to talk with him about her spiritual growth, and every time my words fell on deaf ears." The pastor did not take her concerns seriously. Moreover, after she met with the pastor, his sermons were directed towards her, and a group of the members that felt the same as her. Instead of encouraging the church, participant 8 said, "He said if you do not like how I preach, find you another church," so she did. She is a firm believer in the saying, it is not always what you say, but how you say it.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 was at her former church for 40 years. The church had one pastor for 35 years. The previous pastor retired, and the church elected another pastor. Upon his arrival, he began making some changes. In addition, his teaching style was different from the former pastor, and he was much younger. She said, "The new pastor was younger than my grandson." His

preaching style was different and too non-traditional. She was accustomed to structuring, but the new pastor's style was too carefree. She was considering going to her daughter's church, and his preaching style solidified her decision to leave.

### ***Preaching with Selfish Ambitions***

#### *PA 1*

Participant 1 was a long-time member of her former church. She said, "I was extremely excited about the new pastor when he first came to the church." She even voted for him juxtaposed to the other candidate. However, shortly after he was installed as the pastor, he started preaching about material things that he wanted, and he also chastised the church for not giving his wife a gift for her birthday. The sermons became less about God and more about him and his family.

#### *PA 2*

Participant 2 was not a proponent of the pastor because she felt in her spirit that something was not right about the pastor. Also, some of her friends told her about some of the allegations about the pastor. Moreover, in her opinion, if the pastor had been elected to four churches before the age of 25, something was wrong. The pastor was newly elected and installed in the church. She did not vote for the pastor. Furthermore, his selfishness conferred her thoughts about him.

#### *PA 3*

Participant 3 was clear and concise, with no regret in stating that her former pastor was selfish. She said, "The pastor would always say, "I am the visionary of the church; it is my way or the highway." Even at the demise of the parishioners, the pastor would lead as a cowboy and not a shepherd. His end goal was to look good, get praise, and get a paycheck.

*PA 4*

Participant 4 said, “I was oblivious to the scheme of the pastor at first.” However, she became aware of his insincerity and selfishness as time progressed. His sermons were about money and caring for the pastor and his family. There was a time when the church was in a deficit, and the pastor said, “That is not my problem.” In fact, during the perilous financial times, he came and asked the church for a raise. Times like this magnified his selfishness more and more. She was furious and beyond disbelief of the audacity of the pastor’s greed.

*PA 7*

Participant 7 split her time between two churches. She would attend her husband’s church and her church. She said, “The pastor was a little more ambitious about being taken care of, and that was a turn-off to her and some parishioners.” She no longer splits her time, but she is now a member at her husband’s church.

*PA 8*

Participant 8 recognized that the pastor was more concerned about himself than he was about the church. That was not very reassuring. She said, “When he did not get his way, he would use the Word of God in a malicious manner to get his point across.”

*PA 10*

Participant 10 is very callous towards the pastor. She felt he was not for the people, but he was all for himself and his family. She said, “The pastor is a bully and has no respect for others.” She indicated that leaving a church that she was a lifetime member of was a hard decision, but it was one of the best decisions she had ever made in her life.

## Summary of Research Question 1

Data collection revealed that the pastor's preaching style played a role in members leaving one church to join another. The comprehensive themes encompassed the pastor speaking too forcefully and preaching with selfish ambitions. Those participants who accepted the pastor initially found themselves loathing his ways and actions over time. In addition, the participants that had a problem with the pastor's preaching style led to the demise of their love for their churches. However, most of the participants still have good relationships with some of the parishioners that still attend the church, but their relationship with the pastor is the opposite. Some participants said they would consider returning to their former churches if the pastor resigned or left the church. The tables above are the themes and groupings for the research in question 1.

### Table 3












*Table 3: Comprehensive Themes and Categories for Research Question 2*

Themes	Categories
Messages were not Relevant	<p>Messages did not correlate with life issues</p> <p>Messages edified the pastor not God</p> <p>Messages were confusing</p> <p>Pastor lacked seminary training</p>
Messages did not Inspire	<p>Left church feeling worse than when she came</p> <p>Left church wishing she went to another</p> <p>Sitting in church disengaged with the message</p> <p>Pastor constantly complaining</p>

### Figure 4

Figure 4: Themes for Question 2

[illegible]

Messages were not Relevant										
Messages did not Inspire										

## Research Question 2

*What, if any, did the pastor's education, or the lack thereof, play a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

This question was designed to show data supporting a pastor's education or the lack of, impacting parishioners leaving one church to join another. Although the ten participants have been affected by the pastor's education or lack thereof, the range of the effectiveness falls into multiple categories. There were two themes that emerged from the research: (1) Messages were not relevant, and (2) Messages did not inspire.

### *Preaching was not Relevant*

#### *PA 1*

Participant 1 lamented about how the messages that were preached were not relevant. She said, "I was going through some health challenges, and my faith was wavering, and the pastor would preach sermons about money." She was struggling to trust God. She did not come to church to hear sermons about money.

#### *PA 2*

Participant 2 was a long-time member of her former church, and she was in church all her life. She was past hearing sermons that aroused but did not convict. The pastor would use Greek and Hebrew word to show his education; however, that did not help her with her struggling marriage.

*PA 3*

Participant 3 said she did not have a lot of Bible knowledge. Her pastor did have seminary training, and too often, he would use words that she did not understand. She said, “He would talk over my head.”

*PA 6*

Participant 6 grew up in her former church. She went back to that church because it was her family church. She said, “The pastor used big words when he preached, and she was confused during the sermon.” The big words she was referring to was the Greek and Hebrew words. She said, “The words would have made more sense if he related them to the message.”

*PA 8*

Participant 8 was livid and candid. She said the pastor did not have any seminary training. He was recommended to the church by another pastor in their Association. His sermons were not relevant, and he preached to same sermons. She went to the pastor to ask him why he preaches the same sermons. His response was, “Why do you not complain when the choir sings the same songs?” His lack of education helped her decide to leave.

