

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

COMMUNITY FORMATION AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES IN
HIGH-POVERTY COMMUNITIES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Kevin Laron Moore

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

African American church traditions were reputable for serving “the least of these” (Matthew 25:35 - 46) (TLOT) through intentional, Bible-based community fellowship and relationship. However, African American churches are moving away from community ministries to inside worshipping that does not fulfill God's agenda. As a result, the phenomenon of serving in isolation versus serving through community formation is incrementally deviating from the biblical worldview. This qualitative phenomenological study explores, *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities* in the aggregate city of Newark, NJ. This research aims to explore *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*. At this stage in the research, a servant-leader profile is generally defined as Ministry leaders with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003, pp. 296–301). The following general findings of this research were: 1) “For many are called, but few *are* chosen” (Matthew 22:14), especially when serving in urban America; 2) Effective Christian leadership in HPC is a direct result of a leader’s authentic relationship with Jesus, their clear calling, and passion to serve; 3) Bygone African American church traditions are the possible solution to effective church leadership in HPC based on this study’s findings. The servant-leader theory aligns with the biblical worldview and Shepherd motif doctrine steering this study (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20).

Keywords: Christian Leadership, Inner-city, Poverty, Community formation, African American, Ministry, Outreach

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Dedication

To: Dr. Reverend DeForest Blake "Buster" Soaries, Jr.
*Former Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, NJ,
Former Secretary of State of New Jersey, and
Former chairman of the Federal Election Assistance Commission.*

As a result of the community development initiative (R2000) spearheaded by First Baptist Community Development Corporation – the lives of hundreds of aimless inner-city youths, including myself, were changed in some positive and productive ways! Through the intentional church-based neighborhood outreach programs, I went to college, worked as a Youth Outreach Coordinator for you upon graduation, and owned my first home.

The purpose and title of this research study are a direct result of the effective church leadership that I witnessed and experienced! The high-poverty, high-crime community where I once lived, which is still in proximity to First Baptist Church, is a superb example of serving via community formation.

To: Gerard Robinson, M. Ed.
*School Choice Proponent and Executive Director of the Center for Advancing Opportunity,
Former President of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, and
Former Secretary of Education in Virginia and Florida Education Commissioner.*

Fresh out of surviving the counter-culture of inner-city America, special education classes, and incarceration—I met you as a freshman at Bloomfield College in Bloomfield, NJ, in 1996. I was seemingly at the doormat of uncertainty, thoughtlessness, and escapism; however, God's divine plan providentially allowed our paths to align in the areas of professional self-development, education and planning, and the importance of community and networking.

Therefore, because of the benevolent hearts of both you and your wife, I dedicate this research study to you for being a willing vessel, mentor, and confirmed friend. Thank you for introducing me to the significance of academia, service towards marginalized communities, and how to write with meaningful intentions.

Now, as an older yet budding leader, I must also be that force-multiplying spark to those who deem themselves anomalies and have overcome social adversity. In a motivational poem that you once wrote me via my nickname "Height" (Highly Educated Intelligent His-story Teacher) entitled Soaring Heights, you stated, "Always soaring high above social expectations, your prophetic voice is resurrecting limitless generations" (Robinson, 2003, part III). It is through that said expectation that drives me to maximize my purpose in Christ. To that, I thank God for your mentorship, which has assisted me to be an anomaly of an anomaly, just like you.

Acknowledgments

The *Charity A. Moore* family
"Her name is Charity Moore, so more charity we must give...."

Jacqueline

Leroy/Mia

Latisha

Paul/Catherine

Shaquan

(and all my nephews and nieces)

Children:

Zakee and Zyeshia Jones, and Michael Williams

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List of Abbreviations

African American (AA)

African American Ministry Traditions (AAMT)

African American Church Leadership Traditions (AACLT)

Community Formation Through Ministry Leadership (CFTML)

Competencies and Applications (CA)

Christian Transformational Leadership (CTL)

Effective Christian Leadership (ECL)

High-Poverty Communities (HPC)

Identified General Theme(s) (IGT)

Interview (INTV)

Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach (IOP)

Liberty University (LU)

Newark, NJ (NNJ)

New Testament (NT)

Old Testament (OT)

Postmodernism (PM)

Research Questions (RQ)

Serving Under Cultural Duress (SUCD)

Spiritual Formation (SF)

“the least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) (TLOT)

Transcript (TSCP)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

The biblical narrative tied to the expectations of performing charity, i.e., serving “the least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) (TLOT), and community formation is outlined in both covenant documents. The term “document” in relation to the terminology of covenant document refers to both the Old Testament and New Testament documents that are based on God-ordained conditional and unconditional covenant promises made to specific prophets (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Mosaic, Davidic) and mankind in general (Adamic, Noahic, New Covenant) prominent within the biblical narrative. (Exodus 6:7; 29:45; Deuteronomy 4:13; Ezekiel 11:20; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3).

The Old Testament teaches how the Israelites were mandated to give a 10% tithing of whatever they earned to the Levites (who had no inheritance) to service the needs of the poor, orphaned, and widowed (Numbers 18:21, Ezekiel 34). Jesus then made provisions for those amongst us deemed unfortunate to be served during times of distress (Matthew 25:35–46; Acts 20:35; James 1:27; Galatians 6:2). However, due to the encroaching impactful sting of postmodernism and other sin-centered cultural influences, church leadership is becoming increasingly ineffective at adhering to and aligning with biblical/theological mandates (LeMay, 2012; Pearcey, 2015).

As a result, church leadership has become less spiritual and relational and more self-centered, isolated, and guarded to those neglected communities where their respective houses of worship comfortably rest (LeMay, 2012). To that point, Boa (2001) asserts the following about the obligations of God-ordained leaders in the presence of their flocks (communities): "...God has appointed certain people for places of shepherding and leadership in churches and ministries.

These are people whose gifting and character demonstrate a level of maturity that makes them models for others to follow" (p. 443). Therefore, TLOTs in the proximity of established neighborhood churches are becoming increasingly unseen spiritually, culturally, and relationally.

Even with the beneficial option of church leadership applying to the IRS and becoming a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, arguments for doing so have been based on restrictions and mismanagement of monies. DiVirgilio (2014) contends that:

As churches grow and seek to serve through a variety of ministries that reach the community, leadership teams may want to think about registering with the IRS. Doing so will enable the church to solicit outside funding to support the ministry, including grants from government and foundation sources. Establishing a new, separate organization will also enable the financial records of the ministry and the church to be kept completely separate. (para. 2)

Even with the nonprofit status of many of these urban churches, effective church leadership is not being met or enacted towards community formation in high-poverty, squalid districts. DCG Strategies (2015) points out:

Churches and nonprofits sometimes have opportunities to make money outside their normal income from grants, donations, and services. Often these organizations open thrift stores, lease out excess space, or allow cell phone companies to install cell phone towers on their properties. (para. 7)

Despite the clear and needed tax exemptions, along with local, state, and federal grants, donations, and services – gross financial management and disregard from clergy leadership do not translate into meaningful help for residents in marginalized neighborhoods near church centers. Ebard (2019) contends that the following common mistakes fail nonprofits:

1. Not Having a Qualified Leader,
2. No Website or Poorly Designed Website,
3. Poor Planning and Record Keeping,
4. Poor Accounting and Money Management,

5. Marketing Only to Large Donors and Not Thinking Smaller Donors are Just As Important, and
6. Nonprofit Does Not Mean Tax Exempt. (p. 5)

All of which is also the responsibility of an effective church leader.

In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher initially explores existing community and spiritual formation research in two Newark, NJ churches to examine effective ministry leadership of African American churches in HP communities. Creswell and Creswell (2018) contend that "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). The existing literature which the researcher intends to explore contends that the "...ministry of training lay ministers to take up the work of pastoral care, evangelism, and social relief in the parish" was established to restore the hope that was growing away from the South Ward, Newark, NJ community (Ugwuanya, 2004). The study focused on training related to improving church and community relations (Ugwuanya, 2004). Cadet (2020) contends that "The issue of spiritual formation/soul care, as part of the discipleship ministry, is alien in many churches, particularly in African American churches" (p. iii). Through those previous study lenses, the city of Newark, NJ, is an ideal aggregate to explore, understand, and develop research-based insights that focus on maximizing clergy leaders in the areas of CF in neglected urban communities.

The perspectives of the two Newark, NJ churches intentionally focused on two phases of church-centered CF, one that concentrated on better training for staff and community programming; the other evolved around developing a spiritual formation and soul care course for an African American church. The researcher plans to explore and formulate approaches to training for the ministry staff, church-spearhead programming, and spiritual formation. However, exploring and improving effective leadership via the Shepherd Motif doctrine

concerning serving TLOT in penurious communities through community formation fill the gap within the existing research.

The Background to the Problem

There is substantial evidence and mandates in both covenant documents (NT & OT) related to:

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community Formation Through Ministry Programming,
3. Serving “The least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) in HP Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress, and
5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach.

Additionally, the bygone ministry traditions carried out by way of African American church leadership collectively provide a historical template that aligns with the biblical worldview and expectations to serve (Gates, 2021). Nevertheless, countless postmodern Christian leaders, particularly in urban settings, intentionally and unintentionally move away from the divine standards of church-based neighborhood renewal (Grenz, 1994, pp. 480–482). Those standards spotlight the African American church traditions of serving the community through the lens of its leaders, members, and neighborhood-connected pain and struggles. Using that perspective as a foundation, further discoveries via leadership competencies and applications are needed to counter postmodernism's impact on Christ-centered leadership and the expectations of establishing the church through establishing community.

Through that enormous load once carried by Black church leadership under racial, political, and economic unrest, communities near churches were generally places of refuge, resources, and spiritual support (The Harvard Gazette, 2021). Except for those grossly

understaffed and underfunded urban community outreach ministries, many AA churches operate and comfortably serve through the limited arms of isolation. Thus, it contributing to the substantial moral and spiritual decline incrementally growing in high-poverty, urban communities.

Therefore, despite their being an insufficient ministry outreach presence within urban HP communities, church leaders serving in those communities need to adopt and maintain the Christ-centered principles outlined in the Shepherd Motif Doctrine (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20) to effectively serve. From urban church centers deemed as “mom & pop churches”, storefront ministries, and older traditional churches, to more established family churches and mega-churches – the current phenomenon of serving in isolation must be readdressed using a biblical lens. The continued theme of the Shepherd Motif Doctrine in relation to this study is paramount and rooted in God’s intention for Christian leaders as a set standard of expectations for shepherding the flock of God. Principles, themes, and concepts connected with shepherding (church leadership) are motivation, exhortation, feeding, teaching, and protecting God’s flock through Christ. 1 Peter 5:2 – 4 provides instructions of effective church leadership through the lens of shepherding God’s flock:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

No matter the setting, historical era, cultural backdrop, or dangers involved – shepherding God’s flock as it relates to church leadership stems from the good shepherd Christ himself in Psalm 23.

Bad shepherds by extension is reflected in the scriptural passage of Ezekiel exposing Israel’s leaders who failed to provide care for their flocks. According to, Gladwell (2023),

The motif of the shepherd is found throughout the scripture. In the Old Testament God has words of strong rebuke and warning for bad shepherds, and prophecies of a good shepherd that is to come. In the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd and we find in the epistles the notion of good shepherding extended to those who would lead in the church. (para. 1)

This research is designed to place a loving and necessary spotlight on inner-city church leadership focused on rejecting the new-aged phenomenon that promotes a Christian leadership governed by a groupthink worldview that rejects God's expectations for leading through the community. This study intends to bring some intentional solvency to the glaring yet unspoken scriptural obligations being neglected by an increasing number of clergy leaders of African American churches in high-poverty communities. The following research factors, i.e., Theological, Theoretical, and Related (Thematic) Literature (Table 1), guide this researcher's literature review to explore community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in socially and economically distressed communities.

Table 1

Background of Study

Theological	Theoretical	Related Literature (Thematic)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Old Testament ● New Testament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Christian Leadership models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effective Christian Leadership ● Community formation through Ministry Programming ● Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 46) in High-poverty Urban Communities ● Serving Under Cultural Duress ● Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach ● African American Ministry Traditions

Theological

Old Testament

The Old Testament covenant document is vital in understanding community and spiritual formation when discussing Bible-based leadership. Woven throughout the biblical narrative, beginning with the OT, God uses metaphoric language to spotlight, example, and direct servant-leaders to understand and serve through His divine wisdom: "One of the primary metaphors by which biblical authors conceptualized leadership is shepherding. This is quite consistent throughout the Old and New Testaments" (Laniak, 2006, p. 21). From prophets, kings, and judges, the OT standards for leadership were designed for vicegerents to rule Israel under God's divine unfolding Kingdom plan, which expresses God's character and His expectations for humankind to live in charity, relationship, and community. Even within the scope of the Old Testament storyline, many names and attributes of God characterized the premise of living in a supportive, fellowship, and relational community (Table 2).

Table 2

Names of God the Father Related to Covenant Community (Evans, 2014)

NAME OF GOD THE FATHER	TRANSLATION
Jehovah Jireh	<i>The Lord will provide</i>
Jehovah Machsi	<i>The Lord, my refuge</i>
Jehovah Mauzzi	<i>The Lord, my fortress</i>
Jehovah Raah	<i>The Lord is my shepherd</i>
Jehovah Shalom	<i>The Lord is peace</i>
Jehovah Shammah	<i>The Lord is there</i>
Elohe Mauzi	<i>The God of my strength</i>
Elohe Chaseddi	<i>The God of my lovingkindness</i>

Elohim Machase Lanu	<i>God of our refuge</i>
Elohim Ozer Li	<i>God, my helper</i>
Emmanuel	<i>God with us</i>

The OT emphasizes serving the basic needs and rights of people experiencing poverty, rejection, and marginalized persons and communities through spiritual formation and pastoral care. In the books Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Exodus – God established laws to serve the poor and widowed (Leviticus 19:9–10, 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19, 22; Exodus 22: 21–27, 23:10–11). All of which reimagines God-the-Father through the eternal salvation lens of Jesus-focused community formation outlined in the New Testament.

New Testament

According to the Old Testament, every aspect of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension was rooted in community/neighborhood fellowship and serving “the least of these” (Matthew 25:35–45). From God manifesting Himself in the flesh (John 3:16) and meeting community as Emmanuel (Matthew 1:23), serving through love and community was abundantly exemplified. Through those theological lenses, “The God of the Scriptures regularly chooses to engage humans in the task of leadership” (Laniak, 2006, p. 22). Thus, beyond the secular redefining of *What Would Jesus Do* (WWJD) (Jones, 2012) reimagined in a catchy saying or imprinted on a bracelet, leaders and followers of Christ alike are expected to demonstrate an incarnational ministry which patterns the earthly light and life of Jesus.

The leadership of Jesus regarding the poor laid the foundations for early believers to serve the distressed within a community concept. In addition to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), Jesus reminded believers to be mindful to love those deemed invisible and insignificant: “And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, since

you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (New King James Version, 1997, Matthew 25:40).

Theoretical

The Scriptures have clearly distinguished between ineffective leaders and God-approved leaders, as well as how leadership must be held accountable according to God's plan: “Jesus called out the Pharisees who were abusing the Law and acting like hypocrites, calling them “whitewashed tombs.” The Pharisees were the leaders and teachers of their times, but they felt they were above reproach or rebuke. Paul publicly called out Peter in Galatians for being two-faced and trying to appease both Jews and Gentiles. Lemay (2012) states, “Left without proper accountability, even the best leaders can be tempted to stray and think more highly of themselves than they should. We must respectfully challenge them for their good and the good of the church” (p. 20). Good intentions, great experience, and exceptional expertise sometimes translate to leading with integrity. Therefore, effective ministry leadership must begin and end with Christ-centered integrity rooted in the *Fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5:22–23). According to the Scriptures, without God-ordained character, ethics, and wholeness—a leader cannot effectively lead their followers in God's unfolding Kingdom plan (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Peter 5: 1–5; Hebrews 13:17). Grenz (2000) advances that Bible-based worldview by pointing out the significance of church leaders serving the community through a place of high integrity,

All church leaders must remember that service is the goal and intent of each office in the community. But in this, pastors are to lead the way. They are to be "examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3) "in speech, in life, in love, in faith and purity" (1 Tim. 4:1). In short, they are to be models to the congregation of Christlike character and servanthood. As those chosen by the spirit and endowed with special responsibilities, these persons have been entrusted with leadership authority. However, their positions do not entail licenses to promote selfish or personal goals. Rather, they are to enter into office with all humility and intending to seek the good of the whole. (pp. 569, 570)

It is through that understanding that the leadership competencies for this study are concentrated around the framing of the following theories:

- Spirituality and Transformational Leadership (Jacobsen, 1994).
- Intentional Community Outreach versus Church Isolation, which is intended to be understood via the following theories:
 - The Eight Components of Christian Community Development (Gordon, 2011).
 - Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church (Roden, 2016).
 - Jesus, the Patron of Outsiders (Van Eck, 2013). And,
- Assertive Leadership Model (Ferris, 2020).

These are consistent with effectively leading a church through community and spiritual formation within the confines of serving marginalized persons in high-poverty, urban communities.

Thematic Literature

The related (Thematic) literature prominently used throughout this study is intentionally designed to synthesize the purpose statement with cultural, spiritual, historical, and real-life experiences related to the research problem. Aligned with the research title, “Community formation and effective leadership in African American Churches in High-poverty Communities,” the thematic literature is purposed to steer the research towards the following applicable subject areas:

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community Formation Through Ministry Programming,
3. Serving TLOT in High-poverty Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress,

5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach, and
6. African American Ministry Traditions.

Effective Christian Leadership.

Akin to Jonah's indifference towards the people of Nineveh, exemplified from him being more pleased with the vine that provided him shade from the sun (Jonah 4:10), ministry leaders must always be aware of God's expectancies versus their individual discomforts. A church leader must adhere to not being content with the symbolic comforts stemming from worshipping by way of church isolation and have more pity for those in their respective Church's surrounding community "...who cannot discern between their right hand and their left..." (Jonah 4:11).

As it relates to following Christ's example of leading and serving the community, effective church leadership in urban, in-need districts must be engaged in building church-centered communities. Perkins (1993), the author of *Beyond Charity*, asserts,

We live in a critical hour in which the "least among us" (Luke 9:48) are growing at a frightening rate. We can no longer see pain and suffering as something that takes place "over there" in Third World settings. We now hear the cries of our people, especially in our urban centers. (p. 21)

Using the scriptural passage Ephesians 4:11–13, Chester & Timmis (2008) suggest that in addition to church leaders proclaiming and applying the word of God to their respective followership, they must also prepare them to do the works of service (p. 195). Hence, prepared and effective leaders serving within inner-city landscapes in underprivileged communities must be willing and able to lead despite the many problems associated with serving in densely urban populations. Biblical and theological constants cannot be reduced to contemporary versions of the Christian faith where a clergy leader can serve apart from Christ-centered accountability.

Community Formation Through Ministry Programming.

From names of God (Table 2) describing His compassion towards the poor and marginalized to the overwhelming scriptural support from OT and NT covenant documents, believers are expected to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (New King James Version, 1997, Galatians 6:2). Bible-based, ministry outreach programs by way of CF must supersede those church circles that chooses to abandon God’s intention by serving in isolation. In that regard, Samra (2008) states:

If maturation is the ongoing realization of the eschatological reality of conformity to Christ and if the church is the actualization in the present of the end-time assembly when this conformity will be complete, then the church must be essential to facilitating the process of effecting this transformation (i.e., maturation) in the present. (p. 135)

Although "...The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (New King James Version, 1997, Matthew 9:37), ministry leaders must uphold the biblical worldview of loving God and neighbor (Mark 12:30–31) through the mandate of outreach charity (1 Corinthians 13).

Serving TLOT (Matthew 25:35–46) in High-poverty Communities.

Consistently discussed throughout Chapter One’s introduction, and theological and theoretical areas of the “Background of the Problem”—the biblical theme, principle, and concept of serving TLOT is a constant expectation throughout the scriptural text (2 Corinthians 9:6–7, 1 Corinthians 16:1–4, Acts 2:32–37, Galatians 2:10). According to Lotter (2015):

The life and teaching of Jesus Christ suggest that all Christians should be seriously concerned about the plight of the poor. Why? Let me explain. Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith and a role model for Christian behavior in the world. In his life on earth, he showed deep compassion for all people marginalized by society – for the poor, for widows, children, and the sick.” (p. 11)

With the advancing, invisible encroachment of secular humanism fused with the incremental progressions of postmodernism, effective ministry-spearhead community formation is vitally necessary in countering a cultural phenomenon that promotes serving in isolation (Lemay,

2012). In urban, high-poverty communities, where AA churches once were reputable for adhering to the essence of the scriptural passage of Matthew 25:35–46, the biblical worldview and expectancy to fulfill the Christ-centered agenda to serve the poor are seemingly fleeting away (Mohamed et al., 2021). In that regard, in academically exploring the subject matter, the researcher placed a high emphasis on the standard of Bible-based, effective Christian leadership.

When considering the ever-growing deep pockets of poverty witnessed throughout urban America, the scarcity of resources and opportunities, and the increasing disdain for the homeless, addicted, and mentally unwell in HPC's, Christian leadership simply must obey God's word. "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land" (New King James Version, 1997, Deuteronomy 15:11).

After the third chorus of the hit 1992 record, *The Message*, Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five provided a cultural snapshot and social commentary related to the cycle of deprivation happening in the "ghettos" throughout the cities of New York, NY:

A child is born with no state of mind / Blind to the ways of mankind / God is smilin' on you but he's frownin' too / Because only God knows what you'll go through / You'll grow in the ghetto livin' second-rate / And your eyes will sing a song called deep hate / The places you play and where you stay / Looks like one great big alleyway.

Although not the blatant systemic persecutions endured by the early church and the social, economic, political, and racial unrest that dominated bygone AA church traditions, postmodern clergy leaders in HPCs must be ready to "count the cost" (Luke 14:26–33) and serve accordingly.

Serving Under Cultural Duress.

The crucifix (the cross) is deemed the symbol of the Christian faith for a reason. Jesus died and was resurrected from the cross to set an example and an expectation for all believers to adhere to. Hence serving with the possibility of extreme cultural inconvenience or even death should be clearly understood as a Christian leader in HPC (Matthew 16:24 – 26). From serious diverse threats and attacks to strong disagreements, economic despair, persecution, and even death – all believers, especially Ministry leaders, must decrease to the point of death so that Jesus can increase in purpose. The beheaded John the Baptist stated, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (New King James Version, 1997, John 3:30). The Apostle Paul also contended, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (New King James Version, 1997, Acts 21:13).

It can be argued that modern ministry leaders under the banner of Jesus and who profess the role of a Christ-centered servant-leader can be deemed ineffective Christian leaders for refusing to serve based on those scriptural proofs. To that point, the book/concept of “No Cross no Crown” was written by Quaker William Penn explaining that self-denial and discipline through Christ is imperative to seeking and finding the Kingdom of God (Pen, 1801). Hence, the purpose of for using SUD as a primary theme for this research study is to correlate effective Ministry leadership with the exemplified suffering of Jesus and the Early Church. Within the scope of serving and living in an urban landscape, effectiveness from Ministry leaders must be a concrete standard against those spiritual, cultural, personal, and ministerial daggers that are inevitable (Ephesians 6:16).

Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach.

This study explores *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*; thus, the under-studied Christian topics of postmodernism and secular humanism about effectively serving must be spotlighted. Both on micro and macro levels, postmodernism via secular humanism has nefariously impacted the world and church in some significant ways (LeMay, 2012; Pearcey, 2015). LeMay further asserts,

There is no doubt we are surrendering to the culture instead of fighting for it, and with each passing year, the secular culture becomes more engrained within the church, and one day it will consume us if we do not wake up. (LeMay, 2012, p. 55)

As a result of the historical and incremental chipping away of the Christian worldview, postmodernism is seemingly the new norm. Grenz & Franke (2001) assert:

The expression of Christian thought has taken shape and has been revised in the context of numerous cultural transitions: from an initially Hebraic setting to the Hellenistic world; from the thought-forms of Greco-Roman culture to those of Franco-Germanic; from the world of medieval feudalism to the Renaissance; from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment; from the developed world to the third world; and currently, from a modern to a postmodern context. (Grenz & Franke, 2001, p. 3)

Hedges (2019) also states:

It is generally accepted that secularism rests upon two pillars, or principles, one derived from what is seen as the French model and the other from what is seen as the American model. The former represents freedom from religion and the latter freedom of religion. Based on the laïcité model, freedom from religion concerns the institutions of the state being separate from the institutions of the church. (para 5)

To further explain the significance of understanding the nuanced, impactful philosophy of postmodernism against the church, a broader examination of its history and general tenets are outlined. According to Carlson (2017), Secular Humanism "Roots go back to Renaissance (14th–16th centuries) & the Great Enlightenment (17th–18th centuries) – modern science developed through findings of men like Galileo & Newton," and its "...emphasis is placed more on man &

less on God." Which has historically produced the teachings and practices of the Humanist Manifesto I, 1933, and Humanist Manifesto II, 1973. Carlson (2017) argues that the influential historic thought-leaders Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Paul Kurtz, and Edwin H. Wilson contributed greatly to those two impactful documents, which maintain:

1. The universe has always existed,
2. Mankind must live as if there is not God, since there is no proof of any,
3. Chief goal = develop the human personality in this life, and
4. There are no moral absolutes (Man is good / evil does not come from within man).

It is through those human reason-centered rationales that Postmodernism against the biblical worldview was greatly contributed. Carlson (2017) further contends that postmodernism is a "Term 1st used in the 20th century by philosophers, theologians, literary critics, historians, architects – due to the failure of Secular Humanism, and the basic principles are:

1. No one thinks independently, we are all molded by society,
2. You cannot judge the thoughts, ideas or actions of another culture or person,
3. Each person's reality is in their mind, and 4) No one can prove anything (Carlson, 2017).

