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Challenging the Cancer of Consumerism Ravaging the American Protestant Church

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by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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The American Protestant church is sick and, in some cases, dying. The primary factors adversely influencing the church contribute to church members' warped view of Christianity. The American church is suffering from individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity. The church may be described as critically ill, and in the I.C.U. The purpose of this study was to address the effects of this cultural illness as it has impacted the people and ministry of Kingdom Life Community Church. This topic is chosen because of the researcher's experience serving as the church's lead pastor, observing members approach the church with a consumer bias. This study aimed to help members commit to the church's biblical mission through a five-session intensive intervention designed to increase member engagement. The researcher recruited ten church members and interviewed each to determine the participant's initial views and values. Each volunteer also completed an initial religiosity survey developed by the researcher for this study. The leadership team and seven non-participant members also completed the survey to establish a baseline. The ten participants completed a five-session course held virtually over six weeks. Participants revisited the survey and sat for an exit interview after the course. Three focus groups were convened to ascertain the church's health and viability of this thesis' claims. The study profoundly impacted participants. Immediate observable qualitative and measurable quantitative results confirmed positive results toward church revitalization. Further research on church organizational change, enhanced member spiritual formation, and effective leader development strategies may be engaged.

Key Words: church revitalization, member engagement, consumerism, organizational change

Contents

Tables

Illustrations

Figures

Abbreviations

ARC   *Association of Related Churches*

BPES   *Bel Pre Elementary School*

CFM   *Covenant Family Member*

CPD   *Census-designated Place*

DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

DUREL   *Duke University Religion Index*

FAM   *Fully Activated Members*

IRB   *Institutional Review Board*

KLCC   *Kingdom Life Community Church*

KLCC BOE   *Kingdom Life Community Church Board of Elders*

KLCC LT   *Kingdom Life Community Church Leadership Team*

KLI   *Kingdom Life Institute*

M2M   *Member to Minister*

M2M-CRT   *M2M Church Revitalization Toolbox*

M2M-SDC   *M2M SOS Serving Disciple Course*

RIM   *Relatively Inactive Members*

SOS   *Selfless Giving, Other mindedness, and Sacrificial Serving*

SOSRI   *SOS Religiosity Index*

SP'32   *Strategic Plan 2032*

WAVE   *Willing Active Volunteer Engagement*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The American Protestant church is not healthy. It is being consumed from within by a cancer targeting the core tenets of the Christian faith. Consumerism and the self-centered philosophical position that fosters it strike at the root of what it means to follow Jesus. Christ specified the prerequisite for following Him is self-denial (Luke 9:23). The American consumer culture promotes precisely the opposite.

William Dickens argues that consumerism's cancer produces an unrealistic picture of freedom in congregants, one centered on the individual and predicated on one's ability to purchase what one desires.[1] Dickens further posits that consumerism blinds the church to its primary focus, shifting it instead to a promised future financial blessing.[2] Consumerism, therefore, is a potentially devastating social problem sweeping through the American church, undermining the longstanding Christian values of selfless giving, other-mindedness, and sacrificial service. Self-serving in nature and fueled by the devastating effect consumption has on the church's life, this cancer is attacking the health and future of the Protestant church in America.[3]

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[1] W. T. Dickens, "Living Upside Down: Inverting Consumerism's Notion of Freedom," *Theology Today* 74, no. 4 (January 2018): 377.

[2] Ibid., 385.

[3] Ibid., 386.

Considering the cancer of consumerism from a purely materialistic perspective would be short-sighted. The issue is not about what one may acquire; it focuses on one's entitlement to profit from each personal exchange.[4] Dickens, citing Pope Francis's position on the impact of consumerism on the Roman Catholic Church, acknowledges the pontiff's concern that parishioners have turned aside from their consideration of the poor and needy to gain a good return on their ecclesiastical investment.[5] The church is not an investment firm, promising more return than what church attendees invest. The fact that the church's constituents would view the church on a commoditized scale is proof that consumerism has blurred the lines between Wall Street and the American church.

Debra White Smith, assessing the domino effect of the consumer culture surging through the American church, observes, "Since the current U.S. culture is consumer-driven, the small-church pastor is faced with reaching the members of a culture who shop for a church as if they were shopping for the best buy at the local department store."[6] Saint Augustine argues that God's people are to relate to the things of this world as pilgrims would: neither "captivated by them, nor ... deflected by them from ... progress towards God."[7] The cancer of consumerism ropes one into the bondage of self-gratification rather than propelling one deeper into a life of "mutual dependency, service, and care."[8] Consumerism shifts the focus from God's glory and others' needs to oneself and one's selfish desires.

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[4] Mikko Kurenlahti and Arto O. Salonen, "Rethinking Consumerism from the Perspective of Religion," *Sustainability* 10, no. 7 (2018): 4–6.

[5] Dickens, "Living Upside Down," 393.

[6] Debra White Smith, "Ministerial Training on Consumer Culture and Volunteer Management May Prevent Burnout for Small-Church Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 69, no. 3 (June 2020): 226.

[7] Dickens, "Living Upside Down," 386.

[8] Ibid., 393.

A well-documented correlation exists between the degree of selflessness and other-mindedness in a community and that community's engagement in volunteering.[9] Service suffers when a congregation's focus turns inward rather than upward and outward. Research also suggests a strong correlation between church attendance and volunteer service. Consequently, church leaders are forced into a quandary.[10] The thrust of consumerism tempts church leaders to cater to the metric of the shopping consumer, packaging and marketing the religious experience in the hope that they will buy. Conversely, church leaders may also ignore the appetites of a culture that shops for a church in the same way one would shop for a house and risk their church starving to death.

The cancer of consumerism seriously threatens the health and future of the American Protestant church. This DMIN action research project will consider the influence of consumerism on the church and seek to develop ways to combat its effects by cultivating servant-minded volunteers in the church.

Ministry Context

Kingdom Life Community Church (KLCC) meets in Silver Spring, a Montgomery County, Maryland, suburb. Montgomery County, with a population of just over one million, is one of two Maryland counties bordering Washington, DC.[11] The county's median age is just under 40, and the average household income is almost $112,000.[12] Among counties with populations greater than 65,000, Montgomery ranks 15th wealthiest in the U.S., based on per

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[9] Joonmo Son and John Wilson, "Is There a Bidirectional Causal Relationship Between Religiosity and Volunteering?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 60, no. 4 (2021): 751.

[10] Ibid., 751.

[11] "Montgomery County, MD," Data USA, accessed March 21, 2023, https://datausa.io/profile/geo/montgomery-county-md

[12] Ibid.

capita income.[13] Sixty-five percent of county residents are homeowners, and most households in Montgomery County have at least two cars.[14] The county has moderate ethnic/racial diversity, being comprised of Whites (non-Hispanic) (43%), Blacks or African Americans (18%), Hispanics (18%), Asians (15%), and all other ethnicities (6%).[15] Sixty-eight percent of residents were born U.S. citizens; 32 percent were foreign-born.[16] The most common professional positions held by county residents are in the fields of management, business operations, finance, office administration, sales, and technology.[17] Like most of Maryland, Montgomery County is a "blue county," decidedly Democratic in its political affiliation and voting history.[18] In the seven presidential elections held from 1996 to 2020, no less than 60 percent of county voters voted for the Democratic candidate.[19]

Silver Spring rests along the southeastern edge of Montgomery County and covers eight square miles of the county's property.[20] While not incorporated, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Silver Spring is officially recognized as a Census-designated Place (CDP).[21] With a population of just under 84,000, this densely populated suburb is home to more than 10,000

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[13] "Quick Stats: Montgomery County, MD," Montgomery County Planning Department, accessed March 21, 2023, https://montgomeryplanning.org

[14] Data USA.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] "Maryland Electoral Votes," Statistica, accessed March 21, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1130580/maryland-electoral-votes-since–1789

[19] "Silver Spring, Maryland," City Data, accessed March 21, 2023, https://www.city-data.com/city/Silver-Spring-Maryland.html

[20] "Silver Spring, Maryland Population," World Population Review, accessed March 21, 2023, https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/silver-spring-md-population

[21] "Silver Spring Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 27, 2023, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/silverspringcdp.m.aryland

persons per square mile.[22] Silver Spring is a predominately well-educated community, with more than 72 percent of residents attending college.[23] Forty-five percent of Silver Spring residents are married, and the average family has around three members living in their household.[24] Of Silver Spring residents over 25 years old, 12 percent have divorced, separated, or are widows, and 88 percent are married or single, having never married.[25]

KLCC worships at Bel Pre Elementary School (BPES), the academic home to kindergarten through second-grade students living in the Strathmore Bel Pre community. Situated on the corner of a well-traveled intersection, BPES enjoys high visibility, and KLCC maximizes this visibility with adequate promotional church signage. KLCC rents the school's multi-purpose room and additional classrooms for several hours each Sunday morning and once a month for special Saturday evening church activities.

While KLCC is open to all seeking the Lord, the church defines its market as the five-mile radius surrounding BPES. The church's defined vineyard includes nine zip codes, extending the reach of KLCC from Bel Pre/Aspen Hill to the following neighboring Maryland locales: Olney, Hillandale, Cloverly/Fairland, Colesville, Kemp Mill, Calverton/Beltsville, Rockville, and Wheaton. This densely populated swath of Montgomery County is home to more than 360,000 Maryland residents. KLCC's vision is to reach each household with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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[22] World Population Review.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] City Data.

As with 70 percent of all U.S. Protestant churches, KLCC is the spiritual home to a growing congregation numbering less than 100 people.[26] Demographically, the adults in the congregation represent a 60/40 ratio of women to men. Statistically, 30 percent of the assembly are single, 45 percent married, 10 percent are youth (ages 11–18), and 15 percent are children (ages birth–10). Eighty-seven percent of the adult parishioners are actively employed, while 13 percent of congregants have formally entered retirement.

Most members of KLCC have become associated with the church through personal word-of-mouth invitations, with a few responding to local advertising. KLCC mails postcards to 5,000 residents every other month, inviting them to visit one of many social media platforms or plan a Sunday morning visit to one of the church's weekly services.

KLCC is a church plant that began holding Sunday services in September 2011. Initially, KLCC held services in John Kennedy High School, 3.5 miles from BPES. In 2017, KLCC relocated to BPES, preserving most of its congregation during the transition. KLCC's founding pastor, supported by a governing board of elders, executes church governance. A leadership team works alongside the pastor to implement the church's 10-year strategic plan (SP'32) and undergirds the church's ministry. The theological underpinnings of the church are found in the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37–40) and Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20). KLCC leadership organizes all ministry activities around seven pillars drawn primarily from those two landmark statements recorded during Jesus's ministry. KLCC frames its ministry around worship (loving God), fellowship (loving others), outreach (going), evangelism (making disciples), member assimilation (baptizing), and discipleship (teaching). The seventh pillar is

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[26] Smith, "Ministerial Training," 225.

administration, resting on Paul's instruction to "let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40 NKJV).

KLCC comprises 15 ministries, including Media Ministry, Social Media Ministry, Singles' Social Media Communications Team, Children's Ministry, Men's Ministry, Women's Ministry, Marriage Enrichment Ministry, Resource/Store Ministry, Logistics Support Ministry, KLCC Ambassadors Ministry, Hospitality/Fellowship Ministry, Security Team, Health and Wellness Ministry, Intercessory Prayer Ministry, and Outreach Team. Of these 15 ministries, four exist to serve members of the church; seven provide opportunities for members to serve by supporting an aspect of Sunday worship services; one is a hybrid, helping the children while providing an opportunity for adult leaders to serve; and four provide opportunities for church members to go beyond the walls of the church to impact the larger community.

KLCC was birthed in 2011 as the fruition of the founding pastor's vision, which was nurtured for more than a decade. In December 2009, while actively serving in ministry at their former church, KLCC's pastor and his wife received a prophetic message at a worship service that confirmed the timing of their next ministry venture. They began praying and planning, and soon stepped out in faith. Starting in the spring of 2010, they began meeting with their prayer circle concerning the launch of their vision. In September 2010, the ministry couple began holding Bible Study sessions with their launch team. On September 11, 2011, they had their first worship service, and Kingdom Life Community Church was born.

Though unaffiliated with a denomination, KLCC leaders consider the church more interdenominational than nondenominational. Kingdom Life's culture incorporates the most biblical practices of several denominational beliefs. The founding pastor and his wife hail from the Methodist tradition, and the Elder's Board chairman comes from a Southern Baptist

background. Some members came to Kingdom Life with a Pentecostal or Holiness Church tradition. Others came from the independent influence of so-called Word churches. KLCC is a melting pot of Christian practices embraced to the degree that they are biblical and bring a parishioner into greater freedom in Christ.

KLCC's culture is also heavily influenced by the spiritual journey of its founding pastor. Though raised by church-going parents attending a Methodist church, the pastor initially rejected the Christian life as a path he would follow. Once he graduated high school and left home for college, he chose to live a life that excluded God, becoming an avowed atheist. This became problematic when he was dating a Methodist pastor's daughter in the spring semester of his freshman year of college. By his junior year, they were engaged, and they married in mid-October, following their undergraduate commencement. Over the next five years, as his wife prayed for his salvation, the would-be-pastor slipped from atheist to curious agnostic. Then, early in the couple's sixth year of marriage and through a series of divine encounters, he received the Lord, renounced his atheism, and began serving God. Twenty years later, he began meeting with a group of prayer partners, and Kingdom Life came to fruition.

Because the pastor had been an atheist, somehow avoiding the religious indoctrination of his childhood upbringing, he approached his new Christian life and ministry in a fresh, unorthodox style. The pastor's unconventional approach to living what he calls the kingdom life has profoundly influenced KLCC. Several Kingdom Lifers have described the church as "a different kind of church" or "church the way it was intended to be." Whether those claims are valid, KLCC is markedly unique in the liberty afforded its members and the transparency of its leaders' practice. The church's tagline is "Helping ordinary people live God-empowered

extraordinary lives."[27] KLCC strives to be a community where skeptics, seekers, believers, and committed disciples may coexist and labor together to grow and learn as they become the people God intends.

Kingdom Life devotes considerable attention to discipleship, teaching, and practice. KLCC practices the belief that discipleship is intentionally and actively cultivating a kingdom mind, pure heart, and whole soul in a believer, resulting in that person conforming to the image of God in Christ. KLCC focuses considerable ministry resources on coaching each member through the process of mind-renewal, heart-conversion, and soul-restoration so that they may embrace and live in what Paul calls the "newness of life" (Rom 6:4 NKJV). KLCC has designed four of the church's 15 ministries to contribute to and further participants' discipleship and Christian maturity.

This researcher is the founding and current Senior Pastor of Kingdom Life Community Church. The Board of Elders, Leadership Team, and congregation fully support this DMIN Action Research project (see Appendix B). Each entity is committed to working cooperatively toward a healthier, more Christ-centered church culture. Several key church members eagerly anticipate the intervention process that is to come.

Problem Presented

KLCC members are enthusiastic about belonging to the church and most regularly attend Sunday worship services. Members often express gratitude for sermons, teaching series, virtual coaching sessions, and online classes. Nonetheless, KLCC church leaders experience consistent challenges when planning a non-worship event and rallying members to volunteer.

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[27] "Welcome," Kingdom Life Community Church, accessed March 27, 2023, https://www.myklcc.org

This researcher has studied the congregation's habits and patterns, deducing that KLCC, like many American churches, is suffering from the influence of consumerism. Members relate to KLCC as though it is a place where they come to have their spiritual needs met. While this is true, KLCC, like other churches, is also a point of distribution, a spiritual outpost the Lord desires to use to reach those in the community with the love of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To fulfill its divine calling and mission to reach the larger community and advance God's kingdom beyond the walls of its worship center, KLCC must successfully undergo cultural reformation from its current consuming/taking mindset to a producing/giving paradigm. Such a reformation is critical if KLCC is to fulfill its God-given purpose. The problem at Kingdom Life Community Church is a prevailing "me-centered" consumer culture that inhibits members from transitioning systematically into active volunteers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to teach a course to adult KLCC members that would inspire them toward more committed volunteer service. This project will develop and implement this course and evaluate its efficacy in converting passive members into active volunteers. This DMIN action research project will assess member religiosity, provide teaching and training through a 10-week M2M (member-to-minister) process highlighting the *M2M SOS* Church Paradigm Shift Model, and conclude by documenting changes in member commitment to determine the success of this intervention.

Basic Assumptions

This DMIN action research project will assess KLCC member religiosity, identifying fully activated members (FAM) and distinguishing them from relatively inactive members (RIM) to evaluate changes in religiosity following the planned project intervention. This researcher holds five key assumptions. This researcher assumes he can accurately designate good markers that reliably identify members as part of the FAM or the RIM and develop accurate religiosity indices to provide a reliable standard for evaluating and classifying constituents' commitment levels. This researcher also assumes the participant selection process and subsequent assignment to the FAM or the RIM will be equitable, accurately reflecting each participant's religiosity level. Incorrectly identifying a church member's current religiosity level and willingness to volunteer could skew the results and conclusions drawn at the end of the study.

Further, the researcher assumes that KLCC members invited to participate will agree to be involved in this action research project. Participation is voluntary; therefore, invited participants may respectfully choose to decline. Additionally, this researcher assumes participants will offer honest feedback during the process. This project will include surveys, knowledge checks, personal interviews, and focus groups to gather data. Open and full cooperation is essential to the veracity of the study's findings.

Finally, this researcher assumes that the data collected during this project will be accurately interpreted and applied judiciously to KLCC's ministry context. This project will only impact KLCC and produce beneficial, lasting change if the research team diagnoses root issues and identifies viable solutions during this action research project.

Definitions

This DMIN action research thesis employs several terms bearing specific meanings within this context. The study's arguments will be developed around this chapter's definitions. A clear understanding of terminology is essential. Below are explanations of critical terms.

Christian Service. This term will refer to a church member's volunteer investment of time and energy to support activities that further God's agenda within and beyond the church walls. Barna asserts that active service will follow when Christians develop a deep passion for Christ, mature into a clear understanding of Christian fundamentals, and adopt a biblical worldview.[28] Donald Whitney categorizes Christian service as a spiritual discipline in that it is a fundamental part of one's life of faith.[29]

Consumerism. Consumerism is an economic theory that supports consumers buying goods and services. Elana Nedulcu quotes Larousse's dictionary, defining consumerism as a "lifestyle focused on consumption and characterized by a tendency to systematically buy new goods."[30] Nedulcu explains that a consumeristic culture is one where "the consumption of goods (tangible or intangible) is constitutive of social relations and social meanings."[31] Consumerism, as it relates to the American Protestant church, represents a cultural mindset in which church members exhibit tendencies toward self-consumption. A consumer-oriented congregation evaluates the merits of a church by how that church meets its needs and fits its buying criteria.

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[28] George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2013), 98–101.

[29] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 141–143.

[30] Elana Nedulcu, "Consumerism Versus the Culture of Existential Intelligence," *Romanian Review of Social Sciences*, no. 20 (2021): 4.

[31] Ibid., 4.

Their approach to Christianity is more transactional than relational, and they vote with their financial donations and attendance at services or events.

Paul warned against embracing such a consumeristic, self-focused mindset, instructing, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests but also for the interests of others" (Phil 2:4 NKJV). As Paul called his readers toward other-mindedness, he was also nudging them away from consumerism. The consumer-oriented Christian holds the ideology expressed in the question, "What is in it for me?" This is the ultimate declaration of a consumer-oriented Christian. God's promises and provision are but a means to an end–self-satisfaction for the believer who self-qualifies to have their needs and desires divinely provided.

Covenant Family Member (CFM). This study recognizes the term KLCC uses for those who hold full-member-in-good-standing status in the church. By covenant, KLCC acknowledges its belief that joining a church must not be an expression of personal preferences, met desires, or social grouping. Instead, KLCC holds that church membership should express obedience to one's covenantal relationship with God. In this way, church membership is more vertical (between the believer and God) than horizontal (one member to another). G.L. Archer notes that God is the benefactor of all theological covenants as the beneficiaries commit themselves to uphold their end of the covenantal mandate.[32] Covenant family membership is KLCC's practical theological application of this truth.

Fully Activated Member (FAM). This term will refer to those members of KLCC who participate passionately in the church's life. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey describe this

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[32] G. L. Archer, Jr., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 299.

member as "spiritually formed … deeply rooted in God's love."[33] A fully activated member is thoroughly engaged in whole-hearted pursuit of God, and their lifestyle reveals that deep commitment. Their attendance is regular, and they function as highly vested stakeholders in the church, giving and volunteering freely to support the ministry. In this study, those in the FAM are Covenant Family Members who faithfully observe six core practices.

Those in the FAM 1) attend Sunday services at least three weeks per month, 2) attend 75 percent of a discipleship/growth ministry's sessions, 3) volunteer to support at least 75 percent of a service ministry's available engagements, 4) give financially at least monthly, 5) pray for the church's mission at least weekly, and 6) spread Christ's message often and consistently.

Kingdom living. KLCC members frequently use this term to describe living as a committed and mature disciple of Christ. The understanding of kingdom living or living the kingdom life (as it is often stated) is a three-part commitment that the KLCC member (1) lives according to the Word of God, (2) is empowered and led by the Spirit of God, and (3) their primary motivation is to do all for the glory of God.[34]

Me-centered gospel. Mark Batterson argues that in many American Protestant churches, the gospel of Christ has been inverted, turned into a warped message that "masquerades as spirituality" but is me-centered instead of "Christ-centric."[35] The so-called me-centered gospel is an outgrowth of a narcissistic society that influences the church member to seek their own benefit at all costs. Instead of serving God and His purposes, this twisted faux gospel compels

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[33] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Spiritual Formation Is. . . : How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2018), 17.

[34] "Church Slogan," Kingdom Life Community Church (Silver Spring, MD: Kingdom Life Community Church, 2023).

[35] Mark Batterson, *All In You Are One Decision Away from a Totally Different Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 15–16.

Christians to serve their interests, hoping God will fulfill their desires. Instead of viewing God as the boss and seeking His will and approval, the me-centered gospel beckons its adherents to view God as a glorified butler, serving their wishes and desires.[36] As this study applies this term, it represents one of the common manifestations of the influence of consumerism within the church, as deceived parishioners believe that the promised good life is an entitlement and, therefore, can be negotiated.

Donald Bloesch agrees that in many contemporary Protestant churches, "worship is far more egocentric than theocentric."[37] Bloesch posits that all too often, "the aim is less to give glory to God than to satisfy the longings of the human heart."[38] One study of the population group referred to as millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, reveals them to be especially me-centric.[39] The authors of the study note that in 2013, even *Time Magazine* hailed them as the "Me Me Me Generation."[40] This mentality fits well in a consumer-driven church. In the eyes of many of its parishioners, this church exists to meet the needs of, cater to the preferences of, and play to the applause of its constituents.

Megachurch. This term refers to any church that has at least 2,000 in average weekly attendance.[41] Tim Suttle argues that the megachurch represents the body of Christ "on steroids," pumped up to an inordinate size by "models, strategies, and techniques gleaned not from the gospel … but from the world of business and the narrative of consumer capitalism."[42] Some

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[36] Batterson, *All In*, 16–17.

[37] Donald G. Bloesch, "Whatever Happened to God?" *Christianity Today*, (February 5, 2001): 54.

[38] Ibid., 54.

[39] Aparna Pandey, Anjali Chopra, and Shailaja Karve, "Manipulating Impressions in the 'ME' Culture: A Study of Millennial Consumers." *Journal of Customer Behaviour* 19.1 (2020): 52–53.

[40] Pandey, Chopra, and Karve, "Manipulating," 53.

[41] Tim Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 53.

[42] Ibid., 52–53.

researchers have found that the megachurch experience is more akin to attending a high-tech entertainment venue than a sacred worship service.[43]

Member Religiosity. This religious research term refers to a Christian's demonstrated commitment to their professed faith tenets. Duke University's Harold Koenig has developed the five-question Duke University Religion Index (DUREL), which considers pertinent aspects of one's faith and practice.[44] Church attendance, the practice of personal spiritual disciplines, reports of divine encounters, and the influence of one's faith in practical matters factor into one's perceived religiosity.[45]

Prosperity gospel. This self-focused and, therefore, warped Christian ideology is what Peter Mundey argues is aimed more at offering adherents their slice of the American dream than celebrating Christ's finished work on Calvary.[46] The focus of the prosperity gospel, also known as the American gospel, and the gospel of Health and Wealth is the faithful follower's entitlement to physical health and financial prosperity.[47] The epitome of Batterson's inverted gospel, this prosperity gospel is the natural outgrowth of an unhealthy mix of orthodox Christianity with consumer culture.[48] Mary Wrenn describes the Prosperity gospel's message as "the American Dream reshaped and given clear instructions" for the faithful to realize total

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[43] Josiah Kidwell and Michael Ian Borer, "The Sanctuary of the Spectacle: Megachurches and the Production of Christian Celebrities and Consumers," *Journal of Media and Religion* 20, no. 2 (2021): 55–56.

[44] Harold G. Koenig and Arndt Büssing, "The Duke University Religion Index (DUREL): A Five-Item Measure for Use in Epidemiological Studies," *Religions* 1, no. 1 (2010): 79–80.

[45] Ibid., 79–80.

[46] Peter Mundey, "The Prosperity Gospel and the Spirit of Consumerism According to Joel Osteen," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 39, no. 3 (2017): 340.

[47] Kathleen Hladky, "I Double-Dog Dare You in Jesus's Name! Claiming Christian Wealth and the American Prosperity Gospel." *Religion Compass* 6, no. 1 (2012): 82–83.

[48] Batterson, *All In*, 16–17.

health and abundant wealth.[49] This message and the so-called ministry that supports its effective delivery has become synonymous with consumer-driven faux Christianity. Though the outright preaching of a name-it-and-claim-it message is more likely found in Charismatic, non-denominational churches, the tenets of a faith validated primarily by the benefits bestowed on its adherents are prevalent throughout the American Protestant Church.

Relatively Inactive Member (RIM). This term will refer to those members of KLCC who functionally participate in the church's life peripherally. Their attendance is sporadic, commitment is spotty, investment of time and resources is low, and volunteerism is virtually nonexistent. Batterson calls such members "rim huggers."[50] In this study, the RIM will consist of Family Covenant Members who (1) attend weekly Sunday worship services less than twice a month, (2) do not participate in a discipleship/growth ministry or attend less than 75 percent of ministry meetings, (3) volunteer to support less than 75 percent of a service ministry's engagement calendar, (4) support the church financially less than monthly, if at all.

This study acknowledges that some may be identified as part of the RIM due to influences beyond their control. Some KLCCs are working through serious health issues impacting attendance and engagement. Some members are primary caregivers for others, and their duties prohibit them from engaging more fully in the life of the church. Therefore, this study will not assign value to a member's level of participation. Instead, this study will identify those who, for unspecified reasons, are interacting with the church at a RIM level and determine if it is reasonable, in their case, to increase their engagement level.

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[49] Mary V. Wrenn, "Consecrating Capitalism: The United States Prosperity Gospel and Neoliberalism," *Journal of Economic Issues*, 53:2 (2019): 431.

[50] Batterson, *All In*, 77.

Willing Active Volunteer Engagement (WAVE). As a rogue wave or tsunami builds momentum approaching an island's shoreline, the desired outcome of this study is to develop a process by which KLCC can systematically cultivate FAM members from those currently identified as part of the RIM. The effectiveness of any potential solution will rest on its ability to be replicated, duplicated, and instituted with a momentum that leads to lasting organizational change. Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson outlined three steps ministry leaders must implement to cultivate momentum in such a paradigm shift, including (1) regular articulation of the church's theological values, (2) immediate activation of members who are ready to serve, and (3) ongoing celebration of those who embrace the transition from pew sitter to active volunteer.[51]

Limitations

Six factors beyond this researcher's control may limit this DMIN action research project. The first limitation is that it will rely on a convenient rather than a random sample for research data and participation in the ministry intervention. This limitation will limit the implications of this study's results because all the participants are members of the same church and, therefore, are influenced by the same local church culture.

The second limitation is the potential effect of authority influence on the participants in this DMIN action research study. This researcher also serves as the primary teaching pastor and key spiritual leader of KLCC. Therefore, because the researcher will be working with church members, he could lead some participants to alter their responses to the survey and interview questions in order to be viewed favorably by their pastor.

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[51] Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Connect: How to Double Your Number of Volunteers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 173–78.

The third limitation is this researcher's research design and methodology. This DMIN action research project will attempt to gather data to assess cultural values relative to individual and corporate religiosity. The project design must incorporate several data-gathering methodologies to produce valuable data from this convenient sample. This study will employ surveys, interviews, and focus groups, while other potentially beneficial methodologies may be overlooked in the design of this study.

The fourth limitation of this project is the lack of precedent literature on the subject, specifically dealing with the impact of consumer culture on individual and corporate religiosity in the American Protestant church. There is considerable research and writing on consumerism and its cultural impact on the world's cultures, the secularization of the church at large, the correlation between organizational leadership and stakeholder engagement, and cultivating more profound commitment and involvement in church members. There is literature addressing the impact of consumerism on the American Protestant church; however, it is relatively sparse.

Time is the fifth limitation of this DMIN action research project. This researcher will conduct this study during the summer and fall of 2023. More time is required to assess this project's long-term, lasting impact and, therefore, to accurately assess its effectiveness in producing a permanent shift in individual and corporate cultural values.

Finally, the sixth limitation of this study is access to the participants. KLCC meets weekly for Sunday services and has limited its midweek calendar to allow members to participate in discipleship home groups and to spend time with family. This project faces the challenge of accessing otherwise busy church members for an additional weekly class, interview, or other data-gathering encounters.

Delimitations

The first delimitation of this DMIN action research project is that it is designed as a qualitative rather than quantitative research project. By design, this project will focus more on each participant's quality and involvement rather than seeking a wide cross-section sample of several churches throughout KLCC's community.

The second delimitation is that this project's potential participant population is limited to twenty to thirty KLCC members who will be screened and selected through a process developed by this researcher. The process is designed to identify the most suitable candidates for participation and establish and maintain a demographic balance representative of KLCC's membership.

The third delimitation is that this study combines anonymous, blind surveys and one-on-one interviews. The surveys utilized in this study will encourage participants to respond honestly, allowing the researcher to gather relatively unbiased data. The interviews in this project will provide accountability for the participants, enabling them to respond thoughtfully and intentionally to interview questions.

The final delimitation of this project is the employment of an evaluation team to assist the researcher in processing and analyzing the issues and challenges of the community and the responses of the blind surveys. The researcher will select the evaluation team members from the pool of research participants.

Thesis Statement

Scripture provides a clear mandate that calls pastors and other church leaders to work together to equip the church for effective ministry work (Eph 4:11–12). The M2M process is KLCC leadership's commitment to fulfill this scriptural mandate and to provide the attending but

otherwise disengaged KLCC members an opportunity to learn the importance of, be prepared for, and be dispatched into active volunteer opportunities. If passive church members matriculate through a 10-week M2M (member to minister) process, KLCC will significantly increase volunteers.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Serving God is an essential aspect of the Christian life. Churches plagued by a consumer-driven culture will struggle to overcome members' biases toward what the ministry offers them and how they may benefit from their membership. The church must undergo a significant cultural paradigm shift to catapult it out of this rut and into a culture that promotes and embraces active members who willingly volunteer.

Literature Review

This literature review covers consumerism and its influence on the American church, the nature and shortcomings of a consumer-driven church, and the rise and power of the so-called secular church. This review also covers religiosity as a measure of individual spiritual commitment. It addresses how American consumerism, church health, organizational and leadership effectiveness, and religious relevance impact personal Christian religiosity. Finally, this literature review covers solutions to aid the church in cultivating commitment-based religiosity among church members.

The Influence of Consumerism on the American Church

One of the most significant influences on the protestant church in America today is the pressure of consumerism. Americans have become a nation of consumers, and the thirst for consumption has spilled over into many aspects of American life. The American church has not been immune to this consumer-driven infection. Craig Peters argues that consumerism twists people's perspective, causing them to approach Christianity from the standpoint of what they can

gain from it.[1] Peters posits that many parishioners attend with misguided motives, seeking only what they may receive for their investment of time and donation dollars.[2] Peters laments that American Christians' approach to God and their salvific relationship with God centers more on what they stand to receive than believers giving God the honor he is due.[3]

Peter Mundey, considering the influence of consumerism within the North American church, argues that a spirit of consumption has given rise to the so-called Prosperity Gospel, in which adherents chase the so-called American dream as though God owes them their slice of the proverbial American pie.[4] Other authors agree with Mundey's assessment, noting that consumerism skews one's views, turning one's focus inward and establishing one's value predicated on one's ability to purchase what one desires and meet one's needs.[5]

The church, however, has been established to fulfill the mission of Christ by producing disciples who produce disciples, in part, by selflessly ministering to the needs of those outside the fold in the name of the Lord. A consumer-minded Christian is at odds with God's divine purposes. Consumerism is so counter-positioned to God's kingdom mission that when it infiltrates the church, its influence "derails the mission of the church itself, its goals of service, love of neighbor, all features of God's Kingdom economy."[6] Consumerism points the church

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[1] Craig E. Peters, "Recapturing the Transformational Power of the Church: Moving Beyond Consumerism and Individualism to Experiencing Life-Changing Christian Community," (DMIN thesis., Northeastern Seminary, 2018), 41.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Mundey, "The Prosperity Gospel," 340.

[5] Dickens, "Living Upside Down," 377.

[6] Priscilla A. Lawrence, "American Consumerism and God's Kingdom Economy in a Massachusetts Congregation," (DMIN thesis, Boston University School of Theology, 2022), 26.

inward, causing a faith community that should be a beacon of hope for God-seekers to sink into the useless pursuit of self-gratification and self-absorption.

Josiah Kidwell and Michael Borer consider the influence of consumerism by examining the rise of the Christian phenomenon known as the megachurch.[7] Quoting Neil Postman, Kidwell, and Borer argue that the megachurch rests upon an entertainment paradigm.[8] Church leaders strive weekly to entertain and engage a congregation that must feel its needs are consistently met through ministry programs, relevant preaching, concert-like worship "performances," and exciting, socially hyped events. In such a ministry model, everything that makes Christianity "a historic, profound, and sacred human activity is stripped away."[9] This twisted brand of Christianity is no longer a Christ-centered movement of spiritual formation and kingdom advancement. Instead, it has become a quasi-spiritual gathering of religious thrill seekers and self-serving patrons.

It is undebatable that consumerism has significantly impacted American culture and society. One may reach this conclusion by mere empirical observation, and many authors have supported such a conclusion. The gap in the literature adequately addresses how the American church can stop the onslaught of consumption within the church and cultivate church members who are more committed to Christ and His kingdom than their personal benefits.

The Consumer-Driven Church

Some congregations have not resisted the tide of consumerism flooding the American church. Perhaps this is because they did not recognize the cultural attack underway or lacked the

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[7] Kidwell and Borer, "The Sanctuary," 53–64.

[8] Ibid., 57.

[9] Ibid.

knowledge and skills to rectify the cultural slide. Thus, they were unable to redirect the church into a kingdom-centered culture. Given the allure of the megachurch and the celebrity status of some megachurch pastors, it is reasonable that an American church pastor might aspire to lead such a consumer-oriented congregation.