*PA 9*

Participant 9 said she was not spiritually fed by the pastor's messages. She would leave church feeling worse than when she came. He (the pastor) really needed some seminary training. She is friends with a pastor that went to seminary. Her friend's delivery of the message juxtaposed with her former pastor is night and day.

*Messages did not inspire*

*PA 2*

Participant 2 acknowledged that it was not wholly the pastor's job to inspire her. However, the pastor's aspiration for his well-being was more important than her struggles with sin. She said, "I was all for taking care of the pastor and his family, but she came to church to be inspired about living holy for the Lord."

*PA 3*

Participant 3 said, "How can I grow in the Lord when I do not understand what the pastor was talking about." She was convinced that the pastor wanted to display his education using big words, and he always mentioned that he had graduated from Duke University. She was not impressed by his education or inspired by his messages.

*PA 5*

Participant 5 was direct and to the point. She said the pastor was boring, and his preaching did not keep her attention. She said, "I was a faithful member of my former church for a long time, and he (former pastor) was the only pastor I ever fell asleep on while he was preaching." She struggled to go to church; however, being a deacon's wife, she knew how it would look if she did not come to church with her husband.

*PA 8*

Participant 8 did admit that her frustration with the pastor played a role in her not receiving the pastor's preaching. The pastor would get on the 'soapbox' and then she would tune him out. He would start talking about sports, the news, or some off-the-wall event that had nothing to do with the message. At the end of the sermon, she felt worse than when she first came to church.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 did not mince words about how she felt about the pastor's preaching. She was not impressed initially because she was more educated than him. She said, "He eisegesis the text of scriptures instead of exegesis the text." This turned me against his teaching and preaching. She confessed she did not give him a chance to grow as a pastor, yet, she acknowledged that his sermons were not theologically sound and uninspiring.

**Summary of Research Question Two**

Data collection revealed that most participants admitted that the pastor's education, or the lack thereof, impacted their decision to leave the church. The education or lack of impact the presentation of the pastor's preached messages, which resulted in the messages not being relevant or too dull. Some participants shared their reluctance to leave the church, but at the expense of not growing in faith, their best resolve was to leave. Table three shows the themes and subthemes for research question two.


















**Table 4**

*Table 4: Comprehensive Themes and Categories for Research Question 3*

Themes	Categories
No Children's Ministries	Children did not learn about God with their peers Parents cannot freely focus on worship Children were not excited about going to church
Minimal Community Outreach	Discontinuation of fellowship with other churches Discontinuation of community Garden Discontinuation of reaching the less fortunate children
Closed the Church During COVID-19 Pandemic	Church was only on social media Church grew a part because no social interactions Lack of Communication from leadership



**Figure 5***Figure 5: Themes from Question 3*

Participants	PA 1	PA 2	PA 3	PA 4	PA 5	PA 6	PA 7	PA 8	PA 9	PA 10
Themes										
No Children's Ministries										
Minimal Community Outreach										
Closed the church during COVID-19 Pandemic										

### Research Question Three

*What, if any, does the pastor's vision for the church, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

The goal of this question is to evaluate whether the pastor's vision for the church played a role in parishioners leaving the church. The description from the participants is listed below.

There were three themes that emerged from the research: (1) No children's ministries, (2) Minimal community outreach, (3) Closed the church during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

#### *No Children's Ministries*

##### *PA 1*

Participant 1 said the church always had a children's ministry. The children's ministry was thriving. However, shortly after the new pastor came, he discontinued the children's ministry. The church was not for discontinuing the children's ministry. She said, "The church is like a baseball program. Every player in baseball does not start in the major league, but they go

to the minor league first. This is how it should be in the church.” The pastor’s vision for the church was too shallow and self-centered. Once the children's ministry was discontinued, the church’s attendance began to dwindle.

*PA 2*

Participant 2 was straightforward in her response. The pastor did not understand how important it was to her to have a children’s ministry. She was a foster parent, and allowing the children to learn with their peers was vitally important. In addition, having a children’s ministry allowed her to focus more on the service.

*PA 4*

Participant 4 said, “When the pastor discontinued the children’s ministry, which my children enjoy, I knew I had to make a decision for the well-being and spiritual growth of my children.” When the children started attending church with the adults, her children hated going to church. Their dislike for the church expedited her decision to find a church where the children could grow spiritually.

*PA 6*

Participant 6 grew up in the church when the children's ministry was booming. She wanted her child to have the children’s church experience like she had as a child. It helped her, and she enjoyed going to the children’s church as a child. She was disappointed when she returned to the church, and the children’s ministry no longer existed. She said, “When my children came home and could not tell me what the pastor preached about, then I knew I had to make some changes.”

*PA 7*

Participant 7 said the church's lack of children's ministries helped her decide to leave. The church's neighborhood has a high crime and poverty rate. Having something for the children to do on Sundays and mid-week services were advantageous; and, having something for them to do during the summer, was just as important. Summer was a time when the children in the church and children in the community would come together at the church for Vacation Bible School. VBS was a fun time of the year for the children in the church and the children in the community.

*PA 8*

Participant 8 excitedly reminisced about the days her children came home from church and were able to tell her what they learned in children's church. The church she currently attends has a children's ministry. This helped her decide to leave her former church. She said, "I bring my grandchildren to church with me, and I am past the age of disciplining children while I am trying to worship, so a children's ministry is vitally important, in my opinion."

*Minimal Community Outreach**PA 1*

Participant 1 was a missionary for the church for many years. Her passion was serving the community. The new pastor stopped the missionaries from continuing to outreach. More focus was put on the church. She said, "Outreach is my life. My greatest way of serving Jesus is serving and helping those who could not return to help." She felt she was not being used or allowed to be used by God at the church; thus, she left the church to join another.

*PA 2*

Participant 2 said she was so disappointed, shocked, and hurt that they stopped fellowshiping with other churches they had been fellowshiping with for many years. They

fellowshipped with other denominations under the former pastor. She said he said, “We are all God’s children, and there is one God.” The new pastor did not think it was an excellent practice to fellowship with other denominations. The outreach to other churches was paramount in reaching the community. She did not believe in the vision of the pastor.