It is vital that clergy leadership intentionally develop and cultivate Bible-based CF in distressed and deprived neighborhoods despite the sways of postmodernism to safeguard God's intended community. In that regard, Grenz & Franke (2001) point out that

Apart from the Christian community, the text would not have taken its particular and distinctive shape. Apart from the authority of the Christian community, there would be no canon of authorized text. In short, apart from the Christian community, the Christian Bible would not exist. (p. 115)

When examining the multilayered and multidimensional nuances tied to postmodernism, deductions can be made that church leadership must be ready and able to effectively serve despite today's new age problems (Lemay, 2012). Therefore, leaders with proven character,

doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, 2003) are necessary to effectively counter the new challenges of today while exemplifying the Shepherd Motif doctrine outlined within the biblical narrative. Along with the plethora of sin-focused layers against the church, its leadership must develop new and innovative strategies to combat the world's encroaching rejection of the gospel of Christ while maintaining core Christian beliefs.

African American Ministry Traditions.

Notwithstanding the enormous sacrifices and persecutions of the Early Church (2 Corinthians 11:23–28; Acts 7:54–8:3; Russell, 2022, para. 2), bygone African American church traditions have also been recognized for commendably serving through a social gospel despite being under immense racial, economic, and political compulsion (Gates, 2021). Ward and Bertodatti (2021) contend, "The witness of the traditional black church in the United States testifies to the power of the Gospel and the sufficiency of Scripture" (para. 16).

The church leadership in urban, seedy settings must be further examined through the lens of the said tradition. When considering the biblical and AACLT fact trails, which support the expectation to serve the poor and marginalized within the margins of society, the responsibility begins and ends with ministry leaders who are biblically accountable for adhering to the example of Christ. According to Wimberly (2019), the mental strain that often occurs on leaders in African American churches entrenched in the all-encompassing duties involved with pastoral care takes a toll on ministry leaders and ministries alike (Chap. 1). Arnold B. (2012) also makes the case that "The intersection of African American tradition, community, and spirituality defines the role of the pastor as a caregiver. The black preacher is a caregiver within this confluence of tradition, spirituality, and community" (p. 1). As a result, on-the-job lead ministry

roles, especially in high-crime, poverty-stricken, urban landscapes, must be considered when exploring effective church leadership and community formation.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the existing research, the primary problem explored in this study is effective church leadership via the Shepherd Motif doctrine concerning Bible-based community formation in socially and economically distressed communities across America. The existing research spotlights areas of concern related to training church leaders to combat the increasing eagerness of the laity to serve within the confines of four walls versus serving the community through fellowship and developing relationships (Ugwuanya, 2004). Cadet's (2020) research focuses on the lack of spiritual formation and soul care toward church followership, particularly in African American worshipping communities.

Although the previous research is applicable and beneficial in edifying believers and unbelievers alike in Newark, NJ, communities, the gap for this study examined effective Christian leadership in high-poverty areas near participant churches. An effective leader's proven character, doxological motives, and passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, 2003, pp. 296–301) uses God's word as a lamp during their respective ministry paths (Psalm 119:105). All of these are united with the two commandments left to the disciples of Christ:

And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. (New King James Version, 1997, Mark 12:30–31)

The intentional lens of loving God and neighbor drives this leadership-based research on Church-influenced community development in HPC belts in New Jersey's largest populated city. In addition to exploring the phenomenon, this research aims to formulate innovative leadership competencies and applications aligned with the biblical worldview and consistent with African

American church traditions of serving the community. These are intended to contribute to modern ministry applications for church leadership in an ever-advancing, postmodern world.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*.

At this stage in the research, a servant-leader profile is generally defined as ministry leaders with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion for fulfilling the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003, pp. 296–301) in the following areas,

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community Formation Through Ministry Programming,
3. Serving “The least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) in High-poverty Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress,
5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach, and
6. African American Ministry Traditions.

The servant-leader theory aligns with the biblical worldview and the Shepherd motif doctrine steering this study (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20).

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

RQ1. What biblical accountability do Christian leaders have in community formation models in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ2. What are proven biblical leadership skills needed to develop community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ3. How do postmodern cultural values affect Christian focused community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ4. What are the historical traditions of the African American church which serve to contribute to leadership skills for developing high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ5. How does Bible-based, effective church leadership develop and maintain biblical community and spiritual formation in high-poverty, urban communities?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

To conduct this research study, the following *research assumptions* are noted:

1. The answers from interviewed participant leaders are honest and based on lived and worked ministry experiences.
2. Serving TLOT is a Christian expectation based on consistently stated biblical and theological themes, principles, and concepts related to God's love, grace, mercy, and unfolding Kingdom plan.
3. The selected participants of this study are full-time leaders of African American churches located in an urban, high-poverty community and are familiar with bygone African American church traditions.
4. Spotighting the contributions, methodologies, standards, and positions of the referred African American church traditions is not considered bias and division within the Body of Christ.
5. Study participants understand, accept, and live God's inspired and inerrant Word (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).
6. Christ-centered leadership is defined by men, women, and young people of God with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, 2003, pp. 296–301).
7. Culturally relevant urbanized jargon, slang, and perceptions from interviews, quotes, and art are meant to contextualize individual perspectives on social, economic, and political experiences.

Delimitations of the Research Design

To conduct this research study, the following *research delimitations* are noted:

1. This study focused on Ministry leaders who are 40 years and older. Also, the number 40 "...generally symbolizes a period of testing, trial or probation" in biblical

numerology (Biblestudy.org., 2023). This study did not focus on Ministry leaders who are under the age of 40 years old.

2. This study focused on Ministry leaders who are married, Christian males who are reputable in their respective church communities as under-shepherds, pastors, and primary leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6 – 9). Christian church leaders who did not match those ministry categories were excluded from this study.
3. This study focused on high-poverty, urban communities (Hila, 2021, para. 2) of Newark, NJ. High-poverty, urban communities not within the aggregate research city of Newark, NJ was not included in this study. Additionally, churches located in Newark, NJ not in HPC were excluded from this study.
4. This study focused on church sites with African American traditions of serving via community formation. Churches that are not of African American traditions of serving via community formation are outside of the purview of this study.
5. This study focused on Ministry leaders with ideological and philosophical beliefs aligned with the biblical worldview. Ministry leaders that do not have ideological and philosophical beliefs that align with the biblical worldview were excluded from this study.
6. This study focused on Ministry leaders with a church membership of 100 members or more. Ministry leaders with a church membership of less than 100 members were outside the focus of this study.

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms is based on the following quotes, perspectives, and definitions:

1. *African American (See, Black American)*: Is generally defined as Americans of African descent descended from slaves brought to America during the Transatlantic Slave Trade between the 16th and 19th centuries (Lynn, 2006).
2. *African American Church Tradition*: In addition to the Black Church's unique ways of praise and worship, liberation theology, and gospel music, it acted as a neighborhood center that supported and mobilized communities. Gates (2021) contends that "The church has formed a nation within a nation. The church was, then at least, the single most important institution in the Black community" (p. 95).
3. *Black Church (or African American Church)*: Is defined as "Any church having a predominantly black congregation and leadership; (with the) such churches considered collectively as a religious and cultural entity" (Oxford Lexico, 2021, p. 89).
4. *Church*: "The church is by nature a community of people who are on a mission to make disciples for the glory of God" (Pettit, 2008, p. 238).

5. *Community (and Church Community)*: Is defined as "people living in a particular area" (Cambridge, 2022) in proximity to selected research churches (and participant leaders) assigned to this study. As it relates to the church, a community "...is one that actively cares for its neighboring community, as evidenced by community outreach, community involvement, and making its God-given resources available to welcome the surrounding community hospitably" (Evan, 2009, p. 34).
6. *Community formation*: Rooted in Christian theology (Also see, covenant community), biblical CF is essentially an extension of God's character, omnipresence, and ecology. Samra (2008) asserts that community formation is an expectation of the Body of Christ and stems from the harmony of the Triune Godhead: "This harmful factionalism is ridiculous because the unity of the church is derived from the unity and supremacy of God" (p. 144).

In concert with helping the poor and TLOT, spreading the Gospel of Jesus and community fellowship is an all-encompassing agenda designed for believers to live together under the harmony of Christ. To that point, Pettit (2008) contends the following perspective: "As individuals are conformed to Christ with an integrated devotion and within the community, they do not lose their individuality. They are now functioning in a Trinitarian-informed way in which their individuality is expressed in and for the benefit of the Christian community." (p. 48).

7. *Covenant Community*: Is defined as believers who gather into covenanted communities to preserve the Congregational Way of doing church by intentionally engaging in scriptural practices that form and shape a God expected community (Hartley, 210). Grenz (1994) contends that "the faith community represents every nation and every social and economic status, consisting of males and females" (p. 482).
8. *Doxology motives*: Is defined as a liturgical lifestyle expressed through every area of one's Christ-centered life, including ministry efforts.
9. *Eschatology*: Is define as "the branch of Christian theology dealing with the biblical study of end times prophecies and the events of the last days. These events include the Rapture, the Second Coming of Christ, the Tribulation, the Millennial Kingdom, and the Future Judgments. The primary books of the Bible about end times prophecy are the book of Daniel, the book of Ezekiel, and the book of Revelation." (Fairchild, 2021, para 3; Also see, Matthew 24).
10. *High-poverty*: Is defined as a "set of economic and social difficulties that are found in industrialized cities and that are the result of a combination of processes such as the establishment of comfortable living standards, the increase of individualism, processes of social fragmentation, and the dualization of the labor market, which translates into social dualization" (Hila, 2021, para. 2).

11. *Incarnational Ministry*: Is defined as direct church ministry outreach. Billings (2004) contends that the church is the “incarnational entity through which Christ showers His blessings to a world filled with self-centeredness, suffering, and pain?” (Billings, 2004).
12. *Leadership (Romans 12:8)*: Is defined as “the ability to discern God's purpose for a group, to set and communicate appropriate goals, and to motivate others to work together to fulfill them in the service of God. A person with this gift effectively delegates tasks to followers without manipulation or coercion” (Boa, 2001, p. 308).
13. *Ministry Experiences*: These are diverse life, work, and ministry experiences that are not limited to one's personal and spiritual journey with Christ; Church-related ministry duties via maturing believers and unbelievers in the areas of biblical, spiritual and CF; Congregation and outreach strategies to win souls for Jesus; Leadership approaches based on ideologies, philosophies, joys, and frustrations; Relationships with family, followership, and friends; and experiences concerning the African American church traditions, postmodernism, and serving TLOT in socially and economically distressed communities.
14. *Pastor*: Is defined as an “organizer, trainer, director, and continual impeller of evangelism” (Armstrong, 1984) at a respective Christian church. The term pastor for this study is deemed an under-shepherd serving under the chief-shepherd, Jesus Christ.
15. *Postmodernism*: Is defined according to Duignan (2022): “Postmodernism, also spelled postmodernism, in Western philosophy, a late 20th-century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power.”
16. *Secular humanism*: Is defined as “a panoply of “isms”, which are shaping the minds of people in the world today. The other key ones are postmodernism, consumerism, hedonism, narcissism, feminism, relativism, and pluralism. Of all these, secular humanism appears to be the most prominent as it has become a literal religion, which Homer Duncan describes as “the most dangerous religion in America” (Koduah, 2020).
17. *Serving leadership (Servant)*: Theoretically is defined as “...a multidimensional leadership theory that starts with a desire to serve, followed by an intent to lead and develop others, to ultimately achieve a higher purpose objective to the benefit of individuals, organizations, and societies” (Coetzer et al, 2017; Also see, Mark 10:42 – 45).
18. *Shepherd Motif Doctrine*: Is defined as “an approach to leadership founded on the philosophy that influential leaders' principal responsibility is the safety and welfare of the flock of the people under their custody. Shepherd leaders tend, feed, and protect their flocks from predation” (Odong, 2021, p. 25; Also see, Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20).

19. *Soul Care*: Is defined as “...biblical because God created your soul to reflect His nature and image. You are to be a good steward of all that He has created. Soul care is the daily process of cultivating healthy thought patterns and taking inventory of emotions to live freely before God and healthily form meaningful relationships with others. Your mental and emotional health and relationships will suffer if your soul is unhealthy. Biblical soul care practically allows you to practice a healthy holistic lifestyle before God while taking caring for yourself and others” (McKenna, 2022, p. 49).
20. *Spiritual formation*: Is defined as methods to “engage with the presence of God, walking with him day by day, moment by moment, in worship, prayer, obedience, witness, spiritual disciplines, or whatever” (Pettit, 2008, p. 64).
21. *Telos*: Is defined as a Greek word created by Aristotle and used by Greek philosophers and New Testament writers. The word, concept, and principle aligns with sacrificial intent, purpose, completion, goal, and ultimate victory in and for Christ (Mate-Wayo, 2021).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it generally contributes to the Body of Christ in areas related to better spreading the gospel of Christ (Matthew 28:18–20) and serving “the least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46). Theoretically, applying principles, themes, and concepts gleaned from the six primary points within this study’s purpose statement is significant for ministry efforts in HP, and urban communities across America. Empirically, this qualitative phenomenological study, guided by the love of Christ, Shepherd Motif Doctrine, and ten interviewed ministry leaders will significantly add fresh research in the space of community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in HPC.

On a micro level, the researcher deemed this study significant because the existing Newark, NJ research related to effective church leadership and community formation are in the areas of:

1. Training the laity related to improving church and community relations (Ugwuanya, 2004), and

2. Research focusing on the lack of spiritual formation and soul care toward church followership, particularly in African American worshipping communities (Cadet, 2020, p. iii).

The significance of this research is vastly different in that the Shepherd Motif doctrine drives the following areas needed to better perform outreach ministry during these postmodern times:

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community Formation Through Ministry Programing,
3. Serving the TLOT (Matthew 25:35–46) in High-poverty Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress,
5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach, and
6. African American Ministry Traditions.

On a micro level, the significance of this study within the context of serving during these Postmodern times is enormous. Permeating through the beguiling tentacles of secular consciousness, cultural sin-centeredness, and the nefarious thrust of the grooming internet is the incremental sway inner city churches electing to serve, via, congregational isolation. On a micro level, urban landscapes are undeniably filled with large populations in need of spiritual fellowship and community formation initiated by effective Christian leadership.

The United States is growing in ethnic diversity. There are likely more people groups here than ever in our history. Each group needs someone to proclaim the Gospel's good news to them. Most of these ethnic groups tend to be in cities, making cities a great opportunity to spread the Gospel. (Stetzer, 2016, p. 1)

In addition to feeding the poor, connecting them with resources, and church outreach programs in HP inner city spaces need of "spiritual formation and soul care" inside and outside of a church's four walls (Benner, 2007).

On a macro level, the significance of this study is to

1. Promote biblically expected accountability and effective church leadership in African American churches located in HPC,
2. Reintroduce the Shepherd Motif doctrine as an imperative standard for ministering against the impacts of secular humanism and postmodernism, and
3. Place a fresh academic and theological spotlight on Bible-based CF.

When considering the growing cultural force of postmodern-driven foundationalism, optimal Christian leadership concerning community relationships and local connectedness is vitally needed (Grenz, S., Franke, J. 2001). An intentional and innovative template supporting community outreach is also necessary when considering and countering the gulping gap of commercialized Christianity (Mattera, 2015).

Reestablishing and reimagining the Shepherd Motif doctrine as a benchmark for ministering against the impacts of postmodernism is vital. It is imperative that all Christian circles (i.e., lay and academic) take a fresh look at serving marginalized persons residing in badly off communities. Hence, the findings of this research are designed to provide avenues of church outreach information focused on community relationships in squalid districts tied to public housing and pockets of poverty. Kenneth Boa (2001) stated, "Since God made us in his image and likeness, we have been created in community with him and with one another (p. 417). In that regard, the identity and earthly ministry of Jesus were rooted in those communities deemed rejected, marginalized, and unworthy.

From densely populated, culturally deprived urban areas to the decline in commitment to serve through community, additional urban-based research in HPC is needed for innovative leadership in the church. The goal of this research is to bridge the gaps between:

1. Church leadership and effective CF,
2. Congregational isolation and intentionally serving in HP communities, and

3. Christian academic exclusivity and purposefully serving communities deemed TLOT.

This is meant to heighten Christ's envisioned community and spiritual formation for Christian leaders and believers concerning serving through God's community intention and outline.

This study's gap places a ministry outreach focus on serving through the Shepherd Motif doctrine, versus better training for Catholic laity in the areas of community programming and relations (Ugwuanya, 2004), and spiritual formation/soul care, as part of the discipleship ministry in Newark, NJ (Cadet, 2020). The theological and theoretical frameworks, and related literature outlined in Chapter Two provides academic writings that both align with the existing research used, and additional perspectives that support the purpose statement and distinctive gap of this dissertation study. The ensuing chapter, Greenleaf (1977) provides a summary of what a servant-leader is. Nggada (2012) contends that the Shepherd Motif is necessary to fill in the gap between theology and praxis caused by autocratic and aristocratic governance styles. Mohamed et al. (2021) asserts that traditional Black (African American) leaders were instrumental in enacting community formation in HPC despite being under historical duress. And, Scarborough (2010) stresses that Christian Transformational Leadership is paramount when achieving goals in ministry.

Summary of the Design

A qualitative approach and phenomenological design were used for the study. The multiple data sources for this research are set to come from "interviews, documentation, and observations, via open-ended questions, emerging approaches, and text or image data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Chap. 1). Ten Newark, NJ study participants (per church site) were interviewed using pre-established research questions and sub-questions.

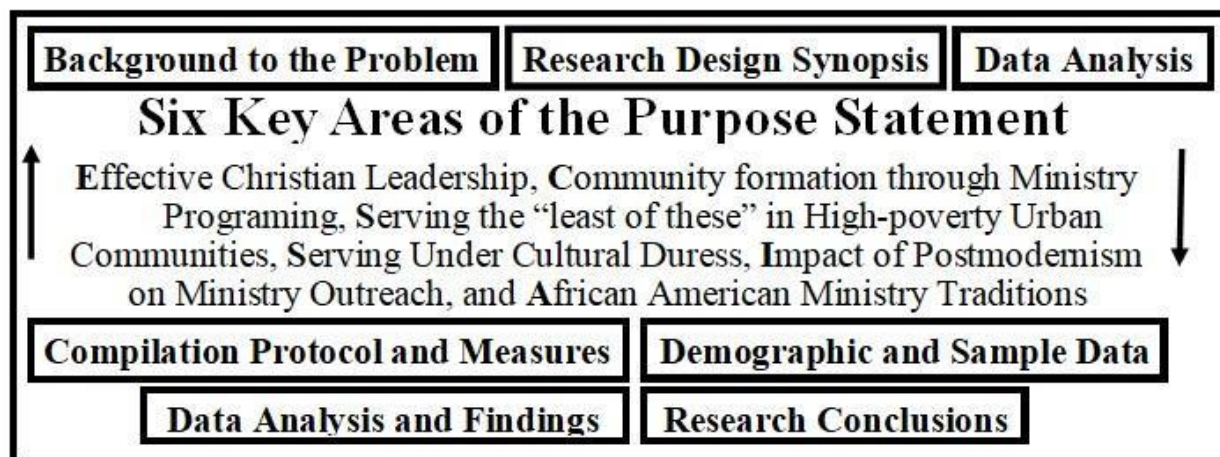
The gathered data was recorded, transcribed, and processed using MAXqda (www.maxqda.com/) – a management software designed for qualitative data analysis, and a line-by-line coding process (pp. 194–197) to generate descriptive codes ideal for a framework analysis of identifying general categories which framed the conclusions of Chapter Five.

According to Goldsmith, L. J. (2021),

Framework analysis is an inherently comparative form of thematic analysis which employs an organized structure of inductively- and deductively-derived themes (i.e., a framework) to conduct cross-sectional analysis using a combination of data description and abstraction. The overall objective of framework analysis is to identify, describe, and interpret key patterns within and across cases of and themes within the phenomenon of interest.

Additionally, the six key areas outlined in the purpose statement supports the,

1. Background to the Problem,
2. Research Design Synopsis,
3. Data Analysis,
4. Compilation Protocol and Measures,
5. Demographic and Sample Data,
6. Data Analysis and Findings, and
7. Research Conclusions (Figure 1).

Figure 1*Six Key Areas of the Purpose Statement*

In informing the reader, Chapter One provides an introduction, overview, theological, and theoretical frameworks for the research. This chapter provided an awareness of the problem and purpose statement using pertinent literature supporting the research. All of which reinforces the existing literature of Chapter Two that focuses on CF in the areas of

1. Bettering community programming and relations training for church leadership in Newark, NJ (Ugwuanya, 2004),
2. Improving AA churches in the areas of spiritual formation and soul care through discipleship ministry in Newark, NJ churches (Cadet, 2020), and
3. Exploring this study’s research gap focusing on performing effective church leader-lead CF and the phenomenon of serving in isolation in HPC byways the Shepherd Motif doctrine.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review chapter intends to review the existing literature associated with the research problem, purpose statement, and research questions. This chapter provides the reader with an outlined research narrative summarizing the researcher's study connected with *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*. The theological and theoretical frameworks provide biblical, ministry, and academic contextualization. The related literature defined through purpose statement themed categories is set to delineate, guide, and add structure to this research study. The rationale for the study, the gap in the literature, and the profile of the current study are purposed to provide clarity, depth, and a nuanced synthesis of the research study.

Theological Framework for the Study

This theological framework aims to identify God-ordained examples of CF and effective and proven faith leaders of their day. From the love and intentions of God's covenant community (Hughes, 2004), to chosen leaders who are after God's own heart (Jeremiah 3:15) – the theological framework focuses on:

1. Servant Leadership,
2. The Shepherd Motif Doctrine,
3. Community by God's Design,
4. God's character,
5. OT Leadership,
6. NT Leadership,
7. Leadership Expectations Under Duress, and

8. Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church.

Servant Leadership

The timeless theme, concept, and principles related to servant leadership is a core biblical staple in that through God's loving intention for mankind, He raises up leaders after His own heart (Jeremiah 3:15) is paramount to manifesting His will, word, and way. From Old Testament minor and major prophets, kings, and judges, to New Testament examples of Jesus lived by His disciples, apostles, and the Early Church – servant leadership is simply rooted in divine expectations of God's love and salvation plans for mankind (Isaiah 46:3 – 11; John 3:16). It is through that lens, examples, functions, expectations, and the impact of servant leadership has been further explored.

When examining biblical servant leadership, the following leaders and key scriptures related to divinely ordained ministries must be noted: 1) Abraham, Genesis 12:1 – 2; 2) Joseph, Genesis 37:5 – 8; 3) Moses, Exodus 3:1 – 3; 7 – 8; 4) Joshua, Number 14:8; 5) Ezekiel, Ezekiel 3:1; 6) Daniel, Daniel 5:24 – 29; 7) Hosea, Hosea 1:2; 8) Jeremiah, Jeremiah 25:15; 9) Nehemiah, Nehemiah 2:17; 10) Haggai, Haggai 2:9; 11) Paul, Ephesians 3:1 – 2; 6; and 12) John, Revelation 21:22 – 24. The plethora of servant leadership examples outlined in the Scriptures are diverse in personality, cultural and historical contexts, and leadership obligations in relation to God's intent and unfolding kingdom plan. However, the common thread that agrees with the stated noteworthy servant leaders was their collective ability to be obedient, willing slaves (Doulos) unto God, thus exemplifying the abundant examples of Christ's earthy ministries:

But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42 – 45)

Generally, the functions of a servant leader is essentially assigned with the transformational leadership philosophy (Jacobsen, 1994) which prioritizes the needs of others through abiding in the gospel of Christ. Through Christ-centered empowerment, passion, and a humbled selflessness – servant leaders function as central persons of character who:

1. Create environments that promote and foster personal and staff development,
2. Establish congregational stability and trust,
3. Spearhead community formation through programming, collaborations, and fellowship, and
4. Spread the Gospel of Christ through being organized, strategic, and consistent.

Eva et al. (2019) points out that, “Servant leadership is a holistic leadership approach that engages followers in multiple dimensions (e.g., relational, ethical, emotional, spiritual), such that they are empowered to grow into what they are capable of becoming.” Eva et al. (2019) also contends this about servant leaders, “When followers' well-being and growth are prioritized, they in turn are more engaged and effective in their work.”

Although the term servant leader is biblical in origin (Matthew 20:25 – 28; Mark 9:35, 10:42 – 45; Romans 1:1; John 13:12 – 17; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:1 – 4), in its present day context, the Bible-based theme and concept has been meaningfully theorized to support both corporate and church agendas alike. Therefore, the Christ and eternal salvation connected verbiage has seemingly been redefined to fit modern perspectives that do not necessarily promote and advance Christian leaders who are expected to bring lost souls to Christ.

Greenleaf (1977), deemed as the person who introduced the theoretical concept and movement of servant leadership to the postmodern world associates the following expectations with the term:

The servant-leader is servant first....It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve--after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature....The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. (p.13)

Aligned with leadership expectations related to the Shepherd Motif doctrine and the earthly ministry model of Jesus, Greenleaf's (1977) servant leader perspective also places a priority on those being served. Ministry leaders serving in the mercurial and randomly ferocious landscapes in high-poverty, urban settings must fully understand the essence and powerful dynamic that governs servant leadership according to Greenleaf's (1977). From biblical instructions, the revealing relationships with God and His chosen servants, to examples of anointed leadership performing under duress – the expectations for God ordained servant leadership is imperative to effective lead in HPC.

However, when considering the multifaceted nuanced nature of Postmodernism, Greenleaf's (1977) dated version of servant leader needs to address the following four overarching questions for maximal effectiveness:

1. How is servant leadership understood and defined within the leadership literature?
2. How is servant leadership measured, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of the research designs employed?
3. What do we know about servant leadership through existing empirical research?
4. What is the future of servant leadership research (Eva et al, 2019)?