When consumer-driven congregants attend a consumer-driven church, they do so more likely for their share of the idealized American dream than to participate through volunteering to help the church fulfill its mission.[10]

Consumerism, however, will be a challenging foe to overcome. Consumption is deeply rooted in the American way of life. Priscilla Lawrence contends that consumerism is entrenched in American society and the underpinnings of how many Christians approach their practical theology in many American churches. A common trait of today's megachurch is the mixing of religion, popular culture, and high-tech media to produce a form of entertainment with a growing consumer base waiting to buy it.[11]

Unquestionably, Christianity in America is being marketed and sold as a commodity to a consuming public. Some authors contribute that when religion offers its adherents a packaged promise of prosperity, it sells them a well-crafted product, the benefits of which are all centered around the consumer.[12] One definition of religion is a system that enables people to live "with a sense of identity, meaning, and purpose."[13] From this perspective, one may rightly argue that consumerism has become a quasi-religion in America. This is the danger and damaging impact of consumerism on the church in America.

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[10] Kurenlahti and Salonen, "Rethinking Consumerism," 11.

[11] Kidwell and Borer, "The Sanctuary," 55.

[12] Kurenlahti and Salonen, "Rethinking Consumerism," 10–11.

[13] Ibid.

The Rise and Influence of the Secular Church

America's megachurch mania has contributed to the rise of the so-called secular church. In a secular church, believers are more likely to give motivated by what they expect to receive in return than by the principles of selfless and sacrificial giving to the Lord.[14] The challenge facing the church in America is that many churches have designed their ministries around a message and practice heavily influenced by culture.[15]

Roman Poplavsky challenges the commonly held notion that American society has grown less interested in religion as it has become more obsessed with consumption.[16] He argues that society has become more absorbed in consumerism, and so has the church. Therefore, where there exists a clear Christian tenet that requires its adherents to shun the world and the values it touts, the new secular brand of the Christian church embraces the world's values and encourages its followers to indulge in all the world has to offer.[17] Smith argues that the American consumer culture has spilled over into the American church, metaphorically forcing pastors to sell their church's membership to the highest bidder.[18] In most cases, lacking the financial budget and staffing to support an elaborate Sunday morning production, the small church cannot compete with the megachurch, whose media team is often so technologically skilled and well-funded that they make the congregant feel more like a concert-goer than a Christian worshipper.[19]

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[14] Mundey, "The Prosperity Gospel," 334.

[15] Peters, "Recapturing the Transformational Power," 3.

[16] Roman Poplavsky, "Religiosity in Context: Towards a Deeper Understanding of the Phenomenon," *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Studia Religiologica* 46, no. 4 (2013): 252.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Smith, "Ministerial Training," 226.

[19] Kidwell and Borer, "The Sanctuary," 56.

God's plan has always been to call a people unto Himself and, within that people group, develop a God-centered culture of people who live for God's glory above all else.[20] A secular church violates God's will and defies God's divine plan for humanity.[21] Secular churches exist on what Jesus discouraged against, admonishing, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it" (Matt 7:13). Secular churches are comfortable places for secular-minded Christians to belong. The cost of discipleship is virtually non-existent, and no lifestyle exchange is required. Jesus is seen as an additive, a means of appropriating eternal life in the hereafter and God's blessings in the present.

Conversely, a servant-leadership culture is different from a consumer-driven community. Michael Von Behren asserts, "Servant-leadership is committed to the wellbeing and personal growth of the volunteer even more so than the tasks and goals of the organization itself."[22] A servant-leader culture, especially in a church, challenges a parishioner to embrace the church's mission above their personal needs and preferences. Von Behren argues that participants in a servant-leader culture cultivate character traits that help them move away from selfish tendencies and toward a more corporate mission mindset.

Jill Lovett argues that the secular church needs a reformation, a drawing back to the New Testament principles that compel church members to believe and practice the lifestyle modeled by Jesus and advocated by Paul.[23] Lovett cites Yves Congar, who argues that the American church's culture has been secularized, creating a compartmentalized approach to faith and

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[20] Kurenlahti and Salonen, "Rethinking Consumerism," 6.

[21] Selaelo This Kgatla and Derek G. Kamukwamba, "Mission as the Creation of a God-Ward Culture: A Critical Missiological Analysis," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019): 6.

[22] Michael T. Von Behren, "Cultivating Volunteer Leaders in the Fertile Climate of Servant-Leadership," *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership* 15, no. 1 (2021): 287.

[23] Jill Lovett, "A Theology of the Laity: Implications for Renewal within the Church," *St. Mark's Review* 259 (April 2022): 85–86.

practice among many Christians.[24] A healthy church intentionally combats a compartmentalized, ineffective approach to faith and practice. Matthew McGraw observes the criticality of church leaders cultivating a robust Christ-centered culture, citing the gravity of the mission God has entrusted to his church.[25] Today's societal stakes are too high for the church to miss the mark by pursuing a secular agenda.

Kurenlahti and Salonen view consumerism not as a mere phenomenological cultural shift but nearly as a religion unto itself.[26] In the sense that religion exists to create life-meaning, consumerism affects how Christians define and practice their faith.[27] Mundey agrees, arguing that "Protestant Christianity and American consumerism [may be] defined as a quasi-religion in which Americans regularly worship at secular cathedrals of consumption and find ultimate meaning, happiness, and purpose in [merely] consuming."[28] Lawrence also supports this position, observing that consumption is worshiped and promoted in many American churches as one might encourage faith in God. Lawrence holds that the biblical Christian mission gets lost in the foray of lesser, secular pursuits in a warped theological perspective of the secular church.[29]

Recognizing the effects of secularism on the American church and the need for drastic renovation of the secular church, some have argued that what a largely secular, worldly church must become is a people with a "God-ward culture." This culture acknowledges God as the source and final purpose.[30] Successful redefinition of a church's mission, values, identity, and

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[24] Lovett, "A Theology of the Laity," 84.

[25] Matthew Curtis McGraw, "Intentionally Creating Healthy Organizational Culture in the Local Church: A Multiple Case Study," (D. Ed. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 4.

[26] Kurenlahti and Salonen, "Rethinking Consumerism," 15.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Mundey, "The Prosperity Gospel," 319.

[29] Lawrence, "American Consumerism," 26.

[30] Kgatla and Kamukwamba, "Mission," 3.

purpose is the only way to effectively reposition God at the center of the church's focus. Renovating a secular church, however, may only be done with intentional effort. It would take a rare church to transition accidentally from a secular church undergirded by a consumption-oriented culture to a church with a healthy organizational culture.[31] Organizational culture shifts are possible but generally do not occur spontaneously. Making a cultural shift from a secular to a biblical church paradigm and effectively instituting cultural change requires a church to initiate new values and support their adherence through continual effort.[32]

Can a secular church transition from its worldly bias to a Christ-centered church and commit to the Lord and His kingdom mission? The literature suggests it is possible for a church to intentionally cultivate a servant leadership culture by systematically helping members mature in the Lord and develop meaningful faith.[33] According to Searcy and Henson, however, such a transition requires more from members than weekly attendance at Sunday services.[34] Searcy and Henson assert, "to be a church culture that commits itself to the task of developing leaders, a sense of urgency must permeate the air, and an appetite for wise risk must be viewed as a signpost of faith."[35] Therefore, a church transitioning from a secular bias to a Christ-centered paradigm must cast a clear and compelling vision before its congregation. That vision must ignite a flame of faith that burns in people's hearts.

A secular, consumer-driven church has arisen in America like persistent weeds in an otherwise well-groomed garden. Consumption and its members' relentless pursuit of self-

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[31] McGraw, "Intentionally Creating," 89–90.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Searcy and Henson, *Connect,* 149.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 106.

satisfaction undermine today's church. Such a church has lost its way and requires rehabilitation. Course-correcting such a church needs leadership to cultivate a culture that produces courageous, selfless, serving followers of Christ. If the American church is to fulfill its God-given mission, it must repent from its secularization and return to the principles on which Christ built His church.

Religiosity as a Measure of Individual Spiritual Commitment

As one researches the effects of consumerism on the faith and practice of the American church, one observes a pervasive theme. Perhaps the most detrimental impact of a consumer-driven culture and the secular church it has spawned is the impact of consumerism upon individual religiosity within the church. Many scholars have widely researched and addressed religiosity, some are seeking to understand the effects of personal religiosity upon society and others desiring to understand the impact of culture upon individual religiosity. In both cases, it is noteworthy to recognize that religiosity is not only studied by theologians and those in religious disciplines but is an interdisciplinary undertaking.[36] Subject matter experts from across the humanities and social sciences have dissected religiosity, seeking to answer one query or another.[37] Therefore, this study must take a multidimensional approach to understanding religiosity.[38]

Religiosity is cultural, contextual, personal, and spiritual. It manifests as private disciplines or public behaviors. Roman Poplavsky asserts that whether private or public, religiosity goes beyond mere professed beliefs to demonstrated behaviors. Therefore, it is observable, measurable, analyzable, and testable.

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[36] Poplavsky, "Religiosity in Context," 253.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 258.

Andrew Abeyta and Clay Routledge define religiosity as a demonstrated commitment to religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices.[39] One author provides an expanded and more inclusive definition, writing, "Religiosity is understood as a complex phenomenon which includes religious actions, religious beliefs, and knowledge (also often referred to as religious consciousness), and attitudes towards different problems and situations in both a religious and non-religious environment."[40] Whether one adopts a more complex description or opts for a more streamlined definition, it is critical to understand that a singular universal application is inappropriate regarding individual religiosity.[41] Other authors agree that religious expression is anything but monolithic; religious convictions and expression take on many forms and follow many different traditions.[42]

Religion, in its most basic understanding, contributes to meaning in life. However one defines it, religiosity solidifies religious beliefs through demonstrated behaviors, consequently solidifying the believing individual's sense of belonging with their religious group.[43] Donald Whitney describes a form of religiosity he terms spiritual disciplines.[44] Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as "those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ."[45] Among the spiritual disciplines Whitney addresses is one of particular interest in this thesis – service.

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[39] Andrew A. Abeyta and Clay Routledge, "The Need for Meaning and Religiosity: An Individual Differences Approach to Assessing Existential Needs and the Relation with Religious Commitment, Beliefs, and Experiences," *Personality and Individual Differences* 123, (2018): 7.

[40] Poplavsky, "Religiosity in Context," 255.

[41] Ibid., 256.

[42] Kathryn A. Johnson, Joshua N. Hook, Don E. Davis, et al., "Moral Foundation Priorities Reflect U.S. Christians' Individual Differences in Religiosity," *Personality and Individual Differences* 100, (2016): 57.

[43] Abeyta and Routledge, "The Need for Meaning," 7.

[44] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines,* 4.

[45] Ibid.

Whitney develops a chapter in his book underscoring the importance of sacrificial service (Christian volunteerism) as a critical element of his prescribed Christian disciplines, also known here as individual religiosity. According to Whitney, serving is the outward confirmation (actions) of the inward conviction (belief); it is impossible to have faith without service.[46]

Therefore, it is reasonable to view service (Christian volunteerism) as a non-negotiable demonstration of the Christian faith, a measure of religiosity that should be present in all forms of Christian commitment. Therefore, if the spirit of consumerism infecting the American church and spawning secular churches is negatively impacting individual Christian volunteerism, one may conclude that consumerism has a detrimental impact on personal religiosity. If this is the case, the focus must become identifying factors that may slow or resist the push of consumerism against the American church and factors that may positively affect religiosity in the form of service within the church.

<div align="center">Impact of American Consumerism on Religiosity</div>

A pervasive attitude that causes parishioners to seek consumption without commitment to share in production has infected a church plagued by consumerism.[47] Dickens asserts that such church members are empty-hearted, only interested in buying, owning, and consuming to meet their perceived needs and desires.[48] According to Philip Herrington, such church members often have shallow self-interests in mind when affiliating with a church.[49] They want God to bless them and usually measure His blessing as the personal desires He fulfills. Herrington asserts it is

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[46] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines,* 158.

[47] Dickens, "Living Upside Down," 378.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Philip Alan Herrington, "The Power of Engagement: A Study of Engagement and Disengagement of Church Participants at Pathways Church," (DMIN thesis, Talbot School of Theology, 2019), 24.

rare for those contemplating becoming Christians to approach the decision in search of an opportunity to obey God sacrificially; most are much more interested in seeking a better life, realizing fulfillment, and finding happiness.[50]

The intentional ministry designs of megachurch culture exacerbate this phenomenon. The entertainment-celebrity culture of the megachurch invites attendees to consume with no need for personal engagement. The only perceived requirements for many attending megachurches are regular attendance and financial support. Authors often describe church members and attendees who do not volunteer their time and effort to help fulfill the church's mission as free riders.

To that end, Kevin Dougherty observes that one mark of a healthy church is its relatively small number of members who are not actively engaged in the church's life.[51] Likewise, Joonmo Son and John Wilson argue that churches with a high cultural value for volunteering and engagement tend to encourage newcomers to get involved to build new relationships and thus help them escape the trap of becoming a "free-riding" member.[52] Likewise, a church with a significant portion of its roster engaged as free riders is a clear symptom of the cancer of consumerism at work in that church.

Von Behren, offering a solution for the free-riding problem that plagues many churches, especially secular churches, notes that free riders are often converted into volunteers when, through communicated meaning, they "transcend self, no longer living by the will to power, but instead pulled outward by a will to meaning."[53] Von Behren adds that it is powerful when a consumer/taker steps outside himself and finds meaning in producing/giving through

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[50] Herrington, "The Power of Engagement," 24.

[51] Kevin D. Dougherty, "Mobilizing Members: Congregational Strategies for Increasing Participation," *Antonianum* 77, no. 2 (April 2002): 318.

[52] Son and Wilson, "Bidirectional Causal Relationship," 751.

[53] Von Behren, "Cultivating Volunteer Leaders," 287.

volunteerism.[54] For a free-rider, therefore, to transcend the cultural pull of consumerism and yield themselves to the selfless nature of servanthood, they would need to be impacted by a greater power, to fellowship in an environment that celebrates serving, and be under the influence of leaders that cultivate committed disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, they would need to belong to a healthy church.

<div align="center">The Impact of Church Health on Individual Religiosity</div>

One of today's most pervasive threats to the church is consumerism and the consumer culture that celebrates it.[55] The primary objective of consumerism is realizing the so-called American dream consisting of a life of wealth, luxury, and comfort.[56] Other-mindedness runs counter-cultural to consumerism. Nevertheless, serving one another is a marked demonstration of the Christian faith, honoring God, and building community among believers (1 Pet 4:10). A compassion that leads to even relatively insignificant acts of kindness can strengthen a church, creating a shared history and identity among the people.[57] Peters argues that healthy community is so inextricably bound to what it means to be Christian that any group that does not elevate community as a value over individualism cannot rightly identify as Christian.[58]

The church is the linchpin of God's redemptive Christian movement. Since the start of Christianity, local gatherings of Christians have been the heart of what it means to follow Christ. Ensuring these local faith expressions are healthy is a crucial responsibility for church leaders.

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[54] Von Behren, "Cultivating Volunteer Leaders," 287.

[55] Smith, "Ministerial Training," 240.

[56] Kurenlahti and Salonen, "Rethinking Consumerism," 11.

[57] Dickens, "Living Upside Down," 392.

[58] Peters, "Recapturing the Transformational Power," 2.

Pastors must prepare to lead churches toward developing a healthy culture. Healthy churches are always the result of good leadership and intentional, biblically supported action.[59]

A healthy church fulfills its divine mission. In so doing, it also encourages a "total way of life that tells the story of who God is, a way of life that praises and glorifies God, and a way of life that enables each creature to live out its place as assigned by God."[60] A God-ward church develops seekers into believers and believers into dedicated disciples. Such a church challenges cultural norms when it infiltrates the church and calls its people to an expression of faith grounded in biblical values. Active participation in God's redemptive plan is a fundamental trait of a healthy church, a deep commitment to fulfilling the church's God-given purpose.[61]

The development of Christlike character and values, of which active religiosity is a part, is what discipleship ministry is focused. Discipleship, or the absence thereof, is a strong indicator of a church's health and, when present, a natural precursor to volunteer and leadership development. The process of discipleship, especially when delivered through the agency of small groups, invariably produces strong leaders as well as committed followers.[62] Another key indicator of a healthy Christ-centered church is a keen commitment to develop disciples who cultivate other disciples.

In Lovett's study of the New Testament Greek word, *Diakonia* (Eph 4:11–12), the cultural understanding is servanthood embraced by the whole Christian community, not just a select few. Discipleship is not a growth track intended solely for those aspiring to the clergy but

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[59] McGraw, "Intentionally Creating," 103.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Kgatla and Kamukwamba, "Mission," 8.

[62] Stuart W. Boyer, *Biblical Leadership Development: Principles for Developing Organizational Leaders at Every Level* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 169.

for all who identify as followers of Christ.[63] Discipleship is God's maturity plan for the entire church. In a healthy church, servant leaders produce servant leaders. Living as a servant leader is a contagious reality. Servant leaders serve selflessly and tend to reproduce by influencing those they serve. Servant leaders are contagious, infecting their organizations and spawning other servant leaders.[64] Servant leaders must be present for this organic movement to take root in a church. In churches, organizational health spreads just as quickly as cultural sickness. Therefore, servant leaders must develop the skills required to cultivate other servant leaders from among their constituents.[65]

One mark of a vital, healthy church is that it activates its membership to volunteerism with a high degree of participation.[66] Free riders are more of an exception than the rule. The church's culture celebrates service and demonstrates the value of volunteering through widespread individual religiosity. Meaning, significance, and organizational belonging strongly correlate with active participation. The culture encourages adherents to go beyond attendance and financial support to active engagement in the organization's mission.

A church culture that embraces high degrees of religiosity and celebrates demonstrated commitment will change how its constituents view and approach their relationship with the church. When the congregation begins to view life through the lens of God's kingdom mission and adopts a sense of urgency to fulfill that mission, that church will soon transform.[67] "This profound conviction moves the church to become a people of radical action, urgency, unction,

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[63] Lovett, "A Theology," 81.

[64] Steven Crowther, *Biblical Servant Leadership: An Exploration of Leadership for the Contemporary Context* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2018), 32.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Dougherty, "Mobilizing Members," 318.

[67] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead,* 108.

and even risk."[68] Christianity was founded as an active movement that demanded total commitment, active engagement, and radical surrender to the will of God. When a congregation experiences a cultural shift that points them back to the mission of Christ, the nature of that church changes and conforms to the pattern set by Christ.

A church that experiences such radical cultural transformation must allow God to reorient its worldview to transition from a self-centered to a God-centered life paradigm.[69] A secular church repenting from consumption and desiring to reform must surrender and allow God to cultivate corporate selflessness, thus challenging the consumerism and individualism of its recent past. One measure that a church has turned the proverbial corner of cultural change and is growing in health is its volunteerism. This singular marker of a healthy church is undisputed as the church develops solutions for keeping people engaged.[70]

Organizational Leadership Effectiveness and Its Impact on Religiosity

The American church has been assaulted and weakened by cultural consumerism. The attack has left the triumphant church sick, a secular shell of what Christ established it to be. Nonetheless, such a so-called church has a choice. The church may continue peddling a false gospel that promises prosperity to parishioners as it profits from the consumer-driven ministry model that packages and distributes it. Alternatively, this church may repent and reform, regaining its place in service to Christ and his agenda. If the church takes the latter narrow path, it must rely upon its leaders to point the way, lead the culture shift, and begin discipling the

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[68] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead,* 108.

[69] Peters, "Recapturing the Transformational Power," 132.

[70] Herrington, "The Power of Engagement," 7.

congregation. There is an undeniable correlation between organizational and leader effectiveness and the individual religiosity observed by church members.

Geiger and Peck liken the skill and precision required to build a healthy culture to the attention needed to pour the foundation for a new home successfully.[71] Geiger and Peck expound, observing, "a foundation with cracks and blemishes cannot hold the house; neither can a culture with inconsistent beliefs sustain a leadership development effort."[72] One must consider the impact of effective organizational systems and leadership. Church leaders set the pattern, establishing and elevating the attitudes, values, and actions church members emulate. The leader articulates, displays, and celebrates the church's most sacred values.[73]

Servant leadership should be characterized at every level of organizational leadership in a church where serving is a cultural value. Modeled values ripple through the church membership and show up in individual religiosity. [74] Effective leadership and leader development happen organically when there is a convergence of deeply held values and consistent behaviors modeled by church leaders.[75] Herrington offers three markers of a healthy church that encourage cultivating volunteers: (1) relevant preaching and teaching, (2) an open and supportive small group ministry, and (3) a user-friendly, clearly marked path that allows potential volunteers to engage in service activities.[76]

As an example of organizational leadership's impact on religiosity, relevant preaching, and teaching are consistent markers of a healthy, volunteer-cultivating church. Both preaching

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[71] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead,* 103.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Herrington, "The Power of Engagement," 119.

[74] Crowther, *Biblical Servant Leadership*, 29.

[75] Boyer, *Biblical Leadership Development,* 27.

[76] McGraw, "Intentionally Creating," 35.

and teaching may be defined as effective communication of the gospel message that points the hearer toward the truth of God's way and away from the carnal flow of the world's culture. William Evans argues that churches whose message centers on current political trends, social media fads, or cultural interests may meet weekly, but their rhetoric cannot be legitimately termed preaching.[77] The preaching that touches a believer's soul and compels them to love God more deeply and thus serve His mission more completely is biblical and then relevant. Preaching and teaching become relevant when it is inductive rather than deductive, allowing a congregation to be shaped by the voice of God beneath the sacred text.

The ministry of God's Word is inductive when the expositor allows Scripture to reveal its meaning and application rather than approaching the text with a predetermined understanding.[78] Inductive preaching challenges the minister to wrestle with the exegetical implications of the text. Consequently, the hearer may be confident that they receive God's interpreted Word, not mere human opinion. This confidence frees the listener to experience the profound revelation God's message often brings. This experience is the catalyst for deep and meaningful change.

Inductive preaching and teaching are practical. This method of sharing Scripture positions a congregation to be shaped by the divine influence of their heavenly Father. Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), known for practicality and relevance in his preaching, connected with hundreds of weekly attendees by drawing truths from the text that conveyed significant application to the prevalent situations of his day.[79] "To Beecher, preaching was action-centered,

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[77] William Evans, *How to Prepare Sermons* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), 11–12.

[78] Wayne McDill, 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 13.

[79] Benjamin K. Forrest, Kevin L. King, William J. Curtis et al., eds. *A Legacy of Preaching: The Life, Theology, and Method of History's Great Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 195–203.

not theologically oriented." [80] Inductively derived practical preaching and teaching do not just give a congregation random, biblically related information but provide parishioners with clear guidance about how to live on mission, lives that honor and please the Lord.[81] A church consistently exposed to the life-altering truths of God's Word will respond by loving God more passionately.

One prophet documents God's promise that His Word would always be an effective tool when applied consistently to His people's lives (Isa 55:10–11). Practical, relevant, inductive preaching and teaching resonate with those consistently exposed to it and, over time, produce a change in their faith and practice.[82] The most profound impact of effective preaching and teaching on a church working through organizational change is that biblical preaching always calls believers toward Christ without condemning them for where they have been.[83]

In general, organizational leadership effectiveness profoundly impacts organizational health. Nowhere is this truer than in the church. Church leaders, through clear communication of a practical, inductive, and relevant sharing of God's Word, may aid in shifting a congregation away from this world's consumer-driven culture toward the way of the Lord. Additionally, a church with a practical, systematic approach to ministry maximizes opportunities to encourage and cultivate volunteers.[84]

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[80] Forrest, King, Curtis, and Milioni, *A Legacy of Preaching*, 203.

[81] Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner, and Lane Jones, *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 119–137.

[82] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 234–36.

[83] E. Randolph Richards, and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 29–51.

[84] Searcy and Henson, *Connect,* 30.

Son and Wilson conclude their study of the relationship between religiosity (active attendance and regular financial support) and volunteering, noting that organizations that effectively mobilize members do so by intentionally providing their constituents with service opportunities.[85] For an organization to be effective, however, in cultivating the engagement of its constituents, there must be a pervasive environment centered on mutual trust. This is one of the most crucial tasks facing church leaders. As it were, it is often easier for would-be-leaders to lead than for them to get others to trust those leaders enough to follow.

Trusted leadership and the perception of a safe environment among church constituents are critical to cultivating a culture of high volunteerism. Boyer underscores that the trust factor in an organization is crucial to that organization's effectiveness and success.[86] The absence or presence of an underlying value for trust may be a defining factor in an organization's success or failure.[87] An adage suggests that those served by leaders do not care how much the leader knows until they know how much the leader cares. Mutual trust grows out of a person knowing their leader cares. Such a conviction results in the member trusting the leader and the leader being able to trust the member.[88]

Not all organizations effectively support volunteerism, and not all leaders lead with genuine concern for their members. Some leaders dictate, micro-manage, control, stifle, and shame those who serve in the church. Unfortunately, coercive leadership, which "influences others to do what is against their own will by force, threat, or manipulation," undermines an

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[85] Son and Wilson, "Bidirectional Causal Relationship," 766.

[86] Boyer, *Biblical Leadership Development,* 28.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

organization's health and discourages volunteerism.[89] Considering organizational health, there is

no substitute for transparent, honest, trust-inducing leadership.

Organizational and leadership effectiveness is critical to a church's health. A weak,

insecure, inwardly focused leader will create a competitive environment where members fight

for what they can get. Such a consumption-oriented leader is likely to foster further the culture of

consumerism, presently eating away at the foundation of the American church. A servant leader

modeling servanthood in a church with systems in place to support volunteers will provide a

personal example for the church to see and emulate, thus encouraging parishioners to engage.

<center>The Impact of Religious Relevance on Religiosity</center>

Another critical theme emerged in researching factors that affect individual religiosity

and contribute to Christian volunteerism. There is a correlation between relevance and

religiosity. Subject matter experts address relevance from two perspectives, both critical. The

first approach is to consider the significance of the religious experience in the believer's church

life. Has church leadership effectively communicated the gospel message in a way that resonates

with members? Is the church relevant to the secular world where the member lives and functions

daily? To this point, Crowther warns that while it is critical for churches to remain relevant to the

culture, the church must also maintain sight of the biblical foundation that undergirds the

church's mission.[90] Some churches have been unable to balance cultural relevance and biblical

responsibility.[91] The mounting pressure of the prevailing culture can influence church leaders to

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[89] Von Behren, "Cultivating Volunteer Leaders," 277–79.

[90] Crowther, *Biblical Servant Leadership*, 20.

[91] Ibid.

cultivate secularism in the name of relevance and a strong attraction for visitors.[92] However, church leaders must differentiate between the short-lived infatuation-like interest that often leads people to join a church and the long-term commitment to help the church fulfill its mission.[93]

Dougherty asserts that congregations that offer a relevant message and contemporary worship experience are more likely to inspire members to become vested and engaged in meaningful participation.[94] However, the healthy church will find and maintain the balance between cultural relevance and the church's commitment to Christ and His kingdom. Making disciples and shaping how Christ's followers see and relate to the world around them is a critical ministry with eternal implications. As the church labors to align with Christ's mission and mandate, following God's design for disciple-making and leader-building, church leaders must carefully consider the organization's underlying culture.[95] A church's culture is too critical a factor in its community identity to be ignored or casually considered.[96]

The second approach to considering religious relevance and its effect on religiosity is to evaluate how potential volunteers view serving opportunities. Christian volunteers engage, and ministry leaders develop when churches present the relevance of serving, reflecting not only the task but also the meaning behind the assignment and its impact on the church's mission. People have an inherent need for meaning and significance in life. Helping members see that their service is not merely needed to complete a task but also to further a vision may alter their perspective of the proposed volunteer opportunity. Robert Clinton adds that the most significant

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[92] Kidwell and Borer, "The Sanctuary," 56.

[93] Herrington, "The Power of Engagement," 8.

[94] Dougherty, "Mobilizing Members," 321.

[95] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead,* 102.

[96] Ibid.

relevance in serving others in the name of the Lord is that one grows to become more like Christ in the process.[97] Clinton is writing of eternal significance, the highest form of relevance.

Systematically Cultivating Religiosity Among Church Parishioners

Businesses must intentionally cultivate sales, new clients, and new opportunities to forge into new markets. Churches, however, are not businesses. Unlike a company, the church is primarily a volunteer-run entity. Volunteers are critical to the lifeblood of the church.[98] Without willing Christian volunteers who see the investment of their time and effort as an expression of their religiosity, the church will fail to fulfill its divine mandate to reach the world for Christ. The healthy church relies on actively engaged members who demonstrate their commitment to Christ and the church through volunteering to support the church's work. Research practitioners who have studied religiosity have often defined it as a measure of church attendance, a person's overall involvement in the church's life, and the degree to which the person engages as a volunteer.[99]

An ecclesiastical precedent exists for member service and engagement, and there is ample biblical support for encouraging church members to serve. As the ultimate servant leader, Jesus demonstrated that serving others is of utmost importance for those who claim to follow the life He lived.[100] Jesus had a word for those actively engaged in the life to which He called them, 'disciples'.

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[97] Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2012), 136–38.

[98] Searcy and Henson, *Connect,* 56.

[99] LaKeisha Williams, "Make Me Stay: A Multiple Case Study on Church Engagement among Young Adults in the United States," (Ph. D. diss., Regent University School of Business and Leadership, 2020), 31.

[100] Boyer, *Biblical Leadership Development,* 134.

Biblically, a clear scriptural theme emerges in support of the term 'disciple'. When considering a church member's engagement level, being a disciple implies being fully vested in Christ's global mission.[101] Therefore, it is appropriate for fully engaged church congregants to be described as devoted followers or disciples of Jesus Christ.[102] Jesus's Great Commission did not dispatch His early deputies to go and make members; rather, they "go and make disciples" (Matt 28:19).

Searcy and Henson suggest two primary ways to cultivate volunteers: by adding new people to existing ministries and by creating new opportunities for people to serve.[103] Regardless of which approach a church adopts or if they subscribe to both, the church must build volunteers by building leaders. Leaders ultimately motivate and influence followers to engage. A church's leadership is uniquely positioned to impact its culture and members' values profoundly. Understanding that a divinely appointed leader possesses a "God-given capacity and God-given responsibility" to lead the church, the church's leadership is key to shifting cultural paradigms within the faith community.[104]

LaKeisha Williams offers five key factors leaders may elevate to cultivate Christian volunteers: (1) a strong sense of personal spiritual commitment, (2) members who have a clear sense of what is expected of them, (3) a system of consistent recognition for those who volunteer, (4) an environment that elevate and encourages spiritual development, and (5) a clear sense of mission and purpose among the members.[105] Regarding spiritual commitment, Jason

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[101] Herrington, "The Power of Engagement," 26.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Searcy and Henson, *Connect,* 58.

[104] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 110.

[105] Williams, "Make Me Stay," 29.

Young and Jonathan Malm, in *The Volunteer Effect*, argue once again that one of the most significant contributions a leader can make to any organization is a contribution to its trust culture.[106] Few things dismantle and undermine organizational unity and effectiveness, like broken trust.[107] Spiritual commitment is best shown by the leader's demonstrated obedience to and trust in God, and mutual trust between church members and leadership. Churches well-equipped to fulfill the Great Commission as an extension of their culture are an outgrowth of healthy pastors who foster healthy relationships between church leaders and volunteers.[108]

While an organization must avoid undue restrictions and controlling practices, research suggests that church members may respond favorably to a balanced approach to clearly stated member responsibilities. Dougherty, citing Laurence Iannaccone, observes that religious "strictness reduces free riding within religious organizations and, hence, raises participation and enhances the net benefits of membership."[109] By strictness, Dougherty is not advocating for cultlike manipulation, control, and use of fear tactics. Strictness, in this sense, refers to a clear code of ethics and widely held values supporting adherence to a loving life as a disciple of Christ. Such clarity in a church's culture encourages members to commit wholeheartedly.

Regarding recognition, Von Behren refers to Ignatius of Loyola, arguing that true servant-leadership is the leader's ability and willingness to serve selflessly and the leader's propensity to see leadership potential in others, developing and coaxing the revelation of the leader hidden within.[110] Boya adds to the discussion, elevating the leader's recognition of the

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[106] Jason Young and Jonathan Malm, *The Volunteer Effect: How Your Church Can Find, Train, and Keep Volunteers Who Make a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 136.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Smith, "Ministerial Training," 243.

[109] Dougherty, "Mobilizing Members," 319.

[110] Von Behren, "Cultivating Volunteer Leaders," 273.

potential volunteer and the ongoing recognition of volunteers' good work.[111] Boya posits that

while "the primary goal of volunteers is to serve without expectations, the lack of proper church

reward system may be detrimental to the modern church's future."[112] A simple way for church

leadership to elevate volunteerism in a church is to implement a system for recurring recognition

of those who serve. An annual volunteer luncheon or awards ceremony is one example of a

sustained way to implement this strategy into the life of a local church.

Regarding ongoing spiritual development for the would-be volunteer, Clinton observes

that a leader's maturity cycle emerges in a future leader's life.[113] It is a spiral of growth that

fluctuates between being and doing.[114] In each being cycle, the leader grows through experience

and in knowing God; in each doing cycle, the leader grows in effectiveness as one of God's

servants.[115] This experience culminates in growth and maturity in the leader's life as identity and

practice become functionally unified.[116]

Regarding the potential volunteer possessing a clear sense of the organization's mission

and the volunteer's place in the purpose, church leaders must implement steps to frame each

volunteer effort in the scope of the church's overall mission. Young and Malm add that "if a

volunteer can see the big picture, often they can see the meaning in their small role. If they can

see how what they do delivers a feeling, and that feeling is the whole mission of the team, they

see the meaning in what they do."[117] When church members can see the value and impact of their

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[111] Kgaugelo S. Boya, "The Ambivalence regarding Volunteering and Reward Systems in Church Settings," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 78, no. 1 (2022): 2.

[112] Boya, "The Ambivalence regarding Volunteering," 2.

[113] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader,* 136–38.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Young and Malm, *The Volunteer Effect,* 106.

contribution as a thread in the larger tapestry of the church's vision and mission, the significance

of their investment tends to rise exponentially.

In addition to the five factors offered by Williams, the church that cultivates volunteers is

forgiving, empowering, and inviting. A compassionate church cultivates a healthy environment

for making mistakes, where even leadership dares to apologize when they have overstepped.[118]

An empowering church gets to know its people and encourages them to use their spiritual gifts in

the church's life. Young and Malm observe that a church must invest in discovering its

member's God-given gifts.[119] Young and Malm add that church leaders demonstrate that church

members matter when leaders take the time to discover and cultivate the gifts and abilities they

have.[120] An inviting church takes the initiative and invites members to volunteer rather than

waiting for the member to show an interest. Of the nature of the invitation, Young and Malm

suggest that an invitation to serve must be compelling enough for the potential volunteer to see

the relevance, significance, and potential impact of their service.[121] A compelling significance, a

meaningful value in a volunteer opportunity is often enough to move the uncommitted to

commitment and the disengaged to engagement.[122]

Finally, for a church to succeed at developing servant leaders, it must address the need to

develop leaders and leadership. "Servant leadership has a clear focus on followers, and one of

the issues of servant leadership is in producing more servant leaders."[123] As servant leaders serve

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[118] Von Behren, "Cultivating Volunteer Leaders," 275–76.

[119] Young and Malm, *The Volunteer Effect,* 40.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid., 27.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Crowther, *Biblical Servant Leadership*, 14.

and lead, followers will also begin to serve. From these servant-hearted members will emerge future servant-hearted leaders.