*PA 3*

Participant 3 did not spare her words about the pastor’s vision for community outreach. She said, “The church was too focused on our in-reach and forgot about the less fortunate that lived on the streets in our community.” She was once one of those people living on the streets, so that ministry was close to her heart. She understood the struggle and echoed, “The struggle is real.”

*PA 5*

Participant 5 was devoted to evangelism, especially foreign missions. She said, “I was a part of the foreign mission ministry, and the purpose of the foreign ministry was to send resources to other countries.” The pastor stopped the ministry. She said, “I believe the pastor stopped the ministry out of spite because he had a problem with me challenging his authority.” His decision to stop the outreach just added fodder to the fire of her leaving the church.

*PA 6*

Participant 6 did not teeter in her words about their community garden, which was deemed unimportant by the pastor. She said, “Growing up, my family depended on churches and other agencies for food.” This outreach helped many people in the community. There were many things that she could handle when it came to the pastor's decisions, but this one was unpalatable.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 was the president of the outreach ministry at her former church. She was livid when the past ‘unplugged’ the outreach ministry. The vision of the pastor was more inwardly than it was outwardly. The discontinuation of the outreach ministry played a role in her leaving her former church.

### ***Church Closed During COVID-19 Pandemic***

#### ***PA 1***

Participant 1 said she was old-school and liked going to church in person. She understood at first about shutting the church down because of COVID-19. She said, “The pastor wanted to hide behind the computer screen (Facebook) and telephone (conference call) to preach to the church.” When other churches started opening, their church stayed closed. Some pastors in the area got creative and had pull-up and park services, but her pastor did not deem that necessary. She said angrily, “All he wanted was to get paid. He did not care about keeping the church together or saving people's souls. All he wanted was a paycheck.” However, there was a silver lining in all of this because she visited other churches. One of the churches she visited during the pandemic is where she is now a member.

#### ***PA 2***

Participant 2 said the pastor’s leadership and vision for the church during COVID significantly impacted her leaving the church. The church was not ready for the onslaught of the pandemic, not to mention that the church was already fragile.

#### ***PA 3***

Participant 3 was confused about what the church was doing weekly during the pandemic. There was no communication because the church was unprepared for the havoc of COVID. The

pastor's main goal was not the well-being of the church. Only a few people could attend the church, mainly the pastor, his family, the deacons, the praise team, and a few others. Other churches had in-person services, so she started visiting other churches. After visiting several other churches that had what she had been thirsting for in her Christian experience, she began contemplating leaving her church to join another. However, she said the 'straw' that broke the camel's back was, "The pastor was taking other preaching engagements to other churches that were having in-person services, but were not having in-person services at his church." It became apparent that he cared more about money than he did about the church.

*PA 6*

Participant 6 said her pastor's vision for the church during COVID was grim. The church was closed for about six months, and the only sermons were through a conference call. She emphatically said, "That was not it (conference call), and it did not feel like church." She started visiting other churches and eventually joined another church.

*PA 8*

Participant 8 said the church was her lifeline. She looked forward to attending church; however, she was initially a little skeptical about attending church. She agreed with the pastor and thought he was trying to keep everyone safe, but when he said the church was going to close for a year, that was disheartening. She said, "COVID became the guiding force in the church, not God." She questioned how he concluded to keep the church closed for a year. There was no in-person service, but they wanted you to give money. She said the pastor did not have in-person services but was eating in restaurants.

### Summary of Research Question Three

Data collected revealed that most participants admitted that the pastor's vision played a role in their leaving the church. The pastor's vision that led to some of the participants leaving the church ranged from no children's ministries, minimal community outreach, closed the church during the COVID-19 Pandemic. About 50% of the participants were affected by the pastor's vision for the listed themes. See Table 5 and figure 6 above.











**Table 5**

**Table 5: Comprehensive Themes and Categories for Research Question 4**

Themes	Categories
Pastor Felt Threatened	Pastor would get defensive when questioned about a scripture text Pastor set protocols in place to stop members from getting to him Pastor did not want to be accountable
The Pastor was Making Changes too Fast	Pastor did everything Pastor did not accept input from others Pastor was always right Pastor overlooked leaders of auxiliaries

**Figure 6**

*Figure 6: Themes from Question 4*

Participant	PA 1	PA 2	PA 3	PA 4	PA 5	PA 6	PA 7	PA 8	PA 9	PA 10
Themes										
Pastor felt threatened										
The pastor was making changes too fast										

#### Research Question 4

*What, if any, did the pastor's dissimilarity or disagreement with you, play in parishioners leaving the church to join another?*

This question was designed to garner data from the participants to see if an argument or disagreement with the pastor led to their departure or the departure of other members of the church. All ten participants attested to either allowing a disagreement with the pastor to play a role in them leaving, or a disagreement caused others to leave the church to join another. Two themes emerged from this question, (1) Pastor felt threatened (2) The pastor was making changes too fast. The participants narratives are described below.

##### *PA 2*

Participant 2 said she went to the pastor several times about his interpretation of the scriptures. However, she vividly expressed going to him about Psalms 37:4, which reads, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." She said, "He told the members that if they praise God, he will give them what they desire." That was not correct, she told him. That scripture means, "God put things in your heart to do for His will; He (God) is the one who gives you that burning and desire." That conversation did not go well because he felt like she was attacking him. She said, "I was not attacking him, he was my pastor, and I did not want him misquoting scriptures." At the end of the conversation, he told her to stop causing problems and finding fault with everything he said and did. She understood that their relationship would not get better, and it was best for her to move on because she did not want to be labeled as a troublemaker.

##### *PA 3*

Participant 3 said she was caught off guard when the pastor and a member disagreed at one of the church meetings. She said, "None of the items on the agenda was discussed because



the argument got so heated.” She had never seen that particular member back at the church, and later it was told that the member had left and joined another church.