The ever growing impact of Postmodernism, particularly in densely populated, HPC need Ministry leaders primed to both serve and lead with a new aged perspective and comprehensive strategy to engage in ministry driven community formation.

In addition to faith and obedience to God’s will, word, and way – the characteristics of a servant leadership should be guided by the following five leadership principles, “i.e.” Decision making, People, Strategy, Productivity and Self-improvement (Burian, et al 2014). In the oftentimes difficult (albeit rewarding) space of urban outreach ministry, characted effective servant leaders should also align with the following eight characteristics, “i.e.” Authenticity, Humility, Compassion, Accountability, Courage, Altruism, Integrity, and Listening for maximum community impact (Coetzer, et al 2017).

Because of the valued, verifiable and trustworthiness of God’s force-multiplying word, effective servant leadership in the space of performing community formation in HPC is hinged on cultural or neighborhood impact. In that regard, the Scriptures reminds us, “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit” (Luke 6:43). As with people, a community can also be impacted through effective or ineffective servant leadership. Bredfeldt (2006) provides an example on how a wayward ministry philosophy backed by ineffective servant leadership was responsible for status of underattended and stressed churches in a particular community.

“The fruit they produced were small and struggling churches – not small because of their location or division, but small because of a ministry philosophy that isolated them from the lost. Those churches were typically ineffective in reaching unchurched, lost people.” (p. 81)

Robert Greenleaf once stated the following about a lasting vision when defining servant leadership, “Do others around the servant-leader become wiser, freer, more autonomous, healthier, and better able themselves to become servants? Will the least privileged of the society be benefited or at least not further deprived?” (Gonzaga University & Robert Greenleaf Center, 2005, p. 7).

Shepherd Motif Doctrine

Found throughout the Scriptures is the guiding theme tied to pastoral care identified as the Shepherd Motif doctrine. The term “shepherd”, used as a biblical metaphor identifies the multiple ministerial duties and expectations aligned with God’s love, compassion, and care for “sheep” (believers) within their respective followership and communities. Nggada (2012) suggest that “...a metaphor communicates a more vivid image than a simile, because it is implicit and draws the comparison more closely” (p. 3). The meaningful biblical metaphors of “shepherd” and “sheep” in relation to the roles and functions of pastors (under-shepherds) and supportive leaders are responsible for church parishioners, communities, and situational events where they serve.

Guided by Scriptural insights (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20), the Shepherd Motif doctrine essentially embodies the divine earthly birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ – the Good Shepherd. Since Jesus, the Good Shepherd is both the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) and sacrificial lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 1:29) “...who takes away the sins of the world!,” the central role of pastors specifically, and church leaders generally are to also sacrifice their lives through exemplifying Christ toward those who they serve.

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (1 Peter 5:1 – 4, NKJV)

As it relates to the six keys of this studies purpose statement, particularly with shepherding flocks in high-poverty, urban settings – the characteristics of under-shepherds and Servant Leaders alike are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization,

foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Thakore, 2013). With the scarcity of resources, elevated poverty, high crime rates, growing concerns associated with homelessness and drug addiction in inner-cities across America, the qualities of under-shepherds and Servant Leaders alike are very relevant when dealing with the plethora of dire issues in HPC. According to Fuder et al. (2013), “The success of a local church should be directly tied to the degree that it holistically transforms its immediate neighborhood. Any other success factor is secondary” (p. 203). As under-shepherds, following the intention of God exemplified through Jesus takes Christ-centered leadership that exercises genuine grace, consistency, emotional and cultural intelligence, and a fervent willingness to sacrifice and/or die to bring provision, guidance, and safety to dependent and destitute flocks. According to Gunter (2016), “Jesus demonstrates that genuine shepherd leadership is indicated primarily by a singular concern for the sheep entrusted to the leader’s care.”

Rooted in communing with Christ, the Good Shepherd discourse touched on in John 10:1 – 21 is a ministry model that promotes Jesus as the gate for eternal life to the community of obedient and faithful believers who hear and follow His voice. Even the term “pasture” which denotes spiritual sustenance for the community of believers in Christ (Isaiah 49:8 – 9) is another undeniable standard within the Shepherd Motif doctrine. All of which reminds believers of their insufficiency and dependency as believers (sheep) (Isaiah 53:6) in need of the vital providence from Jesus (the Good Chief Shepherd) implemented by chosen under-shepherds (pastors/church leaders) within apportioned covenant communities (pastures). In that regard, Nggada (2012) contends:

Due to the autocratic and aristocratic style of governance it has created a gap between theology and praxis. Unless the Church returns back to status quo of the shepherd motif of untiring desire to care for the flock of God in order to learn from the good shepherd and how to shepherd God’s flock. Unless this is done as a matter of urgency the flock of

God will be fed upon, devoured, scattered, and destroyed by the so-called shepherds who are voracious wolves in sheep's clothing. (pp. 8, 9)

By divine augmentation, through theological verbiage, God used the Shepherd Motif Doctrine as a means for His servant-leader to serve their respective flock and as a metaphoric language to define or example the ministry methodology of Jesus and His disciples. In that regard, Laniak (2006) provides a general OT snapshot of the genesis of leadership-shepherding concerning serving in the framework of covenant community:

God's chosen leader Moses was trained for his role as a shepherd of flocks in the deserts of Sinai. In that same setting, Israel's journey to nationhood began. The idea of a shepherd ruler is further reinforced when Israel's ideal king, David, is similarly called from tending flocks to become the shepherd of God's people. These two figures are leadership prototypes, serving as models for leaders who follow them. But they are extensions of the divine Shepherd who leads the covenant community by their hands. (p. 75)

From Abel (Genesis 4:2); Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (13:7, 21:27, 26:20, 30:36, 37:22); Moses (Exodus 2:17; Psalm 77:20); David (1 Samuel 17:12 – 58); Amos (Amos 7:14) – to Jesus (Psalm 23; 1 Peter 5:4), shepherding was a very common cultural occupation. The clear understanding and realities of shepherding was normal and accepted by nomadic and biblical Patriarchs of their time. Therefore, the term shepherd highlighted in the Shepherd Motif doctrine is also an expected progression for postmodern under-shepherds and church leaders alike to effectively protect, provide, be present, gather, and guide their God assigned sheep to the redemptive pastures of Christ.

Community by God's Design

The connection between the Church and the community is an undeniable theme in the OT. Even before the Fall of Man (Genesis 3), humanity was intentionally created and formed to reflect the Triune Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit):

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. (New King James Version, 2017, Genesis 1:26)

In addition to being created through the divine design of spirit and community, and despite the stain of sin chronicled throughout the Old Testament, God intended humanity to live together and connect via CF (Hughes, 2004), especially as it relates to His functioning love and compassion towards the widowed, poor, and unfortunate.

Community by God's design is deemed covenant community (Hughes, 2004), all of which is rooted in covenant theology, which "...reminds the people of God that they are to think covenantally rather than individualistically" (McKay, 2006, para 2). Hence, the parallels between covenant community and community formation are similar for various reasons. From the continued impacts of the Fall of Man (Genesis 3) through secular humanism (Pearcey, 2015, p. 23), both terms are aligned principally and conceptually based on the believer's duty to serve the community. Both terms are based on humanity's expectation to love one another, live in fellowship and community, and to follow the example of Christ who served the marginalized within the community. In that regard, McKay (2006) asserts, "A particularly important element in the life of the covenant community is the bearing of one another's burdens" (para 3).

Akin to the verbiage of Christian community, Christian inspired CF, Neighborhood fellowship, Church-based neighborhood renewal, and Christian community development – covenant community is realized due to the agreed relationship with God and expectations for both leadership and followership alike to love, serve, and live together through community (Hughes, 2004). God initiated cultural mandates like laws, traditions, and customs, which were initiated by His chosen leaders to be compassionately executed within the domain of a God-centered community. "If God directly introduced the covenantal model as an institution, and men

followed his example, we should expect to find the various elements of the form in the earliest covenant administrations” (para. 8).

God’s character

As with the harmony of the Triune Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Ghost), the intentional makeup of man (Spirit, soul, and body) (1 Thessalonians 5:23) is divinely designed to be aligned with God’s revelation and character (LFJA, 2015). In that regard, Houston (2007) asserts,

Several writers on the ethics of the Old Testament have suggested that an important part is played in the rationale of its ethics by the notion, explicit or implicit, of *imitation dei*, the idea that the character of human beings should be modeled on that of God, and their conduct imitate God's. (p., intro)

God-ordained love, purposed under the divine template of OT-defined covenant community, has its ideological and philosophical foundations of Christian community formation realized through our faith and obedience in Christ (Hughes, 2004; McKay, 2006). It is through the idea of communing together, set apart from the influences of unholiness, that Hartley (2010) contends the following about God's promoted and arranged community: "God gathers the Church into covenanted communities. To preserve the Congregational Way of doing Church, the faith community must intentionally engage in the scriptural practices that form and shape the covenant community" (Hartley, 2010).

A substantial part of that ordained community served those deemed less fortunate. Beginning with Old Testament foundational laws, believers are commanded to contribute to the basic needs and rights of the poor, widowed, rejected, and marginalized persons under the umbrella of a joined community (Leviticus 19:9–10, 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19, 22, Exodus 22: 21–27, 23:10–11).

Old Testament Leadership

From an OT perspective, spearheading covenant communities were God-selected leaders primed to serve their followership according to God's specificities. An example of that assertion is how God used the Children of Levi (Levites) to serve at the Tabernacle of Meeting (Numbers 18: 20–32). Additionally, through divine arrangement and compassion of the covenant community, the existing tribes had to pay their tithes to the Levites to serve the poor, marginalized, foreigners, orphans, and widows (Deuteronomy 16:11; 1 Chronicle 23:28–32; Sugarman, 2006, para. 2).

From the life guidelines and compassionate assurance of Psalm 23 to the shepherding forewarnings and standards of Ezekiel 34, the OT established how leadership must example Jesus. Hence the theme of covenant community is seamlessly reintroduced and reconstituted through the Body of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), and the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). According to Goldsworthy (2002), the Old Testament frames the various interrelations within the New Testament (pp. 22, 23).

New Testament Leadership

From the virgin birth of Immanuel prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 to the fulfillment of OT Scriptures in the NT scripture Luke 1:35, the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34) through the ultimate revelation of Christ Jesus was realized. The storyline frames the New Testament, which spotlights His appeal to love and live for God through community. Hiebert (2008) asserts, "The church exists because of and for Jesus Christ. It is the body, his family, his colony. Its mission is to announce the coming of the kingdom to all peoples on earth" (p. 284). It is through that lens that Christ-centered, effective leadership towards TLOT is explored.

Using the Temple elite under Roman Empire rule as a comparative background, Van Eck (2013) articulated the identity of Jesus' earthly ministry concerning serving TLOT. Van Eck also suggests that through participation in the Christian faith, Christ-focused patronage is also expected from everyone adhering to the example of Jesus:

Being part of the kingdom of God turns outsiders into insiders. This new identity entails the willingness to be taken up in the mission of its patron by standing up for justice and showing compassion in the same way as the patron of the kingdom of God. (p. 11)

Van Eck (2013) contends that due to Jesus' "mission, identity, and ethics" towards those deemed outsiders – peace, social harmony, happiness, mercy, justice, health, the common good, and hope were obtainable to all. Thus, following the Jesus patronage model for outsiders is an expectation for church believers and leaders alike.

Leadership Expectations Under Duress

Consistent with the Shepherd Motif Doctrine, a shepherd within the context of church leadership is expected to lead under duress. In addition to spreading the word of God (Matthew 28:16–20) and serving TLOT – Ministry leaders must lead despite social, economic, and religious constraints. According to the scriptures, under-shepherds, or Ministry leadership, are especially responsible for serving their respective flocks even under diverse threats, attacks, strong disagreements, economic despair, persecution, or even death. In that regard, the Scriptures remind all who follow Christ to "...count the cost..." (Luke 14:25–33). Those examples of Jesus as Chief shepherd and servant lamb were intentionally paved for leadership traditions to ensue. From the early believers to African American church traditions, ministry leaders steered their rejected, disenfranchised, and attacked flocks to safety and security despite strong sin-centered influences against their church homes and communities (Grenz, 1994, p. 251; Gates, 2021, p. 114).

The broad love, faith, and promises of Jesus related to community relationships, pastoral care, and spiritual formation under threat during those bygone traditions were a necessary extension of the community compared to today's post-Christian culture. Russell (2022) points out that early Christians had to endure the following concerns: racial tensions between Jews and Gentiles, conflict over circumcision and whether it was necessary for salvation, resisting the authority of the Roman government, disagreement about whether to eat meat offered to idols, sexual immorality in the Church, lawsuits between believers, perversion of the Gospel, and disunity among believers in the Church (Russell, 2022, para. 2).

Hence the standard for effective leadership, regardless of concerns within the scope of this postmodern era, must be understood through the lens of historical Christian leaders (Christ and countless others) who lead with a cross on their backs (Luke 14:27). Jesus asserts that "...The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (New King James Version, 2017, Matthew 9:37).

Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

As it relates to the falling away from the church-centered community in high-poverty, urban neighborhoods in favor of worshiping venues communing in isolation, Roden (2016) defines the responsibilities through the doctrine of Ecclesiology. Roden (2016) asserts that community-based serving must inform the world of Jesus' unfolding kingdom plan while having an impactful significance in society:

Evangelism is a ministry to the world and involves the proclamation of the good news of Christ's atoning work to those outside the Church, intending to see people come to the Savior through repenting sin and placing their faith in Christ. Proper evangelism proclaims the benefits of placing one's life under Christ's lordship and communicates the costs and demands concerning one's relationships and status in society. (p. 4)

Roden (2016) also points out how Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church is clear about church practices concerning serving the community through the lens of Christ's love and redemption, and not solely as a social care agency:

As evangelism seeks to address the spiritual needs of people outside the Church, Christian social concern deals with issues such as economic injustice, food and education for the poor, racism, and human trafficking that represent the effects of sin upon society. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that social ministries are representative of Christ's ministry. Any effort the Church makes must ultimately concern itself with redemption, not charitable deeds. (Roden, 2016, p. 5)

Theological Framework Summary

Rogerson (2000) contends that the foundational models for pastoral care and spiritual formation were an extension of priest-led communities:

It can be argued in favor of the Old Testament as a proper starting-place for a history of pastoral care; that of the sheep and the shepherd comes from Ezekiel 34, and although ancient Israel was a nation, it was also a community of faith with an established priesthood. (p. 15)

God-ordained principles, themes, and concepts articulated within the Shepherd Motif doctrine and expectations of the Levites (Numbers 18: 20–32; Deuteronomy 16:11; 1 Chronicle 23: 28–32), the template for CF has been established for today's Christian leaders to follow. Kilner (2015) contends that in the OT, mankind was created in God's image to be in alignment with Him as a ruler and as a relational God (p. 210).

Even the biblical standard for paying tithes (and offerings) in OT and NT covenant documents is tied to serving the poor and marginalized persons and communities. A God-ordained 10% levy was provided by eleven of the twelve Tribes of Israel to Aaron and his sons (the Levites) to maintain the Tabernacle of Meeting and to serve the widows, orphans, and foreigners (Numbers 18). Deuteronomy 14 repeats that said expectation; however, in the third year, 10% of the crops, livestock, and food went into the storehouse to feed the people, namely,

those persons deemed impoverished, lonely, and excluded (also see Malachi 3:10). Centuries afterward in Matthew 17:24–26, when the officials asked for a temple tax to be paid, Jesus somewhat condemned the tax, yet had Peter pay it for the two of them. Was it because the standards of the OT of serving marginalized communities were not being met? Or did the NT fulfill the Law by serving TLOT expressed in Matthew 25: 35–45, coupled with the following scriptural passages (2 Corinthians 9:6–7, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Acts 2:32–37; Galatians 2:10)?

In the NT storyline, Jesus was characterized as a divine expression of love, compassionate outreach, and the OT standards of serving through CF. "Gospel writers introduced Jesus of Nazareth as a messianic figure in various ways, but consistently in terms of ancient pastoral prototypes and in dialogue with the interpretive traditions that evolved from them" (Laniak, 2006, p. 172). Laniak (2006) further explains the intentionality and immediacy of Jesus' love by sending budding disciple leaders to serve through the character of His identity by helping the poor, unhealed, and culturally rejected: "The disciples were sent as shepherds to feed his sheep. They were also sent out as sheep among wolves. They were called to lead God's people as pilgrim tent-dwellers, living on the margins of society, to their eternal home" (p. 23). The multifaceted earthly charitable examples of Jesus's ministry and words cemented how Church leaders should shepherd the forgotten and lost in their respective flocks (Luke 14:12–14; Acts 20:35; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17–18; Galatians 6:2).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

In line with establishing suitable ministry applications for serving in high-poverty, secular-influenced communities, one of the primary intentions of this study is to develop leadership competencies and applications based on the final research findings. In addition to the theological context, the theoretical framework adds academic and conceptual perspectives to

identify research issues, aid the reader, and buffer this researcher's gap within this study. In doing so, the researcher plans to utilize notions in the following theoretical categories: The theoretical Framework focuses on 1) Spirituality and Transformational Leadership, 2) The Four Paradigms of Leadership, 3) The Eight Components of Christian Community Development, 4) Assertive Leadership Model, 5) God ordained Community through Jesus, 6) Intentional Community Outreach versus Church Isolation, and 7) Theoretical Framework Summary.

Spirituality and Transformational Leadership

Within this postmodern era, transformational leadership lessons must be revisited, understood, and applied to ministry; therefore, church leadership must be reimagined through serving in secular settings. According to Jacobsen (1994), the engine of Christ-centered spirituality concerning Transformational Leadership is the fuel for maximizing church leadership.

After interviewing diverse leaders in secular settings and fields, Jacobsen (1994) contends that spiritually focused leadership is necessary for increased productivity when leading an ever-changing world (p. 25). Jacobsen (1994) also points out that "At present, deeper exploration of human factors in organizational life has led to an increasing interest in the integration of "spirituality" into secular leadership and organizational development..." (pp 3–4). Hence, Jacobsen argues that "Transitional Leadership," coined by J. M. Burns in 1978, can be augmented through leaders focusing on spirituality and synthesizing their improvements in their life and leadership practices.

The theory is rooted in many Christian leadership theories, such as connective, courageous, relational, servant, spiritual, ternary, and transforming leadership. Christian Transformational Theory (CTT) is suitable for theorizing effective ministry leadership

(Scarborough, 2010, p. 59). The definition differs from secular Transformational Leadership in that *leadership vision* is spotlighted (p. 77). Leadership characteristics must be strong and well-rounded within the scope of serving in ministries inside of necessitous communities.

Scarborough (2010) states that

Christian Transformational Leadership is leadership that declares a biblical or Christian foundation or is specifically directed to the Church. It holds that a leader's vision, character, persuasiveness, and ability to strategize guarantee that he or she will be influential (or transformational) to achieve shared goals. (pp. 77, 78)

This is seemingly captured in the Spirituality and Transformational Leadership model used to sculpt this study. Hence, based on the lived ministry experiences of interview participants with meaningful leadership roles—research data can be appropriately obtained to heighten knowledge outlined in the purpose statement.

In addition to using Spirituality and Transformational Leadership to frame this study, the thought process of developing the stated Church leadership competencies and outreach ministry applications for HP communities are framed by the following theological and theoretical leadership perspectives:

The Four Paradigms of Leadership

From the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16 – 20) and Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11 – 21) to considering and remembering each other and assembling during these last days (Hebrews 10:24 – 25), the Church was always directed to serve outside the confines of four walls. It can be argued that church leadership in this new aged era can always use additional CA when establishing an extended community.

In line with the purpose statement for this study exploring community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities, the four-pronged, goal-oriented ministry tool shaped by Bredfeldt (2006) is an ideal leadership model for

this study. The strategies can be very serviceable in formulating this researcher's new church leadership competencies and ministry applications: "Four fundamental paradigms of leadership exist, each driven by a different worldview. These paradigms can be summed up with four simple words – values, vision, venture, and virtues" (p. 136). Values-Driven Leaders are rooted in the "worth and dignity of each person" within relationship dynamics. Vision-Driven Leaders "...lead by casting motivational goals and describing a different future where great things occur." Venture-Driven Leaders "...know that real change happens as a gradual process through well-devised plans and well-oiled organizational machines." Virtue-Driven Leaders "...believe that change should occur with caution as perennial virtues and ideals are upheld and practiced" (pp. 137, 138). For this study, virtue-driven leadership is driven by the biblical worldview.

The paradigms are purposed to guide the final research findings into church leadership competencies and ministry applications related to:

1. Training and ministry strategies suitable for inner-city outreach and CF,
2. Leadership methodologies that emphasize biblical principles, themes, and concepts related to Levite priest duties,
3. The Shepherd Motif doctrine and charity towards TLOT,
4. The examples of Jesus,
5. Methods related to learning, teaching, and applying techniques associated with initiating CF for church congregations,
6. The history, modern technological impacts, and evil influences of Postmodernism against the Church, and
7. Insights regarding African American church traditions related to serving through CF.

The Eight Components of Christian Community Development

As Bredfeldt (2006) articulates, church isolation from the culture at large contradicts expectations of believers being the salt and light of the world and loving one another (Matthew

5:13–16; John 13:34; pp. 81, 82). Through that theological perspective, intentional public outreach must be the philosophical approach ministry leaders enact in impoverished communities.

To that point, Gordon (2011) discusses how the postmodern Church must be committed and deliberate despite the risk of rectifying those major concerns associated with inner-city poverty:

The question arises as to what the response as Christians will be to the troubles of the poor and the inner cities today. The desperate conditions that face the poor call for a revolution in the Church's attempts at a solution. Through years of experience among the poor, many have seen these desperate problems cannot be solved without strong commitment and risky actions by ordinary Christians with heroic faith. (p. 1)

In response to the gradual acceptance and new-aged realities of churches worshiping via various forms of church isolation, Gordon (2011) spotlights eight strategies to counter the historical neglect of believers concerning serving the poor within urban landscapes. The eight Christian Community Development solutions outlined by Gordon (2011) are as follows: Relocation: Living Among the People; Reconciliation (People to God); Redistribution (Just Distribution of Resources); Leadership Development; Listening to Community; Church-based; Wholistic Approach; and Empowerment (pp. 1–7). All of these are proposed for the Church to intentionally respond to impoverished communities in neglect (pp. 1–7).

Assertive Leadership Model

Consistent with the Shepherd Motif doctrine, the Assertive Leadership Model (ALM) is deeply rooted in the servant-leader model of serving. In that regard, Ferris (2020) maintains that because of the emotional inducing factors stemming from leadership, both influence and assertiveness toward able and willing followership promote positive and productive unions between leaders and their followers.

The proposed servant leadership model introduces a concept of assertiveness where the leader asserts him- or herself into the lives of the follower, dependent upon the followers' needs and level of ability and willingness to complete tasks, develop trusted leader-follower relationships. (p. 2)

Ferris (2020) also suggests that within the spirit of telos (the Greek term for an end, fulfillment, completion, goal, or aim) (Brennan, 2002), leaders must be emotionally and culturally intelligent within leadership and followership interactions when leading and developing followers. Thus, it is incumbent on leaders to lead through an assertive yet compassionate approach that harvests a Christ-centered team orientation:

Leaders should understand that the strength of the organization does not come from the sharpness of spears, or the traditional leadership approach of the leader knows all and cannot be challenged for fear of repercussion; it comes from the strength of the shield, or protection from such antiquated leaders and/or leadership approaches, as the shield provides safety for the whole. (Ferris, 2020, p. 16)

God Ordained Community through Jesus

The Scriptures teach, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24, NKJV). Thus, as the omnipresent, ecological expression of God's love for humankind, Jesus was manifested in the flesh to bridge humankind back to the holiness of God through His righteousness. To that point, Grenz (1994) contends the necessity of harmony between God and Jesus:

Revelation, of course, marks a functional connection between Jesus and God. The task of revealing God is a divine activity that Jesus carries out, for he is revealing the essence of God. But the task of revelation also carries ontological implications insofar as the revealer cannot be separated from what is revealed. As a consequence of this connection, Jesus participates by necessity in the essential nature of the one he reveals. He must be ontologically one with God and share in the divine essence he exemplifies. (p. 264)

As with the character of God the Father, through the framework of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension was established to, for, and with the community:

Community is essential in spiritual discernment of our functional calling. We are called to faith in the community. We live out our transformed life in the community. The

purpose of our functional calling is for the service of the community. Sober judgment of our functional calling can take place only in the community. And trust me, and community keeps you humble. God's functional calling comes through other people speaking truth into our lives with few exceptions. (Pettit, 2008, p. 209)

According to Chester & Timmis (2008), it is through that said dynamic that Christian charity must unfold concerning community formation.

We need to be communities of love. And we need to be seen to be communities of love. People need to encounter the church as a network of relationships rather than a meeting they attend or a place they enter. The mission must involve contact between unbelievers and individual Christians and between unbelievers and the Christian community. (Chester & Timmis, 2008, p. 59)

Out of the response of Christ's mind-renewing love, protection, and guidance experienced in the lives of believers – the examples of Jesus must be imitated, shared, and lived in and for the community (2 Corinthians 5:11 – 21). All of which begins with Ministry leadership through the love of Christ.