Conclusion

The literature review covered the influence of consumerism on the American church, the markers of a consumer-driven church, and religiosity as a measure of individual spiritual commitment. This review of precedent literature also reflected on the impact of consumerism, church health, and effective organizational leadership on church member religiosity. While many have published research addressing these issues, there remains a gap in literature dealing directly with American consumerism as a cultural influence potentially undermining the American Protestant church. This DMIN action research project may provide a launchpad for such consideration.

Theological Foundations

Throughout Scripture, several central themes anchor the Judeo-Christian perspective. Two such critical threads are Scripture's mandates for the believer to love and serve the Lord (Exod 7:16; Deut 7:9; 30:20; Josh 23:11; Ps 102:21–22; Luke 10:27; John 14:15; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 4:10). God's call for unwavering devotion from His children weaves throughout the text from the Pentateuch to the New Testament Epistles (Deut 6:5; Ps 31:23; Matt 22:37; 1 John 5:3). Likewise, God's commands to serve Him and His purposes as an expression of that love are replete throughout the sacred record (Deut 13:4; Josh 24:15; Ps 100:2; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 4:10).

This DMIN action research project will consider viable ways to activate dormant members and convert them into willing volunteers. There is no better motivation for offering willing service to the Lord than to grasp His call for His children's love and His desire to see that

love demonstrated in willing service to others in His name. This thesis will examine God's call to the believer to love and serve Him, as these themes are developed in the Old and New Testaments.

<p align="center">The Call to Love the Lord in the Old Testament</p>

Throughout the Old Testament, there are many invocations for God's people to love Him wholeheartedly. Loving the God revealed in Scripture as love is central to demonstrating one's faith in God. This thesis will develop a theme by considering four passages in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and the Psalms.

Moses

One of the most recognized passages in the Bible is in Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch. From courtrooms to Christian schools, the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:2–17) are often displayed and readily recognized, even by those not knowledgeable about Scripture. The covenantal law, technically more accurately termed "the Ten Words," was dictated by God and documented by Moses during Israel's Mt. Sinai encampment.[124] As these ten commandments open, God begins by outlining cultic regulations and laws that govern the people's relationship with God.[125] The second commandment in the Decalogue warns God's people not to fashion any idols for worship (Exod 20:4). The Lord emphasizes His point by revealing Himself as "a jealous God," admonishing His people that even their unborn children would suffer for failing to comply (Exod 20:5 NKJV). Victor Hamilton posits that the best reading of this passage is with the

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[124] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers) 2006, 395–96.

[125] Joe M. Sprinkle, "Law and Narrative in Exodus 19–24," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 2 (06, 2004): 243.

imagery of God saying He gets red-faced when His people pursue other gods.[126] Whatever the interpretation of God's jealousy, He unveils the core of this passage as this command concludes. God's true motive is to inspire His people to love Him just as they are loved (Exod 20:6).[127] Built into the heart of the Mosaic law, and thus central to the Judeo-Christian perspective, is a commandment that rests on the Lord's call to the believer to love their God.

Several allusions to the Ten Commandments are found elsewhere in the Pentateuch. One significant passage is Deuteronomy 5–6. These apodictic laws are expansive, far-reaching frameworks that reveal God's character and offer God's children timeless, universal standards by which to live.[128] In the fifth chapter of the Pentateuch's fifth book, Moses rehearses the ten words before Israel, encouraging them to obey God's commands diligently (Deut 5:1–32). Then, in Deuteronomy 6:4, Moses utters the charge known as the "Shema," which many postbiblical rabbinic exegetes consider "the heart of all the law."[129] Moses' pivotal statement contains two key elements: his declaration of God's monotheistic nature, and the call to the children of God to love God with all their being. The heart of Shema's message is God saying to His people, "I will be your God, and you will be [exclusively] my people." I love you; therefore, reciprocate My love.[130] This is the engine behind a mature disciple's commitment to serve God willingly, joyfully, and wholeheartedly.

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[126] Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 403.

[127] Stuart, *Exodus*, 404.

[128] Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 126–27.

[129] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 139.

[130] Kathryn L. Roberts, "Between Text & Sermon: Exodus 20:1–6: A Journal of Bible and Theology," *Interpretation* 61, no. 1 (01, 2007): 61.

Serving God is not merely an obligatory box to be checked on a believer's spiritual report card. Willing service to God is a believer's joyous opportunity and, ultimately, an expression of their adoration for their King. Therefore, the would-be-healthy church must scrutinize any influence that distracts its constituents from loving the Lord through acts of joyful service.

Joshua

Moses' successor also elevates the mandate for God's people to love the Lord. As his mentor had (Deut 31), Joshua gathers his followers as he offers his farewell address (Josh 23) and posits the charge, "Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God" (Josh 23:11 NKJV). Of all the possible critical information Joshua could have relayed to the people, all the essential instructions that could have been pressing on his mind, he chose to remind them of the criticality of God's people loving the Lord.

These words are not merely suggestive. Some theologians observe that after the command "be very careful," the Hebrew text has a reflexive expression … that is not translated in the New King James Version, literally, "for your own wellbeing" (Holman Christian Standard Bible).[131] That is to say, loving the Lord is not only a divine command; it is in one's best interest.

Gregory Wong elevates the significance of Joshua's charge, noting that God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant with Israel makes it inconceivable that the recipients of His favor would not reflexively reciprocate His love back to Him.[132] Hélène Dallaire agrees with Wong, arguing that "loving Yahweh is an appropriate response from a people whom he protected

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[131] Kenneth A. Mathews, K. *Joshua*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 176.

[132] Gregory T. K. Wong, *Commentary on Joshua: From the Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 48.

from harm in battle and for whom he defeated all enemies."[133] Joshua saw God as a faithful

Patriarch whose love and covenant commitment to His people was beyond reproach. He regarded

serving God as the reasonable response of those who lived under the covenant protection God

provided. This sentiment carries forward through Scripture and, therefore, should live today in

the hearts and minds of those who identify as children of God. A people who claim to be loved

and covered by God's grace and do not possess a sense of duty to serve His purposes is an

oxymoron. Therefore, a Christian church bent toward consuming instead of being passionate

about serving would be very unhealthy and, thus, in need of a spiritual reset.

The Psalms

Numerous Psalms speak of loving God and loving His Word, will, and way (see Pss 5:11;

31:23; 70:4; 97:10; 116:1; 119:48, 127; 122:6; and 145:20). No Psalm is more explicit in its

adoration for God than Psalm 18, which begins, "I will love You, O Lord, my strength" (Ps 18:1

NKJV). As the topic sentence in a well-crafted paragraph opens the stanza, the eighteenth

Psalm's opening phrase has established the full expression's tenor. A recurring theme reminds

the reader that God is the love initiator in this covenant relationship. They are merely to love

God as He first loved them.[134]

From Moses to David (the generally accepted author of Psalm 18), a critical theme has

emerged from the sacred text.[135] God is merciful, faithful, gracious, and kind. Given His flawless

character and demonstrated commitment to His people, it is only reasonable that they love Him

in return. It is essential, however, to note that the love referenced in these passages is not the

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[133] Hélène Dallaire, *Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 274.

[134] Willem VanGemeren, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 1110–11.

[135] Willem S. Prinsloo, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 15.

emotional-based feeling some may conjure when they hear the word. Stuart posits that the expression "love God" … refers idiomatically to loyalty.[136] Covenantal love is not conceptual. The love God calls His people to is also not merely declared. Biblical love requires demonstration. God is inviting His people to be unwaveringly loyal to Him and His purposes. The Lord is challenging His children to demonstrate their love through obedience to His commands and submission to His prescribed way of life.

In God's view, loving is not only a declaration of one's passion but also a demonstration of one's loyalty. A mature disciple is a loyal God-lover. Those who casually approach their faith in God tend to be fair-weather in their commitment to living a God-honoring lifestyle. A true mark of a settled saint is that one's daily decisions reflect a loyal heart to God and His way of life.

<div align="center">The Call to Love the Lord in the New Testament</div>

God's theme of calling the believer to love Him does not fall off in the Old Testament. Loving God is a thread that also courses through the New Testament. This thesis will identify this prevalent theme by considering Jesus's declarations and teachings recorded in the Gospels.

The theological theme of the believer's love for God shows up boldly in Jesus's ministry. Recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; and Luke 10:25–37) is an encounter Jesus has with someone who challenges Him regarding His knowledge of the law. In each case, Jesus answers by pointing the challenger back to the Shema (Deut 6:4–9), resting the whole of God's law on the believer's comprehensive love for God. In Matthew's

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[136] Stuart, *Exodus*, 404.

version, Jesus's authority as a legitimate rabbi is the heart of this challenge.[137] Mark Strauss

observes that questions from apprentices directed toward rabbis concerning which laws were

weightier than others were common practice in early Judaism.[138] David Garland holds that in

Luke's version of the exchange, Jesus's response surprises the challenger, who is then drawn in,

becoming curious about the implications of Jesus's reply.[139] Regardless of the nuanced

differences between these three accounts, what is most significant is Jesus's singular response

which focused those He engaged on the central issue of God's heart of love. Since Jesus framed

this as the Greatest Commandment (Matt 22:34–40), failure to love God with all one's being is

the ultimate measure of one falling short of the glory of God.

Not only did Jesus establish loving God as the greatest of all commandments, but He also

held His disciples accountable using this measure. While John's Gospel does not record a Shema

reiteration, it does account for some explicit calls for the believer to love God and a revealing

love-based exchange between Jesus and one of His closest compatriots, Simon Peter (John

21:15–17).

In John 14:15, 21, 23, Jesus anchors His instructions to His disciples in the

presupposition that they are God-lovers. Edward Klink argues that "fellowship and partnership

with God is a relationship of love, not only God's love for us but also our love for God."[140] Here,

Klink posits, Jesus is not manipulating his disciples into a contrived form of love, but rather He

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[137] Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 822–23.

[138] Mark L. Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 540–41.

[139] David. E. Garland, *Luke: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 438–40.

[140] Edward W. Klink, *John: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 631.

is painting a clear picture of what a heart that loves God leads a person to do.[141] When Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15 NKJV) or "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me" (John 14:21 NKJV), Jesus is not cajoling His followers into twisted compliance. Instead, the Lord reveals how loyalty and steadfast devotion to God manifests in a believer's life. The primary motivation here is God's children loving Him completely, with their whole being.

In John 21:15–17, Jesus challenges Peter's love for Him. Not only as the rabbinic leader of the fledgling movement that would come to be known as the Way but also as one of the three persons of the Trinity, Jesus stands before Peter, asking him to defend his love for the Master. Some theologians view this passage as Peter's reinstatement as they reflect upon the parallels between this exchange and Peter's denial of Christ in John 18.[142] Jesus asks Peter to verify his love for the Master three times, reminiscent of Peter's earlier three denials. Whether there is an intentional connection between Peter's encounters in John 18 and 21, both meetings expose the same scriptural theme: God calls His people to love their God.

As noted, biblical love is neither an emotion nor a feeling. God does not call His children to fall in love with Him. God invites His beloved to enter a mutually committed covenant based upon devotion and loyalty and demonstrate the love they have declared in their faithful obedience to His will. Therefore, serving the Lord must be the second theological consideration of this thesis.

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[141] Klink, *John,* 631.

[142] Klink, *John,* 912.

The Call to Serve the Lord in the Old Testament

Serving the Lord is about something other than a believer's specific tasks or religious duties. Serving the Lord means loving God with one's entire being, surrendering oneself to fulfilling His will, and furthering His purposes. The theme of God calling His people to service runs through the Old and New Testaments. This thesis will first consider what Moses and Joshua reveal concerning the believer's call to serve the Lord.

Moses

In the Decalogue, the ten words delivered by Moses, the second word brought with it implied consequences for disobeying and obeying the commandment (Exod 20:4–6). God forbids the worship of idols and simultaneously warns that being a jealous God, He visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate" Him while "showing mercy to thousands, to those who love" Him and keep His commandments (Exod 20:5–6 NKJV). Here, God ties loving Him to keeping His commandments. Earlier in the second commandment, God forbids His people to bow down to or serve said idols (Exod 20:5a). When Moses reiterates the law in Deuteronomy, the same structure exists: God forbids the people from bowing down and serving as they are encouraged to love God and keep His commandments (Deut 5:9–10 NKJV). Some theologians see a parallel relationship between these coupled verbs.[143] Failure to love God and honor His commandments is akin to erecting a false god in one's life, bowing down, and serving its desires. Given this relationship, keeping God's commandments is analogous to serving the Lord and, thus, a practical demonstration of a believer's love (loyalty and devotion).

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[143] Michael A. Grisanti, "Deuteronomy," in *Numbers ~ Ruth*, vol. 2, Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 128.

God's call to His children to serve Him with their entire being is clear in the scriptural record, dating back to the Pentateuch. Those who heard Moses' directive would have understood the gravity of this call, and a healthy church would comprehend and respond to that urgent call today. Those who lead today's consumer-bombarded churches must see the import of this divine directive and lead God's people into serving Him by living according to His divine command.

Joshua

As Joshua concludes his tenure as Israel's leader, he challenges the people. In keeping with Moses' second commandment, Joshua charges the people to put away their idols so that they may "fear the Lord" and "serve Him in sincerity and truth" (Josh 24:14 NKJV). Joshua continues, challenging his listeners to decide if serving the Lord is an unrealistic request, and subsequently declares his resolution to demonstrate His love for God by serving the Lord (Josh 24:15). Once again, the Old Testament text links faithful devotion to God with serving the Lord and His purposes.[144]

Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals His desire to have His people declare their love for Him and demonstrate their love by faithfully serving His purposes. Moses's first message to Pharoah was that God wanted the Israelites freed to serve Him (Exod 7:16). With many of the plagues, God reiterated His aim to be served by His people (Exod 8:1, 20; 9:1; and 9:13). Later in Exodus, Moses encourages the people to serve God, outlining the blessing they would experience if they chose to obey (Exod 23:25). Later in the text, the people stand before the prophet Samuel and lament over sinning by serving false gods (1 Sam 12:10). The prophet responds by encouraging the people to "fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice" (1 Sam

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[144] Dallaire, *Joshua*, 279.

12:14 NKJV). The psalmists enjoin the reader to "serve the Lord with fear" (Ps 2:11 NKJV) and to "serve the Lord with gladness" (Ps 100:2 NKJV).

From the Pentateuch through the wisdom books to the prophets, the Old Testament record charges God's children to demonstrate their love by serving His will. This theme is apparent from the declarations of Moses to the warnings of Malachi and continues through the instructions of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament Epistles.

<center>The Call to Serve the Lord in the New Testament</center>

Jesus often taught regarding God's call upon believers to serve the Lord. Both Pauline and General Epistles also reveal God's heart regarding Christian service. This thesis will consider the theological inferences in Scripture by focusing on serving the Lord in the Gospels, Pauline Epistles, and General New Testament letters.

Jesus

Jesus's wilderness temptation ended when, after three attempts to corrupt Christ, Jesus responded to the devil, "Away with you…it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall" (Matt 4:10 NKJV). Jesus resolved the conflict when He declared that He had come into the world to serve God's purposes. Osborne observes that Jesus's proclamation is a callback to Moses' warning about God's jealousy and intolerance of believers serving other gods.[145]

Jesus emphasizes this issue in Matthew 6:24, admonishing His followers that "no one can serve two masters." Christ reveals that "God's demands are absolute; there is no room for

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[145] Osborne, *Matthew*, 135.

serving" any other god.[146] Even speaking of Himself, Christ elevates the essentiality of serving

God, assuring His disciples that He "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matt 20:28

NKJV). In this statement, Christ offers Himself as an object lesson on servanthood.[147] Jesus

teaches that the greatest of all is the one who serves (Matt 23:11).

The faithful servant is best positioned for promotion and increased responsibility (Matt

25:21). Faithful service marks the lives of those who are committed to the Lord. Their Heavenly

Father will honor these faithful ones (John 12:26). The Gospels are replete with instruction and

encouragement for believers to serve the Lord.

Jesus taught that serving God demonstrated one's love for Him. The Savior once accused

the scribes and Pharisees of living as hypocrites, appearing to worship God with their words

while their hearts were spiritually distant (Matt 15:7–9). This type of contradictory devotion is

meaningless to the Lord. Some in American Protestant churches have mastered a superficial

form of worship that holds all the right words and gestures but is void of the life dedication the

Lord invites His followers to embrace. This form of lukewarm worship is an insufficient offering

to the Lord and must be confronted and challenged wherever it prevails.

The Pauline Epistles

The biblical theme underscoring the essentiality of Christian service as a demonstration

of a believer's love for God is woven throughout Paul's writings. Paul addresses his readers in

Rome, explicating the significance of the freedom from bondage to the Law, highlighting that

they have "been delivered from the law" to have now an opportunity to "serve in the newness of

the Spirit" (Rom 7:6 NKJV). Paul is reminding his constituents that "an inner and progressive

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[146] Osborne, *Matthew*, 244.

[147] Ibid., 742.

transformation results in living not for self but to 'serve.'"[148] Later in his letter to the Romans, Paul exhorts them to love freely, indicating that to do anything less would constitute a hypocritical and warped form of love (Rom 12:9–12). Paul charges them to "be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom 12:11 NKJV), making the connection again that a zeal for God is only legitimized when accompanied by service to the Lord.

In His correspondence with the believers at Corinth, Paul implores his readers to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," reminding them that their "labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58 NKJV). Thomas Schreiner adds that Paul intends to convince his readers that they ought "to give themselves gladly and fully to the Lord's work since nothing done on earth is futile or useless."[149] Paul has challenged his readers to reframe their lives around dedicated service to God. Such a life is the only one that is worth living.

Finally, Paul writes to the believers in the Asia Minor community, reminding them that even undesirable circumstances are no excuse for believers failing to serve the Lord (Eph 6:5–8). This passage in Ephesians is challenging to read in today's culture, given the atrocious history of slavery in America and other parts of the world. Harold Hoehner argues that Paul's intent is not to address the legitimacy of slavery but to convey to his readers that "no matter what station in life Christians find themselves, they are always to render their conduct as to the Lord."[150] Paul's writings support the claim that he holds a high view of Christian service as a demonstration of a Christian's devotion to God.

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[148] Ian M. Duguid, Iain M, James M Hamilton Jr., Jay Sklar, and Robert W Yarbrough. *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 138.

[149] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 327.

[150] Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 564.

The General Epistles

The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers to be faithful in serving the Lord, exhorting them that "God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb 6:10 NKJV). In Hebrews 13:16, believers are encouraged to serve faithfully, sharing freely, knowing that God is highly pleased with sacrificial service. While sacrificial atonements are no longer necessary, "God is pleased with those who do good and share with others."[151]

James admonishes his readers to ensure they combine their faith claims with corresponding faith-inspired action (Jas 2:14–17). The crux of James's argument is that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas 2:17 NKJV). Douglas Moo notes that James is not, as some have read, contrasting faith with works, but rather faith by proclamation versus faith with demonstration.[152] Just as Christ challenged His followers to love God and keep His commandments, James charged his readers to have faith and demonstrate that faith with good works.

Many more Old and New Testament passages reveal the soundness of a theological position supporting a believer's charge to love God wholeheartedly and demonstrate loyalty and devotion to God by serving Him and His purposes. From the Pentateuch to the General Epistles, God's plea to His people is evident. God calls His people to love Him with their entire being and prove love in their faithful and sacrificial service.

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[151] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews,* ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, T. Desmond Alexander, James M. Hamilton, et al., (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 424.

[152] Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 132–137.

This thesis will consider these two core theological strands to study the cancer of consumerism plaguing the American Protestant church. A church that properly assesses God's great and unfathomable love for them should reflexively love the Lord in return. Such a God-loving church, if it is healthy and properly functional, should demonstrate its love for God through joyful, willing, and committed service to the Lord, in lifestyle, and in ministry.

Theoretical Foundations

This thesis will consider practical ways the church commonly approaches the two-pronged theological mandate to love and serve God. Assessing the prevalent theories and identifying standard ecclesiastical practices must begin with considering the overarching principles that contribute to cultivating disciples who love God passionately and willingly serve His purposes.

Considering practical methods that the church is cultivating congregations who passionately love the Lord, this thesis will review prevailing theories on personal salvation, spiritual formation/discipleship, and a practical application of the Great Commandment. Addressing the common practices that the church employs to develop members who willingly serve God's purposes, this thesis will assess practices for measuring church health and member religiosity, practical theories on implementing organizational change within local churches, and standard methods for cultivating increased member engagement.

Leading Individuals into a God-Loving Life

Churches, like all organizations, are comprised of people. Theologically, a church 'is' its people. If church leadership is to affect organizational change successfully, it must begin with individual transformation. As the people of a church change, so does the church. Therefore, this

thesis must simultaneously focus on the factors influencing personal and corporate cultural change.

Individual transformation begins with personal salvation and manifests through a process of systematic spiritual formation that converts a mere believer into a devoted disciple. One's salvific experience must be authentic, biblical, and accompanied by the indwelling of Christ's Spirit. One's spiritual formation must be effective, resulting in a significant change in one's mind, heart, and soul.

Effective church leadership provides 'bottom-up' support, calling members into a vital relationship with God and coaching them into spiritual maturity. Constructive church leadership also provides 'top-down' guidance toward a compelling vision and healthy core values. In a well-led church, members are sandwiched between the push and pull of caring shepherds.

How is the church practically addressing the need to produce disciples who love the Lord deeply, with their hearts, souls, and minds (Matt 22:37)? How does the theological position meet with the prevailing theoretical practices? Assessing the church's common practices, this thesis will examine the church's posture regarding the believer's salvation and spiritual formation and how they work together to fulfill the Great Commandment.

Personal Salvation

To begin, this thesis must consider what is meant by personal salvation. The believer's salvation is to be differentiated from God's plan to redeem all humanity (John 3:16) and to redeem specific nations/people groups, such as His promise that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26 NKJV). Personal salvation is person specific, embodied in the promise that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13 NKJV). The expression "one is saved" is

the equivalent of saying one is "born again" (John 3:3 NKJV), a "Christian" (Acts 11:26 NKJV), or a "child of God" (Rom 8:16 NKJV).

Becoming a Christian is the natural first step in loving God passionately. Attempting to love God without being adopted into His family is more superstition than true faith. When Paul encountered the philosophers at Mars Hill, he recognized that while they appeared to be 'religious', their inscription that read, "to the unknown god," revealed that they were, in fact, merely 'superstitious' (Acts 17:23 NKJV). Likewise, when Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman beside Jacob's Well, He clarified that her people's attempt to worship fell short since they worshipped the concept of God apart from knowing God (John 4:1–22).

Salvation is the beginning of a believer's journey toward knowing God. When one receives the gift of salvation, one can experience and share God's love with others, which includes loving God in return. Those who know God also know love since God is love (1 John 4:7–8). Those who know God reciprocate God's love by passionately loving God in return (1 John 4:19).

Ensuring a congregation has heard the gospel and been invited into personal salvation is the first step to producing God-loving disciples. A spiritual connection to God is a prerequisite to loving the Lord with all one's faculties. Every true God-lover must first experience conversion, coming to saving faith in God through the agency of Jesus Christ, and subsequent regeneration, God's work of imparting new spiritual life to that believer.[153] Wayne Grudem argues that the salvific experience necessarily involves a basic knowledge of Jesus and His gospel message, acceptance of that message as truth, and placing one's trust entirely in Jesus as one's Savior.[154]

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[153] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 850–51.

[154] Ibid*.,* 861–63.

Salvation is a spiritual gift that changes human nature, moving believers from "rebelliousness to childlike trust and willingness to obey."[155] Millard Erickson contributes that without the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, a concurrent reality of the new birth, one is unable "to recognize and understand truth," much less express sincere love for one's Creator.[156] Erickson defines the process of salvation, or spiritual regeneration, as "the basic change in the direction of one's life from an inclination toward sin to a positive desire to live righteously."[157] Given the significance of biblical salvation, evaluating common practices employed to invite unbelievers into vital relationships with God is critical. This thesis will consider five prevailing theories: (1) the altar call, (2) the decisional model, (3) the "sinner' prayer" model, (4) the fear-based model, and (5) the Luke 11 model.

The altar call paradigm, popularized by the international evangelist Billy Graham, invites listeners to respond to a public presentation of the gospel by coming to the altar to receive salvation.[158] Graham's worldwide crusades were famous for thousands of attendees pouring out of their seats in response to his persistent calls to come.[159] Billy Graham historian Grant Wacker asserts that crusade altar calls often transformed otherwise secular gatherings at a given coliseum into sacred encounters in one of God's sanctuaries.[160] Jonathan Janzen observes that altar calls sometimes negatively influence a worship experience and, at other times, serve as a flashpoint

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[155] R. E. White, "Salvation" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, by Walter A. Elwell. Second ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1050.

[156] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* Third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 217.

[157] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 840

[158] Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, "Billy Graham's Heart Religion: Emotion and 'America's Pastor,'" *Fides et Historia* 52, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 50–51.

[159] Ken Garfield, "The Last (Hometown) Crusade: Billy Graham Preaches to Record Crowd in Charlotte," *Christianity Today* (October 28, 1996), 82.

[160] Grant Wacker, "Altar Call in Europe: Billy Graham, Mass Evangelism, and the Cold-War West," *Christianity Today* (March 2022): 63.

for deeper spiritual meaning. According to Janzen, altar calls for salvation may just as quickly

devolve into mere rote religious activities or initiate sacred experiences with God.[161] Jonathan

Bailey agrees with Janzen, citing his journey of responding to several altar calls without

experiencing any meaningful change in his spiritual disposition or marked impact on his life.[162]

Altar calls are practiced in many American Protestant churches, especially those under

charismatic or Pentecostal influences.[163] Wolfgang Vondey posits that in churches where

invitations to the altar are extended, welcoming the call and responding "to the interruption of

the Holy Spirit is to respond to the invitation of God and the proclamation of the gospel and to

embark on a new life."[164] This statement summarizes the potential significance of one responding

to an altar call. God inspired the leader to issue when the Holy Spirit has drawn one to respond.

Such circumstances constitute a divinely orchestrated meeting with God, and true biblical

salvation is a legitimate possible outcome.

The second common approach to offering salvation to unbelievers is the decisional

model. Nowhere is this better characterized than in Cru's *Four Spiritual Laws* campaign.[165]

Founder of Cru's predecessor, Campus Crusade for Christ, Bill Bright, authored the *Four

Spiritual Laws* booklet in 1965.[166] The laws may be summarized as (1) God loves all of humanity

and offers a wonderful plan for each person's life," (2) humanity is sinful and separated from

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[161] J. Janzen, "Call and Answer?: The Art of Altar Calls in the Twenty-First Century," *Vision* (Winnipeg, Man.) 21, no. 1 (2020): 80, 84–85.

[162] Jonathan R. Bailey, "After All the Altar Calls: How I Went from Getting Saved to Getting an Eternal Life in Christ." *Christianity Today* 60, no. 3 (April 2016): 80.

[163] Wolfgang Vondey, "Soteriology at the Altar: Pentecostal Contributions to Salvation as Praxis." *Transformation* 34, no. 3 (2017): 226–28.

[164] Ibid., 228.

[165] "4 Spiritual Laws," Campus Ministry, accessed July 6, 2023, https://campusministry.org/docs/tools/FourSpiritualLaws.pdf

[166] "About," Cru, Inc., accessed July 6, 2023, https://www.cru.org/us/en/about.html

God, and therefore, "cannot know or experience God's love" and divine plan, (3) Jesus Christ is the answer to humanity's sin problem, and (4) people must receive Jesus, by faith, and experience regeneration to embrace God's plan for them.[167] This publication is so broadly distributed and widely accepted that, in some places, it is held in near-biblical esteem. One account from western Nepal is of a man who placed his copy of the *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet on his sick buffalo and prayed for the animal's healing.[168] While believers should not consider Bill Bright's publication an instrument of spiritual power, this story underscores this paradigm's widespread influence.

Relevant to this thesis is the fact that this approach encourages the prospective recipient to "make a decision for Christ."[169] That one should "make a decision" for Christ has become common vernacular in many churches and parachurch organizations. It is common for church websites to boast about the number of decisions and subsequent baptisms in their church. While Bright's publication invites the recipient to recognize if God has already been at work on their heart, some may misunderstand the decision-making vernacular to imply that salvation is an act of one's volition. The decisional model, taken out of context, is a dangerous twisting of the gospel message and may result in some presuming they are saved when they are not. John's Gospel clarifies, informing the reader that one cannot be born again as a byproduct "of the will of man" (John 1:13 NKJV). No decision any person makes can save them. Salvation is God's gift alone to give (Eph 2:8–9).

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[167] "4 Spiritual Laws."

[168] Tara Singh Kathayat, "Nepal Campus Crusade for Christ: Launching Spiritual Movements Everywhere in Nepal," *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 24, no. 2 (November 2020): 118.

[169] "About," Cru, Inc.

The sinner's prayer model is the third common approach to offering the salvific experience. Some hold the practice of leading others in a prayer during which they confess their sinfulness and express their repentance toward God as an essential element in a church's practical soteriology. Janzen writes about a church member who demonstrated increasing evidence that the Holy Spirit was at work in his life.[170] Despite the confirming proof of transformation, Janzen still felt the need to justify his observation, noting, "Phil has not made a verbal confession of faith in the form of the "sinner's prayer," yet his behavior demonstrates the ongoing work of the Spirit.[171] There is no record of Peter, Levi, John, or Paul uttering the sinner's prayer before being considered Christians.

The shortcoming of the sinner's prayer approach is that it reduces a powerful, transformative spiritual experience to an oral formula. More like a Wiccan incantation than a heartfelt prayer, some in the church act as if they are placing more faith in the words spoken than saving faith in the One to whom these words are presumably prayed. Salvation is not formulaic. It cannot be boiled down to a few rote statements followed by an official declaration from a spiritual leader that the person is now saved. Salvation is not wrought by human influence (John 1:13). Salvation is entirely and exclusively God's doing.

The fourth common approach to offering salvation to those yet to be born again is through the agency of fear. Fear tactics have long been used to motivate unbelievers to escape the coming wrath of God. During the infancy of Billy Graham's ministry, he "frequently appealed to fear, including fear of the atomic bomb, fear of Communist infiltration, and fear of

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[170] Janzen, "Call and Answer?" 83.

[171] Ibid.

rampant crime and juvenile delinquency."[172] Graham was literally scaring the hell out of his

listeners, hoping they would run toward the gates of heaven.

Early Billy Graham was and is not alone. Fear-based preaching was common in America

during the period between the World Wars.[173] So-called "hell, fire, and brimstone" preaching was

typical in many American pulpits.[174] While Billy Graham changed his tenor, some hold that fear-

based evangelism is still apropos today. Dating back to America's colonial days, fear-based

evangelism was popular among New England Puritan ministers.[175] Following a major mood shift

in mainline American Christianity, fear-inspired calls to salvation resurrected during the Great

Awakening of 1730.[176] Well-known pulpiteers, including George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennant,

and James Davenport, specialized in preaching messages designed to scare the unsaved away

from the wrath of hell.[177] The undisputed leader of this fear propaganda was legendary statesman

Jonathan Edwards, known by some as the "master of terror rhetoric in eighteenth-century New

England."[178] Edwards held that genuine Christian conversion could not be affected without a

healthy dose of fear.[179] Alexander Stewart observes, "Jonathan Edwards was motivated by a firm

conviction about the reality of future punishment in hell and intentionally sought to motivate

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[172] Manzullo-Thomas, "Billy Graham's Heart Religion," 50.

[173] Ibid., 51-53.

[174] Ibid., 57.

[175] Brian Jackson, "Jonathan Edwards Goes to Hell (House): Fear Appeals in American Evangelism," *Rhetoric Review*, 26:1(2007): 42, 44.

[176] Ibid., 45.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid., 47.

people by increasing their fear of eternal divine punishment."[180] Edward's theology and preaching represent a foundation on which today's fear-based soteriology rests.

Scare tactics ceased following the Great Awakening and did not resurface until early in the twentieth century. Made popular again in the sermons of "non-institutionalized, itinerant preachers," most frequently delivered in camp meetings and tent revivals, preaching to scare made a comeback.[181] Scaring the uninitiated to accept Christ remained a peripheral evangelical practice until, in the 1970s, Thomas Road Baptist Church's Jerry Falwell was inspired to begin hosting Liberty University's "Scaremare," a predecessor to what is now referred to nationwide as Hell House.[182] Hell houses are dramatic live productions held around Halloween, depicting the horrors of hell, designed to provoke visitors to turn in faith toward Jesus Christ. Hank Willenbrick states, "Hell Houses have become a robust fixture" in American evangelical Christianity.[183] Major media outlets have documented the Hell House phenomenon, and this fear-based approach has drawn significant academic reviews.[184] Brian Jackson observes that there is such a market for this gospel presentation that Hell House kits may even be procured online.[185]

Frightening people into genuine salvation is fraught with severe theological shortcomings. While research suggests that those who support such approaches have been well-intentioned, some in the mainstream evangelical church feel misguided in their theology.[186] Some

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[180] Alexander E. Stewart, "Scaring the Hell Out of You: Scare-Tactics, Christian Horror Houses, and the Apocalypse of John," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 16, no. 2 (2017): 168.

[181] Jackson, "Jonathan Edwards," 50–51.

[182] Stewart, "Scaring the Hell," 167.

[183] Hank Willenbrink, "The Act of being Saved: Hell House and the Salvific Performative," *Theatre Journal* (Washington, D.C.) 66, no. 1 (2014): 73.

[184] Jackson, "Jonathan Edwards," 52.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Joshua Jair Whitfield, "Fire and Brimstone: Tips for Preaching the End Times. Why Recovering History and Theology Matters When Addressing the Last Things," *The Priest* 76, no. 10 (October 2020): 39.

theologians question if this tactic is more manipulative than persuasive.[187] One theologian apprised this approach as "rhetorical thuggery," coercing through fear in a vein that contradicts Jesus's message and ministry.[188]

This thesis rejects this approach to winning souls to faith in Christ. Central to this project's aim is determining a viable method to cultivate people into willing service to the Lord. That purpose must necessarily begin with those who willingly come to faith in and love for God. There cannot be any coercion involved in the participant's response. Any manipulative influence could invalidate this study's results.

In this researcher's view, the only biblically sound and viable method for evangelizing the lost and ensuring professing church members are God-connected is the Luke 11 model. Based on Luke 11:1–13, this evangelistic approach employs no requirement for one to respond to an altar call, decide in favor of Christ, pray according to a set prescription, or be filled with fear about possibly going to hell. The Luke 11 model rests only on desperate, persistent prayer.

In Luke 11:1–4, the Lord teaches His disciples that prayer is God's chosen method for manifesting His will on earth (Luke 11:2). In Jesus's instruction, He guides His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come. You will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Luke 11:2 NKJV). Luke 11:5–8 records Jesus's parable of the desperate friend whose request is granted, not based on friendship, but because of his persistence (Luke 11:5–8). Finally, closing this pericope, the Lord instructs His followers to persist in pursuing God's will, asking, seeking, and knocking until they receive what they need. Jesus closes this last discourse with the pivotal statement, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly

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[187] Jackson, "Jonathan Edwards," 44.

[188] Stewart, "Scaring the Hell," 167.

Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13 NKJV). The simplicity of this

approach is profound. All that is asked of the penitent seeker is to (1) pray, (2) pray desperately,

(3) pray persistently, and (4) ask God for His Spirit.