*PA 6*

Participant 6 was not as candid about her interactions with the pastor as some other participants. She did not want to cast a bad light on him, but she did say a disagreement with the pastor did propel her exodus from the church. However, she added, “One day, I saw the pastor in the church's foyer, and I asked him why is it so much confusion in the church?” His response to her was, “I am not the problem, and maybe people like you are the ones that are causing the confusion.” She said I asked my question in jesting, but it was not received in that manner. She apologized, but from that point on, their relationship was never the same.

*PA 7*

Participant 7 said she was on the precipice of leaving the church before she spoke with the pastor about how she felt about the church. I went to the pastor and asked him why so many people were not coming to church. He told her, “Sheep bear sheep, and shepherds guide the sheep. Then he told me that I was one of the sheep, so instead of coming to the shepherd, I should go find the sheep and ask the sheep.” She said the conversation escalated fast, and some ungodly things were said, and she regretted getting out of character. She felt the pastor should have checked on the missing members instead of passing the buck. After all, she said, “The Bible teaches that you leave the 99 and go after the one.” She said he was not a pastor but a hireling; thus, this altercation aided in her eventually leaving the church.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 said she did not waste time requesting a meeting with the pastor when he first arrived at the church but allowed him time to settle into the role of pastor. However, later

she met with him, but the meeting did not go well. She asked him about some rumors that were being spread about him. She was disappointed with the way the pastor responded to her. She said, “He told me he did not have to answer my questions, and if the church did not do their proper vetting of him, that is not his problem.” She was not pleased with that answer because he did not answer her question and concern. She said the meeting ended with these words, “If you do not like me as your pastor, maybe you should leave.” She said she did not immediately, but certainly, our disagreement played a part in my decision to depart the church.

### ***Pastor Making Changes Too Fast***

#### ***PA 1***

Participant 1 said our church operated like a well-oiled machine. Everybody stayed in their lane and did what they were asked to do, and the church was happy. The new pastor came in like a whirlwind with a controlling spirit. He wanted everything to go thru him. There were protocols set up for every auxiliary; however, he disregarded all of the processes that were in place. She said she went to him and said, “Why are you not allowing anyone to help? Our former pastor was more inclusive.” His response was, “It is a new sheriff in town.” All of the auxiliaries had presidents. The presidents of the auxiliaries usually set the tone for the auxiliaries; the pastor said he was the head of every auxiliary, thus, making the presidents obsolete. She said the pastor was not pliable and understood she had to make some changes.

#### ***PA 2***

Participant 2 admitted that she was a little outspoken and did not mind telling people what was on her mind. She went to the pastor to tell him that the members did not feel like their input mattered and that some members were afraid that it would turn confrontational if they said something to him. He told her, “I am the shepherd of the flock; sheep are to follow the

shepherd.” She did not want to be confrontational with the pastor anymore, so she understood that she needed to change. She stayed at the church a little while longer and left shortly after their conversation. However, she regretted getting into an altercation with the pastor, and if the opportunity presented itself in the future she would react differently.

*PA 4*

Participant 4 felt like the pastor was trying to build his own name and kingdom. She said the pastor would say, “Stay in your lane,” when someone would question his motives. The church began to seem too cultish. This made her feel very uncomfortable. She never verbally disagreed with the pastor, but some other members did. Her sister had a verbal disagreement with the pastor, and she left the church.

*PA 5*

Participant 5 husband was a deacon. She said her husband got frustrated with the pastor’s disrespect of the Deacon Board; he went to him to share his frustrations. The pastor told him that if he did not like how things were going, he should step down from the Deacon Board. She said, “My husband was so hurt because he was one of the ones pushing to get him elected as the pastor.” Soon after their altercation, her husband left the church.

*PA 8*

Participant 8 said, “Yes, the pastor and I had many disagreements.” She felt like the pastor did not want to take any responsibility for what was going wrong in the church. Also, she said the pastor thought he was always right. It is hard to follow a pastor that thinks they are always right. She eventually left the church.

### Summary of Research Question Four

The data collected from research question four revealed that most of the participant expressed a dissimilarity or a disagreement that played a role in them leaving one church to join another. The overarching response was supported by interactions with the pastor or how the pastor interacted with others. Several participants said that the pastor was not easy to talk to and did not like to admit when he was wrong. Table 6 and figure 7 display the themes and subthemes for research question four above.








**Table 6**

***Table 6: Comprehensive Theme and Category for Research Question 5***

Theme	Categories
Church was not the same	Former pastor was more friendly Former pastor was admired by the members Former pastor was empathic

**Figure 7**

***Figure 7: Theme from Question 5***

Participant	PA 1	PA 2	PA 3	PA 4	PA 5	PA 6	PA 7	PA 8	PA 9	PA 10
Themes										
Pastor felt threatened										

### **Research Question 5**

*What, if any, does the pastor's termination, retirement, or death, play a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

This question was designed to gain data from participants in their own words, whether the pastor's termination, retirement, or death played a role in them leaving the church. Most participants asseverated that the pastor's retirement played a role in their leaving. None of the participants experienced the death or termination of a pastor. One theme emerged from this question: (1) Church was not the same.

#### ***Church Was Not the Same***

##### ***PA 1***

Participant 1 felt that she would still be a member of her former church if the former pastor were still pastoring. They had a good relationship, and she really respected him as a pastor. He was a people person. She also said, "Reverend Slaughter was easy to talk to, and he did not mind you asking him for clarity if you did not understand something he said while preaching."

##### ***PA 2***

Participant 2 said, "I know without a doubt in my mind that I would still be a member of my former church if the pastor did not retire." She and the former pastor had a good relationship. She knew him before he became the pastor of the church. She saw the transformation of his life, and they were able to bond together.

##### ***PA 5***

Participant 5 was fond of the former pastor. She was unprepared for him to leave. She admitted that she depended on him too much. She said, "He was the type of pastor that really

cared, was empathetic, and he kept the church together.” She believes that if the former pastor were still pastoring the church, she would still be a faithful member.