Intentional Community Outreach versus Church Isolation

From the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) to the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys found in Acts Chapters 13 and 14, it is irrefutably clear that serving in isolation is not of the Christian worldview. It is to that premise that Goldsworthy (2002) stated, "Examination of the New Testament documents shows that growth is not stepping out from the gospel, but rather stepping out with the gospel" (p. 219). Thus, faith leaders in their respective church communities are biblically expected not to serve in isolation. As a study foundation, it is necessary to use biblical insights related to serving beyond the limitations of church isolation (Genesis 2:18; Proverbs 18:1; Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Romans 12:5, 15:1; 1 Corinthians 12:14, 20–21; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 10:24-25; 13:1-2). The Scriptures mentioned above should not be mistaken for spending alone time with God (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16).

It is comfortable to serve in isolation where community fellowship and relationships are reduced to annual Thanksgiving food basket giveaways, Christmas toy drives, programs, and auxiliaries exclusive to church members. Church buildings are open just five to ten hours per week. All of this is great; however, the effectiveness of church leadership begins with faith and obedience with an emphasis on coordinated care towards marginalized persons and the neighborhoods where they reside. Bellah et al. (1986) asserts that

We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. We never get to the bottom of ourselves on our own. We deserve who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning. Our activities go on in relationships, groups, associations, and communities ordered by institutional structures and interpreted by cultural patterns of meaning. We are parts of a larger whole paying a high price. If we are not to have a self that hangs in the void, slowly twisted in the wind, these are issues we cannot ignore. (p. 84)

This study argues that a Bible-based community is an intentional communication, consistency, caring, and kindness spearheaded by clergy leadership towards their congregations to those who believe and need to believe in the Gospel and agenda of Jesus. That notion supersedes all persons of diverse social, economic, religious, and political backgrounds. Grenz & Franke (2001) state, "We maintain that theology, with its trinitarian structure, finds its integration through the concept of community. Community forms the theme that integrates the various strands of theological reflection into a single web or mosaic" (p. 204). It is the model thought of community expressed in Acts 2:42–47, in which the authors further point out the centrality of living, worshiping, and loving one another together:

We believe that the overarching focus of the biblical narrative is the person-in-relationship or the individual-in-community. This correspondence between the Bible and contemporary thought suggests that the concept of community ought to be the central theme or integrative motif in theology. (p. 215)

That notion is incredibly relevant in highly dense, inner-city landscapes where having church centers on every other block seemingly and seamlessly practices the Christian faith incubated by the comforts of isolation that govern their worship standards.

When considering the scarcity of resources and opportunities, especially in urban, high-poverty communities, God's love must be more evident to Christian followers (Perkins, 1993). Perkins (1993) continues to suggest that intentional community-based servanthood is necessary from the Body of Christ as an expression of the Christian faith:

We bring who we are to the community of faith and seek, by God's grace, to live our lives out together as an indication of the Gospel at work in us—corporately. To withhold our gifts from that local fellowship is to deprive the work of the community of faith of the unique contribution we can bring. (p. 149)

Since community outreach is a primary theme dominating the biblical narrative, it is vital to underscore the leadership expectations of clergy responsible for adhering to the orthodox traditions of loving thy neighbor via neighborhood love and guardianship. In that regard, Perkins (1993) maintains, "The central goal of Christian community development is to restore that stabilizing glue and fill the vacuum of moral, spiritual, and economic leadership that is so prevalent in poor communities" (p. 73).

Theoretical Framework Summary

The goal of using an additional academically sound theoretical framework to enhance research supporting intentional Bible-based CF is very necessary. In his book *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* (Community and Society), the nineteenth-century German sociologist F. Tönnies (1855–1936), who has been described as the founder of the theory of community, defined community as "an organic, 'natural' kind of social collectivity whose members are bound together by a sense of belonging, created out of everyday contacts covering the whole range of human activities" (Mondal, 2022, para. 4). Therefore, defending the inerrant Word of God

(Hebrews 6:18) concerning community and local connectedness with diverse theoretical arguments, is also scholarly and wise when performing research aligned with better-serving communities in HP neighborhoods.

Both theologically and theoretically, the Body of Christ is realized when believers use their purposed gifts to grow spiritually through church fellowship with local outside persons and groups. Through that biblically confirmed narrative, Church leadership of this age must continue the traditions of the Early Church, who also served TLOT via a community.

Married within the ingredients of pastoral care and spiritual formation, Jesus demonstrated to humanity how to establish His intended community. In that light, Lahaye (1996) brings attention to the intentions of Jesus and the earthly expectations of His disciples.

Jesus of Nazareth ministered publicly for only three and one-half years, a short time to establish Himself as “the Son of God” for all time and to found a religion that would stand the test of the ages. Thus it was important to Him that He establish His credibility early in His ministry so His followers could carry on his work. (Lahaye, 1996 p. 139)

Lahaye (1996) further spotlights the impact of pastoral care and spiritual formation stemming from Jesus and realized by His believers:

Jesus of Nazareth is unparalleled as a humanitarian influence. More hospitals, orphanages, rest homes, and rescue missions have been dedicated to Him than to all other religious leaders combined. His followers have founded, financed, and perpetuated more people-helping efforts than all others. (Lahaye, 1996, p. 17)

Related Literature

As a necessary integration with the theological and theoretical frameworks, the following themes (or related literature) are imperative in exploring the research title, addressing the purpose statement, and answering the research questions geared to finalizing this study.

Harmonizing ministry experiences from interview participants serving in high-poverty areas to the biblical expectations of leading through CF is designed to intentionally to be orchestrated in

large part by the related literature of this study. The following themes outlined in the purpose statement assisted the researcher in defining and reimagining effective, urban-based church leadership concerning serving via community relationships.

Effective Christian Leadership

Rooted in the Scripture, "And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (New King James Version, 2017, Jeremiah 3:15), effective leadership is performed by leaders who serve others through Christ-centered solid faith, obedience, selflessness, and dedication. Effective church leadership serves through Dietrich Bonhoeffer's perspective that "The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community" (Bonhoeffer, 1978, p. 84). Outlined through God's program for humanity via His Word, an effective Christian leader acts as an under-shepherd who denies themselves for others under the wisdom and will of Jesus:

Linked to this turn toward God is a turning to others. In repentance and faith, we leave behind the old self-centered way of living and dedicate ourselves to following the example of Jesus, the man for others. We seek the good of all persons, knowing that acts which minister to people in their need are acts of service to Christ (Matt. 25:40). (Grenz, 1994, p. 410)

In line with the examples, mandates, and expectations throughout OT and NT narratives regarding leadership and serving TLOT, the researcher contends the following regarding ineffective church leaders who are not obedient to God's Word: you cannot serve that what you do not love (Matthew 6:24–34). Within reach of this research, the researcher intends to explore:

1. Leadership-steered church isolation,
2. Biblical and theological illiteracy from church leaders concerning CF,
3. Lack of urgency to serving in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and

4. Indifference and disconnection between church communities outside of their places of worship.

According to Laniak (2006), it is the essence, expectation, and desire of an effective leader to lead through servanthood in Christ: “A good shepherd is a follower before he is a leader. He is a leader because he is a follower. The shepherds God judges in the Bible forget that the people in their care are not their own” (p. 22).

The force multiplier of God's intended leadership/servanthood can impact underserved communities of unbelievers and believers towards earthly stability and eternal security through the Holy Spirit.

Community Formation through Ministry Programming

Embodied in God's promise of salvation is purposed through the intentional ministry of Jesus (John 3:16). It is through the promotion of community-based relationships where NT themes such as the Body of Christ (Romans 12), the Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5), and loving one another (John 13) outlines the authority, leadership, and submission of Jesus. All of which is an exact blueprint for followers of Christ to live out under the umbrella of a covenant-inspired community.

In addition to fulfilling the Law and establishing eternal salvation through His sacrificial life, death, and resurrection, Jesus' identity on earth served the culturally marginalized, that is, TLOT (Matthew 25:35–46). "God's kingdom is a kingdom directed at outsiders with a patron that, in his patronage, cushions the vagaries of social inferiors (outsiders or marginalized) by endowing those loyal to his kingdom with the overarching quality of kinship" (Ernest, 2013, p. 8). That character and loving motive drive the biblical motif for leaders to emulate in their respective ministries. Based on the biblical worldview, community that is created and influenced by leadership is a primary foundational theme for serving and unifying persons to God.

Reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel. Jesus said that the essence of Christianity could be summed up in two inseparable commandments: Love God and love thy neighbor (Matthew 22:37–39). First, Christian Community Development is concerned with reconciling people to God and bringing them into a church fellowship where they can be disciplined in their faith. (Gordon, 2011, p. 2)

In this postmodern construct, the understanding and expectation of being a church pastor have been reduced to widely accepting "preachers" that are eloquent communicators who can verbally and emotionally appease their respective followership's comfort spectrums. As an unfortunate consequence of just preaching versus intentional pastoring, congregations, and nearby neighborhoods become deprived of the agenda of Jesus from ministry leaders who are negligent in spreading the love and hope of Christ through CF.

In that regard, Blount (2022) stated, "Preaching and pastoring are two different things. Just because you can speak well doesn't mean you should pastor a church" (n.d.). Furthermore, the Scriptures spotlight communication deficiencies of two of God's significant vessels—Moses and the Apostle Paul (Exodus 4:10, 14–16, 28; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6). Both had distinct yet meaningful pastoring approaches. Why? Because God cherry-picks leaders after his own heart (Jeremiah 3:15), who are primed to pastor via the Shepherd Motif doctrine (Ezekiel 34:1–6; Jeremiah 10:21; Psalm 78:70–72). Church leadership, especially in the role of "pastor," must understand and live out their designed calling, purpose, and expected duties related to tending to lambs, shepherding the sheep, and tending to the sheep of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, the Christ (John 21:15–17).

Ministry leadership qualifications are another reason why Bible-based, effective leadership must be explored to establish a community in economically and socially distressed communities during these eschatological times. Despite speaking and preaching well, being academically degreed in theology, and leading a well-off, popular, and consistently packed

church – church leadership must always prioritize serving their assigned community pastures according to the biblical worldview. The disciple Peter charges the elders at the churches in present-day Asia Minor to

Shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (New King James Version, 1997, 1 Peter 5: 2–3)

The legacy of church leadership will cause many to live or die eternally. “And it shall be: like people, like a priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds” (New King James Version, 1997, Hosea 4:9).

The divine focus for Christ-centered ministry leadership must be realized through church-spearheaded community formation. Despite the enormous and unfortunate realities that govern impoverished, urban landscapes across America, those who pick up and take on the church leadership mantle must be accountable for following God's unfolding Kingdom plan or expect the divine consequences for not doing so (Matthew 23:4; James 3:1). Because CF is aligned with the biblical-expected covenant community (Hughes, 2004; McKay, 2006, para 2), Christian outreach can begin with a mere desire from church leadership, a willingness of trained ministry workers, and \$20.00 worth of Gatorade per week. Then God, through Christ, shall provide protection, direction, and resources to carry out His will (Isaiah 14:24; Proverbs 16:3; Hebrews 10:36, 13:21).

Effectiveness as an answerable church leader is especially relevant in high-poverty communities, with an important Christian mandate to serve TLOT. God empowers specific individuals to manifest His will, word, and way (1 Corinthians 12:28; Romans 12:7; Ephesians 4:11); thus, the unanointed cannot and should not attempt to use the church as a platform to

exercise their gifts and skill sets, fulfill personal bucket list, and/or act on the influences of others.

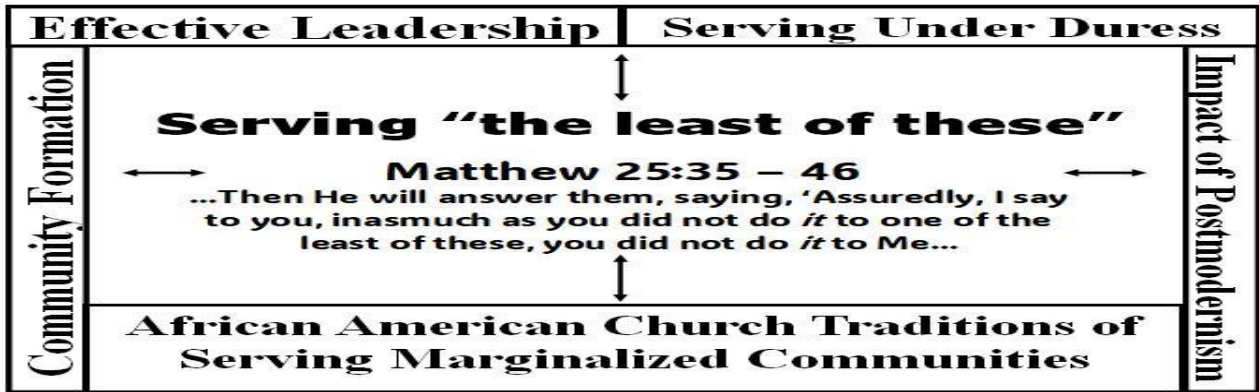
Serving the “Least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) in HPC

The driving verbiage promoting the vital expectation to serve TLOT during these highly secular times is seemingly becoming an optional life and ministry expectancy for postmodern Christian leaders. Flatt (2017) argues, "The secularization of Western culture is one of the most important developments in the history of Western civilization, not to mention one of the greatest setbacks for the Kingdom of God in the West" (para. 1). For Christian leaders and believers alike, not serving through the core principles, themes, and concepts related to expressing Christ-centered love towards the unfortunate and underprivileged in high-poverty communities is a new aged phenomenon that continually needs to be explored.

With the understanding and realization of prophetic fulfillments detailed throughout the Biblical narrative, it is yet incumbent on Christian leaders to be primed to serve in the historical period where they were “elected” by God to serve in. For this study, from the Fall of Man (Genesis 3) to today’s perilous and nefarious times energized by secular humanism and postmodernism (2 Timothy 3:1–7), the following figure represents the synthetization of the six key areas outlined in the purpose statement. For this study, although effective leadership and Bible-based community formation are primary key areas within this research, everything is supported by serving “The least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) (TLOT) in socially and economically distressed urban areas (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Key Areas Connected Through Serving TLOT



Based on the Biblical worldview along with the documented perspectives from ministry leaders with lived experiences serving in HPC, an examination of the phenomenon of serving in isolation was performed to understand new age-effective church leadership. In that regard, Hobson (2023), Lead Pastor at Hill City Community Church, a reputable church for serving the poor in Lynchburg, VA, shared the following ministry experiences and suggestions about serving TLOT in a HP city district:

Ministering to “the least of these” is simply doing what Jesus has called us to do, especially for unfortunate persons living and surviving in poor city areas. I am not asking anything of my church that I am not willing to do myself. When calling our church to live incarnationally within the heart of the city of Lynchburg, amongst people from all different walks of life, I was one of the few to do it first. We moved into the poorest neighborhood in the city, and we put down roots. If you want to do ministry in the city, you cannot be afraid of doing ministry work amongst the poor. If you are afraid of serving the poor amongst the poor, then you will not be an effective outreach worker. You should serve in another serving area because serving “the least of these” comes to loving Christ, desiring to love and help people who are in need, and an empathetic heart unafraid to serve—even unto death.

Umbrellaed under this study’s title, *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities* is the Shepherd Motif Doctrine and serving TLOT. With the aggressive, invisible, and undeniable encroachment of postmodernism and the ever-increasing social, political, and economic uncertainties tied to HP communities, a lot more

attention must be considered towards serving TLOT in relation to effective leader-directed CF. Although eternal salvation through Jesus takes priority over the poor amongst mankind (Mark 14:7; Matthew 26:11; John 12:8), according to Anderson (2013), "...charity to poor has the power to deliver one from eternal damnation," and "Charity acquires such power because one meets Christ through this concrete action of showing mercy" (p. 6).

Serving Under Cultural Duress

Ministering under pressure, challenges, and compulsion, either personally, socially, or spiritually, reminds Christians to:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (New King James Version, 2017, Ephesians 6:11–13)

It is through biblical guidance that adds credence to the World Watch List reporting period of 2022, confirming:

1. Over 360 million Christians living in places where they experience high levels of persecution and discrimination,
2. 5,898 Christians were killed for their faith,
3. 5,110 churches and other Christian buildings attacked, and
4. 4,765 believers detained without trial, arrested, sentenced, or imprisoned. (OpenDoors, 2022, para. 3)

All of which reminds and seriously warns believers and ordained leaders alike to "...count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (New King James Version, 2017, James 1:2–4). When discussing proven character concerning effective leadership via Romans 5:3–4, Howell Jr. (2003) further asserts:

Suffering endured from the perspective of faith is the soil in which perseverance grows, and from perseverance blooms character. Proven character is evidenced by a buoyant hope that has experienced the faithfulness of God to be more than adequate for the crisis (5:4b–5). The tested servant is more than a survivor, but is one who views future challenges as fresh opportunities to prove the sufficiency of God’s grace. (p. 297)

Aligned with that said perspective, Grenz (1994) argues:

Whenever the authors urge us to grow to maturity in our Christian life, the standard they invoke is Christ (Ephesians 4:13). This pattern often focuses on Jesus’ mission of suffering for our sake, whether by direct appeal to his own example (1 Peter 2:18–25) or by elaboration of the character traits which he himself demonstrated (Galatians 5:22–24). (p. 339)

Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach

Examining Postmodernism and its negative impact on the Church and its leadership, specifically in city settings, is difficult because the invisible tentacles of Postmodernism can be deemed both subtle and ferocious. There is seemingly and seamlessly a new age intelligent rebellion that allows the political elites and other unseen persons in power to broker the broken through a set of nefarious philosophies and ideologies that shape social, economic, political, and religious narratives and agendas. This has substantially influenced the Church concerning the decline of church social interaction and outreach responsibilities towards respective urban communities.

In that regard, Jim Erwin (2023), who deems himself "A Postmodern Pastor In A Digital World," provides five challenges Postmodernism presents for the church:

Challenge #1: The Questioning of Universal Truth

As an extension of religion-rejecting secularism, Postmodernism also gravitates to the central tenet that the truth is relative. The Universal Truth notion familiar to and accepted by ancient generations of Christians now comfortably embraces intersectionality worldviews opposed to the doctrine of Christ during these eschatological times. Erwin (2023) contends that,

On the one hand, the Church has traditionally claimed to possess absolute truth and has based its teachings and practices on this claim. On the other hand, many people within the Church have begun questioning this claim and sought new ways of articulating the gospel message in a postmodern context. (para. 3)

In the profound space of Postmodernism, Universal Truth is backed by an explosion of media/social media, political correctness, cancel culture, and false doctrines, which molds the now tolerable relationships between Church and community. From neighboring corners to job workplaces, assumed and unassumed communities of inclusion are becoming increasingly actualized. Now the archaically deemed truth of the Scriptures and its ministering adherents are irritating due to an increasing rejection of the Christian faith, personal comforts, beliefs, bias, and unaccountability.

Coupled with the societal embracing of Universal Truth is the philosophical position of relativism, “i.e.,” Cognitive relativism (truth), Moral/ethical relativism, and Situational relativism. All of which advance underlying presuppositions that reveal sentiments such as "It is true for you, but not for me; That is your truth, not mine; and There are no absolute truths" (Nathaniel, 2019, para. 9). Or “My truth is different from your truth so don’t judge me with your outdated morals” (para. 12). Thus, Universal Truth or absolute truth is being abandoned to appease "...itching ears..." primed for unsound doctrines befitting to individual ideological and philosophical viewpoints (2 Timothy 4:3).

Challenge #2: The Rejection of Meta-narratives

When considering the historical phenomena of the Bible, meta-narratives shaped the storyline via themes, concepts, and principles. From the magnificence of the creation story, the sin-centered tragedy of the fall of man (Genesis 3) – to the audacious prophetic fulfillment of humanity being redeemed through Christ (John 3:16) are mainstays in the Christian faith. However, because of Postmodern worldviews and perspectives, those same contextual,

historical, and culturally proven narratives are viewed as irrelevant and insensitive. Erwin (2023) contends that

Postmodernism also challenges the idea of meta-narratives. Meta-narratives are grand, overarching stories that purport to explain the meaning and purpose of life. Postmodern thinkers argue that these stories are inherently oppressive. They claim that meta-narratives justify the domination of certain groups by others. (para. 4)

Coupled with the new age tenet of Universal Truth, the rejection or ardent dismissal of Bible-based meta-narratives is another reason church/community cohesion is moving away from traditional outreach expectations. Now serving in isolation is increasingly becoming the norm for church congregations and community residents.

Challenge #3: The Emphasis on Personal Experience

With the flood of new age information carelessly oozing from radio, television, internet, and print mediums, media markets are being dominated by ideals and values that significantly contribute to the outlook and repeated practices of individuals at large. Contrary to the scriptural passage, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (New King James Version, 2017, Proverbs 3:5–6,) is now a narcissist selfish approach to thinking and living. Erwin (2023) argues, "Postmodernism strongly emphasizes personal experience and the subjective nature of knowledge. This has led to rejecting objective, universal truths, and a greater emphasis on individual perspectives and experiences" (para. 6).

The once generally received traditional biblical beliefs that relied on objective truths are now being seen through the lens of opinions, misinterpreted facts, group thinking, and a conflation of personal experiences mixed with the Gospel of Christ. Nathaniel (2019) contends,

In a day when debates are raging over sexual orientation, the definition of marriage, abortion, and many other moral and ethical issues, we see our church attendees influenced by postmodernism when they tend to base views more upon personal

preferences and experiences rather than on absolute truths taught in God’s Word. (para. 18)

Challenge #4: The Celebration of Diversity

Acknowledging and celebrating diversity as an expectation and expressing Christ's love through Christian duty has always been an accepted biblical worldview. These are remarkably tied to biblical concepts, themes, and principles related to the Body of Christ. However, via, Postmodernism, the intention of diversity defined under the umbrella of God's holiness is now perverted to an ultra-acceptance and tolerance of sin-centered behaviors, lifestyles, and actions that are not aligned with the biblical worldview. Even the acceptance and tolerance of Homosexuality and gay marriage by the Church is increasingly becoming the norm despite the objective truth of God. On that subject matter, Nathaniel (2019) writes,

It astounds me that the Church, including church leaders no less, can be divided on issues of homosexuality and gay marriage—issues addressed in the Scriptures. There is no gray there. [Lev.18:22,20:13,1 Cor.6:9,1 Tim 1:10] Gay priests.? Churches performing gay marriages.? They say: It doesn’t matter; God is a God of love. Really? Where is the Scriptural justification of that? (para. 17)

Although celebrating new age diversity is seemingly utopian when documented, verbalized, and heard, in reality, Postmodernism's deceptive influence acts as a perfect pair of cultural pliers picking out principles planned by God. In that regard, Erwin (2023) writes, “Postmodernism celebrates diversity and the idea that everyone has unique perspectives and experiences. This has led to a rejection of a homogenous culture and a greater emphasis on respecting and valuing differences” (para. 8).

Challenge #5: The Rejection of Institutions

Within this postmodern context, the rejection of institutions by the general masses is incrementally becoming a model standard of thinking. From political parties, government agencies, and justice systems to religious groups and even families – the rejection of institutions

is becoming the new normal. Erwin (2023) explains, "... Postmodernism challenges the idea of institutions, arguing that they are inherently oppressive and limit people's freedom and individuality. This has led to a rejection of many traditional institutions, including religious institutions such as the Church" (para. 8).

The devaluation of the authority of the Bible ultimately leads to the discrediting and denial of biblical authority in the local Church. It is the postmodern societal impacts of:

1. Questioning of Universal Truth,
2. Rejection of Meta-narratives,
3. Emphasis on personal experience,
4. Celebration of diversity, and
5. Rejection of institutions (Erwin, 2023) that must be addressed by effective clergy leadership.

Because Postmodernism is historically tied to Secular Humanism and reasoning, incrementally deviating from God's word is now witnessed through the prophesized fulfilments expressed in 2 Timothy 3. From 'God as a standard of living' to 'God as an option' to 'God and truth are offensive,' at both micro and macro levels – it is an indisputable and historical acknowledgment that the encroaching steps of Postmodernism are a force to reckoned with. Therefore, Christ-centered community formation, spearheaded by clergy leaders after God's heart (Jeremiah 3:15), is vitally necessary to oppose postmodernism's subtle yet ferocious impacts on the Church.

Erwin (2023) asserts,

Postmodernism is a philosophical and cultural movement that emerged in the mid-to late-20th century. The movement challenged and continues to challenge many of the foundational assumptions of modernism. At the same time, the movement has introduced a new way of thinking about truth, reality, and knowledge. As an institution deeply rooted in the modern era, the Church has faced many challenges in adapting to this new way of thinking. (para. 1)

As it relates to churches located in overpopulated, urban landscapes, the thick reality of Postmodernism systematically affects the day-to-day social interactions and outreach efforts of churches and communities at large. Within inner-city neighborhoods, intentional and unintentional serving in isolation has become a phenomenon, unfortunately, spearheaded by church leaders who are not aligned with God's love and expectation to serve the community. Thus, the lost and unbelieving, TLOT (Matthew 25:36–46), civic leaders, and community resources become neglected and uninfluenced by the intended leadership model exemplified throughout the biblical narrative.

To maximize community-based ministry efficiently and effectively, a church leader must prepare their respective followership to understand how the diabolical nuances connected to Postmodernism is Satan's last stance to counter God's end times program. Grenz & Franke (2001) claim, "...all theology is eschatology, insofar as eschatology informs all theological reflection. By this, we mean that theology must be at every turn directed toward and informed by a Christian understanding of creation's divinely given *telos*" (p. 26). Postmodernism's subtle impact is a present and incrementally relevant cultural system designed to derail the biblical worldview in which God's unfolding Kingdom plan is diabolically challenged. To that end, the rejection and condemnation of institutions, particularly Christian traditions and organizations reveal the sharp moral and spiritual decline of humanity once fortified by the Word of God. Unfortunately, the void produced by the rebuffing of Christ-centered institutions produces false biblical interpretations that validates or even condemns characteristics and facets of society.