Beyond the simplicity of this approach is Christ's final statement, the soteriological tie

that an unbeliever needs to approach and cross the bridge of God-initiated salvation. Salvation is

God's gift (Eph 2:8–9), not a decision or choice any person may make for themselves (John

1:12–13). There is no formula for prayer, no sinner's recipe that compels God to grant salvation

to any given seeker. God has not given humanity a spirit of fear (2 Tim 1:7); therefore, it is

theologically inconsistent to hold that He would use fear to drive the prideful and resistant to

saving faith in Christ. Salvation may be found at an altar, especially when the Holy Spirit's

conviction is the impetus for the person's response to the gospel (John 16:8). However,

responding to an altar call or several invitations to come forward does not indicate that one has

received the indwelling Spirit of Christ and that the new birth has occurred.

Those in the church who feel cold and passionless toward God and His purposes may be

among the mixed population of those who are churched and yet unsaved. Therefore, it is critical

for a church to proclaim the blessing of the salvific gift continuously, presenting the gospel of

Christ in as many God'glorifyin, biblical ways as possible. Craig Ott offers four simple

metaphoric illustrations a church may employ to vary the nature of the gospel presentation

without corrupting its powerful message.[189] Ott posits that the gospel may be illustrated using

four powerful motifs: (1) the legal metaphor, picturing God as the divine judge and Jesus as

humanities chief advocate; (2) the father image, revealing the devastation of a broken family and

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[189] Craig Ott, "The Power of Biblical Metaphors for the Contextualized Communication of the Gospel," *Missiology* 42, no. 4 (October 2014): 357–74.

the patriarch's desire to reunite his children; (3) the purifier metaphor, revealing the holiness of God and Christ's finished work to cleanse all humanity of its soul-defiling sin; and, (4) the liberator motif, revealing humanity as kidnapped and held in bondage for ransom, and Christ coming to the rescue to become a ransom for all.[190] How the gospel is shared is less significant than how often it is shared. A church that does not frequently preach the gospel message is passive in its commitment to cultivating a God-loving congregation. Passionately loving God is one of the byproducts of the new birth. The believer's heart is transformed, and affections are aligned with God and His purposes. Any work to cultivate a passion for God in people's hearts must begin with a commitment to connect them to God through personal salvation authentically.

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

Second only to authentic salvation is a believer's transformation into Christlikeness through spiritual formation and discipleship. While these terms, especially discipleship, are likely familiar buzzwords many churchgoers would recognize, few outside leadership ranks could articulate clearly what either means.[191] Chris Beard agrees, noting that speaking of discipleship is easier than defining and explaining what it means.[192] Even for those in church leadership positions, speaking of spiritual formation and discipleship is easier than defining either.[193] Christopher Moody posits that "besides the word church, the word disciple is the next

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[190] Ott, "Metaphors for Contextualized Gospel," 357-74.

[191] D. Scott Dixon and Trent Rogers. "'Discipleship': Clarifying Terms in the New Testament and Secondary Literature," *Southeastern Theological Review* 14, no. 1 (Spr 2023): 45.

[192] Chris Beard, "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement," *Missiology* 43, no. 2 (April 2015): 176.

[193] Christopher B. Moody, *Disciple-Making Disciples: A Practical Theology of the Church* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2021), 33.

most misunderstood term of Christianity in the modern era."[194] Yet, Christian spiritual formation

is at the heart of the church's existence.[195] The criticality of the Great Commission cannot be

overemphasized (Matt 28:19–20). A key element of the church's mission is to develop believers

into disciples.

Many American churches have either lost sight of or are unaware of this mandate. For

many congregants, the term 'church' has been reduced to a time/event on Sunday morning and a

place they gather to experience an event.[196] Though this perspective contradicts the *ekklessia*

community of believers about which Paul wrote (1 Cor 10:32; Gal 1:13; Eph 5:23; Col 1:18), it

fits squarely into the consumer-driven church paradigm plaguing the American church.[197] The

hallmark of the consumer-oriented church is that members belong to it but are not expected to

grow through it. Andrew Burggraff observes four key shifts in the church that undermine its

primary disciple-making mission.[198] Burggraff recognizes a drop in biblical literacy, a decline in

church attendance, social acceptance of member inactivity, and a lack of emphasis on spiritual

formation.[199] Therefore, this DMIN study must consider spiritual formation and discipleship and

its potential effectiveness in cultivating active member engagement.

Several theologians have defined the term 'disciple'. Tony Evans holds that a disciple is

"a believer in Christ who takes part in the spiritual development process of progressively

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[194] Ruth Haley Barton, Diane J. Chandler, Siang-Yang Tan et al., "Spiritual Formation in the Church," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 292–97.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Chris Beard, "Connecting Spiritual Formation and Adult Learning Theory: An Examination of Common Principles," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 256.

[197] Beard, "Connecting," 257.

[198] Andrew Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum: Applying the Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction by Dick, Carey, and Carey to the Construction of Church Discipleship Courses," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 397–98.

[199] Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum," 397-98.

learning to live all of life in submission to Jesus Christ."[200] Another author defines a disciple as

"a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to

Him…committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in community and developing to their full

potential for Christ and His mission."[201] Jim Putnam and Bobby Harrington employ a trifold

definition, arguing that a disciple is (1) a Christ-follower (born again), (2) a Christ-impacted

person, and (3) one committed to Christ's kingdom mission.[202] Burggraff observes that however

one defines a disciple, a disciple would be in a local church functioning as a fully activated

member.[203]

Likewise, there are numerous approaches to understanding discipleship/spiritual

formation. One theologian describes spiritual formation as "the process of Christ being formed in

us for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others."[204]

George Barna describes discipleship as "becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus

Christ."[205] Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey posit that spiritual formation is the process of being

changed to be more like Jesus."[206] While there are many ways to describe the process of turning

believers into disciples and varying perspectives of what character traits constitute a disciple,

there can be no ambiguity about the centrality of disciple-making in the church's mission.

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[200] Tony Evans, *Kingdom Disciples: Heaven's Representatives on Earth*, (Chicago, IL: Moddy Publishers, 2017), 16–17.

[201] Earley, and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 28.

[202] Jim Putnam, and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 51.

[203] Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum," 403.

[204] Barton et al., "Spiritual Formation," 296.

[205] Barna, *Growing True Disciples,* 17.

[206] Earley and Dempsey, *Spiritual Formation Is*, 4.

That the church is to make disciples who make disciples is clear in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20). How best to accomplish this task will be, in part, what this thesis examines. Working with the Lord to bring about another's transformation is a delicate task. The disciple-maker must know that every candidate comes to the discipleship process already conformed to and formed by a dominant worldview. Every new believer brings emotional and spiritual baggage into their new life in Christ. There is always an internal story rehearsing in their minds and hearts, pointing them back toward themselves as they view the world as though they are its center.[207] Despite the inherent challenge of guiding someone from a known and comfortable way of life into living the way of the Lord, the church must see this work as its primary purpose and endeavor to identify fruitful approaches to transformation.

The gravity of spiritual formation rests on its aim to change the thoughts and core beliefs of the believer. Dallas Willard views the discipleship process as primarily concerned with helping the recipient adopt a new way of thinking about and seeing their world.[208] Rick Yount argues that Christian spiritual formation aims to help the candidate recognize thought patterns that support a life absent God's influence and to replace them with the worldview Jesus advocated in His life and teachings.[209] Akin to the exchanged life Paul promoted (Gal 2:20), leading a believer to a renewed mind (Rom 12:2) cannot be accomplished without their full and active participation. A person can be saved and remain distant, on the periphery of the life Christ

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[207] James A. Lang "An Evaluation of a Discipleship Process Addressing Christians' Inner Life Issues," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 260.

[208] Rick Yount, "The Mind: Discipleship That Forms the Thoughts of Christians—Reflections on Dallas Willard's Thinking on the Mind (Thoughts)," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 52–53.

[209] Yount, "The Mind," 54–55.

called them to, and therefore, remain virtually unaffected by spiritual formation. Effective discipleship requires the would-be-disciple's active participation.[210]

Effective spiritual formation changes a person by first realigning their core beliefs.[211] Many church practitioners have discovered this is easier described than done. Klaus Issler observes, "Our core beliefs cannot instantly be changed by a mere decision or a heartfelt commitment of our will, at any time we want to."[212] Effective discipleship requires more than Bible studies and classes on Christian maturity. Effective discipleship is also not a campaign or program to be spearheaded by enthusiastic church leaders. Fruitful spiritual formation requires time, effort, patience, and discernment. Getting a disciple to change their worldview is not a leader's job; the one being discipled must come to acute self-awareness and willingly challenge their life paradigm.[213]

Once a disciple opens their mind to a new way of life, the discipleship process may address the individual's heart and, ultimately, their actions. Thus, the disciple moves from merely believing in Jesus to following His leadership wholeheartedly. This is evidenced when a believer moves systematically from relatively inactive church engagement to functioning as a fully activated church member. Only one key question remains. How does a church implement a process to help believers become serving disciples?

This thesis will employ a five-aspect spiritual formation process to encourage the believer toward greater Christlikeness. Through one-on-one engagement, small group sessions, and

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[210] Jeffrey W. Aernie, "Theological Grit: The Convergence of Deliberate Practice and Christian Discipleship," *Colloquium* 51, no. 2 (December 2019): 24.

[211] Klaus D. Issler, "Inner Core Belief Formation, Spiritual Practices, and the Willing-Doing Gap," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 2 (2009): 179–85.

[212] Issler, "Inner Core," 191.

[213] James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard, "The Wisdom of Christian Spiritual Formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 13, no. 1 (2020): 13.

employment of self-assessment tools, participants will be guided toward a disciple's lifestyle. Since one major aim of effective discipleship is to coach the disciple toward following Jesus wholeheartedly, this thesis will follow the strategy Jesus demonstrated (see pages 89–90.)

Study participants will be 'confronted' and made aware of the impact of consumerism on the church, 'challenged' to not only believe but also to follow Jesus, and 'called' to take a step of faith toward faithful discipleship. Participants will then be invited to *commit* themselves to love the Lord by serving His mission and to engineer an inner revolution by 'changing' their life paradigm while adopting the new life Jesus prescribes. If this process produces greater *Christlikeness* in KLCC members, it will be deemed an effective way to disciple inactive members toward full engagement in God's mission.

Changes in behavior will be evidence of inner transformation and demonstrate value shifts in the disciple's worldview. As the believer transitions from a me-centered through a we-oriented and into a Christ-driven life paradigm, their change in behavior will reveal that they have altered their core beliefs.[214] For this process to be effective, however, it must be undergirded by the participant actively seeking the Lord's involvement and God's reciprocal grace upon the disciple, discipler, and the discipleship process.

In addition to active engagement in an externally derived discipleship process, the participant must practice the spiritual disciplines that draw one closer to God.[215] Meditation, prayer, fasting, solitude, and submission are helpful as the participant enlists the Lord's help to achieve deep and lasting inner transformation.[216] The outward discipline of service is also

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[214] Timothy S. Gibson, "Proposed Levels of Christian Spiritual Maturity," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 4 (2004): 298–302.

[215] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines,* 15–24.

[216] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th anniversary, 3rd, rev. ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 1–125.

exceptionally helpful in countering the effects of many churchgoers' consumeristic attitudes.[217]

In addition to the participant's engagement in spiritual disciplines, an effective spiritual

formation effort must marry the truths revealed in Scripture with the practical theology lived out

in the church.[218]

Spiritual formation and discipleship are critical to the church's war against consumerism.

Believers must embrace God's call and respond by living as Christ's committed disciples.

Leading a Local Church to Passionately Love God Through Service

Churches are made up of people. As church members change, so does the church. The

bottom-up approach for changing a church's culture entails drawing individuals into a

relationship with God and living a God-honoring life. Authentic personal salvation and effective

spiritual formation are critical for transforming church members.

Even as leaders encourage members to connect and grow with God, initiating a top-down

approach to church transformation is wise. To encourage church transformation from the top,

leaders must navigate the church through organizational change that takes the church out of a

consumer-driven culture and into increased member engagement. This thesis will reflect on

considerations that will impact this top-down transformation approach.

Implementing Organizational Change within A Local Church

Because churches operate in a dynamic environment, change is inevitable. One church

leadership expert observes, "Being a church is being in the business of change."[219] Change is

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[217] Foster, *Celebration*, 126–140.

[218] David Setran and Jim Wilhoit, "Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: Recent History and Future Prospects," *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (2020): 542.

[219] Bârd Erik Hallesby Norheim, "A Grain of Wheat: Toward a Theological Anthropology for Leading Change in Ministry," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 13, no. 1 (2014): 60.

hardwired into all organizations.[220] However, not all organizations weather change well. Recent research suggests that secular businesses and churches experience a change process failure rate as high as 80 percent.[221] Notwithstanding, a church can outlive its inevitable change by adapting strategies for successfully navigating organizational transition.

Some change is thrust upon a church as external forces pressure church leaders to adapt to changing societal conditions. Another change is internally initiated by visionary leaders who envision a preferred organizational future and recognize that the church cannot realize the vision without embracing cultural change. This type of change may be particularly challenging for some churches. Leader-initiated change may feel elective, suggesting the leadership has decided it is time for the church to transition to a new paradigm. If the proposed change seems elective, it may also appear optional. Therein is the heart of the organizational challenge.

Growth necessitates change; change naturally produces organizational growing pains.[222] Many churches want to grow, adapt, and remain societally relevant but do not want to change.[223] Some churches view "change to be a compromise of their congregation's time-tested identity."[224] These churches suffer from the fallacy of mistaking organizational constancy for church stability. Churches that aim to be fixed, rigid, unchanging structures in an ever-changing cultural environment are poised for entire upheaval and organizational obsolescence. Ed Lawler and Chris Worley, urging organizational flexibility, notes, "Looking only at the current environment

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[220] Yuan Li, "Rethinking Organizational Change: Implications from the Chinese Shi 勢," *Frontiers of Philosophy* in China 11, no. 4 (2016): 543.

[221] Robert John Eschlemann, "A Holistic Process for Leading Organizational Change," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: vol.10: no. 1 (2016): 92.

[222] Norheim, "A Grain of Wheat," 64.

[223] Ibid., 60.

[224] Robert Stephen Reid, "Becoming a Built to Change Congregation," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 13, no. 1 (2014): 33.

leads to building a static organization matched to the present but not to possible futures."[225] This

is where effective leadership becomes critical to the organizational change process.

Leading a church into a new cultural paradigm can be delicate and daunting. Effective

leadership positively influences others to see, embrace, and act on what must be done and

successfully mobilizes individual and corporate resources to realize a commonly envisioned

preferred future.[226] Effective leadership casts a compelling vision and develops a forward-

looking strategy.[227] In organizational transition, "churches must change and adapt their ministry

methods, using strategic planning as their vehicle."[228] In a church context, leaders engineering

effective organizational change must be acutely aware that they are "only the secondary agents

of church revitalization."[229] The Holy Spirit must orchestrate cultural shifts in a congregation's

worldview.[230] Church leaders must understand God-dependent change does not signify a passive

approach to leadership.[231] Leaders are responsible for shaping public opinion, setting clear

objectives, providing meaningful progress feedback, and assembling a working team to

spearhead the movement. Russ Linden and David Forney argue that team development may be

among the leader's most crucial roles in the church transition process.[232] Thom Rainer posits that

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[225] Edward E. Lawler, and Christopher G. Worley, *Built to Change How to Achieve Sustained Organizational Effectiveness*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 26.

[226] Norheim, "A Grain of Wheat," 60.

[227] Marcus Moberg, "Studying Change in Religious Organizations: A Discourse-Centered Framework," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 32, no. 2 (2020): 102.

[228] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, Third ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2013), 27.

[229] Brian A. DeVries, "Divine Empowerment: The Holy Spirit and Church Revitalisation," *In Die Skriflig* 49, no. 1 (2015): 2.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid., 3.

[232] Russ Linden and David Forney, "Leading Change: Is the Who More Important Than the What," *The Journal of Religious Leadership* 20, no. 1 (2021): 83–96.

church leaders engineering a successful cultural shift often build their team while developing the

church's new infrastructure.[233] This multitasking approach to staffing and strategic

implementation is what Ranier calls 'simultracking' and can save a church considerable time as

it builds and transitions simultaneously.[234]

Randy Wollf adds that in addition to wise team selection, leaders must manage their

influence through the change process.[235] It is easy and tempting for a leader to exert undue

pressure on members to agree with, conform to, and support the church's vision.[236] However,

through intimidation, manipulation, and other abuses of power, ineffective leadership corrupts

the organic nature of organizational change and, in the end, undermines the environment

required for a healthy transition. Therefore, wise, thoughtful leaders are a prerequisite for an

effective organizational shift in a church.

Assuming church leadership has a clear and compelling vision, a forward-looking

strategy, a viable team in place, and a healthy perspective toward power dynamics in the church,

what comes next? Bârd Norheim applies Jesus's teaching on the grain of wheat (John 12:24) to

provide a useful perspective for organizational change.[237] Norheim outlines a U-shaped

progression in an organization's life that aligns with the organizational change process.[238] Citing

the work of Gilbert Rendle, Norheim posits that organizations transition through eight stages as

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[233] Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 92.

[234] Rainer, *Breakout Churches,* 92.

[235] Randy Wollf, "Leaders and their Use of Power in Facilitating Organizational Change," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 8, no. 1 (2014): 76–87.

[236] Linden and Forney, "Leading Change," 83–96.

[237] Norheim, "A Grain of Wheat," 72–77.

[238] Ibid.

they move from their current to a new paradigm.[239] Norheim argues that all organizations

experience (1) disorientation, (2) resistance, (3) acceptance of reality, (4) capitulation, (5) hope,

(6) openness, (7) commitment, and (8) acceptance and integration of the new paradigm. [240]

Many academic contributions have opened discussions on effectively leading an

organization to cultural change. The scope of this thesis does not permit as broad a sampling as

this researcher would like. Nonetheless, seven key principles will inform this DMIN thesis

process.

First, consistent communication is essential for effective organizational change.

Communication with leaders, key stakeholders, and constituents must begin early and continue

throughout the change process. Second, communicate clearly about the why as well as the

what.[241] Some leaders make a fatal error by accentuating what needs to happen while neglecting

to help members understand the rationale and urgent necessity of the transition. Third, remember

that the church is its people, not an organization. If a church is to change its culture, its people

must first embrace personal change.[242] Fourth, a leader is responsible for delicately dispensing

measured pain.[243] People are naturally predisposed to move from pain to pleasure, discomfort to

comfort. Wherever a church is, its members are likely comfortable being there. Therefore, if

leaders are to encourage the church to a new place, they must create a sense of discomfort with

the current situation. Effective organizational change begins with pain.[244] Fifth, cast a big vision

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[239] Norheim, "A Grain of Wheat," 72–73.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Jeffrey Hiattt and Timothy Creasy, *Change Management: The People Side of Change* (Fort Collins, CO: Prosci Inc., 2012), 80.

[242] Ibid., 45–60.

[243] Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub. Group, 2013), 175–87.

[244] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 179.

but focus on small wins.[245] John Cotter observes that a viable small win meets three criteria: (1) it is visible (everyone in the church can see it), (2) it is unambiguous (there's no room for debate), and (3) it is a clear result of the change process.[246] Sixth, the leader must remember that progress is not a sum-zero proposition. Organizational progress is not an all-or-nothing evaluation. Wise leadership will balance what works and fits into the new paradigm and what must change for the church to embrace its new culture.[247] Seventh, an effective leader will remain flexible. Organizational change is rarely a linear event. People are complex beings. Therefore, leading a church through organizational change may be fraught with unexpected complexities.

Cultivating Increased Member Engagement

This thesis will consider three popular approaches for cultivating active volunteers within a local church. The first model, the Saddleback Approach, popularized by Rick Warren's bestselling book, *The Purpose Driven Church,* has enjoyed broad acceptance and application worldwide. The Church of the Highlands Growth Track approach is the second volunteer cultivation model to be considered here. Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Henson's Connect volunteer activation model is the third and final model to consider.

Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Community Church, outlines his volunteer development model in his book, *The Purpose Driven Church.*[248] The Saddleback Model identifies five possible relationships everyone has with any given church. People are either part

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[245] Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, First ed. (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2010), 124–48.

[246] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 126.

[247] Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 75–90.

[248] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 365–92.

of the community (not connected to one's church), the crowd (at least occasionally attending church events or services), the congregation (regularly attending services and perhaps church members), the committed (actively engaged in ministry life and growing in discipleship), or the core (fully engaged members who are often integral to a church's mission).[249] In this approach, church leaders assess which of these five levels of commitment a person presently occupies and then work with the person to move them to a level of more significant commitment systematically.[250] Warren's theory is that if a local church develops a systematic approach to funneling people to deeper commitment levels, the ministry will eventually see a regular and renewable stream of new volunteers emerging as members who have matured from the community to the core.[251] This approach's major drawback is that it depends heavily on a consistent inflow of new members into a church. If a church is experiencing attendance stagnation or decline and needs to mobilize existing but inactive members, Saddleback's Model could frustrate the church.

Chris Hodges, Pastor of Church of the Highlands, the largest church in Alabama, has also developed an approach for transitioning attendees into active volunteers.[252] Offered through a network founded by Hodges to plant and grow churches known as the Association of Related Churches (ARC), Hodges' approach calls for a church to implement a so-called Growth Track.[253] The Growth Track Model comprises three key steps to help someone move onto what they call their Dream Team: "(1) connect to the church, (2) discover the strengths of your purposeful

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[249] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church,"* 207–392.

[250] Ibid., 155–392.

[251] Ibid., 365–392.

[252] "Highlands Growth Track," Church of the Highlands, accessed April 8, 2023, https://www.churchofthehighlands.com/growth-track

[253] "Highlands Growth Track."

design, (3) develop your God-given gifts to make a difference in the lives of others."[254] In the original Church of the Highlands edition, participants enroll in three classes, often held on Sunday mornings, usually following the Sunday of the calendar (Class 1 on First Sunday, etc.).[255] After these classes, known as steps, the graduate can and is encouraged to join the church's Dream Team, volunteering in one of several ministry assignments.[256] This Growth Track approach is popular among American churches. Many churches employing the Dream Team model personalize it for their context, offering four steps instead of three.

Like the Saddleback model, Hodges's designed his approach as a subset of a church growth strategy. Suppose a church is growing and does not find an efficient way to place people in service roles. In that case, the backlog of inactive members will bottleneck and, if not addressed systematically, may lead to frustrated members and, ultimately, unwanted attrition. The Growth Track approach, however, also fails to provide a means for jumpstarting a dormant church. It is not designed to ignite a spiritual fire in the hearts of those who regularly attend church services but have not moved beyond a peripheral commitment to the church's mission.

Finally, in their book, *Connect: How to Double Your Number of Volunteers*, Searcy, and Henson delineate an approach for dramatically increasing the number of church volunteers.[257] Searcy and Henson identify three vital keys to converting inactive church members into willing volunteers.[258] According to the Connect Model, church leaders adopt a best practice and position the church for success in engineering a church cultural paradigm shift if the leaders (1) articulate

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[254] "Highlands Growth Track."

[255] Ibid.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Searcy and Henson, *Connect,* 17–180.

[258] Ibid., 173–78.

the church's theological values frequently, (2) develop a plan to activate all members who are ready to serve, and (3) celebrate the volunteers who are already actively serving in the church.[259]

Unlike the previous two approaches considered here, the Connect Model is not dependent on church growth to fuel the program. However, Searcy and Henson's system will have a limited impact on a congregation where members are apathetic about serving. Inviting people to become volunteers will work if those members are willing to serve but cannot see the opportunity to act on their desire. When dealing with a population that views church attendance as an opportunity for receiving but holds no commitment to serve the needs of others, an invitation to get involved will not be enough.

Conclusion

After a review of precedent literature, a survey of Scripture, and consideration of existing approaches to addressing the issue of inactive membership and the influence of a consumer-oriented culture upon the American church, there is an evident gap in practical theology. There is considerable research and writing on the impact of consumerism on society, especially Western culture. There is also ample attention given to evaluations of religiosity and the influences that affect a person's commitment to Christian practices. There has not been much research or writing connecting the two influences and investigating or addressing the impact of an individualistic, consumer-oriented ideology on the culture of the American church. An academic/practical gap exists, and this research project has been designed to begin filling this gap.

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[259] Searcy and Henson, *Connect,* 173-78.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the methodology this DMIN action research project will apply to address the KLCC inactive member problem. The ministry intervention will be based on the intervention model demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Paul's calling and writings also demonstrate the precedent for this approach.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus interacts with various people on different occasions. Across these interactions, a pattern emerges. Jesus confronts, challenges, calls, and seeks commitment from these people to usher them toward eventual change. These five steps are the benchmarks of this DMIN action research project. The intervention described in this chapter is designed to confront, challenge, call, and solicit commitment from participants, with a measurable change in values, beliefs, and actions evidenced by the end of the intervention.

In John 5, Jesus encounters a paralyzed man lying by the pool, Bethesda, in Jerusalem (John 5:1–2). Knowing the man had been there many years, Jesus's response was to confront the man, asking, "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:5–6 NKJV). In another encounter, Jesus interacts with the person some theologians call the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17–27). The man is initially confident regarding his righteous lifestyle and dedication to the Ten Commandments. However, following a brief examination of the man's religiosity, Jesus responds to this seeker by challenging him to sell his possessions, donate to the needy, and become one of Christ's followers (Mark 10:21).

Jesus demonstrates calling someone to a lifestyle change during an encounter in Luke 5. After mesmerizing Peter, Andrew, James, and John with a miraculous haul of fish (Luke 5:1–11), Jesus encounters a tax collector named Levi (Luke 5:27). Luke records, "After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me'" (Luke 5:27 NKJV). One must understand that Jesus called Levi to follow His person and principled way of life. Whenever Christ invoked the warning that someone should avoid returning to a life of sin, He simultaneously called them to live a righteous life (John 5:14; 8:11). Matthew records Jesus's explication of a way that leads to life (Matt 7:13–14), and in John 14, Jesus confirms that following Him is akin to following a prescribed way of life (John 14:6). Finally, following Jesus's healing of Peter's mother-in-law and many other sick people, Matthew records that Jesus solicits commitment from a truth-seeking scribe (Matt 8:14–19). As was a hallmark of His ministry, Jesus implores the man to forsake the cares of this world and to commit His life to the mission and ministry of the gospel (Matt 8:20–22).

One of God's recipes for change is seen in the Gospels and evidenced in Paul's calling and writings. Paul's Damascus Road conversion is framed by this recipe for transformation (Acts 9:1–2). Jesus confronts (Acts 9:3–4), challenges (Acts 9:5), calls (Acts 9:6), and demands commitment from Paul (Acts 9:7–9). The result was Christ's desired outcome, a changed Paul (Acts 9:18–20). Paul's conversion and commissioning as one of God's most effective apostles were hinged on a five-step recipe that led to Paul's transformation. This same approach is revealed in Paul's writings (Rom 10:14–17). Outlining the process of change, Paul argues that one must first be confronted with, challenged by, called to, and invited to commit one's life to the gospel of Christ (Rom 10:14–17).

Figure 3.1. God's Five-Step Transformation Recipe

Intervention Design

God's five-step transformation recipe was employed successfully by Jesus, evidenced in

Paul's conversion, and is foundational in Paul's Romans 10:14–17 treatise. Therefore, it is also a

sound foundation for this DMIN action research project. This chapter outlines the ten steps this

researcher will undertake to execute this project and implement God's five-step transformation

recipe for personal and organizational cultural change in KLCC.

This study is designed to be completed in no more than 16 weeks, including all pre-

fieldwork, fieldwork, and post-fieldwork components. Phase 1, pre-field actions, are scheduled

to be completed in weeks 1–4. Phase 2, execution of the fieldwork M2M SOS course and focus

groups, will be completed during weeks 5–14. Phase 3, post-fieldwork efforts, will be completed during weeks 15 and 16.

<div style="text-align: center;">Institutional Review Board Approval</div>

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is an adjudicative body that reviews research proposals to ensure that every authorized research study takes appropriate measures to see that (1) potential participant risks to minimized, (2) potential participant risks are reasonable relative to potential benefits of the study, (3) participant selection is fair and equitable, (4) informed consent is properly obtained and documented, and (5) the research plan provides adequate measures to safeguard research data and protect participant's privacy.[1] Liberty University's IRB protects the rights of research participants involved in studies by its faculty, staff, and researchers.[2] The IRB is authorized to approve, disapprove, monitor, and require changes to research plans that fall within its jurisdiction as determined by federal mandate and university policy. Before any steps are initiated to enroll participants or collect data, the researcher and faculty mentor will apply to the IRB for consideration of this study. This study will proceed according to schedule only after receiving IRB approval.

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[1] "Review of Graduate Student Research by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)," University of Washington Graduate School, accessed April 28, 2023, https://grad.uw.edu/for-students-and-post-docs

[2] "John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Doctor of Ministry Program and Candidacy Handbook," (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2022), 35.

Table 3.1. The action steps of the project overview and intervention design

Research Project Overview and Design			
Phase 1 *Pre-Fieldwork Activities*	**Step 1**	Week 1	Hold Project Endorsement Meetings with KLCC leaders.
	Step 2	Week 2	Recruit and select study participants and obtain signed informed consent forms.
	Step 3	Week 3	Hold participant orientation sessions (2)
	Step 4	Week 4	Issue pre-fieldwork opening survey and hold participant baseline interviews (10)
Phase 2 *Fieldwork Activities*	**Step 5**	Weeks 5–14	Launch *M2M SOS* Intervention Process holding weekly classes
	Step 6	Weeks 5, 8, 11, and 14	Host focus groups (4) with 5–7 participants attending each session
Phase 3 *Post-fieldwork Activities*	**Step 7**	Week 15	Issue post-fieldwork closing survey and hold participant exit interviews (10)
	Step 8	Weeks 15–16	Synthesize and analyze data from surveys, focus groups, and class observations.

	Step 9	Week 16	Formally conclude the project by sending post-fieldwork thank-you notes to all participants and church leadership boards
	Step 10	Week 16	Complete the project evaluation and conclusions

Phase 1: Pre-Fieldwork Actions

This study will be executed following a three-phase approach. Phase 1 will entail all pre-fieldwork activities, Phase 2 will encompass all fieldwork actions, and Phase 3 will conclude this study and include all post-fieldwork activities. A detailed explanation of each phase and a step-by-step guide through this DMIN action research project follows in this chapter. As depicted in table 3.1, these three phases and their respective steps will culminate with the completion and review of this project. Phase 1 will begin one week after the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and receipt of the researcher's notice to proceed.

Step One: Fieldwork Permission and Leadership Endorsement Meetings

Once IRB approval has been granted, and before potential participants are invited, the researcher will email a formal request to KLCC's Chairman of the Board of Elders (KLCC BOE) seeking approval for this study (see Appendix A). After receiving an email from the BOE chair approving the project, pre-fieldwork leadership endorsement meetings will be scheduled with the KLCC BOE and Leadership Team (KLCC LT). These meetings will occur during the first week of the research project's timeline.

On the first Monday, following receipt of the BOE chair's approval to proceed, the researcher will meet with BOE members to present the purpose of this study, the commitment requirements for participants, and the timeline for the study. The purpose of this meeting is to solicit the BOE's support and invite their input regarding the planned intervention process.

On the Thursday following the BOE endorsement meeting, the researcher will meet with KLCC's Leadership Team, a twelve-person practical ministry group comprised of BOE members and several key leaders from the church. This group is highly influential in the church, and their support will significantly affect the membership's receptivity to this study. KLCC LT has no official authority to sanction this project; that authorization will have already come from the BOE. As key stakeholders, however, KLCC LT's endorsement and input are critical to the success of this project. The KLCC LT will also be invited to meet with the researcher in focus groups throughout the process to help identify ministry problems, shape the proposed ministry intervention, and evaluate issues that surface during this study. KLCC LT members are ministry leaders close to the membership in ways that make their input invaluable. Before adjourning this meeting, the KLCC LT will be invited to provide recommendations regarding study participant selection.

Step Two: Participant Recruitment and Selection

During week 2, the researcher will consider KLCC LT's recommendations and identify a pool of candidates to be considered for the study. Once a pool of potential candidates is selected, the researcher will determine primary and alternate participants to be invited into the intervention process. Participants will be chosen from a roster of good-standing KLCC members who are at least 25 years of age and have been members of KLCC for at least one calendar year. Five key parameters will categorize potential participants to maintain a demographic representative of the entire congregation. The researcher will classify prospective participants by gender, marital status, age, KLCC tenure, and current level of church involvement. Active church involvement would constitute regular Sunday morning service attendance (3 out of 4 Sundays per month), consistent participation in one of the church's three discipleship ministries (attending 3 out of every four sessions), and active participation in a service or support ministry (volunteering at

least once a month). Inactive church involvement will be marked by irregular Sunday morning worship attendance (less than 2 out of 4 Sundays per month), inconsistent discipleship ministry attendance (attending two or fewer of four sessions), and inactive volunteer engagement (volunteering less than once per month).

This study will seek twenty participants. Ideally, given KLCC's fundamental demographic breakdown, 13 (63%) should be females, 13 (63%) should be married, 11 (53%) should be under the age of 50, 12 (58%) should be members of KLCC for seven years or less, 16 (79%) should be lay (non-leader) members, and at least 8 (40%) should be relatively inactive members. Considering KLCC LT's advice and these parameters, the researcher will select twenty preferred participants and ten alternates to invite them to participate in this study.

Once the researcher identifies prospective participants, an email will be sent to each participant, inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix B). This recruitment email will be sent to prospective participants on the first Monday following the researcher's meeting with KLCC LT. The informed consent document (see Appendix E) will be attached to the recruitment email. Participants will be requested to return the completed informed consent form within four days to be considered for the study. If some participants do not agree to join the study or fail to reply within the stipulated timeframe, alternate prospective participants will be invited via email. These invitations, if necessary, will be emailed five days after the initial invitations are sent. Once twenty participants fitting the desired demographic mix have accepted the invitation, the study roster will be filled, and the selection process will close.

Step Three: Participant Orientation Sessions and Pre-fieldwork Survey

Once a participant has been selected to participate in this study, they will receive a welcome email thanking them for their willingness to join and notifying them of the date for the

orientation session (see Appendix F). Selected participants will be asked to reply immediately to confirm their availability and intent to attend the orientation session.

During week 3, the researcher will lead selected participants through an initial orientation. During this session, the researcher will explain the general aims of the project, the terms of participation, the anticipated time and effort commitment, and the potential significance of this project to KLCC and the larger church community. This meeting will be scheduled to last 90 minutes and follow an agenda covering all pertinent aspects of this project that a participant will need to know (see Appendix G). The researcher will make special efforts to assure participants that all information, data collected, and personally identifiable information will be kept confidential and carefully safeguarded. During the orientation session, participants will draw a numbered card from a mixed box of cards. They will be instructed that this number will represent their case ID and that no other record of their connection to that number is maintained to ensure anonymity. They will be required to record that number in a reliable place and to use it on all anonymous submissions.