*PA 6*

Participant 6 said she would still have been attending her former church if the pastor had not retired. She was there for eighteen years and had no desire to leave. She said she never even thought about leaving. She said, “Pastor McGyver would lovingly correct you, not mean-spirited. He was gentle and firm.”

*PA 7*

Participant 7 said the former pastor was the main reason why she joined the church. He was very supportive of her and her family during the time when her son was killed. She was forever grateful for the pastor and would have done anything for him. In fact, she went to talk to the former pastor before she left her former church. He told her, “You have to do what is best for you and your family; if that means changing churches, then do what is best.” After their conversation, she felt an absolute calm and peace about what she was fighting and reluctant to do.

*PA 8*

Participant 8 said that the former pastor was a good man. She said, “Yes, we have had our disagreements, but he was not disagreeable.” She said one of his favorite sayings was, “We can disagree, but I will not be disagreeable.” He was a man of peace, prayer, and patience. She said he was easy to follow, and she would still be a church member if he were still pastoring the church.

*PA 10*

Participant 10 said, “When Reverend McCoy was at the church, everything was going well. She knows for a fact that Reverend McCoy’s retirement accounted for a grave number of members leaving the church, including her.

### **Summary of Research Question Five**

The data collected from the participants in conjunction with research question five disclosed overwhelming support that the retirement of former pastors played a role in them leaving the church. Seven out of the ten participants vastly shared information regarding the differences between the current pastor and former pastor. Three of the ten participants pastor’s retirement did not aid in them leaving their former church. Overall, the participants overwhelmingly believed they would still be at their former church if the former pastor were still pastoring it.

### **Evaluation of the Research Design**

According to Creswell and Creswell, “The use of qualitative research methods permits questions that begin with what and how used to explain why certain things occur (2018). This phenomenological research was to understand what people's personal experiences mean to them. Linda Bliss wrote,

Phenomenological research is a deep investigation of what experiences mean to people. At its core, it concerns the investigation of everyday human experiences in order to learn people’s common sense understanding and the meaning they make of their experiences and the experiences of others (para 2, 2016).

The study consisted of semi-structured interviews, and interviewer notes that were captured during the interviews were used to capture relevant data. The participants were free to discuss their veracity during the interviews. The participants were sincere in their answers and carefully communicated their responses effectively according to their experiences. The participants did not

answer any questions rashly but took a long pause to amass their postulation before responding. When the participants expressed their negativity and hurt about leaving their former church and the pastor's unprofessional tendencies, the researcher said, "Thank you for sharing. I realize it is painful." However, whenever there was some ambiguity, the researcher would say, "Can you give me a few more details?" Two participants got emotional sharing some of their experiences, and this researcher told them that he understood their pain; thus, those words seemed to embolden the participant to go more extensive into details. Each participant had to meet specific criteria to a participant.

The semi-structured interview questions were suitable for extracting a copious amount of descriptive data from the participants. However, this researcher detected during the process of the interviews that additional questions would have revealed areas that would have enriched the data to significantly further the study. The following questions would be: (1) Are you a born-again believer? (2) On a scale of 1-10, ten being the highest, would you rate your maturity level as a Christian? (3) What is the process of choosing a new pastor, and were you active in the choosing process? (4) Did you consult God before leaving your former church? (5) Do you understand what a calling on a person's life means? (6) Do you believe that God sent you to your current church? There were some pros and cons to conducting the interviews face-to-face. This researcher was able to read the body language of the participants. A con was that the participant could read the researcher's body language. Body language is essential because it can express nonverbal information.

One weakness of the research design was situated in the use of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. All the research questions were designed to glean information about pastoral leadership being perceived as the leading cause for church members leaving one church



to join another. However, the heart and maturity of the participants were not dealt with in the design. This researcher used excel for coding, theming, and categorizing was sufficient, but because the researcher was a novice in excel, it took more time than expected. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that using a recorder helps alleviate the research from taking too many notes (pp. 199-200). Also, including other Baptist denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and Progressive Baptist, could have been a great juxtaposition to participants from churches associated with the National Baptist Convention, although some from those denominations declined to participate in the research.

Confidentiality was vitally important to the research's success and the participants' cooperation. Thus, the names of the participants' churches were not mentioned, and pseudonyms were given to each participant. Also, the pastor's names given in the research are inaccurate.

In conclusion, the use of phenomenological research generated the desired end by categorizing data, themes, and coding from the participants' lived experiences. The sample size was minimal yet opulent enough to fill a picturesque overview due to the construction of the interview questions. Upon transcribing the interview questions, they were transported to a word document. The next step was to send the transcribed document to each participant for them to review and correct the necessary inaccuracies. There were minimal corrections that one participant needed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of Chapter Five is to present the conclusions resulting from the research data. This chapter provides the reader with an analysis of the purpose of the research, the questions presented in the research, the conclusion, implications, and applications. The chapter is not conclusive of the research but has limitations; hence, more study and research may be advantageous.

### **Research Purpose**

This phenomenological qualitative research aims to introduce readers to the phenomenological inquiry of pastoral leadership as the perceived factor of one member leaving a church to join another in South Carolina. This research is rooted in the philosophical proposition that readers can gain valuable insight into the structure of how people understand their lived experiences. Bliss (2016) phenomenological research provides an opportunity for researchers to help people gain a new understanding of the meaning of these phenomena (p. 14)

### **Research Questions**

In accordance with phenomenological research study design, the following questions are used to guide the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

**RQ1.** What, if any, does the pastor's teaching style plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ2.** What, if any, did the pastor's education, or the lack thereof, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ3.** What, if any, does the pastor's vision for the church, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

**RQ4.** What, if any, did the pastor's dissimilarity or disagreement with you, plays a role in parishioners leaving the church to join another?

**RQ5.** What, if any, does the pastor's termination, retirement, or death, play a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?