African American Ministry Traditions

It is reported that eight days before the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, he said the following words at a packed Newark, NJ high school on March 27, 1968:

“Discrimination and segregation are opposed to all the principles of democracy, and all of the dialectics of the logicians cannot make them lie down together” (NJ.com, 2018). The then face of the Black Church and proven warrior against socioeconomic and racial disparities in America, Dr. King used his national platform as a leader to bring a needed spotlight regarding the cultural injustices that engulfed America.

Through that lens of local and national support from Black Christian church leaders, the social Gospel tied to the African American experience shaped leadership traditions grounded in Bible-based CF. It was Grenz (1994) who quoted familiar black theologian James Cone who “...declares that the black church bears witness that the meaning of Christ lies in the encounter with the crucified and risen Lord who is present today in the struggle for freedom” (p. 251).

Coupled with another agreeable perspective regarding the claim mentioned above, Gates (2021) asserts that,

“Out of the commitment to help their own, Black churches built upon the framework broadly known as the social gospel: Christianity’s attempt to address social and economic problems, drawing upon the tenets of the Bible to scale these persistent, seemingly unmovable mountains.” (p. 114)

In contrast to the cultural positions of many White evangelical churches of that period towards people of color in America, the Black Church had to endure versions of "the Christian faith" that supported racial inequality nationally and locally. (Lohani, 2020). Despite the Three-Fifths Compromise defined in Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution (Constitution, 2022), the plethora of laws tied to Segregation, Jim Crowism, and the Civil Rights Movement – the African American church traditions was an all-encompassing cultural phenomenon that supported its communities (Gates, 2021; Lohani, 2020). Thus, it was those societal conditions and the published article written by eight white evangelical leaders that influenced Dr. Martin

Luther King's 1963 letters from a Birmingham jail which defended the legitimacy of using protests, demonstrations, and civil disobedience (Rieder, 2014).

Cone (1970), an American theologian (1938–2018), pointed out that due to the clear distinctions, divide, and historical disregard between American White evangelical churches compared to Black churches—the term Black Theology is merited.

If we agree that the gospel of God is the proclamation of God's liberating activity, that the Christian community is an oppressed community that participates in that activity, and that theology is that discipline arising from within the Christian community as it seeks to develop an adequate language for its relationship to God's liberation, then Black Theology is Christian theology. (p. 32)

Cone (1970) further pointed out the following regarding the social cleavages that attempt to promote cultural division within the Christian faith fall under the ideological and philosophical worldview of Black Liberation Theology.

Refusing to be separated from the community, Black Theology seeks to articulate the theological self-determination of black people, providing some ethical and religious categories for the black revolution in America. It says that all acts that destroy white racism are Christian, the liberating deeds of God. All acts which impede the struggle of black self-determination—Black Power—are anti-Christian, the work of Satan. (p. 33)

That lens adds credence to this study and emphasizes socially aiding proven traditions that can contribute to ministry efforts within this postmodern construct.

The researcher used previous (Stearns, 1853) and present documented ministry experiences from Newark, NJ church leaders concerning effective leadership to spotlight African American church traditions of serving the community. The African American church traditions most reflected the early church traditions of serving despite gross inequality and cultural deprivation (Gates, 2021, p. 110). However, unlike past African American church leadership responses to community neglect, there is now a seamless cultural marriage of disregard tied to

the convenience of postmodern and Church isolation, which has disconnected the Church and its surrounding communities (Ugwuanya, 2004; Cadet, 2020).

Aligned with serving TLOT and serving via neighborhood/church fellowship—the African American Church, historically, via leadership, was deemed a shining example of serving through community (Gates, 2021, p. 196). In addition to the gross adversities related to chattel slavery, Jim Crowism, and the Civil Rights Movement, American society's social, economic, and political landscapes were especially framed to disenfranchise and oppress non-white Americans (The Harvard Gazette 2, 2021). Nevertheless, the leadership stemming from the African American church traditions diligently served the community under enormous cultural and spiritual duress. The Pew Research Center study also states that:

Black pastors hold a storied place in American history. During the eras of slavery and racial segregation, they played pivotal roles in Black communal efforts to "uplift the race" (a phrase commonly used in the 19th and 20th centuries). This often included organizing job training, after-school mentoring, insurance collectives, athletic clubs, and other community service programs through their churches, in addition to leading protests against racial discrimination. The achievements of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other clergy during the civil rights movement rank among the most celebrated efforts in this realm. (Mohamed et al., 2021, para. 1)

It was within the scope of proven leadership from the African American church traditions that spearheaded effective CF locally, nationally, spiritually, politically, economically, and racially (Time, 2022).

From the Church-steered freedom rides, poor people's campaigns, and opposition against voter suppression, to the war on drugs, police brutality, and a plethora of cultural disparities—the institution of the Black Church was driven by the Christ-centered focus of "We shall overcome." The "we" was a community deemed a nation-within-a-nation where the faith-based understood that God would make a way! According to Gates (2021), "The Black Church was the cultural cauldron that Black people created to combat a system designed in every way to crush their

spirit" (p. xxiii). It is the biblical community formation (CF) model blueprint has been set, proven, and expected from the foundational teachings of the Bible, Early Believers, and a Black church institution birthed out of struggle.

Today, although African American churches are still relevant and strong in urban poverty districts, the renowned prominence of the AA Christian traditions of intentionally and aggressively serving the community is fleeting away. Serving in isolation, comfortably incubated from non-Christian issues and concerns, has become an ever-increasing new normal. According to Mohamed et al. (2021) of the Pew Research Center,

A commonly expressed view during the interviews was that Black pastors' influence in African American communities has been declining since the civil rights movement. To explain this, the pastors offered a variety of reasons, among them: declining social activism by Black clergy, growing secularism in society, the increasing gentrification of urban areas, and scandals that have implicated clergy across racial and religious boundaries. (para. 22)

Of the 30 Black Christian clergies interviewed, the decline in the influence of the Black Church has changed key components of their church services (Mohamed et al., 2021). These changed key components range from

1. Shorter services to appease congregates who have other important things to do on Sunday.
2. Casual and relaxed dress codes for some of their worship services.
3. Contemporary style gospel music versus traditional devotional hymns in services.
4. A tamer, less emotional preaching style (less "call and response" and "whooping") that focuses on teaching and appealing to younger persons.
5. Post-pandemic (Covid-19), virtual services are being utilized to satisfy both younger and senior congregates who cannot or prefer not to attend Church services, and
6. Many Black Churches are accepting LGBT inclusion despite the opposition of older congregates.

Which all sums up the need for effective leadership that adheres to God's word, will, and way. Adjusting one's ministry approaches is sometimes very necessary; however, capitulating to the ongoing demands of Postmodernism and deviating from God's template for humanity must be followed by clergy leaders versed in the African American church traditions.

Related Literature Summary

The literature woven throughout Chapter Two synthesizes the Bible-based expectations for effective leadership concerning CF amongst TLOT. Using the relevant literature key focus areas delineated from the purpose statement to close out this chapter is intended for the reader to understand the foundational perspectives guiding this dissertation. The diverse literature gathered and reviewed herein is designed to explore the phenomenon of effective church leadership (and ineffective church leadership, by extension) towards the marginalized through biblical-influenced community relationships.

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

In addition to exploring the research title, research problem, and purpose statement, establishing the rationale for this study and distinctive gap in the literature was of utmost importance. The researcher used existing literature associated with key aspects of this study, i.e., Newark, NJ churches that are bounded to African American traditions of serving byway of community formation. The aim of researching the existing literature that is comparable with this study are to,

1. Point out the shortcomings of the existing literature related to effectively serving in HPC,
2. Articulate the primary research goals of the existing literature related to effectively serving in HPC, and
3. Discuss how the existing literature did not touch on vital aspects of serving in HPC through the well-defined, God ordained standards of the Shepherd Motif doctrine

(Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20).

Stearn (1853), a Ministry leader from the first ever church established in Newark, NJ argued that the function of the church is to launch community formation and social order throughout the city through the furthering influence of its church's membership.

This Church is among the very oldest of our local institutions – perhaps the oldest of all. It was to establish it, and establish, under its fostering influence, a system of social order, of which its members should have a sole direction, that the fathers of this city came and planted themselves here in the wilderness. (p. 2)

That foundational research perspective provides historical, cultural and a unique ministry insight on church and community engagement from the oldest church in Newark, NJ. Although the era and setting was not deemed high-poverty as defined by this study (Hila, 2021, para. 2), Stern (1853) voiced the importance of church influenced CF through a *system of social order* was noteworthy when examining Newark, NJ ministry perspectives.

The first existing literature used is titled, Developing and equipping catholic lay leaders of Newark for urban ministry in the new millennium (Ugwuanya, 2004). Ugwuanya (2004) contends that better training for Catholic laity is substantially necessary for community programming and relations.

As many dioceses across the country are closing parishes due to lack of priests to run them, the Church must respond to this problem facing her and properly train, equip and empower the laity so that they will collaborate with the clergy in the Church's mission and her outreach to the poor and the needy. (Ugwuanya, 2004, p. 7)

Although, tellingly connected to CF in urban, high-poverty communities – this existing research failed to meaningfully articulate the significance of Christ-centered leadership in relationship to church governed community outreach and ministry expectations of clergy leaders. The researcher contends that training, serving, helping, feeding, protecting, teaching, and encouraging are all notable ministry standards and expectations tied to Ministry leader in HPC.

However, ministering through the God-purposed principles of the Shepherd Motif doctrine engages the servant leader with the mindset and lifestyle that expresses one's love for Jesus. Therefore, as a result, the force multiplying promises of God will manifest itself on one's life, ministry, and community that is being served.

The second existing literature used is titled, *Analyzing the effects of introducing soul care to an African American Men's Group at St. John's Community Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey* (Cadet, 2020). Cadet (2020) theorizes that "The issue of spiritual formation/soul care, as part of the discipleship ministry, is alien in many churches, particularly in African American churches" (p. iii). Using "an eight-session spiritual formation/soul care course designed for the male members of St. John's Community Baptist Church," "80% of the men showed an improvement in their emotional maturity" (Cadet, 2020).

Although, the research by Cadet (2020) was soundly connected with good intentions purposed for improving Ministry leaders in the space of emotional maturity, via, a spiritual formation/soul care course, it did not meaningfully tie more examples of Scriptural leaders exemplifying soul care, emotional maturity, and spiritual formation under duress. The researcher contends that Shepherd Motif doctrine governed church leadership sourced by God promotes effective church leadership in the areas of spiritual formation/soul care discipleship ministry in HPC.

Although the rationale for this study aligns with the existing literature, the rationale for this research study is to contribute in the space of community formation by way of effective church leadership in HPC. The primary distinctions (or Gap) representing this study from the existing literature noted are in the areas of 1) Exploring CF through effective Ministry leadership that focuses on serving TLOT (Matthew 25: 36 – 46) utilizing principles governed by the

Shepherd Motif doctrine, and 2) Exploring the phenomenon of serving in isolation in HPC using the lens of six focus areas outlined in the purpose statement. The researcher contends that addressing the phenomenon of churches in HPC increasingly serving in isolation must be met with Christian leaders driven by the Christ-centered standard of the Shepherd Motif doctrine.

Profile for the Current Study

The theological framework discussed in this chapter focuses on literature related to God ordained servant leadership with a ministry focus on the Shepherd Motif doctrine, community defined through the biblical worldview, and Christian leadership under duress. The theoretical framework discussed in this chapter focuses on literature related to various transformational leadership models and philosophies for intentionally improving in the space of community outreach versus serving in isolation. The related literature discussed in this chapter focuses on research related to the six focus areas outlined in the purpose statement.

The rationale for study and gap in the literature focuses on improving unaddressed ministry areas within the existing literature that can be better maximized by using principles, concepts, and themes delineated in the Shepherd Motif doctrine.

The peer approved and secondary literature in this chapter laid a foundational groundwork for the ensuing chapters for this study. The existing literature selected by the researcher were purposed to explore *Community Formation and Effective Leadership in African American Churches in High-poverty Communities*. The existing literature along with incorporating the documented responses of ten Ministry leaders (study participants) living and serving in the aggregate research population of Newark, NJ were very useful in answering the five RQ's pertinent to this study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOTHODOLOGY

This study's research methodology chapter is intended to educate readers of this qualitative phenomenological study in the areas of:

1. Research intent,
2. Specific designs and approaches used,
3. The researcher's role in the study,
4. Document using different types of data sources,
5. Use of specific protocols for recording data,
6. Analyzing gathered data through multiple steps of analysis, and
7. Using approaches to document the study's trustworthiness, via validation of the data collected using research steps related to credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 179).

This portion of the study describes the interviewing, transcribing, and coding schema processes.

This section also includes the necessary steps to get full approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), a required action in finalizing this dissertation study.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

The research problem stems from Christian leaders in urban, high-poverty communities ineffectively serving despite the biblical/theological expectations to lead through community and local connectedness. Seemingly bygone are those traditions where church leaders governed their respective churches and surrounding communities as a standard reflecting Christ-exemplified leadership. From OT traditions of covenant community steered by the Levites (Numbers 18:21) and pastoral care discussed in Ezekiel 34, to NT expectations for serving TLOT (Matthew

25:40–45; Acts 20:35; James 1:27; Galatians 6:2), church circles are increasingly serving in isolation and community disregard (LeMay, 2012; Pearcey, 2015).

In addition to the impact of Postmodernism on church leadership and the incremental decline in attendance and consistent community charity—serving through CF has been reduced to an unfamiliar social construct and phenomenon, which unfortunately contributes to a new normal of thinking (Pearcey, 2015). Even the exemplified ministries and the ability to serve under extreme cultural duress spotlighted by earlier church leaders and African American church traditions have been seemingly dismissed for a newer, more comfortable version of the Christian faith (Grenz, 1994; Gates, 2021).

The existing research studies used in this research do focus on two phases of church-centered CF. One places emphasis on training for staff and community programming (Ugwuanya, 2004), and the other Newark-based study focuses on developing a spiritual formation and soul care course for an African American church (Cadet, 2020). In addition to exploring and formulating approaches related to training for the ministry staff, church-spearheaded community programming, and spiritual formation, the goal of this research was to fulfill the gap within the existing research by, examining effective leadership via the Shepherd Motif doctrine and the six key areas outlined in the purpose statement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities. At this stage in the research, a servant-leader profile is generally defined as ministry leaders with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, 2003, pp. 296–301) in the following areas:

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community Formation Through Ministry Programing,
3. Serving the “Least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) in High-poverty Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress,
5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach, and
6. African American Ministry Traditions.

The servant-leader theory aligns with the biblical worldview and the Shepherd motif doctrine steering this study (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20).

Research Questions

To remind the reader and establish research and documentation cohesion, at this stage in the research process, it is imperative to reinforce the following research questions that guide this study:

RQ1. What biblical accountability do Christian leaders have in community formation models in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ2. What are proven biblical leadership skills needed to develop community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ3. How do postmodern cultural values affect Christian focused community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ4. What are the historical traditions of the African American church which serve to contribute to leadership skills for developing high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ5. How does Bible-based, effective church leadership develop and maintain biblical community and spiritual formation in high-poverty, urban communities?

The researcher surmised the five RQ’s based on personal lived experiences of growing up and performing outreach ministry work in multiple high-poverty, urban communities throughout

America. RQ1 was developed to explore the phenomenon of churches in HPC intentionally serving in isolation and not being accountable to biblical expectations to serve community. RQ2 was developed to explore the necessary ministry skills needed to effectively serve in HPC. RQ3 was developed to explore the nefarious Postmodern cultural values (i.e., relativism, rejection of objectivity, dependence on technology) in the space of church-driven CF in HPC.

RQ4 was developed to explore the incremental moving away from proven historical traditions of the AA church regarding serving through CF despite being under enormous cultural duress. And RQ5 was developed to explore ways to improve church programming in the areas of community and spiritual formation in HPC.

Research Design and Methodology

The qualitative approach and phenomenological design was used to explore *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). “Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study (p. 249). The researcher utilized three existing studies (Stearn, 1853; Ugwuanya, 2004; Cadet, 2020) that used the qualitative approach to explore or advance church-spearheaded community outreach in the aggregate city of Newark, NJ. Of the three qualitative study approaches, all but Cadet (2020) used the phenomenological strategy to qualify its respective research studies. Cadet (2020), in addition to using surveys, “required the use of two instruments: a quantitative pre- and post-assessment, and a qualitative one-on-one interview with each of the 15 participants” (p. iii).

The research approach and design strategy were utilized to integrate the core aspects of 10 interviewed study participants in relation to similar lived experiences serving as Ministry leaders in AA churches in Newark, NJ high-poverty communities. 25 total questions (5 primary/20 sub questions) were used for gathering data from person-to-person, interviewed ministry participants who shared similar experiences with the cultural phenomena.

The implementation process for this study's *research design and methodology* began with establishing the following qualitative research factors to scaffold the study: Natural setting, Researcher as a key instrument, Multiple sources of data, Inductive and deductive data analysis, Participants' meaning, Emergent design, Reflexivity, and Holistic account (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, pp. 181, 182). Additionally, the *research design and methodologies* used were purposefully aligned with the study's problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions in the categories and subcategories related to the processes and completion outline discussed in paragraph one of this chapter. All the foundational characteristics and procedures used in a qualitative phenomenological approach and design are ideal for completing and maximizing the study's final findings.

Setting

Newark, NJ, was intentionally selected by the researcher because it is a multifaceted city well-chronicled throughout history regarding poverty, rich African American church traditions, cultural and racial conflicts, and documented injustices. Franklin et al., (2021) states,

It is also critical to acknowledge that the modern socioeconomic state of Newark was largely determined decades ago; systems of structural racism have helped to translate poor conditions for minority groups during the 1950s and 1960s into poor conditions for minority groups now. The estimated poverty rate in Newark is generally 29% and, among children, increases to 39.5%. Newark had an estimated median household income in 2017 of USD 35,167 (compared to the New Jersey average of USD 80,088). Black and Hispanic or Latino individuals are more likely than their white Newark counterparts to live in poverty. (para 26)

Newark, New Jersey's most populated city (Fox, 2021) and one of America's largest cities was selected as the aggregate city because it captures all the variables necessary for maximizing this research and advancing ministry outreach in urban, high-poverty communities across the United States.

In terms of the current state of affairs associated with church centers in Newark, Governor Murphy, the present Governor of New Jersey allowed churches (and indoor spaces) to be reopened on May 28, 2021 after being suspended in March 2020 due to the rise of COVID 19 (nj.gov, 2021). Mayor Ras Baraka, the present Mayor of Newark, NJ stated the following about the Covid 19 which ultimately had 76,000 cases resulting in 1,199 deaths: "As we walk into 2021, we're gonna holler that we are winning, and this virus will not destroy our lives -- it will not demean us -- it will not separate us" (Abc7ny.com, 2020, para. 4). Along with those encouraging words, an article written in njmonthly.com., Gibson (2023) writes that "Some traditionally Black churches in cities like Newark and New Brunswick continue to represent urban communities even as they grow in size, but the farther into the suburbs you go, the broader the megachurch audience profile becomes." However, a New York Times article reported that,

Newark — New Jersey's biggest city, with a population of 311,000 — has seen homelessness worsen during the pandemic. The nonprofit that the city contracts with to do homeless outreach, Bridges, has tallied 1,366 people who have spent an unsheltered night so far this year. (Newman, 2021)

Which all points to the need for church-spearheaded CF and updated research on the current state of affairs associated with the large pockets of HP areas spread throughout Newark, NJ.

Participants

The research participants for this study are comprised of 10 church leaders who pastor and/or manage established African American churches located in a researcher-selected, socially and economically distressed (high-poverty) community in the research population of Newark,

NJ. The city of Newark is New Jersey's most populated city, and one of America's largest cities. (Fox, 2021).

The inclusion criteria and sample size for the 10 study participants and their respective churches were drawn using a *single-stage* sampling design where the "...sampling procedure is one in which the researcher has access to names in the population and can sample the people (or other elements) directly" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150). The type of sampling to obtain the 10 participants for the study is "a nonprobability sample (or *convenience sample*), in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability" (p. 150).

The specific identified stratifications (and demographics) for this study "represented in the sample reflects the true proportion in the population of individuals with certain characteristics" (pp. 150, 151) are as follows:

1. Ten male church leaders (ethnicity/race insignificant) who are married, reputable Christians in the roles of under-shepherds, pastors, and primary leaders of their respective church communities (1 Timothy 3:1–3; Titus 1:6–9).
2. Ministry leaders that lead their respective churches out of the African American church traditions of serving through CF.
3. Ministry leaders that lead churches in proximity to socially and economically distressed (high-poverty) communities of Newark, NJ.
4. Ministry leaders who are 40 years and older and have held the said leadership role in their respective churches for at least three (3) years.
5. Ministry leaders with an average church membership of 100 or more. And,
6. Ministry leaders with a biblical understanding of church leadership expectations related to ministering to TLOT and establishing Christ-centered communities.

Recruitment letters, via online advertisement sites, were advertised to potential study participants and church sites. Once study participants were thoroughly vetted using the researcher's inclusion criteria, recruitment, follow-up letters, a consent form to secure signed

agreements, and thank-you letters were initiated and signed for validations. Other relevant particulars involving securing study participants, prescreening process, and finalizing the interviewing processes are articulated in Appendices A, B, C, F, and H.

Ministry Experiences of Research Participants

The researcher interviewed ten participant-leaders with lived ministry experiences to qualify real clergy familiarities and perspectives from answered designed research questions. The interviewed study participants were 10 church leaders from 10 different African American churches in Newark, NJ in HP communities holding management or leadership positions with the status to make decisions at the executive level of a church and/or ministry. All of these identified themes and extrapolated key data are outlined within the purpose statement.

Reflecting the diversity within the Body of Christ, the multifaceted, nuanced, day-to-day occurrences of the interviewed study participants shaped provided their respective ministries and define effective or ineffective leadership based on the answering the research questions. To that point, Goller (2012) suggests, "Christian ministry is defined as work or experience that is undertaken in a focused effort to comply with the biblical commands to make disciples and to show the love of Christ" (p. 10).

It was the ministry experiences of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., advocating on behalf of people experiencing poverty, that influenced a statement in his last public address:

It's all right to talk about 'streets flowing with milk and honey,' but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three meals a day... We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God's children. (Gates, 2021, p. 147)

Akin to the miraculous birth, through the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Christ's early disciples were taught the NT phenomenon borne from the grace of Law and love over judgment.

The actual, documented urban-based ministry experiences are set to act as empirical evidence to account for Bible-based, useful leadership tied to serving TLOT. The researcher intends to explore the bridge between biblical expectations related to CF and the impactful insights learned from interviewed ministry leaders to frame the research, final findings, and new leadership competencies and ministry applications.

Role of the Researcher

In addition to the researcher being the primary instrumentation for this study, the role of reflexivity is key in identifying potential "...biases, values, and personal backgrounds, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status (SES) that shape their interpretations formed during a study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183).

When considering this researcher's impoverished social, economic, and Christian backgrounds, it is imperative to provide research participants and future readers with pertinent information contributing to how data is viewed and analyzed. The following overview of the researcher is relevant life experiences and possible biases or assumptions that may shape this research study:

Born and raised in a run-down neighborhood of New Brunswick, NJ, the middle child of five siblings (three boys and two girls), the researcher experienced the deprivation and lack of support that too often negates the potential of many living in urban landscapes.

A single mother raised the researcher and his siblings after the family was abandoned early by father. The researcher's mother—a devout Christian who instilled her faith and a strong belief in God in her children—did her best under extremely difficult conditions for the family. The five children of the Moore family constantly struggled and learned urban astuteness and survival skills from "the streets" that helped raise them. In that regard, The researcher points out,

The streets raised me... but Mama helped out, and jail was my father that influenced my life's route. The "block" was my home – because my house had no models, I chose my 'hood niggas, pissy corners with broken glass bottles. My motivation was hunger and a place to lay my head – and my instincts controlled my eyes, which saved me from being filled with lead. My social circumstances changed my religion. I even pondered, Who's our creator? But God was a blur because of an empty refrigerator. (Moore., K. p. 96)

From being an active drug dealer, to being a program participant and Youth Outreach Coordinator for the First Baptist Community Development Corporation (a non-profit arm of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Garden located in Somerset, NJ), the researcher experienced the possibilities of church-driven CF. Additionally, the researcher witnessed and played a role in the immediate and long-term impacts of ministry leadership-led CF despite the various social concerns near the very church that was largely responsible for redirecting his life. From children not selling and using drugs, to several teenagers finding gainful employment and entering college – the researcher actively participated in community-based programming intentionally focused on serving the surrounding neighborhoods.

Despite the researcher's actual lived experiences related to this research study's subject matter, the researcher continues to promote effective church leadership in the areas of achieving CF versus serving in isolation near high-poverty, urban communities. Therefore, this research is in alignment with the biblical worldview for serving TLOT (Matthew 25:36 – 46). Using a biblical lens, the researcher asserts that effective church leadership is accountable (through Christ) for impacting and influencing the surrounding neighborhoods/communities near their respective churches.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this study are vital in successfully finalizing this advanced dissertation. The following ethical agenda objectives are paramount throughout the interviewing and dissertation completion process:

1. Signed consent forms were collected before interviews from research participants,
2. Research participants must understand the purpose and goals of the study, and its Christ-centered worldview,
3. Discuss safety measures for interviews (esp. if face-to-face), that is, time, venues, and locations,
4. Confidentiality procedures were explained, and research participants were requested to sign to validate their agreement with the study,
5. All data collected, that is, recordings, documents, and videos, were kept in a secure area with access to the researcher only,
6. A debriefing occurred after each interview with research participants,
7. Study participants were compensated for interviews and thanked verbally and through letters,
8. At least two follow-up emails with updates were sent to all participants prior to the dissertation completion process,
9. digital links of completed dissertations were sent to all study participants; and
10. IRB approval from Liberty University.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

For this study, efficiently and effectively gathering data using the appropriate collection techniques was especially important when performing advanced research. In addressing the purpose statement, research problem, and research questions – various inquiry collection methods were used to gather insights from ministry leaders who serve in high-poverty communities where their respective churches are located. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “The data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study through sampling and recruitment; collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials; as well as establishing the protocol for recording

information” (p. 185). The goal of using the collection methods and instruments is to gather data related to the key areas outlined in the purpose statement.