The researcher will offer two identical orientation sessions. Both sessions will take place during week 3, the first will be held on Thursday evening and the second on Saturday morning. The second orientation session will only be available if more than two selected participants cannot attend the Thursday evening session. If fewer than three participants cannot participate in the first orientation session, one-on-one make-up sessions will be scheduled with each affected party. After the meeting, participants will be allowed to schedule a one-on-one interview during week 4. Participants will also be handed a participant survey (see Appendix H) and a postage-paid envelope addressed to the researcher. Participants will be encouraged to mail the completed anonymous survey no later than the following Wednesday.

The researcher has developed a 25-question Likert scale survey intended to reveal each participant's religious values, beliefs, and convictions by examining their commitment to Christian disciplines, practical theology, views regarding the church as an extension of God's kingdom, and their relationship to giving, compassion, and service as expressions of their Christian faith (see table 3.2).

Table 3.2. The framework for initial and final participant surveys

Study Questionnaire (Initial and Final) Framework		
Category by Focus of Question	# Questions/Category	# Points/Category
Commitment to Christian Disciplines	5	25
Faith in Practice (Practical Theology)	4	20
The Church as an Extension of God's Kingdom	4	20
Giving as an Expression of Faith	4	20
Compassion as an Expression of Faith	4	20
Serving as an Expression of Faith	4	20
	Maximum Available Points	125

Each survey question will be worth a maximum of 5 points, and the entire survey will total 125 points. This measurement will be referred to in this study as each participant's SOS Religiosity Index (SOSRI). The initial SOSRI will provide a baseline for the start of the study. The data from

this survey will help the researcher understand church members' deeply held values, as exemplified in this convenient sample.

In *Survey Research Methods*, Floyd Fowler argues for the benefits of employing thoughtful, carefully developed survey instruments in field research.[3] Fowler observes, "Understanding what a good question is and how to use questions as measures…is certainly the foundation of good survey instruments."[4] According to Fowler, effective survey questions are conceived with the required measurement in mind and accurately reveal what the researcher needs to know.[5] The researcher in this study has made every attempt to devise a questionnaire that will provide valuable responses and meaningful research data.

When all anonymous surveys have been returned, the researcher will tally the results for each respondent and assign an aggregate SOSRI for the group of responding participants. The researcher will factor all non-responding participants and unanswered questions into the data tabulation by allowing for appropriate margins of error.[6] Since this research project aims to study ways to increase religious commitment across an entire congregation, the researcher needs to know the church's baseline religiosity index.

Step Four: Pre-Fieldwork Interviews

In this study, the researcher will interview study participants to probe deep into the culture, concerns, and challenges KLCC members experience. Tim Sensing advocates for interviewing as a source of insight, arguing that "interviews allow people to describe their

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[3] Floyd J. Fowler, *Survey Research Methods,* 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 75–98.

[4] Ibid.*,* 99.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 42–49.

situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not available to the researcher by observation."[7] During week 4, the researcher will interview at least ten of the twenty study participants.

The initial interviews will be semi-structured conversations employing a wide range of questions, including Sensing's recommended "grand tour, descriptive, hypothetical, quotation, ideal position, opinion, behavior, feeling, opinion, and background questions."[8] The researcher will draw from a list of suggested discussion prompts and follow the conversation where the participant takes it as long as it remains relevant to the research.[9] Guidance questions and prompts for the initial interviews are listed in Appendix I.

Each session will be audio-recorded and transcribed for later access to provide an accurate interview record. An outside vendor, such as GoTranscript, will provide transcription services. The researcher will underwrite the costs of these services. To ensure clarity regarding the participant's intended meaning, the researcher will often repeat to the participant what the researcher understood them to say.[10]

The participant will be offered a choice of locations for the interview. They may meet at the researcher's home, the participant's home, a neutral place such as a local café or sandwich shop, or in a BPES classroom. The researcher will set aside 20 one-hour time blocks during week four and make them available to participants using a scheduling app such as Microsoft Bookings. Interviews will be booked on a first-come, first-served basis (see table 3.3)

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[7] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock. 2011), 103.

[8] Ibid., 86–88.

[9] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 102–103.

[10] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 137–38.

Table 3.3. Schedule to accommodate 10–15 interviews during week 4

Week 4 Available Interview Time Blocks with Location					
Day	Block #1	Block #2	Block #3	Block #4	Location
Tues.	3–4 p.m.	5–6 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	9–10 p.m.	Flexible
Wed.	5–6 p.m.	6–7 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	8–9 p.m.	Fixed: BPES
Thur.	3–4 p.m.	5–6 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	9–10 p.m.	Flexible
Fri.	5–6 p.m.	6–7 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	8–9 p.m.	Fixed: BPES
Sat.	8–9 a.m.	10–11 a.m.	12–1 p.m.	2–3 p.m.	Flexible

Interviews conducted at BPES will be scheduled hourly over five hours. Hosting all interviews on a particular day in one location will simplify the participant's process of deciding on a place and eliminate the researcher's need to build in transition time, moving from one location to another. Interviews conducted at other sites, including the researcher's home, will be scheduled every two hours to give the researcher time to commute to the next meeting, if necessary.

Phase 2: Action Research Fieldwork

With the pre-fieldwork actions complete, the researcher will begin executing the action research fieldwork in Phase 2 in week five. This phase encompasses two critical elements of this study: (1) the M2M SOS Intervention Process and (2) hosting focus groups with study participants and key KLCC stakeholders.

Step Five: The M2M SOS Intervention Process

This DMIN Action Research project will address KLCC's ministry problem by assessing the church's current level of member religiosity and prevailing attitudes toward religious commitment by providing teaching and training through a ten-week process designed to promote a shift in cultural perspective. It will conclude by documenting changes in member attitudes and commitment to determine the effectiveness of this intervention.

Week 5 of the study will mark the beginning of the ten-week M2M SOS Intervention, a process designed to help participants transition from being relatively inactive members (RIM) to fully activated members (FAM) as evidenced by their demonstration of willing active volunteer engagement (WAVE). Throughout the ten-week process, participants will engage in a call-and-response exercise, wherein the intervention leader will say, "The church is sick; it is in the ICU! What are we going to do?" Participants will be encouraged to respond with the phrase, "We will be Kingdom Life's SOS as we move from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE!"

The chosen delivery method for this intervention will be a ten-week course designed to help participants understand the biblical mandate for service as an expression of sincere worship, appreciate the role volunteering plays in strengthening a church, and gain a working knowledge of the inextricable connection between Christian maturity and SOS living (Selfless Giving, Other mindedness, and Sacrificial Serving). The underlying concept behind this course and the inspiration for the M2M in the course title is that this intervention addresses the ministry problem by helping participants recognize that every member is also called to be a minister (servant of others in the name of the Lord).

The M2M SOS Serving Disciple Course (M2M-SDC), as the course will be formally named, is led by the researcher and revolves around four critical units: (1) Unit 1: Confrontation, (2) Unit 2: Challenge, (3) Unit 3: Call, and (4) Unit 4: Commitment. Each unit will correspond to

one of four aspects of God's recipe for personal transformation (see fig. 3.1), as demonstrated in

Jesus's earthly ministry, and will help participants move from complacency to change (see fig.

3.2).
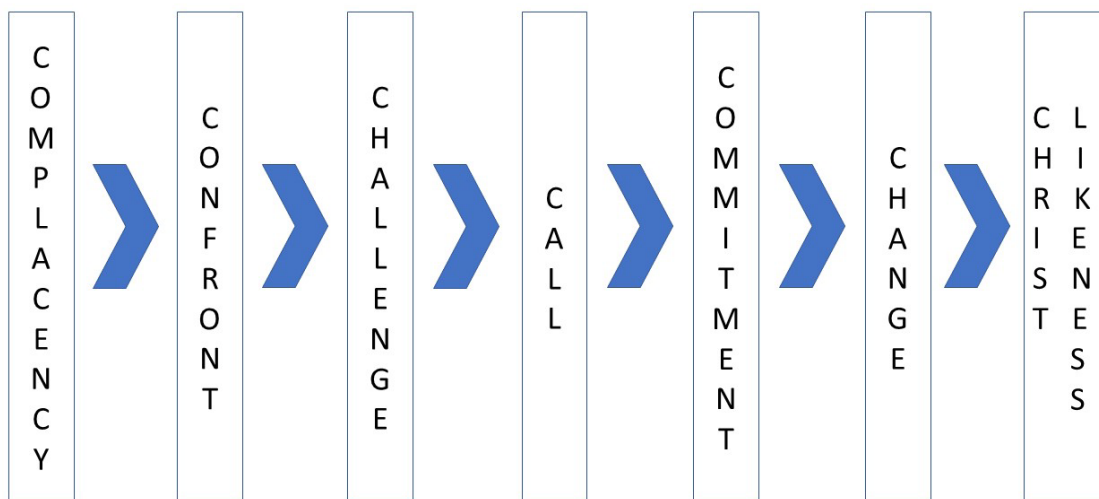
Figure 3.2. How People Move from Complacency to Christlikeness

Each class session will be scheduled to last one hour with a ten-minute break in the middle. This

schedule will divide each class session into two-twenty-five-minute sections. Section 1 of each class will

be devoted to critical principles and scriptural support for the main thrust of that class. Section 2 will be

devoted to practical theology and consider case studies, illustrations, and practical application of the

principles presented in Section 1 of that session. A typical class agenda can be found in Appendix K.

A focal point of this 10-week course will be a progression of development that leads a

Christian through ten successive levels of spiritual maturity, a journey that could span a lifetime.

The first three levels of this spiritual journey are: (1) conversion, (2) connection to a local

church, and (3) commitment to live as a disciple of Christ. Those who are converted and

connected but remain uncommitted are those who remain on the periphery of the church,

attending regularly but staying relatively inactive. These are RIM Christians, and this researcher hypothesizes that they are common in many American churches.

The M2M-SDC, designed to help RIM members become part of the FAM, will be held on Tuesday evenings from 7:30 to 8:30 in the BPES multipurpose room. Participants will receive a loose-leaf binder to maintain handouts and to take notes. The intervention leader will also encourage participants to keep a journal in their notebook, of which some entries will be turned into the leader. Childcare will not be provided. However, hot beverages and water will be served. The class schedule with central themes is in Appendix M. One of the main images around which the intervention is designed is depicted in figure 3.2.
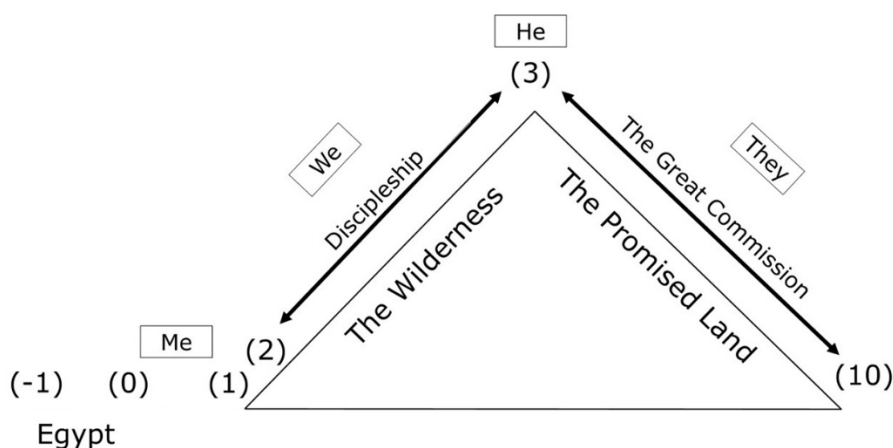
Figure 3.3. God's Mountain of Personal Development for Every Believer[11]

During this course, participants will be confronted, challenged, and called to commit to living lives that demonstrate their faith and transformed hearts, causing them to share God's love through selfless, other-minded, sacrificial volunteer service. Figure 3.3 will play an integral part

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[11] John Thompson, "The Mount of Transformation," *Making Kingdom Disciples* (Silver Spring, MD: Kingdom Life Community Church, 2023), slide 7.

in this course, repeatedly demonstrating to participants that living on the RIM is not God's plan for His people and that an essential part of living as one of Christ's disciples is sharing God's love with others.

After the tenth session in week 14, participants will graduate and be certified as M2M SOS Kingdom Agents of Change, duly equipped to rescue a church suffering from the effects of individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity. Graduating participants will be recognized publicly during a Sunday morning worship service and subsequently scheduled for a follow-up ministry placement meeting with one of a few designated ministry leaders/member coaches. Ministry leader-coaches have already been trained to provide this support to new and transitioning members. Following Graduation Sunday, participants will be asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire, meet with the researcher in a one-on-one exit interview, and participate in one of two focus groups to discuss the impact of the intervention. Graduating participants can also schedule a one-on-one exit interview with the researcher. Exit interviews will be held during week 15 of the study.

Step Six: Focus Groups

Action research is much more concerned with practical solutions than theoretical hypotheses. Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson describe action research, positing that "action research is oriented to some action or cycle of actions that organizational, or community members have taken, are taking, or wish to take to address a particularly problematic situation."[12] Since one of the significant aims of action research is to explore working solutions to real challenges within a ministry context, the researcher must factor stakeholder input into the project

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[12] Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 4.

design. Herr and Anderson elevate the cooperative nature of action research, noting that "action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation."[13] Ernest Stringer speaks to the collaborative nature of action research citing that "action research works on the assumption that all people who affect or are affected by the issue investigated should be included in the processes of inquiry."[14] Since action research is best done in cooperation with those impacted by the ministry context's issues and challenges, focus groups are a viable data-generating research tool.

Focus groups can help research teams (researchers and critical stakeholders) press beyond raw data to understand phenomenological influences impacting an organization's effectiveness. The nature of a focus group leads to more significant interaction than a survey allows and offers the group facilitator an opportunity to probe deeper than an individual interview affords. In an interview, the interviewer is relegated to the one-sided responses of the interviewee. In a focus group, other participants can respond to statements made, offer different perspectives, and even challenge a position held by other participants. The focus group format can provide a richer experience as the collective voice of participants is documented, noting gaps, omissions, and emphases emerging from the group interaction.[15] This study will include focus groups for engaging ministry stakeholders and study participants in a group context. Sensing describes focus groups as large-scale interviews.[16] Therefore, the researcher has identified central discussion themes to employ as conversation starters (see table 3.4).

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[13] Herr and Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation*, 4.

[14] Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 6.

[15] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 223.

[16] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 120.

Table 3.4. Focus group schedule and central discussion themes

Focus Group Schedule and Central Discussion Theme			
Group	**Intervention Week**	**Associated Grouping**	**Central Discussion Theme**
1	1	Study Participants	KLCC is a good church, but it would be even better if… How most KLCers feel about serving in a ministry is… To get more folks involved and off the RIM, KLCC could…
2	4	Ministry Leaders	KLCC is a good church, but it would be even better if… Factors that contribute to KLCC's challenges are… How most KLCers feel about serving in a ministry is… To get more folks involved and off the RIM, KLCC could…
3	7	Study Participants	The best outcome of this study would be… To be a healthy church, members will need a shift in… The best way to support a lasting KLCC culture change would be… After this study, the next steps for KLCC should be…
4	10	Ministry Leaders	The best outcome of this study would be… To be a healthy church, leadership will need a shift in… The best way to support a lasting KLCC culture change would be… What this study missed was… After this study, the next steps for KLCC should be…

5	12	Study Participants	This experience surprised/disappointed me because… If your views have changed, how have they? This study missed something important; it missed… One of the most significant impacts of this experience was… Is KLCC better positioned to be effective? If so, why? If not, why not?

Five focus groups will meet in weeks 1, 4, 7, 10, and 12 of the intervention. Each group will consist ideally of five to seven participants. Following Sensing's advice, each group will represent a particular, relatively homogenous group that shares a common general interest in KLCC's overall health.[17] The focus group schedule, associated attendee grouping, and central discussion themes are shown in table 3.4.

Focus groups will be held at 7:00 p.m. at BPES on the Wednesday of the weeks reflected in the above table. Each session will open with a welcome and opening prayer by the researcher, acting as the group's moderator. Focus groups will be planned to last no more than 90 minutes. The researcher will brief participants regarding the session's purpose and the rules of engagement (see table 3.5).

Table 3.5. Rules of engagement for focus group meetings

The 7 Rules of Focus Group Engagement
1. There are no dumb questions or answers.
2. Do your best to stay on topic and avoid those tempting rabbit trails.
3. Be patient and wait your turn to speak.
4. Be kind in your listening, responses, and contributions.
5. Be respectful to everyone in attendance.
6. Be thoughtful about what you share before you share it.
7. Be discreet when you leave here. What is said here should stay here.

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[17] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 120.

Focus groups offer both potential benefits and drawbacks. These large group interviews can spawn dynamic exchanges wherein the researcher receives feedback that would not have emerged in a one-on-one environment.[18] This dynamic conversation is one of the researcher's desired outcomes. To capitalize on the potentially energized context of group discussion, the researcher has identified three note-takers who will rotate through the focus group calendar, attending a session based on availability. Note-takers are trusted KLCC members who can remain neutral during focus groups and will provide the researcher with a written transcript of their notes within four days of the group session.

A potential drawback of focus groups is that the group dynamic can backfire, producing a stifling social environment. Sensing observes this potential problem, noting that "people may choose not to reveal intimate details to the group or in a group setting that they would otherwise tell in a private and confidential setting."[19] Sensing expounds, noting that "possibly some people will slant their version in a group setting to maintain their pretenses or protect their secrets."[20] The group moderator will work actively during each session to reassure participants of the importance of transparent sharing and authentic engagement.

Focus group feedback will provide a significant research data source in this study. The researcher will evaluate note-taker transcripts to identify common or emerging themes, validate individual interview responses, and uncover root causes or unknown ministry issues affecting KLCC. The researcher will also take special care to safeguard discussion group notes and protect the confidentiality of group participants.

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[18] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 120.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

Phase 3: Post-Fieldwork Activities

With the fieldwork activities complete, the researcher will transition in week 15 into executing Phase 2 post-fieldwork actions. This phase includes two critical elements of this study: (1) post-fieldwork surveys and closing interviews, (2) data review and organization, (3) formal closing of on-site fieldwork, and (4) start of project evaluation and development of conclusions.

Step Seven: Post-fieldwork Closing Surveys and Exit Interviews

After the final session of the M2M-SDC, participants will be reissued an unmarked copy of the same participant survey they received in week 3 (see Appendix H) and asked to complete it anonymously and drop the completed survey into a box before leaving for the evening. This final survey will provide the researcher with valuable comparative data and a way to quantify changes in participant attitudes and perceptions since the start of the intervention.

Table 3.6. Schedule to accommodate 10–15 interviews during week 15

Week 15 Available Interview Time Blocks with Location					
Day	Block #1	Block #2	Block #3	Block #4	Location
Mon.	5–6 p.m.	6–7 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	8–9 p.m.	Fixed: BPES
Tues.	3–4 p.m.	5–6 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	9–10 p.m.	Flexible
Wed.	5–6 p.m.	6–7 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	8–9 p.m.	Fixed: BPES
Thur.	3–4 p.m.	5–6 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	9–10 p.m.	Flexible
Fri.	5–6 p.m.	6–7 p.m.	7–8 p.m.	8–9 p.m.	Fixed: BPES
Sat.	8–9 a.m.	10–11 a.m.	12–1 p.m.	2–3 p.m.	Flexible

During week 15, the researcher will meet with participants for exit interviews. Guidance questions and prompts for exit interviews are listed in Appendix Q. As with the initial interviews, all meetings will be audio-recorded to ensure the most accurate record of what has been said. Interviews will be booked on a first-come, first-served basis (see table 3.6.).

Step Eight: Data Synthesis and Analysis

During week 15, the researcher will begin to organize, synthesize, and analyze the data generated during the study. By this point, the research will have pre-test/post-test data from the initial and closing surveys issued to participants. SOSRI scores will be calculated and entered into a spreadsheet for comparison and analysis. These Likert scale surveys will provide quantifiable data that can be charted, tested, and displayed graphically. The researcher will employ a one-tailed, paired T-test to determine if meaningful change has occurred because of

this intervention. Resources for testing these quantifiable results will be found at the Social

Science Statistics website, www.socscistatistics.com.

Participant responses recorded during interviews or focus group studies will require a

different approach to data analysis. Stringer recommends a four-step approach to processing

qualitative data, including (1) categorizing data by common themes and similarity of responses,

(2) synthesizing data into more prominent themes, simplifying feedback into major streams or

thought, (3) prioritizing data, segregating more critical problems from lesser issues, and (4)

analyzing data to interpret meaning from the raw results.[21] Fowler further details the process of

analyzing data into five sub-steps, including (1) unitizing, (2) codifying, (3) categorizing, (4)

recording, and (5) cleaning the data to ensure maximum integrity of the data pool.[22] Beginning in

week 15, this researcher will meticulously review audio recordings, field notes, and transcripts to

start working through Sensing's four-step data analysis process.

In addition to the researcher's observance of care in processing data, this research project

must utilize measures in gathering data that contribute to the credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.[23] Toward the project's credibility, the

data generated by this intervention qualifies under four of Stringer's measures: (1) prolonged

engagement (extended interviews, focus group discussions, and a ten-week course), (2) persistent

observation (the researcher and participants will maintain a daily journal noting developments),

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[21] Stringer, *Action Research*, 182–83.

[22] Fowler, *Research Methods,* 127.

[23] Stringer, *Action Research*, 92–94.

(3) and member checking (participants will have access to data during and after its collection).[24] In addition to these measures, this study will employ methodological triangulation.[25]

Data will be generated using three distinct methods providing feedback from three different points of view. Interviews with members will give the non-leader (lay) perspective, focus groups with leaders will offer a leader angle regarding the problem, and the researcher, as the church's pastor, will provide an organizational perspective. Identifying points of triangulation and thematic commonality will give a more reliable data set than using a single or similar method or drawing data from a homogeneous sampling.

The last sources of data that will be factored into this analysis will come from the reflexive journals kept by the researcher and study participants, as well as any interaction or feedback that emerges during M2M-SDC class sessions. While these sources may not provide empirical, measurable data, they may provide significant insight into KLCC's culture, values, corporate concerns, and most deeply held beliefs. These research diaries will serve as artifacts of this process.

Step Nine: Formal Conclusion of On-site Research Relationship

During week 16, the researcher will formally conclude the on-site research relationship. The researcher will telephone the BOE Chair to thank the church for supporting this project, answer questions the Chair may have, and provide any early feedback available to the church at that point. The researcher will also email a thank-you note to each participant and key stakeholders (see Appendix R).

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[24] Stringer, *Action Research*, 92–94.

[25] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 73–74.

Step Ten: Project Evaluation and Study Conclusions

Evaluation is a critical step in assuring that the project addressed the ministry's problem and assessing the effectiveness of the intervention. Sensing explains the criticality of this step in the research project, noting, "Evaluation is the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of actual programs to make judgments about specific aspects of the program, improve the program's effectiveness, and make decisions about the program's future."[26]

With effective evaluation, the researcher can ascertain the effectiveness of the action research. Sensing agrees, arguing, "Evaluation of the intervention provides information and feedback to ascertain what works or does not work…such an assessment of goals will inform you about strengths and growth areas of your intervention."[27] Evaluation allows the researcher to develop an unbiased view of the intervention's ministry context impact.

This DMIN Action Research project aims to address KLCC's ministry problem by assessing the church's current level of member religiosity and prevailing attitudes toward religious commitment by providing teaching and training through a ten-week process designed to promote a shift in cultural perspective. It will conclude by documenting changes in member attitudes and commitment to determine the effectiveness of this intervention. The researcher will invite the faculty mentor to assist by critically examining the process, research tools, findings, and conclusions related to the stated ministry problem. The vital input provided by the faculty mentor will assist the researcher in evaluating the effectiveness of this study and identify ways to improve this and other research projects undertaken in the researcher's future.

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[26] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 70.

[27] Ibid.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The first part of this chapter outlined the intervention design, the researcher's hypothetical plan execution. In this section, this thesis will report intervention events as they happened. In some cases, the researcher was forced to deviate from the planned intervention to accommodate KLCC's ministry context. In other cases, the intervention proceeded as anticipated. Reported events have been dated to give the reader sense of the project's progression and culmination to this stage. Intervention event locations, venues, and other mitigating factors are also reported in the text below.

IRB Approval and Church Leadership Endorsement

This researcher applied for IRB approval at the start of this DMIN Action Research Project. On June 27, 2023, this researcher and mentor received IRB approval to proceed with the planned research project. Phase 1 of this project commenced following receipt of official IRB written approval.

Having written to the Chair of the KLCC Board of Administrative Elders on May 30, 2023, this researcher received the chairman's blessing to proceed on June 3, 2023. Church permission was granted for the planned research to proceed under two conditions: (1) only KLCC members who are at least 25 years old would be invited to participate, and (2) all data derived from the study would be stripped of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

On August 28, 2023, this researcher met with and briefed KLCC LT regarding the nature, scope, and purpose of this DMIN intervention. All ten members of KLCC LT attended the virtual session held on the Zoom platform. This researcher shared a project overview and

timeline. Questions were asked and answered. The project received unanimous approval from the team, and the meeting was adjourned.

Participant Recruitment, Orientation, and Involvement

Though it was planned that KLCC LT would recommend a list of preferred study participants, KLCC LT recommended that a blanket invitation be sent to members who fit the study criteria instead. On Wednesday, August 30, an invitation was emailed to a list of members who fit the study criteria. Only three members volunteered to participate in the study. By Friday, September 1, the researcher had received considerable feedback from potential participants indicating two significant obstacles to their participation: (1) they could not commit to a ten-week study, and (2) they could participate in a shorter study if there was a virtual option.

 On Saturday, September 2, potential participants were sent an email invitation offering a modified project that included virtual engagement, a 5-week timeline, and an option for partial participation. By September 5, enough members had responded that the researcher could select ten Level 2/full participants and six Level 1/partial participants for the study. A welcome email, including an informed consent form, was sent to all study participants.

On Wednesday, September 13, study participants attended an in-person orientation session held at BPES (see Appendix G). At the end of the orientation session, all participants completed an initial SOSRI survey, submitted a signed informed consent form, and received a link to schedule their one-on-one opening interview. Only two participants were absent, and both watched a video replay of the session and submitted signed consent forms on Sunday, September 17.

M2M-SDC began on Wednesday, September 20. Class participation was very high throughout the course, with 100 percent attendance in sessions 1, 2, and 5, 80 percent in session

3, and 90 percent in session 4. All participants also participated in one-on-one interviews and focus groups.

Intervention Process Summary

The fieldwork portion of this project included online classes, data collection, and field notes taken during one-on-one and group encounters. Due to participant constraints, this researcher chose to modify the M2M SOS Making Disciple Course from ten two-hour sessions to five three-hour classes. All classes were virtual, using the Zoom online platform. Each session followed a modified three-hour class agenda (see Appendix M), and the course followed a modified five-session course foci (see Appendix N). Opening interviews were scheduled and completed between Saturday, September 16, and Thursday, September 28. Focus groups were held on Friday, October 20, Friday, October 27, and Monday, October 30. Closing interviews were scheduled and completed between Tuesday, October 31, and Tuesday, November 7.

M2M-SDC

The core of this DMIN intervention is a course featuring five three-hour sessions designed to follow God's five-step transformation process (see fig. 3.1). All classes were conducted virtually utilizing the Zoom online meeting platform. All sessions were video recorded, and participants were required to have their cameras on throughout each session.

Session 1 began promptly at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 20. The theme for this class was confrontation. The engagement profoundly affected participants and could be described as a shock and awe encounter. Participants were engaged, asking questions, sharing past experiences, and seeking to reconcile what they have learned about what a church is relative to what Scripture reveals Christ's church should be. The class aimed to jolt participants out of

complacency and into concern by confronting and exposing the ills plaguing KLCC. The session was highly effective.

Participant #7 commented, "If I had attended a session like this when I first came into the church, it would have dramatically changed my view of the church and my part in the big picture." Participant #4 responded, "This is much needed in our church; I hope every member will attend a class like this." Participant #9 added, "I did not know anything about consumerism, but after tonight, the blinders are off. I am looking forward to the rest of this experience."

Session 2 convened on Wednesday, September 27. The theme was *Challenging the Church to Fight for Its Healing*. This second encounter developed into another profound experience for participants. A pivotal moment in the session revolved around the discussion about the church being so sick that it has been remanded to the I.C.U. with symptoms of individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity. The second session aimed to challenge participants by inviting them to an unveiled view of the church's brokenness. It succeeded.

Participant #3 observed, "This course is needed at our church and across the body of Christ!" Participant #8 responded, "I knew something was broken in the church, in general; I never saw the church as sick and certainly didn't see it in the ICU. This was eye-opening." Participant #6, representing the church's LT added, "I am very hopeful for Kingdom Life as I consider this process. When this study is finished, I hope the members will be given a chance to experience these classes for themselves."

Participants met virtually for session 3 on Wednesday, October 4. Working through the theme, *Calling the Church from the RIM to the FAM*, participants were engaged in this session, volunteering to read requested passages of Scripture, answering questions, and offering

meaningful input. Participants gained an understanding that all believers are called to grow from the 'me' stage through the 'we' stage up to a 'He' focus to develop a 'they' passion. One key takeaway from this session was the criticality of a believer's spiritual formation. When the group was polled to ascertain if they were more hopeful or discouraged by what they had experienced in this course, 100 percent of participants indicated they were between 7–10 (1 = very discouraged and 10 = very hopeful).

Session 4 followed a one-week break in the schedule and resumed on Wednesday, October 18. The theme for this class was *Transformation Begins with Personal Commitment*. One major takeaway from this session is that once a person is God-connected through salvation, they should grow into being God-directed through discipleship. Session modules built a case for the indicators that one is becoming a disciple, commitment as the cure for an ailing church, and the church's way of escape. The class concluded by considering three healthy commitments every believer should make to the Lord and His church.

Session 5, the final class in the course, met on Wednesday, October 25. Participants focused on the culminating theme, 'Change Comes When Commitment Becomes Action'. Attendees fully engaged in the class experience, asking pointed questions, offering personal testimonies, and synthesizing the lesson into a revised worldview. By the session's conclusion, attendees' perspectives were notably different than at the opening of the first session.

Participant #10 concluded, "Ever since you challenged us to stop reading the Bible from a 'me' perspective, everything I have read has changed." Participant #2 indicated they "got more out of this experience than they imagined they would." Participant #5 responded, "This opened my eyes to so many new thoughts and ways of looking at loving God. This will definitely impact my commitment to love the Lord through my service in the church."

On Sunday, November 12, this researcher publicly recognized study participants during the Sunday worship service. This researcher also shared public remarks with KLCC, thanking the KLCC BOE, KLCC LT, and Level 1 study participants. The intervention officially closed as the BOE chair led the church in a prayer for the success of the DMIN thesis project.

Data Triangulation: Interviews, Surveys, Focus Groups and Field Notes

This DMIN Action Research project utilized Sensing's recommended triangulation method of data collection. This project will consider five sources of data collected through this intervention: data from SOSRI surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus group engagement, M2M-SDC researcher field observation notes, and entries from the researcher's journal.

All Level 2 participants completed initial SOSRI surveys (see Appendix H) at the start of this intervention and revisited them on Sunday, October 29. This provided the researcher with a baseline of religious data to compare to data gathered after the study. Level 2 participants also participated in two one-on-one interviews with the researcher. These discussions were completed at the start and end of the intervention, providing the researcher with two comparative data points. Prompts for each interview's questions were predetermined. Actual interviews closely followed the scripted format (see Appendices J and P).

Survey responses will be organized by indicators and evaluated across the participant sample. Interview and focus group questions will be organized and evaluated by question to determine emerging themes, slippages, and silences in the respondents' answers. Field notes, transcripts, and video recordings will be analyzed to assess changes in participants' pre-study and post-study attitudes toward willing active volunteer engagement.

A third data source came from notes taken during the three focus groups held during this process. One group consisted of full study participants, another comprised members at large, and

the third focus group included KLCC's leadership. Each focus group was recorded and transcribed.

The researcher obtained significant data from observations made during the M2M- SDC classes. Sessions were video-recorded, and participant comments, expressions, and responses were observed and noted. Additionally, the researcher updated a research diary between sessions, capturing reflections, concerns, and notes to prepare for future engagement. The researcher documented the discernable impact of this study carefully. Data gathered during this project met Stringer's standard of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking.[28]

Issues, Challenges, and Obstacles

The implementation of this study differed in three critical ways from its design. Due to this project's unanticipated constraints, the timeline had to be modified, the content needed to be reformatted, and the delivery method required revision. The issues that hindered the study's planned approach presented challenges this researcher was forced to overcome. However, each of these obstacles provided opportunities for this researcher to be creative, flexible, and adaptable by fitting the study's requirements within the ministry context's needs.

The first issue arose when none of the invited participants could commit to the planned ten-week M2M–SDC schedule. Some could do six weeks, while others could commit to eight. The researcher was thrust into a quandary since the curriculum was developed around a ten-week timeframe. The solution was to condense the ten two-hour classes into five sessions. This change, however, created a secondary issue.

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[28] Stringer, *Action Research*, 92–94.

Could a course designed with ten units maintain integrity in half the time? The issue was resolved by combining similarly themed modules and rearranging the class schedule from two hours to three. By elongating each class by one hour, the researcher effectively converted twenty hours of engagement into fifteen. The truncated course schedule worked for study participants while enabling the researcher to deliver the essential elements of the course.

The final issue the researcher encountered implementing this study was the change of delivery method from in-person instruction to a virtual platform. Moving to an online experience opened the project to the risks of participant disengagement, technical difficulties, and miscommunication that can easily occur when persons are not in the same physical space. To combat these potential hindrances, the researcher required all participants to be on camera throughout each session, developed a class handout that required participant involvement, and led each class to be engaging and energetic. Participants received breaks during the evening, and instructional modules were kept to no more than twenty minutes each. While these issues, challenges, and obstacles could have derailed this study, they allowed the researcher to engage the study's subjects creatively and effectively.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This DMIN action research study aims to determine the effectiveness of the M2M-SDC in helping KLCC members shift from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE.[1] To ascertain this finding, this study employed four data-gathering instruments. To determine any change in study participants' commitment to key Christian values, each was asked to complete two surveys that yielded a quantitative measure of shifts in individual and group religiosity during this study. This researcher also conducted before and after interviews with each participant, documenting qualitative and quantitative indicators of each contributor's views toward key factors affecting this study's results. During this study, three focus groups convened to provide qualitative and quantitative data that helped the researcher establish KLCC's overall cultural health. Focus Group 1 consisted of the study participants, who discussed their views of the church, given their exposure to the M2M-SDC class content. Focus Group 2 was the control group and comprised KLCC members-at-large, who provided a view of KLCC's culture with no prior influence from this study. Focus Group 3 convened with eleven members of KLCC LT. This session provided a unique top-down view from the church leader's perspective and offered the researcher an informed qualitative and quantitative measure of the church's effectiveness. The final data-gathering tool employed in this study was the researcher's field observation notes. This source informed this study with a qualitative assessment of shifts in participants' attitudes, engagement,

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[1] See list of acronyms on page xii.

and commitment levels. The study determined a clear and measurable change in KLCC's members' shift from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE through these four sources.

Data Sources and Analysis Framework

This chapter documents the data analysis of four key data-gathering tools employed in this study. In the sections below, this thesis will consider the impact of M2M-SDC on KLCC's member engagement and religiosity by evaluating survey, interview, focus group, and researcher observation results. Each tool was implemented to answer a specific ministry context question related to this study's findings. These questions will be discussed in the text that follows. The study sample demographics must be considered before this thesis analyzes data gathered during this process.