### **Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications**

This section reviews of the research questions coupled with theoretical and theological implications, research limitations, suggestions for further research, and a summary of the findings.

#### **Research Conclusions**

The research discoveries revealed that pastoral leadership plays a significant factor in church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. The participant's expressive and graphic responses aided in coming to this formidable conclusion in this arduous undertaking. Their clear and coherent response did not overshadow their ability to shed light on how to undergird pastoral leadership better. The following section provides a summary and supposition of each research question. The research questions are italicized below.

#### **Conclusions for Research Questions**

**Conclusion to RQ1.** *What, if any, does the pastor's teaching style of the plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

The first research question seeks to understand how the pastor's teaching style plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another. The research findings offered prodigious support in each participant's informative responses on how the pastor's preaching style played a role in them leaving the church. Most of the participants experienced an unfavorable interaction with the pastor's preaching style, whether directly or indirectly. All the participants loved their former churches and did not want to leave under the leadership of the previous administration. The participants that shied away from discussing the pastor's teaching style realized his style was

counterproductive to the church body as a whole, and they witnessed the falling away of many members.

The themes generated from RQ1 were: (1) Speaking too forcefully and preaching with selfish ambitions. Most of the participants declared the following the pastor: he would bring up personal private conversations that they had with him during his sermons, he was being too demanding, he preached about money for selfish gain, and his belittling others openly was disappointing. Joe McKeever wrote, “Dangerous pastors can be cancerous, spreading disease throughout the flock; its lay leadership must rise up and take action” (Church Leaders, 2022, para. 4). Seemingly, everything that the parishioners tried to do before leaving the church did not work. McKeever (2022) sometimes gets reminded on this blog—which we admit is directed toward pastors and church leadership—that the church’s problem can be the preacher (para 3). Some admitted that they did not have a plan in place for the new pastor. Michelle Jenkins suggested, “Once the church leadership recognizes that pastor leadership changes will occur, it can make the necessary plans to proactively take steps to ensure a smooth transition when it does happen” (p. 28).

Several participants acknowledged that they were hurt by pastoral leadership in the church. The literature supported the participant’s perception, according to Ed Taylor when he wrote, “There are many ‘walking wounded’ among us who have been hurt purposely by men and women in positions of oversight in the Church, by bad leaders, bad pastors, bad people,” (2016, para. 2). 1 Peter 5:2 instructs pastors, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind Neither as lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” (KJV, 2005).

**Conclusion to RQ2.** *What, if any, did the pastor's education, or the lack thereof, play a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

The second research question investigated how the pastor's education, or the lack thereof, played a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another. The research indicated a firm and succinct conclusion on the impact of the pastor's education, or lack thereof, on members leaving one church to join another. Most participants said that the pastor's education, or lack thereof, played a role in them leaving the church and other members leaving as well. Half of the participants said the messages or sermons that the pastor preached were irrelevant. People do not attend churches unless there is some connection with scripture. Gallup Poll (2017) suggested, "Three in four worshippers noted sermons or talks that either teach about scripture or help people connect religion to their own lives as major factors spurring their attendance (para. 1)." Some participants admitted that they left church feeling uninspired by the pastor's preaching, and the messages seemed thrown together. Rainer wrote, "More than 90 percent of pastors in America spend only two hours per week in sermon preparation each message preached" (Rainer, 2001, p. 67). Half of the participants were not engaged in the sermons and were not being fed. Falwell (1982), the term feed the flock, that is recorded in 1 Peter 1:2 suggests that one word 'feed' sums up the total pastoral responsibility to the flock or congregation (p. 749). All of the participants postulated credibility that the lack of education or seminary training was partly the blame for the pastor's irrelevant sermons. Malphurs (2003) Christian leaders are servants with credibility and capabilities which can influence people in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction (p. 33).

**Conclusion to RQ3.** *What, if any, does the pastor's vision for the church, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

The third research question addressed whether the pastor's vision for the church played a role in parishioners leaving the church. The participants attested to the fact that the vision of the pastor played a tremendous role in parishioners leaving the church. The pastor began making some changes, and he was not pliable, then some members began to leave. McNeal (2006) understood the challenges of leadership making unpopular decisions, and members would get frustrated, and some would even leave (p. 99). Five of the participants admitted to going to the pastor to ask him about making the changes, only to no avail. Participant 2 wanted the pastor to share his vision, but he was unwilling. Malphurs wrote,

Today more than in the past, they want to know where their leaders, especially pastors are taking them. They are tired of pastors who are directionless and boards that are wandering around in ministry circles like Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. If they feel that their leaders are wasting their time they will go elsewhere (pp. 59-60).

Some of the participants did not have a problem with the pastor, but they knew some of the parishioners that were attending did, and they are no longer attending. Newport (2018),

The parish concept is dead. People join a church because of the pastor. Those who find church leaders unsatisfactory can easily drift away from active participation, often not bothering to seek out a new church. This is particularly easy to do in the unique United States religious structure, which makes it possible to switch churches or even Protestant denominations with little effort (para. 18).

Participants no longer allowed the pastor to influence them positively. Clinton wrote, "All leaders have the capacity to influence" (p. 99). The pastor's influence is not always positive, and it can be detrimental to the growth and spiritual maturity of parishioners. The pastor's vision does not value relationships with the parishioners, which can lead to other problems. Rainer (2001) lack of relationship with the pastor led members to join other churches (p 77). Relationship and buy-in of the pastor's vision are vitally important because it binds them

together. John Bisagno asseverated, “The ideal pastor is much like his people. In all great growing churches, there is the common denominator of a homogeneous mix between pastor and people. They are comfortable with him, he with them” (2011, p. 97).