Collection Methods

For this study, the researcher performed field testing, person-to-person interviews, observations, and documents to gather data. Gathering via documents also includes using digital audiovisual materials as a secondary collection method to verify and validate the lived experiences of study participants, ministry efforts, and historical insights.

Instruments and Protocols

For this study, the researcher developed and used Interview Protocols (Appendix F) when recording, observing, and interviewing the ten study participants interviewed for this study. The steps to complete the overall interviewing process included:

1. Field testing,
2. Interviewing,
- 3) Observations,
- 4) Document analyses,
- 5) Eliciting participants, and
- 6) Gathering/Recording Data, and Securing IRB Approval.

The 10 separate interviews were 30 to 45 minutes of length, audio recorded, and descriptive and reflective notes were taken. The rationale behind the procedure used stems from the qualitative approach and phenomenological design used for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher was the primary instrument for this study and operated as an observer/participant whose role is known to the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher was responsible for the initial development of the interview questions and sub-

questions, observation forms, checklists, textual or visual analysis, and strategies concerning completing the interviewing process.

The five RQ's (and sub questions) were based on the literature documented in Chapter Two. All the RQ's are heavily supported by both the theological and theoretical frameworks for this study. The literature discussed in the categories of Seven Leadership, Shepherd Motif Doctrine, Spiritual and Transformational Leadership, and Assertive Leadership strongly supports RQ1 and RQ2, along with the other literature within the said chapter. The literature within the Related literature section supports the intentions of RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5. The concluding verbiage, i.e., high-poverty, urban communities stated in each RQ is defined by a cultural high-poverty standard set by (Hila, 2021, para. 2). The researcher purposed all the RQs to keep the focus on the primary theme of serving "the least of these" (Matthew 25:36 – 46) in HPC.

The researcher also utilized MAXqda (www.maxqda.com/) – a management software designed for qualitative data analysis as a protocol procedure and as a necessary research instrument.

Procedures

The procedural portion of this research has various steps necessary in the dissertation completion process. The following procedural processes were used to navigate this study: Field Testing Process, Interview Process, Observations Process, Eliciting participants, Steps in gathering the data, and Securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Field Testing Process

For this process, the primary instruments tested during the field-testing process were interviews. Observations, document analysis, and audiovisual and digital materials were used to gather data. In addition to testing the interviewing process with research questions, the researcher

also pilot-tested the digital equipment and note-taking strategies to record the gathered data. All field-tested instruments were tested at least three times with budding and established ministry leaders familiar with Christ-centered CF. The instruments were tested for reliability, consistency, sampling, and ways to improve the interviewing process (University of Phoenix, 2015, para. 5).

The data collection methods began with performing field testing of the emergent questions by pilot testing students at Liberty University located in Lynchburg, VA. The small-scale pilot studies for this research were performed before interviewing study participants to check for errors, test the instruments, establishing time and cost factors, and amending the study topics, methods, questions, and sub-questions (Crossman, 2019, para 1).

The sequence in which the field testing were executed occurred as follows:

1. Three full-time Liberty University students familiar with serving or living in high-poverty communities were vetted and selected,
2. The field testing participants were informed of the study's purpose statement, research problem, research purposes, 30–45 minute interview length, venue location at university's library, and compensation for participating in the pilot test,
3. The researcher observed the field testing participants through taking nuanced notes related to better understanding "...the processes, culture, or people under study" (Delve et al., 2022, para. 2),
4. The researcher tested audiovisual and digital materials several times before interviewing and recording field testing participants,
5. The researcher documented the answered questions of field testing participants using established open-ended RQ's and audiovisual and digital materials,
6. All recordings were checked for clarity, saved for further review, and eventually deleted, and
7. Field testing participants were thanked and compensated for their assistance, 8) RQ's and sub-questions were changed accordingly based on pilot test.

Interview Process

The interview process began with sending recruitment letters to potential study participants and church sites, recruitment follow-up letters, and a consent form to secure signed agreements (Appendices A, B, C). Then, through mail, email, and phone correspondences, the researcher set person-to-person interview schedules, interview lengths, dates/times, locations, and study details with all the primed interviewees. The 10 interviewees were asked multiple sub-questions based on each of the five research questions and sub-questions established (Appendix F). Once all the interviews are completed, a first and second follow-up letter and a thank you letter was sent to the 10 study participants (Appendices D, E, H).

Validation standards for the information gathered in this study "...is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 199). However, to establish credibility, accuracy, and trustworthiness of findings, the "Use of *member checking* to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate" (p. 200). The validation of interview questions then supports the procedural outline for steering the multiple interviews.

Developing audiovisual digital materials was based on researching and gathering data via the Internet, libraries, photos, and art. When applicable, the researcher collected noted materials that confirmed, spotlighted, and brought attention to the research topic, purpose statement, and research questions. The collected material was developed throughout this study and organized and incorporated within the research accordingly. The materials were validated based on sound

historical documentation, reputable journalism and business practices, witness confirmation, and experiences.

The rationale for the student participant interviews was to get answers to the five research questions using the six key areas (themes) outlined in the purpose statement (Table 15). The answered RQ's subsequently supported the research findings and conclusions. Based on the intentionally chosen existing literature and documentation, the questions used for the interviews were designed to get to the root of the research problem and purpose statement. Given the research setting being tied to HP communities and potential ministry neglect from church leadership and their respective churches, the research questions and sub-questions are bibliometric.

The interviewee selection criteria is based on 10, 40-years or older individuals who are reputable, married, male church leaders (ethnicity and race insignificant). Additionally, interviewees were designated as under-shepherds, pastors, and primary leaders of their respective church communities in HPC of Newark, NJ. (See, Delimitations of the Research Design).

Observations Process

The participant as observer acted as an “observation role secondary to participant role” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 188) during the collection process. The development of the observation collection method consisted of observing and taking notes during each interview. All of which allowed the researcher to document seemingly insignificant yet meaningful factors that may be pertinent to the study.

Through employing the subjective method of qualitative observations, the research was able to capture and gather the nuanced intricacies understood through this researcher’s lens.

According to Delve et al. (2022), qualitative observation:

...enables the researcher to observe, interact and gain a rich picture of participants in their natural environment. This data collection method allows you to understand better the processes, culture, or people under study. Qualitative observations are usually used by social scientists, sociologists, and psychologists to gain a more comprehensive understanding of human and animal behavior. (para. 2)

Observation and interview protocols were used to better refine and define the research within the framework of gathering data using the said instrumentation. In that regard, Creswell and Creswell (2018) contend that observation protocols can begin with separate descriptive notes, i.e., “portraits of the participants, a reconstruction of dialogue, a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events, or activities” and include the researcher’s reflexive notes, that is, “...personal thoughts, such as “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (p. 190).

Document Analysis

The public and private documents developed and gathered throughout this emergent study were organized and incorporated within the study accordingly. The public and private documents were validated based on sound historical documentation, authenticity, reputable journalism, business practices, and witness confirmation and experiences.

The methods used for document analysis for this research are based on the thematic examination of documents, interview transcripts, and publications (i.e., articles, books, historical sermons, letters, diaries, legal documents, and newspaper clippings). Using a strategic inclusion criterion in which the content is examined, a combination of predetermined and visual images coding procedures were established for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 196, 197).

The researcher collected relevant data via documents. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “During the research process, the investigator may collect qualitative documents. These may be public documents (e.g., newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports) or private documents (e.g., personal journals and diaries, letters, e-mails)” (p. 187). Also, documenting, via gathering *digital audiovisual materials*, captured those meaningful real-life ministry stories that “...may take the form of photographs, art objects, videotapes, main website pages, e-mails, text messages, social media text, or any forms of sound” (p. 187).

Eliciting Participants

Eliciting participants who fit the interview selection criteria plays a significant role in this research. The following steps were taken during the recruitment process/strategy.

1. Determine and select potential ministry leaders (participants) and their churches in high-poverty communities in Newark, NJ.
2. Write and send a letter of introduction, then obtain relevant information from interested participants.

3. Inform potential participants of the Christ-centered benefits and additional compensation possibilities for participating in the research. And,
4. Provide agreeing participants with detailed information regarding the research study, including the research problem, purpose statement, and overall intent. Also, research times, dates, venues (or online), interview length, study insights, confidentiality, and integrity standards were made available for those set interview participants.

Steps in Gathering/Recording Data

The gathering and recording data procedures are multifaceted and vital components of securing the overall integrity of this research. The following procedural steps are imperative in capturing nuanced information in the lived experiences of ministry leaders who were interviewed.

The procedural plan to use each collection method to gather data is very important. The plan to use this method involves documenting observations via writing field notes throughout the interviewing process. The collection methods were used in the following ways:

1. The researcher established intentional, structured scheduling with interview participants through phone calls, video chats, mail, or emails.
2. Once interview participants were thoroughly informed of the research purposes and interviewing process – an agreement of times, dates, venues, and compensation per participant was confirmed.
3. The 10 separate interviews were 30 to 45 minutes of length, audio recorded, and descriptive and reflective notes were taken. And
4. Interviewed participants were verbally thanked, thanked via letter, and then sent a physical and digital copy of the researcher's final dissertation as a courtesy.

Any public and private documents, such as minutes of meetings, newspaper articles, journals, diaries, or letters related to researcher-selected participants and their respective churches and communities, were utilized when relevant to the research topic.

Recording data via digital equipment and note-taking were pilot-tested for effectiveness and efficiency. The field voice-recording device was purposefully designed to collect research

recordings effectively. The researcher used the Cornell note-taking method (Tamm, 2021) to document research notes. All gathered recordings were categorized appropriately and then stored securely in a safe place. Recording test runs were performed before interviews, and completed recordings were safeguarded, transcribed, and interpreted accordingly. Confidentiality and anonymity of data were agreed upon via signed documentation and processed and safeguarded according to national codes of ethics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The data-collection methods for this study was gathered through field testing, person-to-person interviews, observations, and useful documents. The rationale for selecting the methods are:

1. The researcher participated as an observer in a role secondary to the interviewing participants,
2. Face-to-face, one-on-one, or online interviews with the participants are options, and
3. Public and private documents can be used for research and audiovisual digital materials, such as, photographs, videotapes, art objects, computer messages, sounds, and film (pp. 188, 189).

During the observations, the researcher documented any nuanced information that applied to the research subject. For example, at an interviewing site – the researcher may document a selected church site’s hours of operation and resources available to the community. Even if interviews are performed using an online interviewing platform, verbal and non-verbal communication can add to the interpretation of the data collected. All the data was then validated, analyzed, interpreted, and translated into the final findings. The documents added complexity to the other research findings that contribute to the shaping, interpreting, and finalizing of this dissertation.

Securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018),

Researchers must have their research plans reviewed by an institutional review board (IRB) on their college and university campuses. IRB committees exist on campuses because federal regulations protect against human rights violations. The IRB committee requires the researcher to assess the potential risk to participants in a study, such as physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm. (p. 91)

In that regard, all the necessary IRB permissions, that is, instruments usage permissions, informed consent forms, implementation protocols, and other relevant information, must be taken by a researcher (pp. 91, 92). (See, Appendix I: IRB Approval Letter).

Data Analysis

Once collected and measured, the data were analyzed thoroughly through analysis methods (coding process) defined through themed and bracketed categories associated with trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, comfortability, and transferability. Within the data analysis process, “the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 194) were utilized. All of which assisted in making “...sense out of the text and image data” (p. 190) through transcribing, organizing, developing, identifying, validating, and summarizing the gathered data (pp. 190–198).

Analysis Methods

The following analysis methods exercised in this dissertation research study are

1. Transcription of answers from study participants,
2. Identifying themes, patterns, and relationships,
3. Development and Applying Codes,
4. Organization of data, and
5. Validation of the findings.

All of these were solidified through research measures to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Transcribing the gathered interview voice recordings is a significant part of analyzing and interpreting this research (Stuckey, 2014, para. 1). The transcribing process establishes accuracy, organization, and dependability, preparing for the coding process and evidenced-based interpretation within the research. The transcribing process was completed using Microsoft® Teams software—a trustworthy, reputable, and dependable transcription service.

Identifying and establishing the themes, patterns, and relationships is significant in the data analyses and coding processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 194). This research related all the themes and coding verbiage to the keywords supporting this study’s abstract, i.e., Christian Leadership, Inner-city, Poverty, Community formation, African American, Ministry, and Outreach. These are under the biblical worldview of leadership-spearheaded CF in high-poverty communities.

Developing and applying codes begins with generating themes based on the research problem, purpose statement, and research questions (p. 194). Additionally, ResearchArticles.com (2019) contends that

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative salient essence capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of a language based on visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation, field notes, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, e-mail correspondence, and so on. (para. 5)

The following predetermined code categories or code labels shaped the findings of this study:

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community formation through Ministry Programming,
3. Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) in High-poverty Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress,

5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach, and
6. African American Ministry Traditions.

The descriptions and themes were developed through the category of *expected codes*. Creswell and Creswell (2018) asserts, “Code on topics that readers would expect to find, based on the literature and common sense” (p. 195). In the coding process, the researcher used the phenomenological strategy of analyzing “significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called “an essence description” (p. 198). When using the scheme for research and coding, it involves “...generating categories of information (open coding), selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model (axial coding), and then explicating a story from the interconnection of these categories (selective coding)” (p. 198). Within the scope of this study’s emergent design (p. 182), a “combination of emerging and predetermined codes” (p. 196) was used to maximize the code schema process. (Appendix G).

The researcher used open and selective coding, along with emerging and predetermined codes to determine 70 Descriptive Codes (Tables 6 – 11). The descriptive codes used were determined by ministry needs and priorities to effectively serve in urban, HPC as a church leader. The ministry rationale of serving TLOT (Matthew 25:36 – 46) was then used as a standard to prioritize the 70 descriptive codes into 39 identified general themes (Table 13) purposed for outreach ministry in high-poverty, urban communities.

The primary method for organizing data during the data analysis utilized a qualitative computer software program designed to assist advanced research students (p. 192). The program the researcher used is MAXqda (www.maxqda.com/). Additionally, the researcher utilized a separate notebook to organize the researcher’s controlled thoughts, organizational notes, plans,

and ways to improve data analysis. After generating descriptive codes for key areas of each six data sets, in Chapter Four—the researcher:

1. Perused through the six data sets (Tables 6–11) and established assigned meaning-based points to corresponding descriptive codes, respondents, and percentages,
2. Identified general themes based on the calculated outcomes of perused data sets (see Table 13), and
3. Integrated and summarized data purposed to finalize results for Chapter Four results; and
4. Addressed research questions.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (p. 199). It is followed using multiple validity procedures, i.e., the different data sources, using the member checking method, writing a thorough description of the findings, and clarifying biases (p. 200). For this research study, a major part of validating the data is using the following terms, i.e., “*trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility*” (p. 200). The study was authenticated through dependability, confirmability, and transferability processes.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness that confirms the validity and reliability of this qualitative research is hinged on “four key components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Devault, 2019).

Credibility

This research used “Triangulation and member checks” to “...help establish credibility and contribute to trustworthiness” (para. 3). Devault (2019) further states that

Triangulation asks the same research questions of different study participants and collects data from different sources through different methods to answer the same

questions. Member checks occur when researchers ask participants to review the data collected by interviewers and the researchers' interpretations of that data. (para. 4)

In establishing trustworthiness, the researcher used a two-pronged examination strategy that produced credibility to the analysis process. The researcher used the triangulation of sources approach during with individual study participant interviews to

1. Involve different data collection sources, that is, interviews, observations, and document analysis to check the consistency of the findings, and
2. Return answered RQ's to study participants to engage them in the research process by validating the credibility of their individual results and the researchers' interpretations of the data.

Dependability

According to Ali and Yusof (2011), qualitative research dependability is dependent on implementing corresponding procedures and extensive methodological descriptions that support the research to be replicated. For this research, both the research context and processes were aligned and consistent with the research conclusions and how the overall study was procedurally outlined. These dependable steps are thoroughly presented and primed for replication within the scope of using the qualitative approach and phenomenological design (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 4; p. 249) In appraising the research of interviewed study participants, the researcher's interpretations, and final conclusions – the procedural protocols and methodological portions of this study are sound, verifiable, and can be reduplicated by the reader. Additionally, the required documentation for this dissertation study was submitted and approved by Liberty University's IRB.

Confirmability

Based on the processes and procedures utilized for gathering and interpreting the data within this study, readers can efficiently and effectively track the audit trail for replication.

Default (2019) states: “It's important for other researchers to be able to replicate the results to show that those results are a product of independent research methods and not of conscious or unconscious bias” (para. 9). The reader can replicate this study by reviewing the established data and interpretations of the findings herein, and following the step-by-step procedures outlined and discussed throughout this study.

Transferability

Although, “Transferability generalizes study findings and attempts to apply them to other situations and contexts. Researchers cannot prove definitively that outcomes based on the interpretation of the data are transferable, but they can establish that it is likely” (para. 5).

Purposive sampling was used “to maximize specific data relative to the context in which it was collected” (para. 5). This practice of nonprobability sampling further strengthened the validation and reliability of this study (para. 6). The ten study participants and their respective church sites were randomly selected from an online platform promoting a Recruitment Letter (Appendix A) staged by the researcher. Study participants were thoroughly vetted based on established criteria connected to the research population, setting, and participants. The reliability of this research is especially valid in urban, high-poverty settings, specifically Ministry leaders performing community outreach, versus other communities that are not socially and economically distressed.

Chapter Summary

The research methodology for Chapter Three used various research methodologies (how-to steps) to navigate through the qualitative approach and phenomenological design covered in this chapter. The five research questions aimed to explore *community formation and effective*

leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities through the various methodologies discussed in this chapter.

Based on the facilitating approaches, the interviews were observed, audio-recorded, documented, analyzed, bracketed, and validated for reliability, consistency, and transferability. The validation process includes triangulation of data, member checking, repeated observations, peer examination, participatory modes of research, and clarification of researcher bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 208). After the data was coded and transcribed, the data was reviewed, organized, and prepared for analysis. Raw data (transcripts, field notes, and images) were processed into narratives shaping the study's findings (p. 194).

The methodology-related research classifications utilized in this study are Research Design Synopsis, Setting, Participants, Role of the Researcher, Ethical Considerations, Data Collection Methods and Instruments, Procedures, Data Analysis, and Chapter Summary.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis. Distinct from the methodological information discussed in Chapter Three, the results herein are designed to launch the interpretation and discussion of outcomes outlined in Chapter Five. The data analysis process findings were processed using:

1. Compilation Protocol and Measures,
2. Demographic and Sample Data,
3. Data Analysis and Findings, and
4. Evaluation of the Research Design.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore *Community Formation and Effective Leadership in African American Churches in High-poverty Communities*. At this stage in the research, a servant-leader profile is generally defined as ministry leaders with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, 2003, pp. 296–301) in the following areas:

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community Formation Through Ministry Programming,
3. Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) in High-poverty Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress,
5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach, and
6. African American Ministry Traditions.

The servant-leader theory aligns with the biblical worldview and the Shepherd motif doctrine steering this study (Ezekiel 34:1–6; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 78:70–72; Matthew 25:35–46).

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The researcher gathered all the data through person-to-person, semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol consisted of 20 exploratory research questions (five RQ's and four sub-questions per RQ) (See, Appendix F). The five broad central research questions “ask for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept in a study.” The following sub-questions “narrow the focus of the study but leave open the questioning” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 133). During the actual interviews with study participants, the researcher asked additional open-ended questions that were not predetermined for clarification purposes. In exploring the phenomena, additional non-predetermined open-ended questions were asked to gather nuanced information related to cultural, personal, and societal factors not answered from the supporting research questions.

All the study participants were asked structured questions in topic and order. The researcher was the primary instrument for this study and operated as an observer/participant whose role was known to the study participants.

After all study participants were interviewed and recorded, all gathered data was transcribed from audio into text using Microsoft® Teams software, a qualitative transcription service to transcribe data. The transcribed data was securely uploaded to the researcher's personal computer and then organized for the code schema process. The researcher used MAXqda (www.maxqda.com/), a tenable and secured information management software designed for qualitative data analysis to effectively and efficiently detect emerging codes to complete the coding and thematizing processes. Creswell and Creswell (2018) contend, “Qualitative software programs have become quite popular, and they help researchers organize, sort, and search for information in text or image databases...” (p. 192). The researcher also used

line-by-line coding (pp. 194–197) to generate additional relevant descriptive codes. The researcher perused through the six data sets and assigned a meaningful point to each of the corresponding descriptive codes. The respondent totals from those points were calculated into percentages, then general themes were eventually identified for each of the six data sets.

The following research questions were developed to understand the lived experiences of ten study participants in relation to exploring *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*:

RQ1. What accountability do Christian leaders have in community formation models in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ2. What are proven leadership skills needed to develop community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ3. How do postmodern cultural values affect community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ4. What are the historical traditions of the African American church which serve to contribute to leadership skills for developing high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ5. How does effective church leadership develop and maintain community and spiritual formation in high-poverty, urban communities?

Demographic and Sample Data

The inclusion criteria (See, Participants, p. 81) for this study include the following primary demographic characteristics and sample data:

1. 10 clergy leaders pastoring or managing African American churches located in high-poverty communities within the research population of Newark, NJ, and
2. Ministry leaders who are 40 years or older.

The clergy leaders (study participants) for this research generally consisted of the following Christian denominations: Baptist (7), Catholic (2), and Methodist (1). Of the 10 ages of the study participants, the median age of the male study participants was 46.9-years-old. The

racial ethnicity of the participants was generally African American (8), with one (1) Nigerian, and one (1) Latino. The church roles of the interviewed participants were largely tied to outreach ministry (6), along with a pastor (1), a deacon (1), and two (2) others with ministry roles connected with this research study (Table 3).

To protect the individual identities, gathered information, and confidentiality of research participants and their respective church locations, a pseudonym per study participant and church site was utilized by the researcher during the interview process. The overview summarized in Table 3 provides the pseudonym-veiled study participants/site's church denominations, gender/age, ethnicities, and ministry roles.

Table 3

Interviewed Study Participants Overview

Clergy Leader Pseudonym/Site Name	Church Denominations	Gender/Ages	Ethnicities	Roles
Participant 1/ <i>Site A</i>	Baptist	Male/47	Nigerian	Outreach Minister
Participant 2/ <i>Site B</i>	Catholic	Male/41	African American	Outreach Worker
Participant 3/ <i>Site C</i>	Baptist	Male/48	African American	Team Leader
Participant 4/ <i>Site D</i>	Baptist	Male/42	African American	Youth Mentor / Outreach Worker
Participant 5/ <i>Site E</i>	Catholic	Male/46	Latino	Ministry Teacher / Outreach Worker
Participant 6/ <i>Site F</i>	Baptist	Male/52	African American	Deacon / Com. Leader
Participant 7/ <i>Site G</i>	Southern Baptist	Male/45	African American	Director of Sunday Serving
Participant 8/ <i>Site H</i>	Baptist	Male/49	African American	Com. Outreach
Participant 9/ <i>Site I</i>	Methodist	Male/51	African American	Pastor
Participant 10/ <i>Site J</i>	Baptist	Male/48	African American	Youth Outreach

Ten active clergy leaders and ten churches located in Newark, NJ, made up the sample for this study. The ten clergy leaders and their corresponding churches were selected based on the particulars necessary for the aggregate city in relation to poverty, African American church traditions, cultural and racial conflicts, and injustices. The participants were recruited using online social sites like Facebook and Craigslist. The interview format for all the interviews was person-to-person. Interested recruits were thoroughly vetted for the purposes of aligning with predetermined criteria established for the research study's population, setting, and participants.

All the interviews were conducted person-to-person in the city of Newark, NJ, between the dates of August 11th–17th, 2023. Interviews one, two, and three were conducted and completed on August 11, 2023. Interviews four and five were conducted and completed on August 16, 2023. Interviews six, seven, and eight were conducted and completed on August 16, 2023. Interviews nine and ten were conducted and completed on August 17, 2023. Collectively, a total of 388 minutes of audio recordings was collected from all ten of the interviewed study participants. On average, the duration of the interviews was 38.8 minutes. All the data retrieved during the interviewing process yielded 61 pages of transcripts, with an average of 6.1 pages per transcript (Table 4).

The overview summarized in Table 4 provides the pseudonym-veiled study participants/site's political wards, interview dates, time stamps/length of interview, interview format, and number of pages transcribed. The participating church sites involved in this study were all located in high-poverty (Hila, 2021, para. 2) communities. All selected churches had majority African American followership's and placed an emphasis on serving by way of AA church traditions related to community formation. The ten study participants were selected from

the following five political wards of Newark, NJ: North (3), South (3), East (1), West (1), and Central (2).