Participant Demographics

Analysis of participant data is intended to answer three primary questions. Is the study sample an accurate representation of KLCC, and if not, does any deviation invalidate the study's accuracy? Was participant attendance and engagement sufficient for the study results to be reliable? To ascertain contributors' viewpoints, how long have study participants been members of KLCC and the body of Christ? These questions were answered by analyzing the study sample relative to KLCC's demographic population, evaluating participant attendance records and researcher's field note observations, and analyzing each participant's stated lifelong church and KLCC experience.

Though it was planned that KLCC LT would recommend a list of preferred study participants, KLCC LT recommended that a blanket invitation be sent to members who fit the study criteria instead. On Wednesday, August 30, an invitation was emailed to a list of members

who fit the study criteria. Only three members volunteered to participate in the study. By Friday, September 1, the researcher had received considerable feedback from potential participants indicating two significant obstacles to their participation: (1) they could not commit to a ten-week study, and (2) they could participate in a shorter study if there was a virtual option.

To determine if this intervention included a reasonable representation of KLCC's overall demographic, this researcher considered each participant's role in the church, gender, and marital status. When KLCC members were invited to participate in this study, the most committed church members were among the first to volunteer. Though members known to be on the RIM were encouraged to consider signing up, the greatest response was from those who already serve in some capacity. Therefore, it was reasonable to discover the sample's skew toward participating KLCC leaders. While KLCC's leader-to-member ratio is close to 1:4 (fig. 4.1),
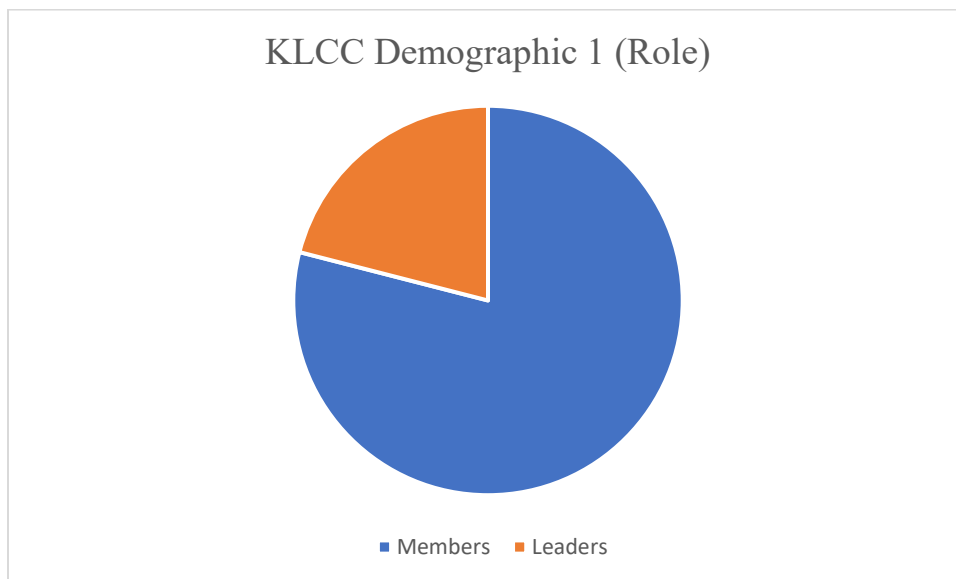
Figure 4.1. KLCC Demographic 1 (Role)

KLCC leaders were over-represented on this study's participant roster, which featured three leaders for every two non-leader members (fig. 4.2).
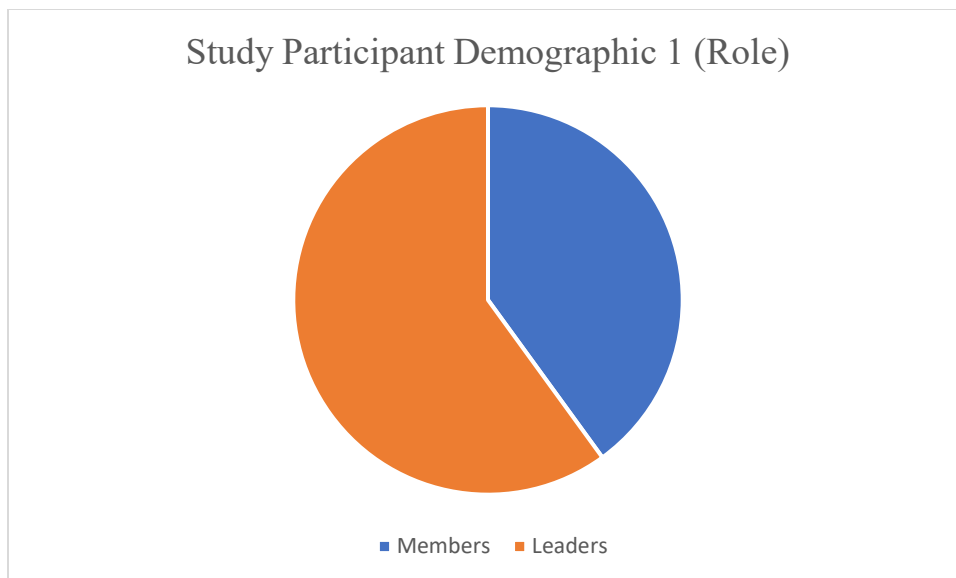
Figure 4.2. Study Participant Demographic 1 (Role)

To accommodate this proportional imbalance, this study included a focus group for all participants and a separate session for leaders. This separation enabled the researcher to isolate views held commonly by KLCC leaders from views common to all members of the church. What was interesting to note is that despite the demographic disparity that leaned toward KLCC leaders, the entire group showed significant shifts in views and values after the M2M-SDC process. Leaders appeared to have no measurable advantages over non-leader members.

Further consideration of the study group's demographic alignment with KLCC reveals that the gender composition of the group was very close to KLCC's male-to-female ratio. KLCC enjoys a significant male presence in the congregation, constituting four of every ten members (fig. 4.3).
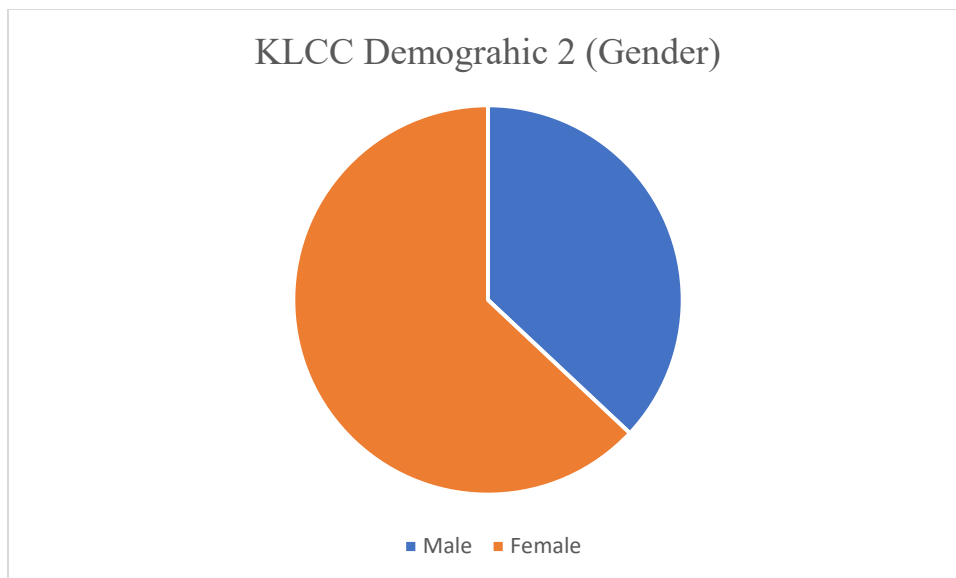
Figure 4.3. KLCC Demographic 2 (Gender)

This study's gender distribution was close to the church's, hosting five men and five women (fig. 4.4). Therefore, the gender disparity between the study and the ministry context was insignificant, and its impact on the study results has been deemed inconsequential.
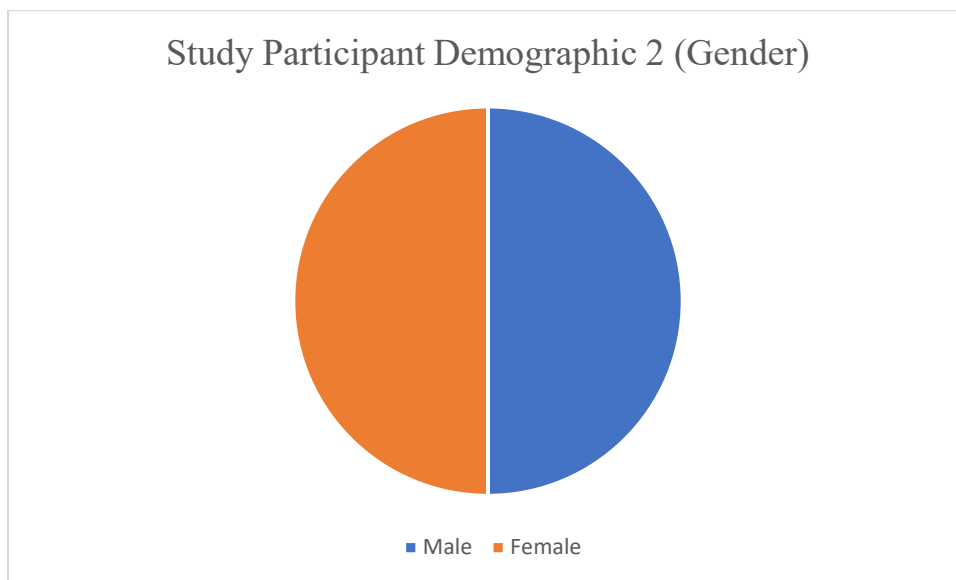
Figure 4.4. Study Participant Demographic 2 (Gender)

KLCC boasts a very high marital success rate. More than 60 percent of KLCC members are married (fig. 4.5), while just over 5 percent of church members live as divorced singles.
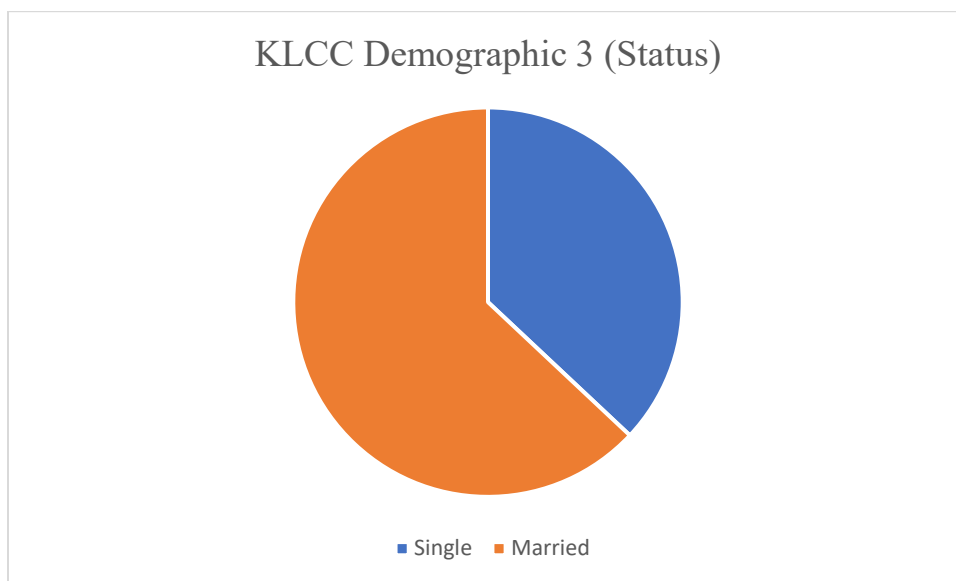
Figure 4.5. KLCC Demographic 3 (Status)

Therefore, it is reasonable that this study's participant roster would favor married couples. Six of ten KLCC members are married; the distribution of married M2M-SDC participants was eight out of ten (see fig. 4.6). Given that this study did not allow for individual participant selection and depended on candidates' interest, availability, and willingness to participate, the variance between this study's marital status demographics and KLCC's membership composition is reasonable and acceptable.
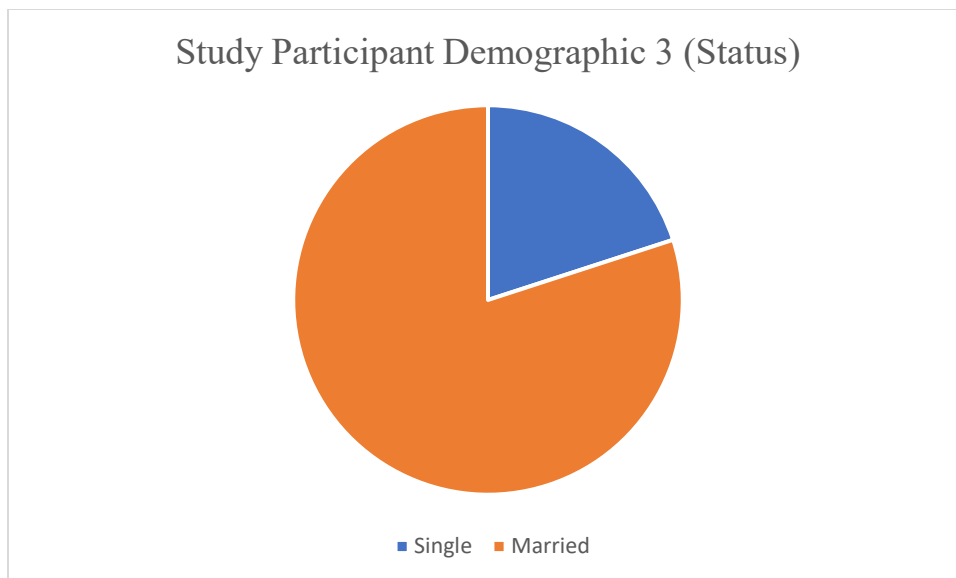
Figure 4.6. Study Participant Demographic 3 (Status)

This thesis has considered the study participant's role, gender, and marital status relative to the congregation's demographic composition. Quantitatively, the demographic ratios of the study group were close to those of the church. However, it is more important for this researcher to consider a few key qualitative questions. Were the voices of each group heard during this study? Did the leaders overshadow the members? Did the married couples lobby for their views at the expense of the unmarried participants? Was there equity in each session, and did each participant, regardless of role, gender, or marital status, have an opportunity to participate freely and fully in the intervention process?

As will be borne out in a later analysis of the researcher's field notes, each participant was observed to participate in this process without restriction or inhibition. Married group members did not silence singles, and leaders could not dominate exchanges. The demographic composition of the M2M-SDC action research project came close to mirroring its ministry context. Where there was demographic divergence, the research impact was negligible.

Regarding the study participants' active engagement in the intervention process, this study considered the group's weekly attendance record. Before this thesis can analyze the intrinsic value this process brought to each participant, it must consider the extrinsic value of the participant's exposure to M2M-SDC class content. An idyllic lesson plan featuring visual graphics is meaningless if several participants have missed significant content delivery. Therefore, the first measure of participant engagement must be tied to attendance.

M2M-SDC study participants maintained a 94 percent average attendance rate over the five class sessions of this study (table 4.1). All participants attended classes 1, 2, and 5, two participants missed class 3, and one was absent from class 4. Despite the unplanned but unavoidable schedule conflicts, all participants began and ended together. Those who missed sessions could also get back on track with the group and fully engage in the curriculum.

Table 4.1. M2M-SDC Class Attendance Record

M2M-SDC Class Attendance Record			
M2M-SDC Session #	Registered Participants	Participants in Attendance	Attendance Percentage
1	10	10	100%
2	10	10	100%
3	10	8	80%
4	10	9	90%
5	10	10	100%
		Average Attendance	94%

However, the participant attendance is only half of the story here. This will be reflected in the researcher's field note observations. Each M2M-SDC session was enlivened by energetic discussion, probing participant questions, and active group engagement. Not only were the participants physically present nearly 100 percent of the time, but many appeared to be 100 percent mentally and emotionally present each time the class convened. This intervention was designed to inspire greater member commitment in a local church context. Each participant signed an informed consent form detailing each group member's expectations.[2] The M2M-SDC class attendance record (table 4.1) supports the conclusion that study participants took their commitment to this project seriously.

Regarding the participant's experiential qualifications to offer feedback in this process, this thesis will examine the group's composite age, church experience, and tenure at KLCC. The age of participants speaks to their general life experience. While a study was conducted with a group of twenty-year-old participants could be beneficial, their input regarding church health and leadership policy would likely be drawn from a more limited well of experience than a roster of forty-year-old subjects. Life experience can offer a broader perspective and deepen each participant's view on the societal issues impacting the church.

Likewise, if this study was conducted with a group of sixty-year-olds, it could yield results that lack relevance to the trends in the prevailing culture. It could easily fall prey to tradition and custom and get bogged down in nostalgic protectionism of what has been despite its ministry effectiveness. For this study to have its greatest effect, it is best shared as it was across an intergenerational cross-section of the church. Three group members' ages ranged between 25

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[2] See Informed Consent on page 185.

and 40, two between 40 and 50, three between 50 and 60, and two between 60 and 70 years old.

Seasoned experience was counter-balanced by fresh eyes.
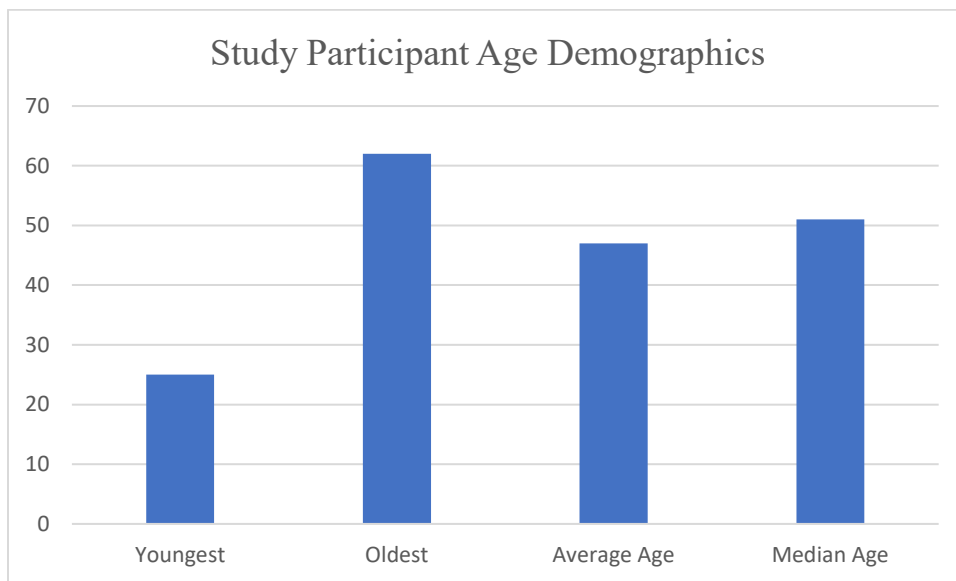
Figure 4.7. Study Participant Age Demographics

The youngest participant was 25, and the oldest was 62, with a median age of 51 (fig. 4.7). This study included KLCC members born across five decades. The richness of the verbal exchanges of class sessions, interviews, and focus groups reflected this diversity. The zeal of relative youth met the temperance of maturity. It gave this researcher a depth of feedback that enhanced this project and ensured its application to the KLCC ministry context.

The group participant's broad age span was not the only significant factor impacting the quality of this project research. The participant's experience with church life and tenure at KLCC combined to lend credibility to the study group and their views on church health and effective organizational change.
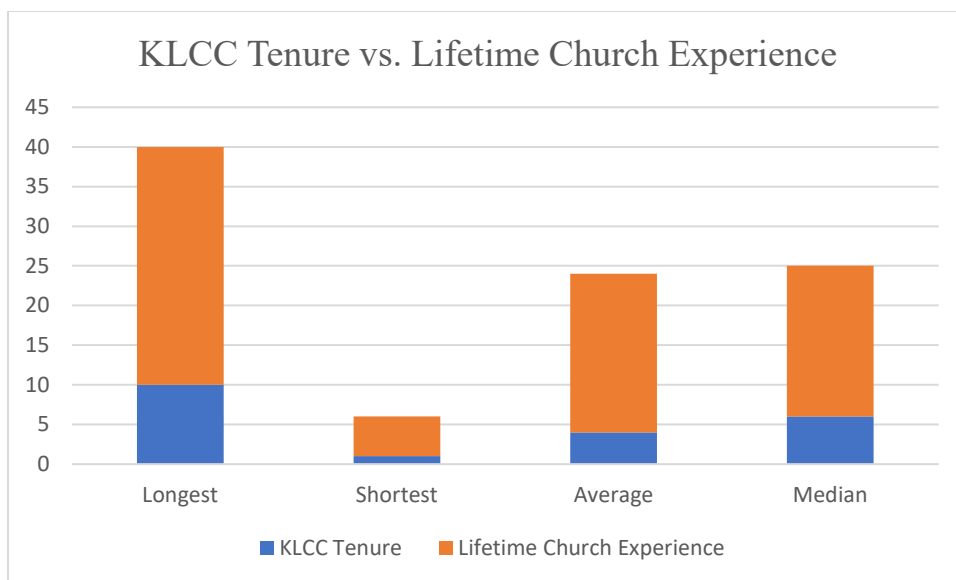
Figure 4.8. KLCC Tenure Versus Lifetime Church Experience

The study group's church experience ranged from six to more than forty years (see fig. 4.8). Some participants had been involved in church life since early childhood. The participants brought an average of twenty-four years of ecclesiastical experience to this process as a group. Their experience was not only long but also varied. KLCC was no one's initial church experience. Most had been a part of at least three churches before joining KLCC.

Some study participants came from a denominational church, while others had spent years attached to independent churches. Some KLCC leaders had served as church officers before joining the church, while some had no prior leadership experience. The group's diversified church history contributed to the expanse of this study's perspective and led to meaningful and engaging group dialogue.

Regarding the group's qualifications to speak specifically to KLCC culture and church dynamics, the tenure demographics bode well for meaningful consideration of the subject matter. The newest member had one year of KLCC experience, and the longest tenure was held by one of the church's charter members. Three group participants brought the fresh eyes of those who

had spent less than three years at KLCC, five group members have been with KLCC between five and seven years, and two brought to bear the legacy view of earned over more than eight years with this church. Together, the group garnered fifty-eight years of KLCC tenure, making the average length of membership 5.8 years. Given this level of involvement in this local church context, this group was considered well-qualified to address the issues undermining the church's effectiveness.

To determine the credibility of this study as an intervention that legitimately impacted KLCC's ministry context, this thesis has considered the role, gender, and marital status of each study participant. This research has also evaluated M2M-SDC class attendance and its potential impact on the validity of participant engagement. This thesis also analyzed each group member's age, church experience, and KLCC tenure. Given this analysis, this researcher concludes that the three credibility considerations proposed earlier in this chapter have been satisfactorily answered, supporting this study's credibility.

<div align="center">Participant Survey Results</div>

To analyze M2M-SDC's effectiveness in affecting a meaningful shift in participant values, this study employed a before-and-after survey to measure member religiosity. The SOSRI Survey asked subjects to rank their agreement with each of the twenty-five statements designed to reflect the participant's commitment to a particular Christian value.[3] Statements were drawn from six statement clusters, each reflecting one of six key religiosity measures. Statements were then arranged randomly on the survey. The opening survey was issued at the end of the participant orientation session; the closing survey was issued following the final M2M-SDC

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[3] See SOSRI Survey on page 191.

class. Surveys were completed anonymously. To protect each respondent's identity, group members selected an identification number during the orientation session and entered the same participant code on each submission.

To evaluate the survey results and determine if a meaningful and measurable shift has occurred following the M2M-SDC intervention, this thesis will consider changes in average ranks per statement for all participants, changes in average ranking by statement cluster, and overall religiosity score changes as determined by shifts in averages across all clusters collectively.

Analyzing the average responses across all twenty statements and comparing the averages before and after M2M-SDC, this analysis shows an uptick in ranks on all statements and, on some, a significant increase (fig. 4.9). Notable are jumps on statements 9, 18, 21, 22, and 23. These statements will be examined more closely in the respective cluster discussions.
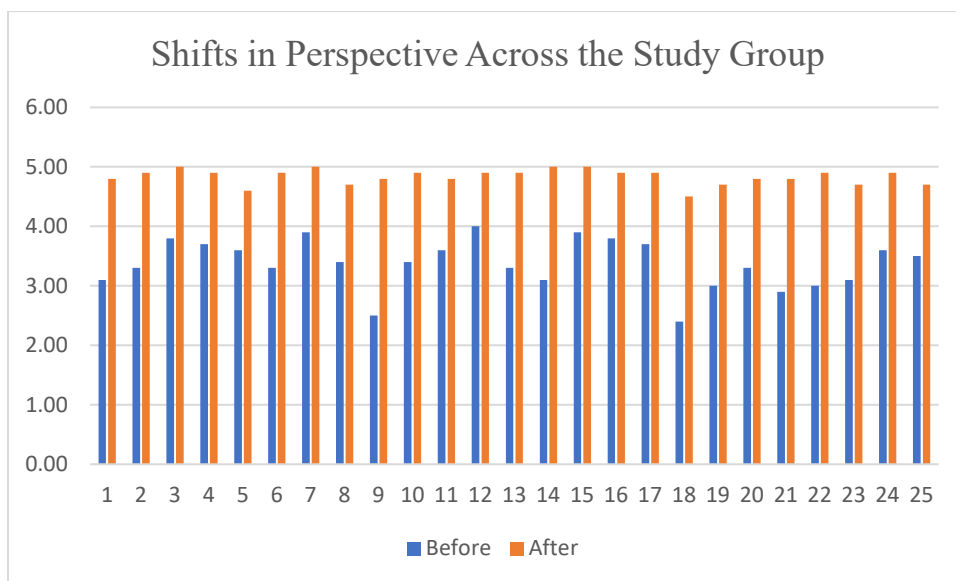
Figure 4.9. Shifts in Perspective Across the Study Participant Group

Statements that Indicate Commitment to Christian Disciplines

The first cluster of statements embedded in the survey reflected the participant's

commitment to key spiritual disciplines. Statements 1, 9, 18, 21, and 25 addressed prayer, Bible

study, meditation, and private worship as important aspects of one's life. A rank of 1 meant the

practice was extremely insignificant; 5 indicated that the participant viewed the discipline as

indispensable. The five statements that indicate a commitment to Christian disciplines are:

#1   Regular prayer is important in my life.
#9   Regular Bible study and review of Sunday lessons are important in my life.
#18 Reading my Bible, reviewing Sunday lessons, and rehearsing kingdom truths are
     important and regular practices in my life.
#21 Meditating on Scripture and kingdom principles is important in my life.
#25 Private worship, prayer, and study are as important in my life as attending public
     worship services.

M2M-SDC profoundly impacted this cluster. Statements 9, 18, and 21 are three of the

changed ranks in this survey. The average initial ranking for the group was 2.50, and following

M2M-SDC, the rank jumped from 2.30 points to 4.80 (table 4.2). It is also noteworthy that three

of the biggest increases were in this cluster. These shifts suggest a significant value change for

the group. While prayer, Bible reading, and reviewing Sunday messages were important at the

start of the intervention, these practices became crucial by the end of M2M-SDC.

Table 4.2. Survey Statements that Indicate Commitment to Christian Disciplines

Survey Statements that Indicate Commitment to Christian Disciplines			
Survey Statement #	Average Response Before M2M-SDC	Average Response After M2M-SDC	Average Point Differential
1	3.10	4.80	+ 1.70
9	2.50	4.80	+ 2.30
18	2.40	4.50	+ 2.10

21	2.90	4.80	+ 1.90
25	3.50	4.70	+ 1.20
		Average of Averages	+1.84

Statements that Reveal Faith in Practice (Practical Theology)

The second statement cluster included in the SOSRI Survey was designed to reveal the participants' practical theology convictions. This section determined the group's perceived connection between belief and daily practice. The statements that revealed faith in practice were:

#4 My faith should be demonstrated in my actions; not merely declared by my words.
#10 Authentic Christian faith is demonstrated in one's actions as well as words.
#17 One's faith should impact how one lives each day.
#20 One's true beliefs are generally evident in one's life choices.

While the results in this cluster are not as dramatic as the Christian disciplines results, there is a measurable, consistent increase in value rankings across each of these statements and the cluster (table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Survey Statements that Reveal Faith in Practice

Survey Statements that Reveal Faith in Practice			
Survey Statement #	**Average Response Before M2M-SDC**	**Average Response After M2M-SDC**	**Average Point Differential**
4	3.70	4.90	+ 1.70
10	3.40	4.90	+ 1.50
17	3.70	4.90	+ 1.20
20	3.30	4.80	+ 1.50
		Average of Averages	+1.35

Statements that Affirm the Church as an Extension of God's Kingdom

The third cluster of SOSRI Survey statements reveals the disposition of the participant's worldview. What does the subject believe about the church? How does the participant interpret the church's role in the world? Does the participant believe the church is the manifestation of God's kingdom on earth? What is the group member's position on a practical application of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20)? Does the participant tie their ecclesiology to God's kingdom-manifestation? The answers to these questions are revealed in these key statements:

#2   God's kingdom is eternal, in heaven, but also present and seen on earth

#7   One of the Christian church's primary roles is influencing the world around them.

#14   The Christian church's primary role is spreading Christ's influence worldwide.

#19   One of the Christian church's primary roles is transforming society at large.

The second-largest shift in this survey was the change in study participants' views of the church as an extension of God's kingdom. The average group ranks assigned to statements 2, 7, 14, and 19 increased by 1.58 points (cf. table 4.4). These results support the conclusion that after M2M-SDC, study subjects experienced a significant revision of their understanding of the church's purpose and primary mission.

Table 4.4. Survey Statements Affirming the Church as an Extension of God's Kingdom

Survey Statements that Affirm the Church as an Extension of God's Kingdom			
Survey Statement #	Average Response Before M2M-SDC	Average Response After M2M-SDC	Average Point Differential
2	3.30	4.90	+ 1.60
7	3.90	5.00	+ 1.10
14	3.10	5.00	+ 1.90
19	3.00	4.70	+ 1.70

		Average of Averages	+1.58

Statements that Support Giving as an Expression of Faith

The first three statement clusters dealt with the participant's 'orthodoxy', deeply held Christian beliefs, and theological positions. The last three clusters deal with the participant's 'orthopraxy', deep convictions that show up as commitment-driven behaviors. The first of these statement clusters to be analyzed, and the fourth cluster in this survey is the participant's view of giving as an expression of one's faith.

Noteworthy is that clusters four, five, and six are three of the four highest-rated clusters of the survey. Given the emphasis on giving in many churches, it is unsurprising that study participants would view stewardship as a central Christian value even before going through the M2M-SDC experience. The four statements that support giving as an expression of one's faith are:

#5   My faith reflects my sacrificial and consistent giving to support KLCC's mission.
#11   Systematic giving is important to expressing one's faith in God.
#16   Giving freely and sacrificially is important to expressing one's faith in God.
#23   A Christian with faith void of consistent giving has an empty, dead faith.

Cluster statements 5, 11, 16, and 23 averaged a score of 3.53 on the groups' initial survey. They ended the intervention averaging 4.75, for a cluster increase of 1.23 (see table 4.5). This change was the lowest of the six clusters, indicating the smallest shift in participant views. Interestingly, statement 23 was one of the most dramatically changed survey ranks. This suggests that while participants readily connected giving to one's faith, they may have been uncomfortable with the hard-line, all-or-nothing tenor of this statement. Study subjects entered the process relatively convinced that giving is an important demonstration of one's faith. They concluded M2M-SDC even more persuaded.

Table 4.5. Survey Statements that Support Giving as an Expression of Faith

Survey Statements that Support Giving as an Expression of Faith			
Survey Statement #	Average Response Before M2M-SDC	Average Response After M2M-SDC	Average Point Differential
5	3.60	4.60	+ 1.00
11	3.60	4.80	+ 1.20
16	3.80	4.90	+ 1.10
23	3.10	4.70	+ 1.60
		Average of Averages	+1.23

Table 4.6. Survey Statements that Support Compassion as an Expression of Faith

Survey Statements that Support Compassion as an Expression of Faith			
Survey Statement #	Average Response Before M2M-SDC	Average Response After M2M-SDC	Average Point Differential
3	3.80	5.00	+ 1.20
8	3.40	4.70	+ 1.30
13	3.30	4.90	+ 1.60
24	3.60	4.90	+ 1.30
		Average of Averages	+1.35

Table 4.7. Survey Statements that Support Serving as an Expression of Faith

Survey Statements that Support Serving as an Expression of Faith			
Survey Statement #	Average Response Before M2M-SDC	Average Response After M2M-SDC	Average Point Differential
6	3.30	4.90	+ 1.60
12	4.00	4.90	+ .90
15	3.90	5.00	+ 1.10
22	3.00	4.90	+ 1.90
		Average of Averages	+1.38

As with the cluster that supported giving as an expression of faith, it was also the case with the remaining two clusters. Cluster five, statements that support compassion as a demonstration of one's faith, and cluster six, statements that reveal the participant's value for serving, yielded results that confirm these deeply held values before the M2M-SDC intervention.

Interestingly, though respondents had a preexisting intrinsic value for compassion and serving, statement 22 bumped 1.90 points following the intervention (table 4.7.). Also, the average for the compassion cluster was initially 3.53, and the serving cluster was 3.55; both increased to 4.88 and 4.93, respectively (tables 4.6 and 4.7).

Statements that Support Compassion and Serving as Expressions of Faith

The four statements that tested compassion as an expression of one's faith were:

#3　　One cannot truly love God without also loving others.
#8　　Responding to people's needs is critical to living as a Christian.
#13　As Christ was moved with compassion for those in need, I should also have deep compassion for those in need.
#24　It is impossible to truly love God without being deeply concerned about the well-being of others.

The statements that comprised the Serving Cluster were:

    #6   Serving in a ministry is important for Christians to demonstrate their faith in God.
    #12   As Christ came to serve and not to be served, I should also willingly serve others.
    #15   Saying "I love God" while refusing to serve others is spiritual hypocrisy.
    #22   There is an irrefutable correlation between one's beliefs and behavior.

SOSRI Survey Summary

None of the data collected during this DMIN Action Research project has provided clearer quantitative results than the SOSRI survey. The results from the before-and-after survey reveal a significant impact on M2M-SDC study participants. Despite their years of church experience and KLCC tenure, group participants recorded a meaningful and measurable shift in perspective in six pivotal measures of religiosity. An average of the average participant scores across each of the six statement clusters yields a 1.45-point average group increase on a scale of 1 to 5 (table 4.8). As a percentage, that increase represents nearly a 30 percent shift in participant values toward deeper Christian commitment following involvement in the M2M-SDC process.

Table 4.8. Average Shift in Survey Statement Clusters

Average Shift in Survey Statement Clusters			
Statement Cluster	Average Response Before M2M-SDC	Average Response After M2M-SDC	Average Point Differential
Christian Disciplines	2.88	4.72	+ 1.84
Faith in Practice	3.53	4.88	+ 1.35
God's Kingdom in the Church	3.33	4.90	+ 1.58
Giving Reveals Faith	3.53	4.75	+ 1.23
Compassion Reveals Faith	3.53	4.88	+ 1.35
Serving Reveals Faith	3.55	4.93	+ 1.38

		Average of Averages	+1.45

Though the most significant view shifts were in clusters one and three, considering Christian disciplines and God's kingdom reality, every cluster revealed an increased perspective. From a 1.23-point incremental increase to a monumental 1.84-point jump, this survey provides definitive quantitative evidence that the M2M-SDC succeeded in shifting KLCC members' Christian views.