**Conclusion to RQ4.** *What, if any, did the pastor’s dissimilarity or disagreement, plays a role in parishioners leaving the church to join another?*

The fourth research question explored did the pastor’s dissimilarity or disagreement play in parishioners leaving the church to join another. The research forged toward dissimilarity and disagreement with the pastor played a role in parishioners leaving the church to join another. All ten of the participants either directly or indirectly witness this phenomenon. The participants presented real heartfelt experiences that shook them and other parishioners to their core. Some of the situations or interactions were often over the pulpit, during the sermon, or in church meetings. Participant 2 regretted her confrontation with the pastor and would handle the situation differently if the opportunity presented itself in the future. Chuck Swindoll wrote, “Sometimes separation is necessary. Sometimes disagreements cannot be resolved. It is not a matter of right and wrong but simply differences of opinion, and you must agree to disagree while staying friends. Leaving a church is always painful” (2009, para. 9). Half of the participants suggested that the pastor was selfish and that he wanted everything for himself. Ezekiel 34:1-5 reads

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? “You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. “The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. “So, they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered” (NKJV, 2012).

Disagreements with the pastor are not the end, but God prohibits being disagreeable. All of the participants suggested that members began leaving the church due to the confusion that was happening in the church between the pastor and the people. Richard Krejcir (2007) wrote,

When the hurt builds because it was not diffused by a simple effort of contact and care, these people may never come back to their home church-or any church. The statistics tell us; this is true in any church and why many are failing (para. 12)!

**Conclusion to RQ5.** *What, if any, does the pastor's termination, retirement, or death, plays a role in parishioners leaving one church to join another?*

The fifth and final research question focused on the impact that a pastor's termination, retirement, or death plays in parishioners leaving one church to join another. All participants said they did not experience the death or the termination of a pastor. Two of the participants experienced the retirement of a pastor. One of the two participants did go back to their 'home' church or the church they grew up in and experienced the differences between her childhood pastor and his successor. The conclusion for research question five rests in support of the retirement of the pastor did aid in parishioners leaving one church to join another. All ten participants admitted that they were fond of and greatly admired their former pastor juxtaposed to their feelings about the church's current pastor. Most of the participants emphatically believed that if the retired pastor were still pastoring the church, they would still be faithful members of that church. Half of the participants even went as far as to say they believed other parishioners who left the church would still be members. Newport (2018) states that people join a church because of the pastor. Those who find church leaders unsatisfactory can easily drift away from active participation, often to seek out a new church (para. 15). The one theme that was derived from the question was 'church was not the same.' The current pastor made some drastic autonomous changes. Bisagno (2011) the new pastor should give the church time to get to know



them before he presents new ideas (p. 143). Most of the participants did not agree with the pace the new pastor was making the changes. One participant used the adage, “He was going so fast, he did not let grass grow under his feet.” Sheep are led, not pushed (Bisagno, 2011, p. 143).

This research found that pastors are a factor in parishioners leaving one church to join another. Newport (2018), an interviewer asks church members about their minister; there may be built-in bias resulting from the fact that those who are more negative have already left the church -- either moving to another congregation (para. 5).

### **Research Limitations**

The study was limited to the geographical area of South Carolina. Broadening the realm of the research area could have produced a more diversified participants and population.

Diversity and inclusion are another limitation in this research. All the churches were of the National Baptist Convention. Also, all the participants were African American women. The lack of diversity in the participants was not due to the lack of trying, but churches of other Baptist Denominations declined to respond to the invitations. Some of the pastors that responded said they did not have any parishioners that fit the criteria, while other pastors did not respond at all. Another area for improvement was the need for other ethnicities with the same pastoral leadership problems. Luckel (2013), despite the fact that “there is little doubt that leadership in general and pastoral leadership, in particular, is a major factor in the church growth process” (p. 3).

This study evolved around ten participants is another limitation of this study. The study would have been more advantageous from having more time coupled with more participants. Thus, it is the researcher’s goal to continue to expand this research as time permits in the future. Using more participants would have added to the study's trustworthiness. John Maxwell said it

best, “Everything rises and falls on leadership” (2005, p. 269). Pastoral leadership is a primary factor in church relationships. Luckel (2013) wrote in his dissertation,

Kouzes and Pozner (2010) said, “Leadership begins with you and your belief in yourself. Leadership continues only if other people also believe in you” (p.15). They added, “Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow (p.16).

### **Implications for Further Research**

This study focused on pastoral leadership as the perceived factor for church members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. However, expanding the study to include all auxiliary affiliations, all ethnicities, pastors, and males would capture even more lived experience data other than this research purvey. The research can also examine other denominations for the same perceptions. Another area for further study can be found in looking at the death and termination of the lead pastor. Furthermore, interviewing male and female participants in the same study. In addition, the study did not interview participants that had women pastors, former or current.

Another area of study will be interviewing the participants via video coupled with face-to-face. Video recording will afford the researcher time to interview more participants that cannot meet due to distance or time. Some people are not comfortable with strangers. McBride (2021) said that McQuillan & Gehrmann wrote an article that addresses the impact of religious denominations on mentality and behavior (p. 143). She asserts that religious affiliation is a determinant of thoughts, behaviors, and mentalities.

Pastoral leadership is a challenging and daunting calling. For many the preliminary years of their pastoral assignment are the easiest. Rainer (2014) understood the first year of the one’s assignment as the honeymoon stage for the church and the pastor (p. 58). During the early years

of pastoral position, more conflicts arise in their personal and congregational duties (McBride, p. 143, Rainer p.58).

The study does not just focus on the pastor, but it would also look at the spiritual maturity of the participants that are interviewed. In some instances, spiritually immature Christians can be problematic. Some of the problems are not problems, but they maybe opportunities to do real ministry.

This study can also be used as a catalyst for the decline of church attendance in Baptist churches and more specific research with pastoral leadership as the main factor for church decline. The study can also be conducted to help reverse the curse of church members leaving one church to join another. Several studies have been conducted on declining church membership (Barna, 2021; Gallup Poll, 2018; Rainer, 2013).

A potentially different realm of the study was divulged during the research. The potential for the pastor's wife's role in parishioners leaving the church to join another church. Pastor's wives are in the middle and sometimes can be the voice of reason to cultivate and garner a different result.