Table 4

Interview/Participant Data Description Information

Clergy Leader/Site Pseudonym Names	Political Ward	INTV. Dates	Time Stamps / Lengths	Inter. Format <i>Person-to-person / Digital</i>	No. of Pages per TSCP
Participant 1 / <i>Site A</i>	North	8/11/2023	5:25 PM (36m)	Person-to-Person	6
Participant 2 / <i>Site B</i>	North	8/11/2023	6:15 PM (35m)	Person-to-Person	7
Participant 3 / <i>Site C</i>	Central	8/11/2023	8:30 PM (37m)	Person-to-Person	6
Participant 4 / <i>Site D</i>	South	8/14/2023	7:18 PM (44m)	Person-to-Person	6
Participant 5 / <i>Site E</i>	South	8/14/2023	8:40 PM (36m)	Person-to-Person	5
Participant 6 / <i>Site F</i>	East	8/16/2023	9:52 AM (35m)	Person-to-Person	7
Participant 7 / <i>Site G</i>	West	8/16/2023	11:40 AM (42m)	Person-to-Person	6
Participant 8 / <i>Site H</i>	South	8/16/2023	1:17 PM (44m)	Person-to-Person	7
Participant 9 / <i>Site I</i>	North	8/17/2023	2:34 PM (41m)	Person-to-Person	5
Participant 10 / <i>Site J</i>	Central	8/17/2023	3:13 PM (38m)	Person-to-Person	6

Participants & Church Sites

Participant 1/Site A

Interviewed in the North ward of Newark, NJ – *Participant 1/Site A* was a 47-year-old, Nigerian *Outreach Minister* serving at his Baptist church for seven years. *Participant 1* expressed an understanding of the biblical expectations related to effective Christian leadership in the areas of CF, serving the poor, serving under duress, and bygone AA ministry traditions. *Participant 1* had a limited knowledge regarding Postmodernism and its impact on the culture at large.

Participant 2/Site B

Interviewed in the North ward of Newark, NJ – *Participant 2/Site B* was a 41-year-old African American *Outreach Worker* serving at his Catholic church for six years. *Participant 2* had a passion for serving the city’s poor and expressed pride to be a servant-leader. *Participant 2*

discussed how his church takes serving TLOT very seriously and verbalized the significance of those old African American ministry traditions and CF.

Participant 3/Site C

Interviewed in the Central ward of Newark, NJ—*Participant 3/Site C* was a 48-year-old, African American *Team Leader* serving at his Baptist church for four years. As a ministry leader at his church, *Participant 3* believed that serving in isolation is not the will of God, and reaching back in the community is a substantial part of the Christian faith.

Participant 4/Site D

Interviewed in the South ward of Newark, NJ—*Participant 4/Site D* was a 42-year-old, African American *Youth Mentor/Outreach Worker* serving at his Baptist church for three years. In the space of effective leadership, *Participant 4* verbalized his passion to serve young people contending with growing up in poverty. *Participant 4* articulated the importance of being consistent and intentional when serving the poor and addicted amongst us.

Participant 5/Site E

Interviewed in the South ward of Newark, NJ—*Participant 5/Site E* was a 46-year-old, Latino *Ministry Teacher/Outreach Worker* serving at his Catholic church for nine years. *Participant 5*, an active member of his church's outreach team enjoys serving and building the community that he lives and works in. *Participant 5* stressed that serving must be done by responsible Christian leadership regardless of the inevitable pressures from people and culture at large.

Participant 6/Site F

Interviewed in the East ward of Newark, NJ—*Participant 6/Site F* was a 52-year-old, African American *Deacon/Community Leader* serving at his Baptist church for 11 years.

Participant 6 confirmed that growing up in the Black church taught him that serving and community are one in the same. *Participant 6* believes that outreach ministries toward TLOT in a church define the intentions of its leadership.

Participant 7/Site G

Interviewed in the West ward of Newark, NJ – *Participant 7/Site G* was a 45-year-old, African American *Director of Sunday Serving* at his Southern Baptist church for five years. *Participant 7*, a Master's level theology student, stressed the importance of community-based outreach ministry and serving the poor. *Participant 7* also discussed the enormous impact of secular humanism and postmodernism on the world and the need for church leaders to combat it aggressively.

Participant 8/Site H

Interviewed in the South ward of Newark, NJ – *Participant 8/Site H* was a 49-year-old, African American *Community Outreach Worker* serving at his Baptist church for nine years. *Participant 8* believes that effective leadership in the church begins and ends with consistent relationships with the people in the community. *Participant 8* pointed out that many churches today are declining in attendance due to lack of authentic leadership and the inability to reach their communities with the saving message of Jesus.

Participant 9/Site I

Interviewed in the North ward of Newark, NJ – *Participant 9/Site I* was a 51-year-old, African American *Pastor* serving at his Methodist church for eight years. *Participant 9* placed a lot of emphasis on biblical eschatology and the need for Ministry leaders to be spiritually prepared to respond to the impact of gross societal sins before the impending Rapture occurs (1 Corinthians 15:52). *Participant 9*, serving at his store front church believes that a church leader

must be ready for the uncertainties, inevitabilities, and safety concerns when it comes to participating in urban outreach ministries.

Participant 10/Site J

Interviewed in the Central ward of Newark, NJ – *Participant 10/Site J* was a 48-year-old, African American *Youth Outreach Worker* serving at his Baptist church for five years. *Participant 10* placed a large emphasis on community outreach toward the youth, their grades, and parental accountability. *Participant 10*, a recovering addict, believes that anyone can be saved if the right person brings the healing principles of Jesus to the lost, hungry, and unbelieving.

Data Analysis and Findings

For this section, the researcher reported the research findings according to the data analysis procedures of Chapter Three. The six data sets are titled from the six key areas outlined in the purpose statement. The data analysis and findings herein was initiated by:

1. Organizing of the Data,
2. Phase One: Identifying General Themes,
3. Integrated and Summarized Phase One Data,
4. Phase Two: Processing Identified General Themes,
5. Phase Three: Labelling/Prioritizing Processed Identified General Themes,
6. Phase Four: Addressing the Results of Research Questions (Table 5), and
7. Evaluating the research design's strengths and weaknesses.

Table 5*Data Analysis and Findings – Phases and Descriptions*

Phase One: Identifying General Themes	Prioritized or ranked the respondent totals and percentages from 100% - 0% to spotlight relevant and applicable ministry matters.
Integrated and Summarized Phase One Data	Provides an integrated and summarized spotlight of the <i>lowest to the highest percentages (0% - 50%)</i> from Phase One's calculated six Data Sets (Tables 6 – 11) which initially prioritized the 70 descriptive codes from the <i>highest to the lowest (100% - 0%)</i> to produce the 39 identified general themes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table 12: Talled Data of Identified Themes • Table 13: Identified General Themes from Ministry Priority
Phase Two: Processing Identified General Themes	Prioritized the lowest percentages (0% – 50%) of Phase One's calculations based on ministry neglected categories tied to pertinent ministry descriptive codes.
Phase Three: Labelling/Prioritizing Processed Identified General Themes	Processed and labelled identified general themes to represent the <i>critical, significant, and concerning</i> ministry priorities needed to serve in high-poverty, urban communities.
Phase Four: Addressing the Results of Research Questions via Key Areas	Addressed each RQ with 1) The researcher's RQ intentions, 2) Calculated data associated with the final High Impact/Urgency and Ministry Priority Rankings, 3) Relevant literature documented in Chapter Two, and 4) Meaningful perspectives from study participants that further contextualized and substantiated the RQ's.

Organizing of the Data

The researcher initiated meaningful organizing of the data during the data collection process. Once the study participants were interviewed and the recordings transcribed and privately secured, the researcher performed the following to organize the data for this study:

1. Assigned pseudonyms to the ten study participants and their participating churches to further secure their confidentiality.
2. Processed reviewed transcripts using MAXqda (www.maxqda.com/) – a management software designed for qualitative data analysis, and a line-by-line coding process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, pp. 194 – 197) to generate descriptive codes for key areas of each of the six data sets (Tables 6 – 10).
3. Established ten verbatim Microsoft Word transcriptions from the ten student participant interview recordings.
4. Wrote notes related to research steps, miscellaneous study thoughts, and research structures needed. And,

5. Password-protected computer where all the digital files were saved.

Phase One: Identifying General Themes

Generating the primary themes for this portion of the research was initialized by perusing through the six data sets (Tables 6 – 11) and calculating the percentages of respondent totals from the descriptive codes within the six data sets. Using the code schema process, the researcher generated 70 descriptive codes and divided them accordingly to the six key areas associated with the six data sets. The 70 descriptive codes (per data set) calculated the respondent totals and percentages from the *highest to the lowest* (100% - 0%), which were later recalculated in Phase Two to determine the 39 identified general themes (Table 13) used to establish the research findings and conclusions. The prioritized descriptive codes for each data set (Tables 6 – 11) were assigned to the following RQ's that governs this dissertation study.

Research Question 1

Data Set 1: Effective Christian Leadership (Key Area 1), assigned to RQ1, ranked relevant descriptive codes from respondent totals and percentages from highest to lowest as Phase One's initial step to identifying general themes.

Table 6

Data Set 1 Effective Church Leadership

Key Area	Descriptive Codes	Respondents	Ranked %'s
Effective Christian Leadership	1. Effective communicator	8	1. 80%
	2. Emotional/Culturally intelligence	7	2. 70%
	3. "the least of these" (Mat. 25:36 – 46)	7	2. 70%
	4. The Great Commission (Mat. 28:16 – 20)	7	2. 70%
	5. Proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003)	6	3. 60%
	6. Christ-centered integrity*	5	4. 50%
	7. Vision-driven*	5	4. 50%
	8. Establishes Community Collaborations*	3	5. 30%

	9. Delegates responsibilities*	3	5. 30%
	10. Active followership*	3	5. 30%

Research Question 2

Data Set 2: Community Formation (Key Area 2), assigned to RQ2, ranked relevant descriptive codes from respondent totals and percentages from highest to lowest as the initial step to identifying general themes.

Table 7

Data Set 2 Community Formation through Ministry Programing

Key Area	Descriptive Codes	Respondents	Ranked %'s
Community formation through Ministry Programing	1. Church Website/Social Media Sites	7	1. 70%
	2. Serving the Poor/Homeless Ministry	7	1. 70%
	3. Church/Neighborhood Fellowshiping	6	2. 60%
	4. Youth Ministries	6	2. 60%
	5. Church as Advocacy for Community*	4	3. 40%
	6. Drug Addiction Outreach*	4	3. 40%
	7. Community Spiritual Formation*	3	4. 30%
	8. Community Collaborations*	3	4. 30%
	9. Housing/Employment Resources*	3	4. 30%
	10. Staff Development and Training*	2	5. 20%
	11. Elderly/Sick and Shut-in ministry*	2	5. 20%
	12. Court/Law Enforcement Relations*	1	6. 10%
	13. Community Strategic Plan*	1	6. 10%
	14. Church/Community Liaison*	1	6. 10%
	15. Jail/Prison Ministries*	1	6. 10%

Research Question 3

Data Set 5: Impact of Postmodernism (Key Area 5), assigned to RQ3, ranked relevant descriptive codes from respondent totals and percentages from highest to lowest as the initial step to identifying general themes.

Table 8*Data Set 5 Impact of Postmodernism*

Key Area	Descriptive Codes	Respondents	Ranked %'s
Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach	1. Negatives of Mass/Social Media/Internet	10	1. 100%
	2. Lost Church Traditions	9	2. 90%
	3. Philosophical/Ideological views	9	2. 90%
	4. Use of Technology for Outreach Ministry	7	3. 70%
	5. Political correctness, Cancel culture, Tolerance, Acceptance	6	4. 60%
	6. Understanding of Eschatology*	5	5. 50%
	7. Choosing Worldliness over God*	5	5. 50%
	8. Ministry Approach/Design*	4	6. 40%
	9. Church Acceptance from Community*	4	6. 40%
	10. New Age Ministry Training*	2	7. 20%

Research Question 4

Data Set 4: Serving Under Cultural Duress (Key Area 4), assigned to RQ4, ranked relevant Descriptive codes from respondent totals and percentages from highest to lowest as the initial step to identifying general themes.

Table 9*Data Set 4 Serving Under Cultural Duress*

Key Area	Descriptive Codes	Respondents	Ranked %'s
Serving Under Cultural Duress	1. Plans to Better Serve Under Duress	6	1. 60%
	2. Biblical Expectations*	4	2. 40%
	3. Expected Persecution Worldview*	4	2. 40%
	4. Courageous Leadership*	4	2. 40%
	5. Staff Fear/Excuses/Laziness*	4	2. 40%
	6. Incidents against Church Membership*	2	3. 20%
	7. Safety in High Crime areas*	1	4. 10%
	8. Not the vision of Church*	0	5. 0%
	9. Preference to Serve in Isolation*	0	5. 0%
	10. Refuse to Serve Under Duress*	0	5. 0%

Data Set 6: (Key Area 6) was also assigned to RQ4, ranked relevant *descriptive codes* from respondent totals and percentages from highest to lowest as the initial step to identifying general themes.

Table 10

Data Set 6 African American Church Traditions

Key Area	Descriptive Codes	Respondents	Ranked %'s
African American Ministry Traditions	1. Solid Pastoring/Gospel music	8	1. 80%
	2. Community Relationships/Fellowship	8	1. 80%
	3. Youth/Family Support	7	2. 70%
	4. Intentional Community Outreach	7	2. 70%
	5. Congregational/Neighborhood Support	7	2. 70%
	6. Church/Community Leadership	6	3. 60%
	7. Church as Community Hub	6	3. 60%
	8. Welcoming Church Environment	6	3. 60%
	9. Support for Church Leadership*	5	4. 50%
	10. Liberation theology*	5	5. 30%

Research Question 5

Data Set 3: Serving the “least of these” (Key Area 3), assigned to RQ5, ranked relevant descriptive codes from respondent totals and percentages from highest to lowest as the initial step to identifying general themes.

Table 11

Data Set 3 Serving the “least of these”

Key Area	Descriptive Codes	Respondents	Ranked %'s
Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 46) in High-poverty Urban Communities	1. Homeless Outreach	7	1. 70%
	2. Youth Outreach	6	2. 60%
	3. Safety Training/Crime concerns	6	2. 60%
	4. N/A and A/A*	4	3. 40%
	5. Resource Information*	4	3. 40%
	6. Church Informational tracks*	3	4. 30%
	7. Housing/Employment Support*	3	4. 30%
	8. Community Advocacy*	3	4. 30%

	9. Clothing Closet*	3	4. 30%
	10. Persons with Disabilities*	1	5. 10%
	11. Prison Ministries*	1	5. 10%
	12. Foodbank/Feeding Programs*	1	5. 10%
	13. Church Emergency Contact #*	1	5. 10%
	14. Specialized Training*	1	5. 10%
	15. Criminal Justice System Liaison*	0	6. 0%

Integrated and Summarized Phase One Data

Based on the outcomes of the lowest ranked 70 Descriptive codes from the Data Sets (Tables 6–11), the identified general themes were integrated and summarized into the following tallied categories:

1. High Impact/Urgency %'s calculated from the lowest to highest,
2. Ministry priority rankings based on identifying language, and
3. 39 identified themes coupled with an abbreviation (Table 12 – 13).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested “Ways to integrate the quantitative and qualitative data, such as one database, could be used to check the accuracy (validity) of the other database” (p. 14).

Table 12*Tallied Data of Identified Themes*

High Impact/Urgency %'s from Data Sets (from Lowest to Highest)	Tallied Ministry Priority Ranks	Identified Themes Per Ministry Priority Rank and Assigned Abbreviations
20% – 30%	Significant (2)	ECL: Community Collaborations ECL: Delegates responsibilities
40% – 50%	Concerning (1)	ECL: Christ-centered integrity ECL: Vision-driven
0% – 10%	Critical (5)	CFTML: Court/Law Enforcement Relations CFTML: Community Strategic Plan CFTML: Church/Community Liaison CFTML: Jail/Prison Ministries CFTML: Com. Spiritual Formation
20% – 30%	Significant (5)	CFTML: Community Collaborations CFTML: Housing/Employment CFTML: Staff Dev. and Training CFTML: Elderly/Sick and Shut-in CFTML: Church as Advocacy for Community
40% – 50%	Concerning (1)	CFTML: Drug Addiction Outreach
0% – 10%	Critical (6)	TLOT: Persons with Disabilities TLOT: Prison Ministries TLOT: Foodbank/Feeding Programs TLOT: Church Emergency Contact # TLOT: Specialized Training TLOT: Criminal Justice System Liaison
20% – 30%	Significant (4)	TLOT: Christian Information TLOT: Housing/Employment Support TLOT: Community Advocacy TLOT: Clothing Support
40% – 50%	Concerning (2)	TLOT: N/A and A/A TLOT: Resource Information
0% – 10%	Critical (1)	SUCD: Safety in High Crime areas
20% – 30%	Significant (1)	SUCD: Incidents against Church Membership
40% – 50%	Concerning (4)	SUCD: Biblical Expectations SUCD: Expected Persecution Worldview SUCD: Courageous Leadership SUCD: Staff Fear/Excuses/Laziness
20% – 30%	Significant (1)	IOP: New Age Ministry Training
40% – 50%	Concerning (4)	IOP: Ministry Approach/Design IOP: Church Acceptance from Community IOP: Understanding of Eschatology IOP: Choosing Worldliness over God
20% – 30%	Significant (1)	AAMT: Liberation theology
40% – 50%	Concerning (1)	AAMT: Support for Church Leadership

Table 13

Identified General Themes from Ministry Priority Rankings of 0% - 50%

39 Identified Themes (processed Descriptive Codes)

<p>Effective Christian Leadership (ECL): Community Collaborations; Delegates responsibilities; Christ-centered integrity, Vision-driven.</p>
<p>Community formation through Ministry Programing (CFTML): Court/Law Enforcement Relations; Community Strategic Plan; Church/Community Liaison; Jail/Prison Ministries; Com. Spiritual Formation; Community Collaborations; Housing/Employment; Staff Dev. and Training; Elderly/Sick and Shut-in; Church as Advocacy for Community; Drug Addiction Outreach.</p>
<p>Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 46) in HPC (TLOT): Persons with Disabilities; Prison Ministries; Foodbank/Feeding Programs; Church Emergency Contact; Specialized Training; Criminal Justice System Liaison; Christian Information; Housing/Employment Support; Community Advocacy; Clothing Support; N/A and A/A; Resource Information.</p>
<p>Serving Under Cultural Duress (SUCD): Safety in High Crime areas; Incidents against Church Membership; Biblical Expectations; Expected Persecution Worldview; Courageous Leadership; Staff Fear/Excuses/Laziness.</p>
<p>Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach (IOP): New Age Ministry Training; Ministry Approach/Design; Church Acceptance from Community; Understanding of Eschatology; Choosing Worldliness over God.</p>
<p>African American Ministry Traditions (AAMT): Liberation theology; Support for Church Leadership.</p>

Phase Two: Processing Identified General Themes

Phase Two processed the final 39 *identified general themes* by calculating the lower percentages (0% - 50%) of Phase One’s data sets that were initially calculated from highest to lowest (100% – 0%). The logic of using this method is based on categorizing descriptive codes to further identify general themes pertinent to undermentioned, under addressed, and unaddressed areas necessary to effectively serve in HPC. Participant 8/Site H, from the South ward of Newark, NJ said, “In the neighborhoods that we serve, we try to help with the children and homeless people first because a lot of people are quick to look past them.”

The researcher used the ministry rationale of serving TLOT (Matthew 25:36 – 46) as a standard to prioritize the 70 descriptive codes into 39 identified general themes purposed for outreach ministry in high-poverty, urban communities. The 39 identified general themes were then processed into labelled priorities based on ministry need, per study participants responses.

The remaining 31 higher respondent percentages of 60% - 100% calculated from the data sets (Tables 6 – 11) used in this study represent low urgency categories and suggested focus matters that will not be factored into the Phase One integrating and summarizing description (Table 12), addressed research questions, and final findings and conclusions. However, the data findings can be observed by readers in (Tables 6 – 11). For Phase Two, Both the lower (0% - 50%) and higher (60% - 100%) percentages were assigned descriptive labels to prioritize the impact and urgency of ministry categories in Phase Three analysis of findings process:

- 0% – 50% (**Critical**: 0% – 10%, **Significant**: 20% – 30%, and **Concerning**: 40% - 50%).
- 60% – 100% (Notable:60% - 70%, Important: 80% - 90%, and Minor: 100%).
- Table 14 uses intentional verbiage to describe ministry needs/issues using the High Impact/Urgency %'s and Ministry Priority Ranking percentages of 0% - 50%.

As with the higher respondent percentages of 60% - 100% and their corresponding descriptive labels, i.e., Notable, Important, and Minor will not be considered in the research results and conclusions *.

Table 14

High Impact/Urgency %'s and Ministry Priority Ranks

High Impact/Urgency %'s from Data Sets (from Lowest to Highest)	Ministry Priority Ranks
0% – 10%	<i>Critical</i>
20% – 30%	<i>Significant</i>
40% – 50%	<i>Concerning</i>
60% - 70%	Notable *
80% - 90%	Important *
100%	Minor *

Phase Three: Labelling/Prioritizing Processed Identified General Themes

This phase used the calculated 39 identified general themes and then processed them into a priority scale utilized in information management (IT) service management sectors that focuses

on providing value to customers through a Basic Impact, Urgency, & Priority matrix (Figure 3).

Figure 3

BMC: Basic Impact, Urgency & Priority Matrix



		Impact		
Priority		Low	Medium	High
Urgency	High	Medium	High	High
	Medium	Low	Medium	High
	Low	Low	Low	Medium

Basic Impact, Urgency & Priority matrix

(Mathenge, 2020).

According to Mathenge (2020, p. 1), “Anything that has both high impact and high urgency gets the highest priority, while low impact and low urgency results in the lowest priority.” For this study, instead of using the exemplified low, medium, and high performance measures illustrated in Figure 3, the three highest ranked correlating ministry priority orders of *critical, significant, and concerning* were used to qualify the urgency of the identified themes (High = *Critical*; Medium = *Significant*; Low = *Concerning*) (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Dissertation Basic Impact, Urgency & Ministry Priority Matrix

		Impact		
Priority		Concerning	Significant	Critical
Urgency	Critical	Significant	Critical	Critical
	Significant	Concerning	Significant	Critical
	Concerning	Concerning	Concerning	Significant

In the case of this study, anything that has both critical impact and critical urgency based on the calculated respondent percentages gets the highest ministry priority based on its urgency and impact alignments. The same logic also applies to the High Impact/Urgency %'s and Ministry Priority verbiage assigned to the significant and concerning slots within Figure 4.

As a result of the tracked low or not mentioned responses from interviewed study participants in vital areas related to performing effective urban ministry in high-poverty communities, this study method was useful in prioritizing the plethora of broad outreach ministry problems when documenting the findings per RQ.

Phase Four: Addressing the Results of Research Questions via Key Areas

In sequence with the previous phases, Phase Four provides each RQ with the researcher's intentions, along with additional insights and calculated data associated with the final High Impact/Urgency and Ministry Priority Rankings. The supporting key areas used to address the RQ's connects with:

1. Identified general themes umbrellaed within each data set,
2. Relevant literature documented in Chapter Two,
3. Meaningful perspectives from interviewed study participants that further contextualize and substantiate the RQ's, and
4. The captured interviewed voices from 10 study participants related to their lived ministry experiences associated with many of the Identified General Themes prioritized as high ministry matters that needs to be addressed (Table 14).

Table 15

Key Areas/Data Sets Aligned with Research Questions

RQ1.	Data Set_1_ Effective Christian Leadership	Table 6
RQ2.	Data Set_2_ Community Formation through Ministry Programing	Table 7
RQ3.	Data Set_5_ Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach	Table 8
RQ4.	Data Set_4_ Serving Under Cultural Duress Data Set_6_ African American Church Traditions	Table 9 Table 10

RQ5.	Data Set 3 Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 46)	Table 11
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Research Question 1

The researcher’s intention of RQ1 was to place a spotlight on all Christian leaders who are increasingly serving in isolation in high-poverty, urban communities. Therefore, negating the clear biblical expectations for Christian leaders and believers alike to example the ministry of Jesus to serve TLOT (Matthew 25: 35 – 46) byway of community formation.

Effective Christian Leadership. The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ1 ranked the following identified general themes of:

1. Community Collaborations, and
2. Delegates responsibilities

as: High Impact/Urgency, 20% – 30% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Significant*.

For the identified themes in this key area, both themes were prioritized as *significant*. Given the scarcity of resources and the need to take on the enormous number of responsibilities of ministry leads, particularly pastors serving in HPC (Perkins, 1993, p. 149; Wimberly, Dr. E., 2019, Chap. 1), the results herein represents the need for ministry attention of the two significant identified themes. Participant 5/Site E and Participant 7/Site G felt that clergy leaders must embrace community collaborations, or they will become quickly burned-out due to their massive ministry workloads. Participant 4/Site D, when responding to a sub-question of RQ1 referenced Moses setting up the standard of ministry delegation (Deuteronomy 1:9 – 18) to combat the enormity of problems that dominate HPC.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ1 ranked the following identified general themes of 1) Christ-centered integrity, and 2) Vision-driven as: High Impact/Urgency, 40% – 50% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Concerning*.

With a ministry priority ranking of *concerning*, both themes, Christ-centered integrity and vision-driven effective leadership was marginally responded to by study participants. Participant 6/Site F poignantly answered a RQ by stating, “These pastors ain’t real leaders today, a lot of them are just manipulating people out of their money and chasing after other ungodly things.” Participant 6/Site F also felt that drug dealers and criminals with money and status are increasingly garnering more respect than area church leaders who are not always seen. Rooted in the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22 – 23) and being Holy like God through Christ (1 Peter 1:15 – 17), questionable Christ-centered integrity associated with effective Christian leadership in HPC needs to be seriously addressed. Likewise, Participant 3/Site C shared views about vision-driven Christian leadership supports Barton (1997), who claims that “...the single most important element in having an effective and life-changing ministry is to capture God's vision for your ministry” (p. 42).