Participant Interview Feedback

Study participants were invited to participate in two interviews during this research process. The opening interview was designed to determine the subject's views on KLCC's culture, organizational health, the process for assimilating new members into the church, and leadership effectiveness. The closing interview was to measure M2M-SDC's immediate impact on the participant and potential long-term effects on KLCC. This final interview was also designed to ascertain the participant's view of M2M-SDC's broader application within KLCC and portability to other ministry contexts.

All study participants attended a one-on-one virtual opening interview after the orientation session on September 13. Closing interviews were held during the week following M2M-SDC class 5 and conducted utilizing a virtual platform. Interviews were video-recorded and transcribed. The statements noted in this thesis are identified by participant number to maintain anonymity.

Opening Interview Feedback

Opening interviews targeted each participant's assessment of KLCC's culture, overall health, member assimilation process, and KLCC's leadership effectiveness. These inquiries were

designed to determine if KLCC is a church that inspires its members to engage fully and cultivates an environment that draws the congregation from the RIM toward the FAM. A church's health, intentional process for developing members, and unity of effort among leaders are critical elements of a church that cultivates willing and active volunteer engagement.

KLCC's Culture

Interviewees were asked to describe the most favorable aspects of KLCC. Four central themes emerged from the opening interviews. Respondents identified KLCC as warm and welcoming, a church intentionally practicing authentic community. KLCC was described by participants 2 and 8 as a transformational church, pointing its members toward Christ and growing in Christlikeness. Six of the ten participants labeled their church Christ-centered, kingdom-focused, and Bible oriented in its teaching and preaching. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10 agreed that one of the best ways to describe KLCC is challenging, a great community for those who are serious about their faith and desire to mature in Christ.

In the participants' view, KLCC is a good church doing good work. KLCC is committed to Christ and His mission and dedicated to pointing its people toward living God-honoring lives. KLCC's culture is conducive to growth and maturity in the Lord. This faith community's culture should foster and contribute to developing committed, serving disciples.

KLCC's Organizational Health

To determine each group member's view of KLCC's organizational health, interviewees were asked if they would invite those seeking a church home to visit KLCC. One participant exclaimed, "Absolutely!" Participant 2 continued, "This is church how it was meant to be!" In another interview, participant 8 responded, "Yes, because KLCC is real, authentic, and

practical." Six other participants affirmed during their interviews that they would confidently invite friends if they were thirsty for truth and willing to grow and mature in the Lord.

According to study participants, KLCC is a church with a clear mission and compelling vision. KLCC leaders preach, teach, and gather the community with the singular objective of helping members grow in faith and apply biblical truth. The church rests on the Word of God, outlining unequivocal paths toward the kingdom life Christ commands and challenges its constituents to choose the way of God. Considering KLCC's organizational health, interviewees gave the church solid high marks.

KLCC's Member Assimilation Process

To discover if the KLCC member assimilation process fosters member engagement or frustrates would-be disciples, interviewees were asked about their experiences when they joined the church. Four themes emerged from the opening interviews. Participants offered a glowing review of the KLCC's assimilation process, an honest assessment of how it felt to be a new face in the church, a surprising strength of KLCC's ministry philosophy, and a few suggestions for improvements the church can make in this area.

All participants agreed that KLCC's member assimilation process worked well for them. Participants 1 and 2 offered high praise as they recalled their initial visit to the church and the interaction they experienced coming into the fold. Participant 10 commented on how effectively the *Discover KLCC Class*, the *Is This the Place, Lord* gift audio CD, and spiritual gifts inventory facilitated their transition into the ministry.

The second theme in this part of the opening interviews is KLCC's welcoming, come-as-you-are culture. Participants 7 and 9 underscored the impact of the culture on their decision to

revisit. Participant 3 commented that the lead pastor and KLCC LT were approachable. Several participants said they felt invited to visit, return, and eventually join.

Theme three was a surprising strength that is the product of KLCC's ministry philosophy. Kingdom Life leaders famously remind church members that ministry should be viewed as an 'opportunity', not an 'obligation'. Because of this posture, two interviewees indicated they were surprised when church leaders allowed them to remain disengaged for several months after joining the church. They expected to be pressured into service but were not. They were grateful for this gentle, low-pressure shepherding approach and said they needed time to recover from other life transitions and heal to serve others eventually.

The final participant theme from answers to this round of questions incorporated key suggestions of what the church could do better to encourage members from the RIM to the FAM. Participant 2 observed that the leaders and other members could be more intentional about inviting RIM members to have greater connection and commitment. Participant 9 added that developing a means to reach and impact the young adult members could spark interest to serve among the next generation of Kingdom Lifers. Participant 8 identified a need to establish and activate the KLCC Ambassadors, a ministry to help new members acclimate to KLCC.

KLCC Leadership Effectiveness

The final topic introduced in the opening interviews was KLCC's leadership and group members' confidence in the church's future. Interviewees were asked to provide a number ranging from 1 (low confidence) to 10 (high confidence) and to explain their rating. The results ranged from a perfect 10 score to a 5, with an average 8.5 rating (table 4.9).

Table 4.9. Opening Interviews: Confidence in Church Leadership

Confidence in Church Leadership		
Participant #	Leadership Confidence Rating (1=low; 10=high)	Explanation for Rating
1	9	Leadership is doing well, given resources.
2	10	Leaders are being transformed along with the members.
3	5	Leaders must grow and come under the mission or step down.
4	9.5	KLCC is on the right path, a healthy path—keep going!
5	9	Leaders are visible and growing to carry the pastor's heart.
6	8.5	KLCC is on the move!
7	5	The framework is in place; leaders must now execute.
8	8.5	The members have such great accessibility to leaders.
9	9.5	The leaders live and teach the truth. They are doers of the work.
10	8.5	Leaders execute ministry at a very high level, delivering on promises.
	8.25	← Average Leadership Confidence Rating

In addition to the leadership ratings and explanations listed above, interviewees outlined three effective leadership advice themes. First, more than one respondent suggested that leaders undergo mandatory indoctrination to become effective church leaders. As church members must be discipled, so must church leaders. Second, leaders must carry a unified message from the pastor to the pew. Divided leaders cannot cultivate a unified congregation. Finally, two participants observed the importance of KLCC leadership protecting the church's authentic

community. This is one of the church's unique ministry propositions and must remain a leadership priority.

Closing Interview Feedback

Closing interviews began one week after M2M-SDC's class 5 and concluded on Tuesday, November 7. These interviews were to determine the immediate impact of M2M-SDC on each participant, the interviewee's assessment of M2M-SDC's portability to other churches, and the projected lasting impact of M2M-SDC on KLCC. Participants were asked ten questions during each interview. The most relevant responses to the most pertinent questions are recorded in this thesis.

Assessment of M2M-SDC Experience

Four questions were asked to ascertain M2M-SDC's immediate impact on course participants. Group members were asked to provide an overall assessment of the experience, identify one watershed moment, document one significant shift in perspective, and determine if they felt this study addressed a legitimate KLCC issue.

Question 1. What do you think now that you are on the other side of this experience? Each participant responded exuberantly to this opening query. All participants said the experience was engaging, informative, and life-changing. Most said M2M-SDC was timely for them and much needed for KLCC members. Participant 7 observed, "The course itself pulled me out of me-centered living, forcing me to go up God's mountain." Participant 10 responded, "This course changed my view on what is plaguing the church and how to address it." Participant 3 said, "This was transformational!"

Participants were deeply impacted by their M2M-SDC experience. Each interviewee's enthusiasm about this intervention and the opportunity to join this study was palpable. They were all overwhelmed by what they learned, the biblical support that undergirded the course, and the implications for KLCC's congregation.

Question 2. Can you recall one "aha" moment when you saw something in a new way? Participant 1 responded by acknowledging that they did not realize complacency and consumerism were such undermining issues facing the church. Participant 3 noted that their watershed moment came when they discovered the stark difference between the commitment of a member on the RIM and one in the FAM. Participant 5 realized that each of their previous churches had been spiritually sick and in the ICU.

Several interviewees cited many M2M-SDC eye-opening moments. A few remarked that this study offered a fresh approach to an ageless dilemma. Others commented that they had been spiritually awakened through this process. Like Participant 10, many felt that one of the consistent lightbulb moments was seeing that everything discussed was supported in Scripture. Based on participant feedback in these closing interviews, spiritual eyes were opened, thinking was broadened, and group members received a fresh view on several topics presented in this course.

Question 3. How did your overall perspective shift during this process? Participant 3 exclaimed, "I will never think about church and church membership the same way again!" Participant 9 responded with conviction, "We simply must grow up the discipleship mountain, people are waiting on us!" Participant 7 admitted, "I had never heard of RIM, FAM, ICU, or WAVE! Now I see them everywhere!"

Based on the responses to this third interview question, it is apparent that this process profoundly shifted M2M-SDC participants. They were exposed to new concepts and challenged to view church cultural paradigms through a new lens. In the end, they emerged looking at the church differently, able to identify the symptoms of a sick organization. They also demonstrated that they had internalized and assimilated the concepts they heard in class.

Question 4. Did this study legitimately address a major KLCC problem? Four questions were asked to ascertain M2M-SDC's immediate impact on course participants. Group members were asked to provide an overall assessment of the experience, identify one watershed moment, document one significant shift in perspective, and determine if they felt this study addressed a legitimate KLCC issue (table 4.10).

Table 4.10. Closing Interviews: Did This Study Address a Major KLCC Problem?

Did This Study Address a Major KLCC Problem?		
Participant #	Participant Response	Explanation for Response
1	Yes	This study spoke to the heart of KLCC.
2	Yes	KLCC is building a healthy church – this will fix what needs to be addressed!
3	Yes	We've been in the ICU for years. This is the cure.
4	Yes	No questions asked!
5	Yes	This is not only for KLCC but for many other churches as well.
6	Yes	This should become mandatory for all KLCC leaders!
7	Yes	KLCC was definitely in the ICU!
8	Yes	Now, we have a clear picture of a healthy and sick church.
9	Yes	This has already impacted each of us, and we are KLCC members!

| 10 | Yes | We've been in the ICU, and many still are. |

In this section of the closing interview, the researcher sought to ascertain each participant's overall experience assessment, an eye-opening moment, a significant perspective shift, and whether this study addressed a major KLCC issue. Based on the responses recorded above, this researcher concludes that the experience profoundly impacted study participants, who had several water-shed moments and shifted their views on several key issues. The researcher concludes that this study accurately identified and remedied a legitimate KLCC dilemma.

The next central question these closing interviews were designed to answer concerns M2M-SDC's application in other ministry contexts. This DMIN Action Research project was conceived to benefit KLCC. However, several participants suggested that this course could impact other churches that need a similar solution, raising the question of M2M-SDC's portability.

Portability of M2M-SDC to Other Churches

When asked if this process could benefit other churches, interviewees responded with a rounding "Yes!" in each interview. Participant 4 added, "This is much needed for the entire body of Christ." Participant 7 observed, "This process could bring churches out of traditional American church thinking!" Participant 3 commented, "Every church should go through this process if they are serious about growing out of the ICU!" Participant 6 remarked, "This could help other churches move away from the member count paradigm."

Those who experienced M2M-SDC are convinced that this process offers a meaningful benefit to KLCC and other churches. As Participant 3 argued, "This process is too important for

us not to share it with other pastors and churches!" Among M2M-SDC participants, there is perceived merit in sharing this study and findings with other churches and church leaders.

Lasting Impact of M2M-SDC on KLCC's Future

The last question of the closing interviews asked participants to imagine how this process could impact KLCC's future. The thought of KLCC on the other side of a church-wide M2M-SDC indoctrination unanimously inspired participants. A few responses stand out.

Participant 1 said, "I am very encouraged, hopeful, and excited." Participant 8 responded, "I see health and God's glory, a healthier church, families, and members!" Participant 3 commented, "Exciting! This life-changing process takes people from receiving Christ to the FAM!" Participant 4 offered, "I see a church of dedicated disciples sold out for bringing heaven here on earth and living the kingdom life." Participant 10 exclaimed, "I am overwhelmingly happy because this will help grow a stronger church with much healthier members!

Summary of Interview Feedback

In the opening interviews, interviewees spoke about KLCC's culture, organizational health, member assimilation process, and leadership effectiveness. Participants painted a portrait of a healthy church growing stronger as its leadership team unifies and rallies around the KLCC's vision and mission. In the closing interviews, respondents assessed M2M-SDC's immediate impact on participants and potential portability to impact other churches, and they envisioned how M2M-SDC could impact KLCC's future. The transcription of these interviews revealed that this experience profoundly impacted study participants, who are convinced that this process can help other churches and hopeful about KLCC's post-M2M-SDC future. These

interviews provide further support for the validity and effectiveness of this study. Based on these interviews, this group of participants has been moved from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE.

Focus Group Sessions

This study's third data source was three focus groups held between Friday, October 20, and Monday, October 30. Three focus groups met to provide qualitative and quantitative data to help the researcher establish KLCC's overall cultural health and to determine the validity of M2M-SDC intervention in KLCC's ministry context. Focus Group 1 consisted of the M2M-SDC participants. This group aimed to provide study participants with an open forum to freely discuss KLCC culture and the impact M2M-SDC could have on the church. Focus Group 2 was non-study KLCC members-at-large. The purpose of this group was to provide an objective view of KLCC and its strengths and challenges to determine the accuracy of this thesis' problem statement. Members of the KLCC LT attended Focus Group 3. This group offered a leader's perspective of the church's situation and the suitability of this M2M-SDC intervention.

Each group met virtually via an online platform for approximately two hours. Each session was video-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were organized by key word and central themes and analyzed for emerging patterns. The results are noted in this thesis and all statements are identified by group participant numbers to maintain anonymity.

Assessing KLCC's Organizational Health

Focus Group 1 was asked if the trend of KLCC's organizational health was on an incline, decline, or plateau. Participant 1 responded first with a definitive, "Incline!" They continued, "That's one thing I can say for sure. This church has been growing healthier and stronger since the day I joined." All other respondents agreed with this initial position. Participant 4 added,

"Yes, we are going up as we have been pointed toward Christ!" Participant 7 observed, "Even as I watch videos in our YouTube archive, I can hear God calling us higher since 2018." Participant 3 contributed, "I have watched this church grow as our pastor has grown – his hunger makes us hungry!"

Focus Group 2 comprised seven KLCC members aged 32 to 61. They had been in church an average of twenty-two years and held an average 6.8 per year KLCC membership tenure. One participant was a KLCC leader, and the other six group members represented various levels of commitment from the RIM to the FAM. Collectively, this group held 141 years of church experience.

Focus Group 2 was asked to identify one example of organizational health in KLCC. Three themes emerged in their responses. This group identified the three markers of KLCC's health as a church, citing KLCC's 1) transparent and authentic community, 2) sound and practical Bible-based teaching, and 3) propensity for simplifying the path for a believer to live a kingdom-centered life. Participant AL6 stated, "The church's culture invites authenticity." Participant AL4 reflected, "This is the first equipping church I have attended. We are not just taught what the Bible says, but how to apply it to our lives." Participant AL1 observed, "At Kingdom Life, we are actually learning how to live the kingdom life."

Focus Group 2 was also asked to assign a numerical value to reflect how they had been impacted by KLCC's ministry. The newest member had been with KLCC for just over one year and the most seasoned members had been part of the congregation for more than a decade. The results of this discussion are tabulated below (table 4.11).

Table 4.11. KLCC's Ministry Impact on Focus Group 2 Members-at-Large

KLCC's Ministry Impact on Focus Group 2 Members-at-Large		
Participant #	**KLCC Ministry Impact Rating (1=low; 10=high)**	**Explanation for Rating**
AL1	8	"I'm simply not the me I used to be!"
AL2	10	Leaders are being transformed along with the members.
AL3	10	"I have been transformed! I trust God and my pastor!"
AL4	10	"I have never been so deeply impacted by a church before!"
AL5	9	"My heart has changed toward the truth, and I now believe God's story!"
AL6	10	"I am inspired by KLCC; I am moving up the mountain!
AL7	10	"My life has changed, and I believe there is more to come!"
	9.6	← Average Impact Rating

This focus group indicated organizational health and effectiveness by rating their experience at KLCC a 9.6 out of a possible 10. In most academic settings, 96 percent is graded an A. Based on these first two focus group sessions, the findings support that KLCC's congregation views it as a healthy, vibrant, effective church that deeply impacts the people it serves. Do KLCC leaders corroborate this conclusion? Does the church look as effective from within inner circles? Are there less obvious issues that only a leader might observe?

Focus Group 3 met on Monday, October 30. Ten of KLCC LT's eleven leaders were present. The average KLCC leader is a seasoned believer, 43 years old, with twenty-nine years in church and nearly eight years at KLCC. Each brings an experienced perspective to this exchange. The group comprised seven men and three women; only one leader was unmarried.

To assess KLCC's organizational health, this group was asked what key shift church members must make to cultivate greater health as a church. Their ten responses echoed around three themes: KLCC members must (1) commit to the church's mission and the pastor's vision, (2) elevate their view of serving as a demonstration of one's faith, and (3) move from "me" to "we," shifting from self-centered consumerism to selfless other-mindedness. Two of the respondents' answers supported commitment as the missing element, two felt serving was the key, and six responses pointed toward selfless living as the key.

Three core observations emerged when asked what key shift KLCC leaders could make to improve the church's overall health. KLCC LT attendees noted that the church would be healthier if (1) leaders were more intentional about maturing as disciples and growing as leaders, (2) leaders were more visibly supportive of the pastor and more committed to supporting the church's vision, and (3) leaders worked together across the ministry matrix to intentionally cross-pollinate and strengthen the entire church through greater unity of effort.

These focus groups yielded meaningful and useful data to support this study's objectives. Participants revealed that KLCC is a healthy, strong, and effective church with room to grow from the pulpit to the pew. KLCC also offers members a cultural environment conducive to moving from the RIM to the FAM, engaging in meaningful ministry, and serving the Lord by helping to fulfill this church's mission.

Assessing M2M-SDC's Viability

To aid this researcher in assessing M2M-SDC's viability in the KLCC ministry context, Focus Groups 2 and 3 were asked if they agreed with this study's problem statement. To determine if participants could envision this intervention positively improving KLCC's ministry

culture, Focus Group 1 was invited to provide the most significant benefits they felt this study could provide KLCC.

All members attending Focus Group 2 agreed that the thesis' problem statement was accurately and appropriately applied to KLCC's ministry context. Participant AL5 recalled, "When I first came to the church, I was looking for what this church could do for me." Participant AL4 observed, "When I see folks come on Sunday, get the Word, and head for the parking lot as soon as you say 'amen,' I know we are in the ICU." Participant AL7 added, "I can definitely see this when I came to Kingdom Life, I am sure I was looking for what I could get out of it and how it would meet our needs." Participant AL2 confessed, "I never knew any other way to find a church home. I never thought of it as shopping or consumerism."

Focus Group 3 also spoke to the veracity of this study's claim. Like Focus Group 2, they agreed unanimously. Participant LT10 asserted, "This is a very relevant topic; ICU is prevalent at KLCC and throughout the body of Christ." Participant LT2 observed, "ICU thinking comes from how one is indoctrinated into the church. Most churches just want good consumers!" Participant LT1 concluded, "Yes, this is a relevant study, but when we come to a church like Kingdom Life, it can take a while for us to grow out of the ICU."

When Focus Group 1 was asked what benefit this study potentially brings to KLCC, their answers grouped around the hope that this systematic approach to discipleship would provide a clear picture of how the church should function, that M2M-SDC would provide a practical application for growing deeper in the Lord, and that this would be a means to show the church practically how to live a kingdom-centered life.

Summary of Focus Group Feedback

Focus Groups 1, 2, and 3 met to provide this researcher with qualitative and quantitative data on KLCC's overall cultural health and the validity of M2M-SDC intervention in KLCC's ministry context. Each session was lively, engaging, and well-attended. The data provided during these sessions was integral to evaluating KLCC's situation and the soundness of the approach employed in this thesis study. Based on the documentable confirmation derived during these focus group sessions, this researcher concludes that this thesis' problem statement accurately describes KLCC's ministry context and that the M2M-SDC intervention is suitable for addressing the prevalent consumer culture.

Researcher Observations and Field Notes

The fourth data source in this study comes from this researcher's observations and field notes. This researcher has maintained a field diary throughout this process, recording observations from the project's inception through the survey analysis, interview sessions, focus group encounters, and M2M-SDC classes. This data aims to provide the researcher with qualitative data that will ensure the humanization of this thesis.

It is critical to this process and true to the nature of action research that the researcher and thesis readers remember that the subject in this study is not merely a bound and legally structured organization. The subjects in this study are the people of Kingdom Life Community Church. Whenever this thesis refers to KLCC, there is a congregation of real people on the other side of that reference. This was never more apparent than as recorded in the researcher's observations and field notes.

The recorded observations from this research study are too numerous to outline here. However, this data may be dissected into two subsections for reference in this thesis. Some

observations and notes were derived during the study, recording immediate participant experiences. Other observations recorded after-action impacts that have developed since the close of M2M-SDC. Both immediate and after-action observations and notes may be distilled down into a few major and recurring themes.

Immediate Observations and Field Notes

Immediate researcher observations revealed that this study's participants, whether full M2M-SDC participants, KLCC LT, or focus group-only subjects, approached each facet of this process displaying four characteristics. Participants appeared intrigued by this project. Most had been in church for years and had never questioned the culture or considered its health. When they heard a description of the church in the ICU, most seemed genuinely drawn into the process. Anticipation was high before each encounter, and enthusiasm remained high throughout.

Participants also demonstrated exceptional commitment to this study. There was never a need for reminder emails or text messages to participants. This researcher published the schedule, and participants were self-governed to honor their commitments. When asked about the group's apparent devotion to showing up on time and ready to engage, Participant 7 responded, "Of course, this is so important for our church; we would not miss it!"

Participants were physically present for sessions and emotionally and mentally tuned in during each engagement. Study subjects appeared alert, attentive, and responsive to questions and discussion prompts. At times, engagement was so high that group dynamics had to be redirected to get through that evening's curriculum.

Finally, and the most dramatic immediate observation, seven M2M-SDC demonstrated an immediate perspective change. Some increased their church commitment by joining a service ministry, becoming more involved on Sunday mornings, or adding a discipleship ministry to

their resume. There was an immediate documentable shift from me-centered to we-oriented church membership.

After-action Observations and Field Notes

One of the key after-action observations was participants adopting and using the M2M-SDC language. Graduated subjects could be overheard talking with other members about moving from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE. Their enthusiasm was palpable. It has since become infectious, spreading to those not involved in this study.

Another post-study observation is the shift in perspective now sweeping through KLCC. Study participants are emerging in small group contexts, ministry settings, and worship gatherings to vocalize their intolerance for a consumer-driven church culture and their passion for God's call to go up His mountain. It has become a domino effect, reshaping KLCC's culture one member at a time.

The last after-action observation was the church's adoption of a new paradigm. This study has changed this researcher (also KLCC's pastor). His teaching has crystallized around God's mission and KLCC's vision. Some church leaders are beginning to rally behind the church's disciple-making direction, and a spiritual movement seems underway. From worship services to discipleship ministries, this researcher has observed that momentum for healing a sick church has begun.

Summary

This chapter has considered and analyzed study participants' demographics, subject interview feedback, focus group transcripts, and this researcher's observations and field notes. This intervention's effectiveness was supported when all the data was evaluated and measured.

Participant demographics showed that study participants were qualified to evaluate KLCC's organizational health and contribute objectively toward its healing. Interviews provided independent concurrence among study participants regarding the M2M-SDC process and its application in the KLCC ministry context. Focus group discussions clarified this project's suitability and its problem statement's accuracy. Immediate and after-action researcher observations and field notes documented the congregation's receptivity to and engagement in the process and documented the impact M2M-SDC has had with KLCC. This research project was designed to help KLCC activate relatively inactive members. Data suggests it succeeded. This study has become a spiritual spark for KLCC and has given the church the means to fan that spark into a lasting and church-transforming flame.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The problem facing KLCC is like the challenge threatening many American churches. The cancer of consumerism plagues this church. The influence of the prevailing culture has rendered KLCC ineffective because its ministry paradigm rests on individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity (ICU). If KLCC and other churches plagued by this organizational malady do not find and apply a quick cure to this ravaging sickness, KLCC will fail to fulfill its Christ-ordained mission and may cease to exist. The stakes are high, and the risks are grave. KLCC leaders must fight the cancer of consumerism assaulting the church. This thesis provides church leaders with a viable solution.

Study Summary

Theologically, God still calls to His people to love and serve Him. The church, God's sacred community of those called out of the world system, must demonstrate wholehearted devotion to the Lord. Any church that fails to manifest this reality is, at best, a sick church and, at worst, no church at all. Theoretically, affecting health in an otherwise sick church must be simultaneously approached from two perspectives. The church must lead its people to love God by calling them to authentic personal salvation and effective spiritual formation. At the same time, church leaders must lead the church to serve the Lord through carefully engineered church revitalization and increased member engagement. This project was designed to be the catalyst for KLCC church revitalization.

This DMIN action research study aimed to develop, implement, and evaluate a systematic process to convert passive members into active volunteers. The study sought to measure shifts in KLCC member religiosity following a 5-week intervention called the M2M-SDC process. Study subjects completed surveys, participated in interviews, and met with focus groups to establish before-and-after data to reveal if significant changes had occurred. Participants also attended a 5-week virtual class that led them through a process designed to confront, challenge, call, commit, and change each participant's views on active Christian engagement. Group members were systematically beckoned from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE.

The Data Has Spoken

Results from a comparative analysis of SOSRI surveys, participant interviews, and focus group transcripts reveal that study participants experienced a meaningful and measurable change in religiosity during this process. Data analysis provides a strong correlation for this study's effectiveness. Participants maintained an average attendance of 94 percent throughout this study (see table 4.1) and engaged enthusiastically in every facet. This demonstrates the relatability of this approach. The participants' buy-in was high. Subjects agreed with the sick church diagnosis and vested themselves in working with this researcher to pursue an effective remedy.

Before-and-after survey comparisons show a nearly 30 percent jump in participant religiosity following the M2M-SDC intervention. This researcher also recorded immediate observable behavioral shifts in several of the participants. A movement toward cultivating fully activated members has begun in KLCC, and the M2M-SDC graduates are the chief instigators. Study participants were not only exposed to the course content, but they also internalized and were changed by what they learned.

The data has spoken. Could this study significantly increase KLCC's member engagement and commitment? Yes. Could this be the beginning of a meaningful paradigm shift in the church? Yes. Could this study bring hope to KLCC's future? Yes.

It Worked!

This study aimed to provide KLCC with a reliable method to move RIM members to the more committed FAM in a WAVE of ministry momentum. The analyzed results reveal that the M2M-SDC process worked. Every KLCC member exposed to this study, whether a full or focus-group-only participant, was dramatically impacted by the gravity of this study's thesis and content.

The participants who participated fully demonstrated an immediate perspective shift remain more engaged in KLCC's mission than before the intervention. KLCC LT has adopted language from the study and is socializing their new ministry perspective in conversations with church members. A tangible momentum toward a healthier KLCC is building in the church and can be sensed at ministry events and Sunday morning services. KLCC now has a process that leaders may modify and adapt to mobilize inactive members and indoctrinate new members into the new KLCC church culture. Rather than cursing the proverbial darkness of consumerism, KLCC now has access to a church-revitalizing candle.

Hope for Healing a Hurting Church

This study has provided hope for KLCC. The M2M-SDC process has demonstrated that a consumer-driven church culture may be redirected into love and service to God. Through this process, complacent KLCC members may be effectively confronted, challenged, called, and invited to increase their commitment to Christ. Whether incorporated into a new member

onboarding process or developed into a small group study curriculum, the M2M-SDC approach points the way to a healthier church. This study provides a biblical yet practical solution for organizational change to combat the onslaught of consumerism sweeping the church. There is finally hope for healing a hurting church.

Research Implications

This study's research implications are significant for KLCC and any church floundering under the ICU's cultural influence. Where individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity flourish unchecked in a church, the ministry is stifled as leaders take three steps back for every two forward. It is like attempting to sail a boat with a gaping hole in the hull. No amount of rowing will overcome the ravaging water inflow into the struggling craft. When church members see themselves as consumers, ministry leaders cannot simultaneously keep up with their demands and effect meaningful ministry. The M2M-SDC intervention can provide a church with the means to secure the leak and save the vessel.

This study holds four vital implications for KLCC's future ministry. M2M-SDC can mean a shift in KLCC's overall ministry approach, an opportunity for KLCC to cultivate a healthy church culture, a chance for the church to reverse a common dysfunctional organizational paradigm, and a new way to view church membership.

Changes to KLCC's Existing Ministry Paradigm

Until now, KLCC has unknowingly promulgated a church consumer culture. Like many churches, leadership has often focused more on who and how many attended a service or event than on who was actively engaged in the church's life. Discipleship was a buzzword with no real

application in KLCC members' lives. Sunday morning services felt more like college lectures than spiritual encounters. Bodies in the room measured the success of special events.

The M2M-SDC experience has profoundly impacted church leaders. Five of the ten study participants were members of KLCC LT, and the remaining members joined Focus Group 3. Because of this process, KLCC leaders have been exposed to this thesis proposition that the American church is sick and in the ICU. The leaders have discussed the implications of leading a church of consumers instead of one undergirded by disciple-making disciples. KLCC LT cannot ignore what they have learned; they are ready for a healthy change.

If KLCC is to foster a culture that develops fully activated members, leaders must no longer offer ministry services, hoping the congregation will 'buy' them. Instead, leaders must create ministry opportunities for committed members to 'buy into'. Instead of numbering attendance, leaders must begin measuring active engagement. If KLCC has decided to no longer participate in the prevailing consumer culture, leaders must refuse to offer ministry services for sale.

This means inviting members in from the periphery. Leaders must know where each member is relative to KLCC's mission. Those on the RIM must not be allowed to fall through the proverbial cracks. Leaders must be intentional about creating clear paths to active member engagement. Serving must be elevated as a core value and a recognized demonstration of one's faith. Volunteers must be publicly celebrated, and cultivating recruits must become a ministry priority. A RIM-located member must become more of the exception than the rule.

Cultivating a Healthy Church Culture

Just as personal physical health does not happen without intentional attention and effort, church health requires attention and hard work. Organizational health must become a KLCC LT

priority. Not to be mistaken with church growth, church health is not synonymous with numerical increase. An unhealthy consumer-driven church may be among the fastest-growing churches in America. Once a church has mastered certain marketing techniques and connected with its intended market, ministry services for sale are precisely what the prevailing church culture awaits. Parishioners may gather by the thousands, and the church may expand to a multi-site format. These developments, however, do not necessarily make for a healthy church.

To be sure, a healthy church should be growing. That growth, however, is a byproduct of organizational health and not slick marketing campaigns or an appeal to mass consumption. A healthy church intentionally attracts the lost, offers salvation through faith in Christ, and develops disciple-making disciples. If KLCC is to cultivate a healthy church, KLCC LT must clearly define what one is.

A healthy church 'evangelizes' those who either do not know the Lord or are saved but living on the faith's periphery. It calls them to Christ and His prescribed lifestyle. The healthy church also 'educates' its members about their unique spiritual gifts and their duty to give and serve with compassion and commitment. The healthy church 'equips' its people for fully activated membership, showing them how to share the gospel and shadow a new believer into living by faith. A healthy church intentionally 'elevates' the importance of personal spiritual disciplines and public, corporate engagement in a believer's maturation process. Finally, the healthy church 'enforces' its core values through preaching, teaching, cultural signposts, and a leader-modeling ministry paradigm.

KLCC may succeed in changing its corporate culture, but to do so, leaders must evangelize, educate, equip, elevate, and enforce the underpinnings of a new commitment culture. Every leader must buy into a changed church culture, and every member must be invited to

confront the church's consumeristic leanings as they answer Christ's call to come into living the kingdom life fully.

Flipping the Script

KLCC's standard for ministry execution has been similar to that of many churches. Most of the work has been done by the faithful few to benefit the consuming crowd. KLCC LT members have often quipped that the 80/20 rule was in effect. The same faces showed up to load and unload, set up events and services, and execute the behind-the-scenes tasks required for all ministry happenings. Personnel burnout was common, and the absence of one or two key people could prove disastrous.

This ministry paradigm is prevalent in many churches. Regardless of size, it is unsurprising to learn that a fraction of the members provide ministry while most are only dedicated to consuming a church's ministry services. Many Christians do not define church biblically as the community of God's called out Christ-carriers. Instead, they view the church as a place or event, something to attend, support financially, and benefit from. This is how being a part of the church has been scripted for many parishioners. They were introduced to church membership through a consumer's lens and lived faithfully by its code of conduct.

M2M-SDC allows KLCC to rewrite this script. The process employed in this intervention offers KLCC leaders a framework for inviting the consuming majority of the 80/20 rule to cross over, expanding the serving minority until the balance of ministry burden shifts in the church. As church members matriculate from me-centered personal devotion to God to a we-oriented corporate commitment to Christ and KLCC's mission, the way ministry happens will change. Instead of the many benefitting from the sacrifice of the few, the whole church will be strengthened by what many in the church selflessly contribute.

Research Applications

This research project opens many ministry avenues to KLCC and to other churches that desire to shift their focus from 'me' to 'we', up to 'He', and out to 'they'. This thesis will consider four such ministry opportunities. The M2M-SDC process lends itself to informing future leader training, member orientation, online classes, and the potential development of a church revitalization toolbox. These applications would offer KLCC or any church that desires to exit the ICU a viable means for activating and mobilizing otherwise inactive members.

Leader Training

The M2M-SDC process is an ideal leader training model. Several participants suggested that this experience should be strongly recommended, if not mandated, for all KLCC ministry leaders. M2M-SDC's selfless, other-minded, and sacrificial philosophy makes this process a perfect resource for developing servant leaders in a local church context. This training could be a gateway for members transitioning into leadership roles. It could also serve as an annual refresher for those who hold leadership positions in the church. Pastors could build annual retreats around the five pillars of this course and teach through its curriculum during a weekend getaway. Emerging missionaries could be required to pass M2M-SDC before being certified for mission field assignment. Teenagers could be exposed to this curriculum in a young leaders' development program. The applications for M2M-SDC in church leader development are limited only by one's imagination.

Member Orientation

M2M-SDC is an ideal addition to KLCC's member orientation program. KLCC LT has already expressed an interest in seeing this process standardized for all KLCC members. This

curriculum is as well-suited for new members joining the church as it is for existing members contemplating a shift from the RIM to the FAM. The curriculum can be revamped for in-person delivery before Sunday service in one of a facility's classrooms. It can also be adapted into a purely virtual asynchronous model with recorded modules supported by an online discussion group. The final version of this study consists of only five lessons, making it easy to break up into smaller units or condense into a two-day focus group.

When an unsaved person receives Christ and is born again, they join God's family and are to begin growing and learning what that means. Part of this process is discovering one's role in the family and the responsibilities of kingdom family life. Without proper discipleship training, the new convert may learn erroneously that the church is a place to go or an event to attend, with little or no connection to the rest of their life. This warped development produces a believer who can be nothing more than a consistent consumer of the services the church provides. The member commitment will be measured by their attendance at services and events and financial support. This produces great church customers but lousy family members.