### **Summary**

The research demonstrated that pastoral leadership is a factor in members leaving one church to join another in South Carolina. The answers to the research questions supported the evaluation of this conclusion derived from the participants. The findings revealed that parishioners' reasons for leaving one church to join another were impacted or aided by pastoral leadership.

The implications of the study can be fully understood with additional research. With additional research on this study, pastoral leadership is the perceived factor for members leaving

a church to join another in South Carolina. The inability of some pastors to be pliable, their lack of training, and the pastor's retirement played a part in church members leaving one church to join another. This study can be advantageous to churches and pastors in their pursuit of looking for pastors and pastors seeking a church. Pastors benefit from the study by recognizing the importance of the relationship with memberships. Churches can benefit from the study by identifying how to choose a pastor.

The study results have not only shed light on the importance of pastoral leadership, but they have also allowed the participants to self-reflect and examine how they can handle conflict and change better regarding church leadership. There were two notable takeaways from the research. First, pastoral leadership is vitally important to the church's growth, including spiritual and numerical. Second, in choosing a pastor, the church should vet them carefully and ensure that God has called that particular pastor to that church, not man. Pastoral leadership is more than preaching; it is giving of one's self for the betterment of the people. Paul penned,

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23, NIV, 2010).

Bisagno (2011) says pastors are called to be shepherds not ranchers of cattle, not church growth gurus, or executives. A faithful shepherd who works for the Owner takes really good care of His sheep (p. 98). The Lord Jesus sums it up this way, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep" (St. John 10:11). Pastoral leadership should mimic the heart of Jesus, "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5, KJV, 2005).

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**APPENDIX A****IRB Approval Letter****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 2, 2022

Bobby Dukes  
Joseph Butler

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-1077 PASTORAL LEADERSHIP AS A PERCEIVED  
FACTOR OF CHANGING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN SOUTH CAROLINA: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Bobby Dukes, Joseph Butler,

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

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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

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



If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Consent Form**

**Title of the Project:** Pastoral leadership as a perceived factor of changing church membership in South Carolina: A phenomenological Study

**Principal Investigator:** Bobby L. Dukes, Doctoral Candidate, Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

#### **Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to be part of a research study about pastoral leadership as the perceived factor for members changing church membership in South Carolina. To participate, you must be 18 or older and a Baptist church member who has changed churches within the last three years and who was a member of your previous church for at least three years.

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

The purpose of this study is to shed light on pastoral leadership as the perceived attributing factor of church members leaving one church to join another.

#### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

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

1. Participate in an audio and video recorded interview that should range from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. You will also be allowed to review the transcript for accuracy.

#### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society: This research will focus on pastoral leadership in South Carolina, but it will also be used to examine pastors in other parts of the world. While Christians are looking in the pews for

answers to understand why the church is in decline, this research seeks to ask them to take a look at the pulpit as well. The propensity of pastoral leadership being the causation for members leaving one church to join another is not a South Carolina problem alone. The hope of this researcher is to present research that will be applicable to other denominations.

### **Risks Associated with the Participants?**

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

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or 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.

- Participants responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.  
Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. Research records will be maintained on an external hard drive that is encoded to further guard participants' privacy.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

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

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

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

**Whom do you Contact if you have any Questions or Concerns about the Study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Bobby L. Dukes. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Joseph Butler.

**Whom do you Contact if you have any 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[s], 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](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

### **Interview Questions and Withdrawal**

Participant is a liberty not to answer any of the questions. Participants can withdraw at any time. Upon their withdrawal data that was collected will be properly disposed of; and, your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

### **Your Consent**

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to [audio-record/video-record/photograph] the person named below as part of their participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

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Printed LAR Name and Relationship to Subject

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LAR Signature

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Date

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Recruitment**

Dear Participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the cause of church decline and membership retention in churches located in South Carolina. The purpose of my research is to see if pastoral leadership is the main factor of members changing church membership, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

As a participant you must be 18 years of age or older and a Baptist church member who has changed churches within the past three years and was member of his/her previous church for at least three years. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview that should take 45 to 60 minutes. I will give you a copy of the transcript of the interview for you to review. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me for more information.

A consent document will be sent to you before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email before the interview. However, if you do not have an email address you can give it to me when we meet for the interview.

Sincerely,

Bobby L. Dukes

Ed.D Candidate

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Interview Questions**

I want to thank you again for participating in this study. Here is the list of the research questions asked during the interview process. If you have any questions, please feel to reach out to me without any hesitation.

#### ***Previous Church***

1. Would you please describe the church polity at your previous church?
2. What were the circumstances that led you to leave your former church ministry?
3. Did your children have an impact on your decision to leave? If so, how?

#### ***Teaching Style of the Pastor***

1. Describe the preaching style of your former pastor?
2. Describe how the preaching style of the pastor affected your decision to leave?
3. Describe the differences of the preaching styles of your former and current pastors?

#### ***Lead Pastor's Education***

1. Do you feel the seminary training played a role in the preaching of the pastor? If so, how?
2. Describe how challenged or convicted you felt because of the preaching of your former pastor?
3. Describe the type of messages your pastor preached? Do feel like the messages challenged you?

#### ***Connectedness to the Pastor's***

1. Describe whether your family's connection to the pastor helped with your connection with the pastor?

2. Describe whether your connection to the pastor made it harder for you to leave the church?
3. Did the lack of connection with the pastor influence members leaving the church? If so, how?

***Varying Perspective of the Pastor's Vision***

1. Please describe how decisions were made in the church?
2. What role did you perceive the pastor played in making decisions for the church?
3. Did you have a disagreement with the pastor that led to you leaving the church? If so, please explain?

***Pastor's Vision for the Church***

1. Describe how the pastor's vision for the church played a role in you leaving the church?
2. Please describe the pastor's vision for the church? Please describe your feelings about the pastor's vision?
3. Please describe the ministries that were in your former church? Did the lack of ministries you wanted to see at the church influence your decision to leave? If so, how?
4. Describe how the pastor handled leading the church during the COVID-19 pandemic?