M2M-SDC could provide the training and kingdom indoctrination a new believer requires to become a healthy, contributing member of the household of faith. This process could expose the new convert to the Christ-centered philosophies of self-denial and sacrifice that form the foundation of a life of service to the Lord. Instead of viewing the church through a consumer's lens as a place to come to have one's needs met, this maturing disciple could see the church as a community of faith bound by Christ, for Christ, and serving Christ's mission.

This process is also just as suitable for other churches as for KLCC. One of its strengths is its portability to other ministry contexts. Whether a congregation numbers 25 or 2,500, M2M-SDC can help church leaders engineer a cultural shift away from a consumer-driven culture to

becoming a disciple-making church. This process can assist leaders in reshaping members'
perspectives by confronting their consumerism, challenging them to rethink the church's
mission, and calling them to love the Lord through committed service to His aims.

<div align="center">Kingdom Life Institute</div>

One promising application of this study is as part of KLCC's Kingdom Life Institute
(KLI). KLI is an emerging online discipleship resource subscribers may access for spiritual
formation content. KLCC's vision for KLI includes classes for new believers, new KLCC
members, maturing disciples, and ministers-in-training. M2M-SDC would be an ideal addition to
the discipleship curriculum.

Through an online delivery platform, M2M-SDC may be accessed wherever someone has
an internet connection. As an asynchronous course, subscribers could complete it according to
their availability and at their own pace. Since KLI subscriptions will be open to anyone who
applies, M2M-SDC can potentially have a global impact. Christians worldwide would be a
mouse click away from the M2M-SDC content.

This format ensures the consistency and integrity of this process. Logging onto KLCC's
servers to access the KLI platform ensures subscribers experience the same content with each
course iteration. This is another example of this study's portability. Other pastors and ministry
leaders may confidently provide their members with a link to KLI's website, knowing that
people are exposed to the content they have endorsed. This feature makes M2M-SDC a
potentially powerful tool, a global remedy in the race to cure the church of the cancer of
consumerism. It is not an overstatement to hypothesize that M2M-SDC could have the power to
impact the church across the world profoundly.

Church Revitalization Toolbox

Perhaps the most revolutionary application of this research would be to organize it so that pastors and church leaders can deliver it to their congregations. M2M-SDC could be packaged and delivered to churches as the *M2M Church Revitalization Toolbox (M2M-CRT)*. M2M-CRT could be a kit shipped to requesting churches or a digital all-access platform that a church could customize to fit its ministry context. If it were a physical resource, the kit would include a leader's guide, ten participant manuals, and a copy of John Thompson's yet-to-be-written book, *How to Turn Members into Ministers: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization*. The digital version would include access to video content and downloadable participant talk sheets.

The vision for this outreach would include establishing a foundation to fund these resources through donations and benefactor gifts. The foundation would promote the resource, fulfill resource orders, and underwrite a team of trained *M2M Turnaround Specialists,* available to provide ongoing support through the first three years of a church's revitalization effort.

The church in America is in declining health. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Consumerism's cancer is ravaging congregations, leaving behind the carnage of hopeless communities. Frustrated pastors and leaders need a solution to reclaim their church's identities and resist the pull of the prevailing culture. If churches are to turn successfully, leaders must take drastic measures to address the devouring scourge of individualism and uncommitted Christianity eating the church. M2M-CRT could provide churches with a timely cure, a spiritual formation tool leaders may use to call their congregations back from the brink of destruction. These are lofty ambitions, but these are also desperate times.

Research Limitations

This thesis will consider four factors that limited this study and impacted its results. The research limitations that most affected this study were the reality of conducting research in a post-COVID ministry context, the challenge of syncing schedules with study participants, the limits of this study's observation window, and the challenge of projecting one ministry context onto another.

Ministry in a Post-COVID Context

If KLCC wanted to meet with members in 2018 to discuss church health and develop a vision for the church's future, church members would have gathered at BPES without a second thought. That all changed in the second week of March 2020. When the spread of the U.S. strain of the Coronavirus forced America to shut down effectively, something changed permanently.

Like many other churches, KLCC needed to find alternative ways to maintain its membership and ministry momentum. Worship services were broadcast from a makeshift studio in the pastor's basement. Discipleship ministries shifted from in-person gatherings to internet-hosted video conferencing platforms. Even when the church resumed in-person services a few years later, online giving replaced offering plates. Social distancing affected the service setup; everyone was forced to abide by mask-wearing guidelines.

While redefining KLCC's ministry approach in a post-COVID context, the church lost a degree of interpersonal intimacy. KLCC is working back to its pre-pandemic authenticity, but it has taken time and intentional effort from the leadership. Consequently, members have demonstrated a willingness to come together for Sunday services and some special events, but members have not yet returned to a primarily in-person ministry paradigm. Therefore, when this study opened to potential participants to meet in live sessions at BPES, there was such sparse

interest that this researcher was forced to reconsider the study format. Once the project was reconfigured as a virtual experience using an online video conference platform, indications of interest began.

One of this student's DMIN professors advised him that he was almost certain to lose critical data input by foregoing in-person sessions. However, the video-recorded sessions proved strategically useful in later extrapolating interaction details. The video aided in transcribing conversations, and since all participants were always on camera, facial expressions, and in-the-moment reactions were easily seen and documented. Although there is no substitute for in-person interaction, the online delivery medium utilized by this researcher did not adversely affect the research process.

No One Has Time

The second limitation that impacted this study was the potential participants' difficulty committing to a ten-session intervention. This M2M-SDC was originally designed to be ten two-hour classes. Participants comfortable with a virtual environment could not commit to the planned course duration. Within the first two weeks of this project, this researcher faced a second dilemma that threatened to derail the process.

Like many Americans, KLCC members lead busy lives. Most work full-time and remain actively involved in social/leisure engagements. Some are engaged in midweek discipleship group sessions, and some are involved in family commitments. Regardless of their diversions, nearly all interested participants could not commit to the planned ten-session intervention.

This researcher was forced to deviate from the original intervention design to implement a modified course, truncated from ten to five sessions, extending each class from two hours to three. Participants found this proposition more feasible, and the study was underway. Despite the

original design, the five-session model proved effective. The shorter duration and extended class sessions allowed the facilitator to build more momentum in each session and develop more fully pertinent key points.

Lasting Change Takes Time

The third limitation affecting this research is antithetical to participants' requests for a shorter study. This limitation rests on the observation that change takes time. This study was limited by the timeline established by the DMIN action research process. Liberty University and the School of Divinity have limited the time a DMIN candidate may track the effects of their study. Given this reasonable but drastic limitation, this researcher cannot accurately report on this study's long-term impact. Therein lies the problem with this limitation.

Lasting organizational change takes time. Church cultures do not spring up overnight. Depending on the age of the church, its culture may have developed over several decades. Even a young church inherits the culture its members bring from their previous church experiences. Recording cultural shifts in a church's ministry paradigm requires lengthy observation. Will KLCC's momentum from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE continue and eventually transform a consumer-driven church into a disciple-making ministry? Only time will tell. The understandable limitation of the long-term observation window has limited this thesis.

Does One Size Fit All?

The fourth limitation that affected this study is that it was designed for and executed in KLCC's ministry context. That is, it was designed with KLCC in mind. How might the results from this study change with a few different key ministry variables?

Suppose the church is led by a college of elders instead of a single and influential senior pastor. Suppose a controlling governing board stifles church advancement. How might this study work in a megachurch that built its entire model around a consumer-driven congregation? M2M-SDC is portable as an experience, but will KLCC's positive immediate impact appear in other ministry settings?

Since this study was developed for KLCC, a church with fifty to one hundred members, it must be tested in larger and smaller churches to determine whether it will produce measurable results. This study was conducted in a suburban Maryland mobile congregation; further research is required to determine whether it will work in a southern Tennessee family church. Theoretically, M2M-SDC offers a transferable framework to aid any church in the ICU. Its formatting, delivery, and requirements for support from each unique ministry context will vary and are beyond the scope and limitations of this study.

Further Research

As this study concludes, this thesis must consider opportunities for further research. Given this intervention's purpose, further research must apply to one of three critical areas. Further research must address how to change the church's organizational structure strategically, how to shift a consumer believer into a serving saint effectively, and how to develop leaders that are instrumental for sustained and healthy organizational change efficiently.

Many research opportunities remain in relation to this thesis. What questions must still be asked? What sources must be added to the literature review? What gaps in perspective or application must be explored and filled in? How can the next researcher take this study further?

This researcher has identified three key areas where further research is warranted. Future research may consider the dynamics that drive effective organizational change and ways to guide

a church more efficiently into a new cultural paradigm. Research may delve into the role of spiritual formation and personal discipleship as they relate to shifts in Christian religiosity. Further research should also consider best practices in strategies designed to cultivate stronger church leaders.

<div align="center">Organizational Change Dynamics</div>

Churches are made up of people. Therefore, affecting a cultural shift in a church must involve impacting the members' views. While this transformation must occur as a grassroots effort, campaigning individuals and groups within the church, change must simultaneously occur in the church's social framework and cultural structure. This is where effective organizational change comes into play.

Jesus likens His followers to sheep (John 10:11–14), which suggests they must be led. He is the ultimate Shepherd but has also designed His church to be guided by God-ordained church leadership. Suppose a church is to transition effectively away from the cancer of consumerism into a selfless, other-minded, and sacrificial church model. In that case, it must modify its organizational priorities even as it disciples its people.

Further research is welcomed around effective church organizational change. What unique church nuances impact the strategies leaders employ in affecting cultural transition? What challenges are typical for a church daring to call out the false gods of the prevailing culture, boldly returning to a biblical model? What transferable lessons are common to all organizations, religious or secular, and may be applied to a church in transition? This thesis left many questions on organizational change unanswered, offering broad opportunities for further research.

The Role of Discipleship in Church Revitalization/Mobilization

As a church addresses its social framework and cultural structure, it must also give intentional attention to its members' development. Each member's bottom-up, spiritual formation must accompany the leaders' top-down modifications to organizational culture.

There is considerable literature on discipleship and spiritual formation. Further research may be undertaken to extract specific strategies and philosophies to facilitate church revitalization and member mobilization. The plethora of academic writing on discipleship confirms the field's broadness. Useful research in this area would narrow the conversation to focus on those approaches that may facilitate greater efficiency in affecting spiritual maturity in believers. The idea would be to identify methods for helping believers move from 'me' to 'we', up to 'He', and then to 'they' as expeditiously as possible.

Church Leader Development Strategy

Finalizing this trifecta of further research considerations, one may add to this thesis through further research on church leader development strategies. As the church members are discipled, so must the leaders be trained. Some spiritual formation lessons may be 'taught'; the most critical lessons must be 'caught'. Therefore, church leaders must model the values they want the members to emulate. When Paul admonishes his readers to imitate him as he follows Christ (1 Cor 11:1), he is not merely offering a suggestion. Paul is providing key insight into how church culture works. People do some of what their leaders teach but often do most of what their leaders do. What considerations could enhance leader training effectiveness? What methods have been proven most useful? What is the most relevant recommended reading list to prescribe to emerging leaders? Who are the most prominent voices that should shape today's leadership

perspectives? What are the greatest impediments to effective leader development, and what strategies have been developed to overcome them?

Further Research Summary

Further research may be conducted on ways to enhance (1) church organizational change, (2) church members' spiritual formation relative to personal religiosity, and (3) leader development strategies. This top, bottom, and middle approach to additional study is certain to contribute meaningfully to the breadth and scope of this project.

The Last Word

This thesis has addressed one of the American Protestant church's serious maladies. The church is critically ill and, in some cases, dying. The cancer of consumerism is ravaging congregations, turning what Jesus built on the rock of His Messiahship (Matt 16:18) into a marketing ploy for more members, bigger buildings, and deeper budgets.

Would Jesus recognize His church today? Unless the church repents and returns to a biblical model, it will never escape the ICU, failing to fulfill its mission. This thesis has offered the church a viable option for reversing this destructive cultural trend in the church and opened the door to reflection and potential change. Can the American church be healed? Yes, but only through systematic and intentional personal, corporate, and church leader transition away from the prevailing me-centered perspective presently gripping the church.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER TO KLCC BOARD OF ELDERS

May 30, 2023

James Fields
Chair, Board of Elders

Kingdom Life Community Church
P.O. Box 4797

Silver Spring, MD 20914–4797

Dear Mr. Chairman,

As a Doctor of Ministry Candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree in Organizational Leadership. The title of my research project is *Challenging the Cancer of Consumerism Threatening the American Protestant Church*. My research aims to equip the church at large to realize its mission by combatting the effects of a consumeristic and individualistic cultural influence.

I am requesting your permission to conduct my research at Kingdom Life Community Church and utilize the church's membership roster to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey and contact me to schedule a pre-fieldwork interview. They will also be expected to participate in a weekly volunteer development course for ten weeks. During the course semester, participants will be expected to attend at least two focus discussion groups to be held on-site.

Participants will be given an informed consent agreement to sign and return to join this study. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to ███████████████████.

Sincerely,

Pastor John

John A. Thompson, II DMIN Candidate

Rawlings School of Divinity

Liberty University

APPENDIX B

APRROVAL LETTER FROM KLCC BOARD OF ELDERS

Kingdom Life Community Church
P.O. Box 4797
Silver Spring, MD 20914–4797

June 3, 2023

John Thompson, Pastor

Kingdom Life Community Church

P.O. Box 4797

Silver Spring, MD 20910–4797

Dear Pastor Thompson:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled *Challenging the Cancer of Consumerism Threatening the American Protestant Church*, we have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at Kingdom Life Community Church.

It is with honor that we grant you permission to conduct your research at Kingdom Life Community Church and utilize the church's membership roster to recruit participants for your research. Speaking for the Board of Elders and the congregation, I welcome the opportunity to assist and participate in your study.

- We grant permission for John Thompson to contact KLCC members 25 years and older to invite them to participate in his research study.

- The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

Sincerely,

James R. Fields

James Fields

Chair, Board of Elders

Kingdom Life Community Church

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL #1

Dear Fellow Kingdom Lifer,

As you know, I am completing my postgraduate studies at Liberty University. As a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, I am researching how a small church may encourage more volunteer engagement by challenging the influence of consumerism within the church. My research aims to learn about the factors that cause member inactivity and develop a systematic approach to help churches overcome them. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be:
- 25 years of age or older.
- Kingdom Life Community Church members in good standing.
- Willing and available to participate in this research study.
- Available to attend a 90-minute orientation session, meet for interviews, focus groups, and a ten-week course consisting of weekly two-hour classes.

Participants will be asked to attend a 2-hour participation orientation session, complete two (2) 30-minute anonymous surveys, take part in two 45-minute, one-on-one, audio/video recorded interviews, take part in two 90-minute focus groups, and attend ten (10) 2-hour weekly classes for 10 weeks over the course of a 17-week research period.

Participants will be nominally compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the course, participants will receive a $50 gift card. Any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study after beginning but before completing all study procedures will receive the gift card prorated over the ten class sessions to reflect their actual participation. A participant must begin the course to be eligible for the gift card to be given for course completion.

A consent document containing additional information about my research is attached to this email. **To participate, please complete the informed consent agreement by email by Saturday, September 2, 2023**. Once I receive your completed informed consent form, I will contact you via email to schedule your initial one-on-one interview and to invite you to the initial orientation session.

I appreciate your consideration of this important invitation.

Sincerely,

Pastor John Thompson, MDiv, Doctoral Candidate
Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL #2

Dear Potential Participants,

Thank you for considering my original invitation and thank you to those who have offered feedback and suggestions. Based on your input, I am modifying my project to provide more ways for those who want to participate but cannot fully commit to the proposed timeline. I am extending a new invitation to each of you to consider the following project modifications:

Modification #1) The full program will be shortened from ten (10) 2-hour classes to five (5) 3-hour classes. Classes will be 100% virtual via Zoom and meet on Wednesday evenings from 7–10 p.m., beginning 9/20/23 and ending 10/25/23.

Full project participants will be asked to attend each class session and two (2) one-on-one interviews. They will schedule a 30 to 50-minute one-on-one interview at the start of the project and a 30 to 50-minute one-on-one exit interview at the conclusion of the project.

Modification #2) Partial project participants may volunteer for a focus group without participating in the class.

Given these modifications, please consider if you will be able to participate in this research project. If this is to be a solution for KLCC, it must work in a real-life context. This experience is immensely helpful as I learn and grow in my understanding of what will work in a local church environment.

If you can participate in this modified project, please indicate your commitment level in your reply.

- ☐ **Level 1**: I cannot commit to the entire project, but I CAN participate in one (1) focus group of my choosing: Focus Group #1 (Friday evening, 9/29) or Focus Group #2 (Friday evening, 10/20).
- ☐ **Level 2**: I CAN now commit to the entire modified project.

I am grateful to each of you for your careful consideration of this important undertaking. I would like to have all responses by Tuesday, September 5th.

Blessings to you and yours,

Pastor John Thompson, MDiv, Doctoral Candidate
Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Challenging the Cancer of Consumerism Ravaging the American

Protestant Church

Principal Investigator: John Thompson, Doctoral Candidate John W. Rawlings School

of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 25

years of age, and a full-member-in-good-standing with Kingdom Life Community Church.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. Please read this entire form and ask questions

before deciding whether to participate in this research.

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

This study aims to address the problem of relatively inactive members at Kingdom Life

Community Church by identifying the causes of inactivity and reshaping cultural convictions to

inspire more members to volunteer. Individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity

are prevalent influences in our society—they should not be so in the church. This study seeks to

identify how these influences have affected the church and discover effective ways to combat

their reach.

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:

1. Sign and return this Informed Consent Agreement.
2. Agree to do your best to be available to participate in a scheduled 7-week process.
3. Attend a 90-minute Study Participant Orientation Session.
4. Complete a 25-question Initial Survey. (15 minutes)
5. Schedule and participate in a 50-minute, audio-recorded one-on-one intake interview.
6. Attend and participate in at least one audio-recorded and transcribed 90-minute focus group session.
7. Attend and participate in the 5-week *M2M SOS, Becoming a Serving Disciple* course that meets weekly for two hours.
8. Schedule and participate in a 50-minute audio-recorded one-on-one exit interview.
9. Complete a 25-question Exit Survey. (15 minutes)
10. Participate honestly, authentically, transparently, and fully in this research project.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study

include:

1. Participants will be a part of a historical process that could affect this church's future.
2. Participants will be able to influence this church's policies and practices.
3. Participants will benefit from a new course designed specifically for them.
4. Participants will be able to deepen their relationship with the Lord.
5. Developing Kingdom Life ministers can visualize a model they can use someday.

Benefits to society include:

1. Other growing churches may benefit from this research and apply it to their contexts.
2. Other pastors and church leaders may gain insights into approaching similar issues.
3. The 5-mile radius this church serves will benefit if this church develops more volunteers.
4. This study will add to the academic literature that addresses church revitalization.
5. This study will become a lasting record and resource future researchers may build on.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. However, the few risks involved in this study include the possibility of psychological stress from being asked to recall and discuss prior trauma. To reduce risk, I will monitor participants, discontinue the interview/group, or provide referral information for counseling services if needed.

There is also the risk that I will be forced to report an issue to the appropriate authorities. I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, spousal abuse, elder abuse, or intent to harm themselves or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

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.

Participant responses to the surveys will be anonymous. Participant responses in interviews and focus groups will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms in reports.

Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.

Data will be stored on a password-protected/locked computer in my private home office. After three years, all electronic records and/or hardcopy records will be deleted. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected/locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the course, participants will receive a $50 gift card. Any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study after beginning but before completing all study procedures will receive a $50 gift card prorated over the ten class sessions to reflect their actual participation. A participant must begin the course to be eligible for the gift card to be given for course completion.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as the Senior Pastor at Kingdom Life Community Church. Survey responses will be masked to shield the identity of specific survey submissions. Responses will remain anonymous to limit potential or perceived conflicts. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is John Thompson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact

. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jeffrey L. Dowdy at .

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is

Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434–592–5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT WELCOME EMAIL

Dear Study Applicant,

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in a very important work! Thank you for agreeing to join me in my postgraduate research project, considering how a growing church may encourage more volunteer engagement by challenging the influence of consumerism that is so prevalent within our culture.

I have received your completed informed consent agreement. We are ready to begin! The next step is a critical orientation session that will provide a broader understanding of this project and what will come in the weeks ahead.

Please join me on Wednesday evening, September 13th, at 7:00 as we begin this journey together. The meeting will be held in the Multipurpose Room at Bel Pre Elementary School. Please use the main doors when you arrive. I anticipate the meeting will end around 8:30. Childcare will not be available; however, hot and cold beverages and light refreshments will be served. Please park in the upper lot just across from the multipurpose room doors.

Kindly RSVP as soon as possible to confirm your intent to attend. If you have a conflict that cannot be rescheduled, please email me ASAP to let me know. Arrangements will be made for additional sessions when necessary.

Again, thank you for agreeing to join me in this important work.

Grace and peace,

Pastor John Thompson, MDiv, Doctoral Candidate
Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT ORIENTATION SESSION AGENDA

Wednesday, September 13, 2023
7:00 p.m.

7:00   Welcome/Opening Prayer

Roll Call

Purpose of this Meeting

Purpose of this Study
        Problem Statement
        Purpose Statement
        Thesis Statement
        Overview of the Intervention Plan
        Study Schedule

Responsibilities of Participants
        Time Commitment
        Honest Participation
        Transparency and Authenticity
        Engagement in Process

Responsibility of the Researcher
        Honor Schedule
        Remain Flexible
        Transparency and Authenticity
        Protection and Safeguarding of Data
        Protection of Participant Information and Identities

What's Next?

Q & A Session

8:30   Closing prayer/adjournment

APPENDIX H

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

PARTICIPANT CODE #_____

Please circle the number indicating your agreement with each statement. **5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree. Please attempt to answer all questions.**

1) Regular prayer is important in my life.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

2) God's kingdom is eternal, in heaven, but also present and seen on earth.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

3) One cannot truly love God without also loving others.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

4) My faith should be demonstrated in my actions; not merely declared by my words.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

5) My faith is reflected in my sacrificial and consistent giving to support Kingdom Life's mission.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

6) Serving in a ministry is important for Christians to demonstrate their faith in God.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

7) One of the Christian church's primary roles is influencing the world around them.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8) Responding to people's needs is critical to living as a Christian.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

9) Regular Bible study and review of Sunday lessons are important in my life.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

10) Authentic Christian faith is demonstrated in one's actions as well as words.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

11) Systematic giving is important to expressing one's faith in God.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

12) As Christ came to serve and not to be served, I should also willingly serve others.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

13) As Christ was moved with compassion for those in need, I should also have deep compassion for those in need.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

14) The Christian church's primary role is spreading Christ's influence worldwide.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

15) Saying "I love God" while refusing to serve others is spiritual hypocrisy.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

16) Giving freely and sacrificially is important to expressing one's faith in God.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

17) One's faith should impact how one lives each day.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

18) Reading my Bible, reviewing Sunday lessons, and rehearsing kingdom truths are important and regular practices in my life.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

19) One of the Christian church's primary roles is transforming society at large.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

20) One's true beliefs are generally evident in one's life choices.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

21) Meditating on Scripture and kingdom principles is important in my life.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

22) There is an irrefutable correlation between one's beliefs and one's behavior.

Disagree   Somewhat   Agree
1   2   3   4   5

23) A Christian with faith void of consistent giving has an empty, dead faith.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

24) It is impossible to truly love God without being deeply concerned about the well-being of others.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

25) Private worship, prayer, and study are as important in my life as attending public worship services.

Disagree		Somewhat		Agree
1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT SURVEY ORGANIZED BY STATEMENT INDICATION

Statements that Indicate Commitment to Christian Disciplines
- #1   Regular prayer is important in my life.
- #9   Regular Bible study and review of Sunday lessons are important in my life.
- #18   Reading my Bible, reviewing Sunday lessons, and rehearsing kingdom truths are important and regular practices in my life.
- #21   Meditating on Scripture and kingdom principles is important in my life.
- #25   Private worship, prayer, and study are as important in my life as attending public worship services.

Statements that Reveal Faith in Practice (Practical Theology)
- #4   My faith should be demonstrated in my actions; not merely declared by my words.
- #10   Authentic Christian faith is demonstrated in one's actions as well as words.
- #17   One's faith should impact how one lives each day.
- #20   One's true beliefs are generally evident in one's life choices.

Statements that Affirm the Church as an Extension of God's Kingdom
- #2   God's kingdom is eternal, in heaven, but also present and seen on earth
- #7   One of the Christian church's primary roles is influencing the world around them.
- #14   The Christian church's primary role is spreading Christ's influence worldwide.
- #19   One of the Christian church's primary roles is transforming society at large.

Statements that Support Giving as an Expression of Faith
- #5   My faith is reflected in my sacrificial and consistent giving to support Kingdom Life's mission.
- #11   Systematic giving is important to expressing one's faith in God.
- #16   Giving freely and sacrificially is important to expressing one's faith in God.
- #23   A Christian with faith void of consistent giving has an empty, dead faith.

Statements that Support Compassion as an Expression of Faith
- #3   One cannot truly love God without also loving others.
- #8   Responding to people's needs is critical to living as a Christian.
- #13   As Christ was moved with compassion for those in need, I should also have deep compassion for those in need.
- #24   It is impossible to truly love God without being deeply concerned about the well-being of others.

Statements that Support Serving as an Expression of Faith

    #6   Serving in a ministry is important for Christians to demonstrate their faith in God.

    #12   As Christ came to serve and not to be served, I should also willingly serve others.

    #15   Saying "I love God" while refusing to serve others is spiritual hypocrisy.

    #22   There is an irrefutable correlation between one's beliefs and one's behavior.

APPENDIX J

OPENING INTERVIEW DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. How are you this evening? (General check-in)

Shall we get started? As you know, these interviews are being audio-recorded, so I will start the recorder when you're ready. (Please speak naturally and candidly with me. This helps all of us when we are truthful and relaxed in these sessions.)

Let's begin.

1. How did you learn about and subsequently join this church?

2. What has been the most favorable aspect of being a member here?

3. Would you invite others to consider this church if they were searching?

4. How effective has our assimilation process been in healing you find your place here?

    Now, let's go a bit deeper…

5. What do you think are some of the problems we need to address?

6. If you could sit down with the Board of Elders, what would you want to tell them?

7. On a scale of 1–10, how much confidence do you have in church leadership? Explain.

8. Do you attend Sunday services more or less than twice a month?

9. Are you involved in one or more of the church's discipleship ministries?

10. Are you currently volunteering to serve in a ministry?

    a. If so, which one and why that one?

    b. If not, why have not you signed up to serve somewhere?

        i. *This would be an ideal opening to dig a little.*

11. Please finish this statement: When I think about volunteering, I think…

APPENDIX K

PROPOSED TYPICAL M2M SOS CLASS AGENDA

7:30   Session 1

The theme for Tonight's Class

Anchor Scripture

Supporting Scriptures

Key Kingdom Principles

7:55   Break

8:05   Session 2

Application: Illustration/Case Study/Examples

Discussion: What Does This Look Like?

Transformative Thought

Key Takeaways

8:30   Dismissal

APPENDIX L

ACTUAL TYPICAL M2M SOS CLASS AGENDA

7:00   **Welcome**

7:05   **Roll Call/Opening Prayer**

7:10   **Opening Discussion**

Theme for Tonight's Class

Anchor Scripture

Supporting Scriptures

7:30   **Module #1**

Key Kingdom Principles

8:20   **Break**

8:30   **Module #2**

Application: Illustration/Case Study/Examples

9:20   **So What?**

Discussion: What Does This Look Like?

Transformative Thought

9:40   **Q & A/Comments**

Key Takeaways

10:00   **Closing prayer/adjournment**

APPENDIX M

PROPOSED M2M SOS COURSE LESSON FOCI

- Unit 1: Confrontation
  - Class 1 – The Beginning of the End
    - Luke 9:23–27
  - Class 2 – Sitting on the "RIM"
    - John 5:1–15
- Unit 2: Challenge
  - Class 3 – The Church is Sick: Overcoming the "ICU"
    - Mark 10:35–45
  - Class 4 – Moving from "I" to "We"
    - 1 Cor 12:12–27
  - Class 5 – Moving from "We" to "He"
    - Matthew 6:33
- Unit 3: Call
  - Class 6 – Welcome to the FAM: Called to a Living Faith
    - James 2:14–24
  - Class 7 – Cultivating the "HOTS" for God
    - Rev 3:14–17
  - Class 8 – Do You Love Me?
    - John 21:15–19
- Unit 4: Commitment
  - Class 9 – Making God Smile
    - Matthew 5:13–16
  - Class 10 – Walking in the Newness of Life
    - Romans 6:1–4

APPENDIX N

ACTUAL M2M SOS COURSE LESSON FOCI

- Session 1: Confrontation
  - Confronting the Issue that is Plaguing the Church
    - Jesus's 5-Step Transformation Plan
    - Upon this Rock – The Nature and Purpose of the Church
    - What Happened to the Church?
    - Indications of a Lost and Sick Church
    - We Must Confront It to Change It!
- Session 2: Challenge
  - Challenging the Church to Fight for Its Healing
    - Christ's Church is Sick!
    - What's Wrong with the Church?
    - The Church is in the ICU!
    - This Sickness is NOT Unto Death!
    - Remedy for an Ailing Church
    - Pick One!
    - Will The Church Fight for Its Healing?
- Session 3: Call
  - Calling the Church from the RIM to the FAM
    - Christ is Calling Us Out!
    - Christ is Calling Us In!
    - Coming Out and Coming In!
    - A Spiritual Call to a Spiritual People…
    - Will We Answer the Lord's Call?
- Session 4: Commitment
  - Transformation Begins with Personal Commitment
    - Committed to What?
    - God's Commitment Cultivating Cycle
    - The Seven Markers of a Mature Disciple
    - Commitment: Cure for an Ailing Church
    - Commitment: The Way of Escape
    - 3 Healthy Church Commitments
- Session 5: Change
  - Change Comes When Commitment Becomes Action
    - What Shall I Render…?
    - The Great Exchange
    - Have I Been Cheating God?
    - God's Growth Plan for Every Believer
    - Moving to Doing…
    - Will We Move from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE

APPENDIX O

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Focus Group Schedule and Central Discussion Theme			
Group	**Intervention Week**	**Associated Grouping**	**Central Discussion Theme**
1	1	Study Participants	KLCC is a good church, but it would be even better if… How most Ulcers feel about serving in a ministry is… To get more folks involved and off the RIM, KLCC could…
2	4	Ministry Leaders	KLCC is a good church, but it would be even better if… Factors that contribute to KLCC's challenges are… How most KLCers feel about serving in a ministry is… To get more folks involved and off the RIM, KLCC could…
3	7	Study Participants	The best outcome of this study would be… To be a healthy church, members will need a shift in… The best way to support a lasting KLCC culture change would be… After this study, the next steps for KLCC should be…
4	10	Ministry Leaders	The best outcome of this study would be… To be a healthy church, leadership will need a shift in… The best way to support a lasting KLCC culture change would be… What this study missed was… After this study, the next steps for KLCC should be…

5	12	Study Participants	This experience surprised/disappointed me because…
			If your views have changed, how have they?
			This study missed something important; it missed…
			One of the most significant impacts of this experience was…
			Is KLCC better positioned to be effective? If so, why? If not, why not?

APPENDIX P

REVISED FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROMPTS

FOCUS GROUP 1 – Full Study Participants

- One of the most significant benefits this study potentially brings to KLCC is…
- To be a healthier church, members must shift in this key way…
- One critical thing KLCC must do to get more folks off the RIM and into the FAM is…
- Can the M2M-SDC really help this church?
- Describe your *before* KLCC and *after* KLCC spiritual journey.
- How profoundly has this study impacted you?
- Is KLCC better positioned today to be healthy than it was? Incline, decline, plateau?

FOCUS GROUP 2 – KLCC Members-at-Large

- I agree/disagree that the church-at-large is suffering from the influence of individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity, and why…
- When I think of serving as an expression of my faith in God, I feel…
- How hard must you work to move beyond past experiences to a new paradigm?
- 1) One critical thing KLCC must do to move someone from the RIM to the FAM in the WAVE is… 2) Will that be easy or hard?
- One thing about KLCC that is healthy is…
- One thing unhealthy about KLCC that is healthy is…
- Two numbers: 1) 1–10, how dramatically has this church impacted you, and 2) 1–10, how hopeful are you that you will continue to grow at KLCC?

FOCUS GROUP 3 – KLCC Leadership Team

I.   The legitimacy of this thesis statement:

- I agree/disagree that the church-at-large is suffering from the influence of individualism, consumerism, and uncommitted Christianity, and why…
- One can serve for many reasons, but if one has faith, it is reasonable to think that one's faith should be evident in one's service to God. (True or false)

II.   The health of the church:

- Is KLCC healthier today than it was a few years ago? If so, why? If not, why not?
- To be a healthier church, members will need a shift in this crucial way:
- To be a healthier church, KLCC leaders must shift in this crucial way:
- One thing about KLCC that hinders our health:
- I hope this study addresses/accomplishes…

APPENDIX Q

FINAL INTERVIEW TALKING POINTS

Wow! Here we are at the end! You made it! Thank you for agreeing to meet with me again and thank you for participating in this study. How are you this evening? (General check-in)

Well, you know the drill…shall we get started? As you recall, this interview will be audio-recorded, so I'll start the recorder when you're ready. (And again, please speak naturally and candidly with me. This helps all of us when we are truthful and relaxed in these sessions.)

Let's begin.

1. Now that you're on the other side of this experience, what do you think?

    a. Was it what you expected?

        i. If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways?

2. How did this experience impact you, if at all?

3. Can you recall one "aha" moment when the light bulb really came on for you?

    a. If so, what was it? Tell me about it. How did it impact you?

4. In your estimation, was this an effective use of time and resources?

5. Would it be beneficial for other KLCers to go through this experience? Why do you say that?

6. Would it be beneficial for other churches to go through this experience?

7. On a scale of 1–10, how meaningful was this experience for you? Why do you say that?

8. Did this study really address a major problem here at Kingdom Life? Please explain.

9. Is some major issue that was not addressed? If so, how would you propose we address it?

10. Is there anything you wished you'd shared that you would like to share now?

Thanks again for participating in this study and thank you for your time today.

APPENDIX R

PARTICIPANT AND LEADER FORMAL CLOSING EMAIL

Dear Study Participant,

Congratulations, and thank you! With your help, we completed the research project that we started many months ago!

The experience was challenging and enlightening; it was well worth the hours we spent together addressing the challenges that face Kingdom Life Community Church and moving toward a stronger, healthier future together.

If you have any questions about this project or want any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Working with each of you on this important study has been a pleasure and an honor. May the Lord bless His church and be glorified through the work we have completed together.

May the Lord bless and keep you and yours!

Grace and peace,

Pastor John Thompson, MDiv, Doctoral Candidate
Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

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IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 27, 2023

John Thompson

Jeffrey Dowdy

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY22–23–1800 Challenging the Cancer of Consumerism Ravaging an American

Protestant Church

Dear John Thompson and Jeffrey Dowdy,

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

that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project

with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study/project is not considered human subjects research because

(1) it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to

generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

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

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

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office