In relation to the Identified General Theme (IGT) Community Collaborations, prioritized as *Significant* (20% - 30%), Participant 1/Site A argued that despite there being churches on every other street, because of denominational differences and the need to “outshine” neighboring churches, there is almost never any real community collaborations. Participant 5/Site E stated, “Sometimes we might visit or have revivals with other churches, but that’s about it.” In relation to the IGT, Christ-centered Integrity, prioritized as *Concerning* (40% - 50%), Participant 3/Site C noted that because of the citywide reputation of a lot of the church leaders in Central Ward where he serves, the integrity of other well-meaning Ministry leaders come into question by Newark, NJ residents. Participant 9/Site I frustratedly stated that oftentimes, if the pastor’s character is not in question, the deacons are known for not living right. Participant 9/Site I

further noted that there are many great Ministry leaders in the city with Jesus focused integrity that plays a major role in serving TLOT.

Research Question 2

The researcher's intention of RQ2 was to uncover the perceived understandings of proven leadership skills needed for developing community outreach ministries in socially and economically distressed areas. Often attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1091—1153), the proverb "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" (Leonard, 2017) is oftentimes an excellent example of church leaders who are not after God's own heart (Jeremiah 3:15) operating in urban churches. As a direct result of leadership without proven skills, urgent ministry matters are not performed and prioritized, and the community becomes further neglected. The study participants with lived experiences of the phenomenon were asked RQ to establish what skillsets qualifies an effective Christian leader in HPC to bring a bright light to the research problem. To that point, Participant 3/Site C enthusiastically stated,

These days, preaching and singing like James Cleveland ain't gonna keep people in church seats like 'back in the days;' now, a pastor needs to know how to organize, make connections, and know how to set-up things in the community.

Community Formation through Ministry Programing.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ2 ranked the following identified general themes of:

1. Court/Law Enforcement Relations,
2. Community Strategic Plan,
3. Church/Community Liaison,
4. Jail/Prison Ministries, and

5. Community Spiritual Formation

as: High Impact/Urgency, 0% – 10% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Critical*.

The *critical* rankings of the above five themes are imperative in relation to establishing and maintaining ministry programming under ministry guided community formation in HPC. In responding to RQ2, Participant 2/Site B, a Newark, NJ resident living and serving in the North ward excitedly said,

When I was younger, the church was the place to be, on Sunday we had a ton of programs to attend. Monday and Fridays – the church was our afterschool hangout spot, and you can't forget about Bible and Prayer Meetings every Wednesday and Thursday night. And don't get me started about the holidays.

Participant 10/Site J also lamented that even if residents wanted to attend their local churches, the hours of operation are typically open for Sunday services and a one hour Wednesday evening Bible Study. Beginning with having a strategic community plan along with a church liaison to initiate and cultivate public relations with residents and city officials alike is necessary when responsibly serving in HPC. Likewise, community and spiritual formation must also be aggressively concentrated on in HPC.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ2, ranked the following identified general themes of:

1. Community Collaborations,
2. Housing/Employment Resources,
3. Staff Development and Training,
4. Elderly/Sick and Shut-in, and
5. Church as Advocacy for Community

as: High Impact/Urgency, 20% – 30% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Significant*.

The above noted plethora of high impact/urgency ministry matters in relation to community formation and ministry program designs were prioritized as *significant*. According to O'Brien (2005), "The church is a servant-steward of the mission of God," hence, diverse outreach ministry programs in HPC begins with intentionality and a dedication to Christ. Participant 7/Site G agrees with that premise by suggesting that if a Ministry leader's commitment is not centered in Christ, their serving efforts will not be sustainable. Therefore, to improve in the noted six *significant* themed priority areas, a more diligent focus is required in churches in proximity of socially and economically distressed communities.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ2, ranked the following identified general theme of 1) Drug Addiction Outreach as: High Impact/Urgency, 40% – 50% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Concerning*.

According to Hobson (2023), interacting with diverse groups of people with various issues is a major part of serving in HPC; therefore, having an empathetic heart and being unafraid to serve – even unto death is vital. Participant 8/Site H confidently believed that people are still people even if they are dealing with addictions and life's burdens, therefore consistently and lovingly engaging with them can lead people to Christ. This ever-growing ministry concern must be met with the consistent love of Christ expressed through the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22 – 23). In that regard, setting up places for addicts to meet up or providing related community resources is substantial when it comes to church-led CF.

In relation to the IGT, Court/Law Enforcement Relations prioritized as *Critical* (0% - 10%), Participant 4/Site D expressed his discontent with the overall criminal justice system and the failure of church leaders who refuse to consistently address the blatant injustices against Newark, NJ residents. In relation to the IGT, Community Strategic Plan prioritized as *Critical*

(0% - 10%), Participant 6/Site F contends that one's passion for Christ and serving the community are honorable and necessary as a Ministry leader; however, more leaders are needed who can think and plan as well. In relation to the IGT, Jail Prison Ministries prioritized as *Critical* (0% - 10%), Participant 2/Site B noted that a major problem that is seriously under addressed is the steady flow of freed prisoners and convicts getting out of jail/prison without support or encouragement. Participant 7/Site G declared that it would be very helpful for churches to have job, housing, and mental health resources in place for ex-cons, then maybe hearing God's word will be better received. In relation to the IGT, Elderly/Sick and Shut-in prioritized as *Critical* (0% - 10%), Participant 3/Site C pointed out that due to Newark, NJ's increasing elderly populations, there are consistent reports that several older people are being found alone and dead in rooming houses and apartments. Participant 8/Site H maintained that his church can't do everything, but should do a better job serving the sick and shut-in.

Research Question 3

The researcher's intention of RQ3 was to integrate and explore Secular humanism and Postmodernism, and how they impact community formation and serving TLOT in HPC. Due to the perilous times (2 Timothy 3) in which mankind lives, Postmodernism despite being culturally dismissed or irrelevant is "a new movement representing a critical challenge to the Christian church, and to the minister" (Mohler, 2004, p. 1). According to J.K. Smith (2006), Postmodernism tends to be something of a chameleon, portrayed as either monster or savior – either the new form of the enemy or the next best thing" (p. 15). Therefore, specialized training in the underexplored subject matter related to Postmodernism has to become a standard during eschatological times (Pearcey, 2015).

Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ3, ranked the following identified general theme of 1. New Age Ministry Training as: High Impact/Urgency, 20% – 30% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Significant*.

Aligned with the scripture, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV), ministry training especially in teaching about the basic understandings of Postmodernism in HPC needs to be continually addressed. Participant 5/Site E asserts that different times need different trainings, and that the older more familiar ways really are not being received by a generation that lives through technology and the pleasures of social media.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ3, ranked the following identified general themes of

1. Ministry Approach/Design,
2. Church Acceptance from Community,
3. Understanding of Eschatology, and
4. Choosing Worldliness over God

as: High Impact/Urgency, 40% – 50% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Concerning*.

The broadly identified themes tied to Postmodernism, worldliness (2 Timothy 3), and community formation are all notable factors underlying the realities of prophesized Eschatology (LeMay, 2012; Pearcey, 2015). Due to the aggressively subtle and ferocious wounding spirit and system of Postmodernism, the invisible sinful limbs connected to this global phenomenon nefariously affects the church in some unconventional and impactful ways. Participant 3/Site C, a 48-year-old, African American *Team Leader* serving at his Baptist church for four years said,

“I get so mad when the children can’t even stop playing on their phones while in the church, and their mothers and ushers won’t make them stop!” Participant 1/Site A, Participant 4/Site D, and Participant 9/Site were all adamant about the church improving in areas related to ministering through social media to efficiently win souls for Jesus. The identified themes are serious areas of concern that all church communities must continually counter accordingly.

In relation to the IGT, New Age Ministry Training prioritized as *Significant* (20% - 30%), Participant 3/Site C pointed out that a lot of the Mom & Pop storefront churches are ran by old school values, and that outside Newark, NJ residents must adjust to them and not the other way around. Participant 6/Site F argued that when performing outreach ministry, Ministry leaders “...have to learn not to talk too much” if they what to keep the attention of young people. In relation to the IGT, Church Acceptance from Community prioritized as *Concerning* (40% - 50%), Participant 10/Site J contends that due to the increasing lack of church/community interactions, people still love and respect the church; however, they are moving away from the structured beliefs of the church that speaks on personal accountability to God. Participant 4/Site D spoke on the aggressive outreach efforts of the Muslims, Black Hebrew Israelites, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses that are taking a lot of people from the African American church. In relation to the IGT, Choosing Worldliness over God prioritized as *Concerning* (40% - 50%), Participant 5/Site E declared that there is an obvious drop in church attendance, and that the only time that he sees his church full is on Easter, Christmas, funerals of respected and popular people, or during revivals. Participant 5/Site E continued by arguing that the impact of social media provides the masses with an abundance of pleasures and distractions that conceals the Gospel of Christ.

Research Question 4

The researcher's intention of RQ4 was to explore the largely bygone African American church and leadership traditions that heavily supported community and spiritual formation in densely populated, urban, high-poverty communities (Gates, 2021). It is said that "The witness of the traditional black church in the United States testifies to the power of the Gospel and the sufficiency of Scripture" (Bertodatti, 2021, para. 16).

For RQ4, the researcher combined the Key Areas, Serving Under Cultural Duress with African American Church Traditions to address the Postmodern cultural phenomenon of serving in isolation in HP, urban communities. From Quaker William Penn's concept of "No Cross no Crown" (Pen, 1801), to Deitrich Bonhoeffer's quote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die" (Bonhoeffer, 1995), all Christians must be able and ready to "count the cost" (Luke 14:26 – 33) for Christ. This is especially relevant in densely populated urban landscapes.

Serving Under Cultural Duress.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ4, ranked the following identified general theme of 1) Safety in High Crime areas as: High Impact/Urgency, 0% – 10% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Critical*.

The identified theme of safety in high crime areas was deemed as *critical* in the ministry priority ranking for various reasons. Participant 2/Site B stressed that due to the plethora of concerns linked with mental illness, lack of a Christ-centered moral compass, and high-levels of criminality, when attempting to serve in Newark, NJ without a team and a detailed plan can quickly become dangerous. However, when considering the serving/ministry experiences of AACT, the early church, and biblical prophecies related to the expectations of Christians being persecuted – this identified theme must be continually focused on.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ4, ranked the following identified general theme of 1. Incidents against Church Membership as: High Impact/Urgency, 20% – 30% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Significant*.

Contributing to the incremental phenomenon of serving in isolation in economically and socially distressed communities are incidents against church members. Overcoming this *significant* area is central in sharing the love and sanctifying gospel of Jesus. Participant 10/Site J, a 48-year-old, African American *Youth Outreach Worker*, and resident serving in the Central ward of Newark, NJ deeply remembered the undeniable respect and pivotal role that the Black church had in every aspect of family development and community life. Participant 10/Site J further noted that this themed ministry priority needs to be unapologetically and consistently focused on because year-by-year incidents against church leaders and members are seemingly getting worse.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ4, ranked the following identified general themes of:

1. Biblical Expectations,
2. Expected Persecution Worldview,
3. Courageous Leadership, and
4. Staff Fear/Excuses/Laziness

as: High Impact/Urgency, 40% – 50% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Concerning*.

Serving Jesus in a culture of fear is not an option, it is an expectation and a lifestyle for all Christians (Bader-Saye, 2007). To that point, Participant 5/Site E slightly leaned towards the researcher, and looked the researcher in the eyes and exclaimed, “Doing ministry work in ‘Brick-City’ ain’t no play-play, a weak pastor will get exposed real quick around here.” Participant

5/Site E, then earnestly pointed out to the researcher, when and if serving in Newark, NJ, you better listen to Jesus and go out in twos (Luke 10:1) or more. Fear douses the biblical expectations to serve through courageous leadership despite the anticipated and prophesized persecutions and challenges against believers. All the above identified themes should never be taken lightly in ministry efforts in HPC.

In relation to the IGT(Identified General Themes), Safety in High Crime Areas prioritized as *Critical* (0% - 10%), Participant 1/Site A ardently stated that criminals seek out church members and their parked cars whenever they could. In relation to the IGT, Incidents Against Church Memberships prioritized as *Significant* (20% - 30%), Participant 8/Site H argued that incidents such as arguments, stealing, and fights often occur inside the church when residents visit his church. In relation to the IGT, Fear/Excuses/Laziness prioritized as *Concerning* (40% - 50%), Participant 5/Site E maintained that church leaders make sure that they support their inside church programs but are reluctant to help people outside of their churches due to fear. Participant 7/Site G stated that a lot of pastors tend to become comfortable as leaders, and people outside of their respective churches are deemed obsolete.

African American Church Traditions.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ4 ranked the following identified general theme of 1) Liberation theology as: High Impact/Urgency, 20% – 30% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Significant*.

Deemed *significant* according to the data findings, the notion of liberation theology articulates “...the theological self-determination of black people” (Cone,1970, p. 33). Cone (1970) also argues that AA liberation theology is a justified extension and “...proclamation of God’s liberating activity” (p. 32). In that regard, Participant 8/Site H, a 49-year-old, an African

American community outreach worker firmly stated, “Black people in this community will go as far as the church leads them; right now, many churches here are too comfortable to serve the way they use to, and I think that’s a shame.” Church communities in HPC must deem this identified theme as substantial, therefore, it should be considered within the scope of ministry efforts.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ4 ranked the following identified general theme of 1. Support for Church Leadership as: High Impact/Urgency, 40% – 50% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Concerning*.

In relation to this *Concerning* Ministry Priority Rank, and the gargantuan, stressed-filled responsibilities of urban Ministry leaders serving in HPC, this area of concern must also be addressed going forward. Participant 7/Site G continually and emotionally stated throughout the interview that performing urban ministry is definitely not for everyone. Participant 7/Site G continued by stressing that the slumps tied to serving the poor would not be so frustrating if he had more help and support from church members and the very community that he loves to serve.

In relation to the IGT, Liberation Theology prioritized as *Significant* (20% - 30%), Participant 10/Site J asserted that the difference between today’s Black church compared to yesteryear’s Black churches was its freeing impact on the communities that they served. In relation to the IGT, Support for Church Leadership prioritized as *Concerning* (40% - 50%), Participant 1/Site A claimed that the respect and reverence that Ministry leaders once had has been replaced with caution based on the nefarious reputations of other local church leaders. Participant 8/Site H alleged that after Covid-19, it seems as though it is “everyman for himself,” and that “people could care less about church leaders unless they have something to give them.”

Research Question 5

The researcher's intention of RQ5 was motivated by the Shepherd Motif doctrine as it relates to effective church leadership and developing and maintaining community and spiritual formation in HPC. The existing literature from the aggregate city of Newark, NJ focused on training related to improving church and community relations (Ugwuanya, 2004). As well as "The issue of spiritual formation/soul care, as part of the discipleship ministry, is alien in many churches, particularly in African American churches" (Cadet, 2020, p. iii). RQ5 was purposed in large part to connect the Shepherd Motif doctrine gap with relevant ministry areas tied to community and spiritual formation in HPC.

Serving the "least of these" (Matthew 25:35 – 46).

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ5 ranked the following identified general themes of:

1. Persons with Disabilities,
2. Prison Ministries,
- 3) Foodbank/Feeding Programs,
4. Church Emergency Contact #,
5. Specialized Training, and
6. Criminal Justice System Liaison

as: High Impact/Urgency, 0% – 10% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Critical*.

The *critical* priority rankings of the identified themes in relation to serving TLOT are glaring, especially in urban HPC. Participant 4/Site D answered the RQ by saying, "I witnessed it myself, even when it is dangerously cold outside, a lot of the city's homeless people sleep under church roofs or on their steps, and that's not right at all." Participant 10/Site emphasized that

many church leaders who are anointed to serve in other areas do not understand that serious outreach ministry training needs to occur before attempting to be effective in the space of urban ministry. With the combination of feeding the poor, better serving and connecting with the criminal justice system – placing a spotlight on nuanced areas of ministry outreach programming is vital.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ5 ranked the following identified general themes of:

1. Christian Information,
2. Housing/Employment Support,
3. Community Advocacy and
4. Clothing Support

as: High Impact/Urgency, 20% – 30% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Significant*.

The significance of addressing the above identified themes covers broad areas of cultural problems tied to effectively performing urban ministry in HPC. The vital ministry expectations of the four identified themes are considerable, and possibly represents the increasing disconnect between local churches and residents in need. Participant 10/Site J pointed out that there are servant leaders and churches who are so committed to outreach ministry, that you can see the major positive and productive fruit of God in their respective communities. Nonetheless, through ministry efforts, collaborations, and/or sharing of relevant resources – the vital areas of significance need to be addressed by churches serving in HPC.

The calculated results from the interviewed study participants in response to RQ5 ranked the following identified general themes of:

1. N/A and A/A, and

2. Resource Information

as: High Impact/Urgency, 40% – 50% / Ministry Priority Rank, *Concerning*.

In urban, HPC – the abovementioned *concerning* areas are crucial to a church's ability to aide TLOT. With the ever-present need to curb the explosion of alcoholism and drug use in America, along with the scarcity of desirable resources in HPC, these concerning areas need to be concentrated on by the leadership of urban-based churches. Participant 7/Site G and Participant 1/Site A proudly discussed the Alcohol Anonymous and Narcotic Anonymous programs in their respective churches that are making a huge difference in the neighborhoods that they serve. However, the two study participants stressed that most churches refuse to have certain people of that ilk traffic in and out, and around their worship centers.

In relation to the IGT, Foodbank Feeding Programs prioritized as *Critical* (0% - 10%), Participant 10/Site J asserted that at the end of the month, a lot of pressure is placed on those churches that feed the poor. Participant 10/Site J continued by saying that churches in the city of Newark has gotten much better with feeding the poor. Participant 4/Site D acknowledged that the foodbanks located in Newark's South Ward simply cannot fulfill the needs of residents who depend on them. In relation to the IGT, Church Emergency Contact # prioritized as *Critical* (0% - 10%), Participant 6/Site F argued that due to the extent of ongoing emergencies that is a constant in the East Ward, calling 911 is more ideal than calling the church. Participant 8/Site H contends that although church emergency contact telephone numbers are needed, it will not work unless the other churches collectively have church emergency numbers as well. In relation to the IGT, Criminal Justice System Liaison prioritized as *Critical* (0% - 10%), Participant 5/Site E lamented that the young people who are involved in criminal activities throughout the city of Newark, NJ are often not innocent, but the police and courts are racially and politically unfair to

them. Participant 9/Site I emotionally stated, "...they treat everyone as if they are criminals, and the church has to fight them back too or it will get worse." In relation to the IGT, Homeless/Employment Support prioritized as *Significant* (20% - 30%), Participant 2/Site B discussed the link between high rent in Newark, NJ and the increasing homeless rate that ultimately places an additional strain on local churches.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This research was processed and guided using a qualitative strategy of inquiry and phenomenological design. Both the research approach and design were generally effective, efficient, and appropriate for completing this dissertation study. The advantages and drawbacks are reflected in the following research design strengths and weaknesses.

Research Design Strengths

The overall qualitative phenomenological research design was suitable for capturing the nuanced crux of "...exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 4), and identifying "...the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study" (p. 249). The research design aided the researcher with harmonizing the structural procedures with the many facets needed in the overall dissertation completion process. The said design strategy especially assisted the researcher with:

1. Crafting the research questions to explore the phenomenon,
2. Gathering, transcribing, and interpreting data using the code schema process to identify and process general themes,
3. Gradually sculpting the study using useful qualitative methodologies to reach desired conclusions processed through multiple structured procedural steps,

4. Developing the broad 39 identified themes which allowed the researcher to properly qualify the general and nuanced particulars of the enormous research problem and cultural phenomenon, and
5. Articulating the complexity of the research problem through the lens of six key areas outlined in the purpose statement purposed to support the five research questions.

The ability to collect and analyze data from ten study participants with lived ministry experiences allowed the researcher to easily transition step-by-step during the study completion process.

Research Design Weaknesses

The research weaknesses found were associated with the phenomenological design for this study was somewhat linked with the collection process. The researcher performed ten person-to-person interviews with study participants in socially and economically distressed communities. Although the actual individual interviews with the ministry participants were on time and completed successfully, traveling from site-to-site venues throughout the political wards of Newark, NJ should have been more planned out by the researcher. During the data collection process, the researcher experienced the following challenges:

1. Excessive heat, finding suitable and safe parking, and navigating through obvious pockets of criminality and random questioning from curious locals,
2. Restating/reframing RQ's to be better understood by interviewed study participants, and
3. Concerns of being recorded and a comprehensible suspiciousness of the researcher from a few study participants despite being fully informed of the interviewing protocols during the recruiting and vetting processes.

No changes would be made to the qualitative design and phenomenological approach used for this dissertation research study. The aforementioned inconveniences experienced throughout the person-to-person interviewing process ingratiated the researcher with a new appreciation for effective Ministry leader serving via community formation in high-poverty, urban communities.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Four presented the results of the data analysis process and was instrumental in producing the study's findings exploring *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*. This chapter begins with restating the research purpose and the research questions and then presents conclusions obtained from the analysis of findings. Additional information discusses the research conclusions, implications, and applications of the research findings that were interpreted using the researcher's ideas. The researcher's ideas are based on the empirical data extracted from theological and theoretical literature presented in Chapter Two of this study. Chapter Five concludes with study-related research limitations, suggestions regarding further research needed, and the final summary.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*. At this stage in the research, the servant-leader profile is generally defined as ministry leaders with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003, pp. 296–301) in the following areas,

1. Effective Christian Leadership,
2. Community Formation Through Ministry Programming,
3. Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35–46) in High-poverty Urban Communities,
4. Serving Under Cultural Duress,
5. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach, and
6. African American Ministry Traditions. The servant-leader theory aligns with the biblical worldview and the Shepherd motif doctrine steering this study (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23,

37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20).

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

RQ1. What biblical accountability do Christian leaders have in community formation models in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ2. What are proven biblical leadership skills needed to develop community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ3. How do postmodern cultural values affect Christian focused community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ4. What are the historical traditions of the African American church which serve to contribute to leadership skills for developing high-poverty, urban communities?

RQ5. How does Bible-based, effective church leadership develop and maintain biblical community and spiritual formation in high-poverty, urban communities?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Research Conclusions

In this dissertation study, the five RQ's were instrumental in integrating the six key areas foundational to the study's purpose statement. For this chapter, the researcher integrated study participant perspective and data calculations from the 39 identified themes to conclude the research questions, and to address research conclusions, implications, and applications. Of the six key areas discussed within the five RQs for this study's concluding chapter, Serving Under Cultural Duress and African American Church Traditions were aligned with RQ4 based on ministry expectations and traditions of serving in HPC (Table 15). Additionally, the researcher discussed the relationship between the study's findings and the theological and theoretical literature delineated in Chapter Two to complete this study and chapter. From those demarcated

data influenced relationships, the researcher provided general examples or pathways for improving the ranked ministry priorities from the identified themes.

Research Question One

The research findings associated with biblical accountability for Christian leaders in relation to community formation models in HPC were prioritized as significant and concerning regarding four of the identifying general themes (Table 12).

Theologically, the question of Christian leadership accountability in CF models are consistently outlined throughout the Scriptures, via the Shepherd Motif doctrine (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6, 23, 37:24; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 23, 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46; John 10:11 – 15; Hebrews 13:20). Aligned with the Shepherd Motif doctrine, the Assertive Leadership Model contends that Ministry leaders asserting themselves “into the lives of the follower, dependent upon the followers’ needs and level of ability and willingness to complete tasks, develop trusted leader-follower relationships” (Ferris, 2020, p. 2). The willingness to intentionally serve in HPC as an assertive church leader is also an expected shepherding standard according to God’s word. The question of leadership accountability according to both theological and theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter Two all point to a clear ministry standard of selflessly serving community as a ministry priority.

The calculations of Key Area 1 (Data set 1), touching on the substantial responsibilities and challenges placed on clergy leaders serving in HPC are massive to contend with. According to *Participant 1/Site A*, effective church leaders in HPC are driven by the love of Jesus, and their need to serve at any cost. The following are examples of improving the two ministry priorities:

1. Being in spiritual/relational alignment with God through Jesus for guidance, and
2. Setting up detailed and structured strategies that intentionally carries out the incremental improvements of the themes in question.

Research Question Two

The research findings associated with proven biblical leadership skills needed to develop community outreach in HPC were prioritized as critical, significant, and concerning regarding eleven of the identifying general themes (Table 12).

Theologically, the principals, themes, and concepts of CF through Ministry Programing embodies the intentionally structured agencies that should be an operational part of serving in HPC. Christian leaders who choose to endure and partake in the uneasy endeavor to serve in the space of HPC must have an efficient and effective means to carry out God’s unfolding Kingdom plan (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Timothy 3:1 – 13; Titus 1:5 – 9; 1 Peter 5:1 – 5; Hebrews 13:17).

Applying the theoretical framework to address the critical, significant, and concerning ministry priority rankings are also useful models for maximal outreach determinations in HPC. In that regard, Mohamed et al. (2021) contend that, during the eras of slavery and racial segregation, the Black church intentionally united “organizing job training, after-school mentoring, insurance collectives, athletic clubs, and other community service programs through their churches” (p. 1). *Participant 4 /Site D* points out that serving young people through church sponsored programing must also be done with passion and knowledge.

The significant, critical ministry and concerning priorities tied to church programing through CF efforts should begin with the following core competencies of *purposed calling, intentionality, consistency, community orientation, love and empathy, passion to serve, and strategic planning*. The following are examples of improving the two ministry priorities:

1. Placing a high emphasis on community collaborations,
2. Train and assign Ministry leaders and workers to all outreach areas concerning the criminal justice system,

3. Hire a qualified Christian professional with an expertise in church and community relations, and
4. Always have viable resources available for persons in immediate need, “i.e.” homeless, addicted, women and children, and the elderly.

Research Question Three

The research findings associated with the impact of postmodernism on cultural values in relation to Christian focused community outreach in HPC were prioritized as significant and concerning regarding five of the identifying general themes (Table 12).

Hidden in the sinful cultural subtleties of Satan’s perfect pair of pliers is Postmodernism fused from Secular humanism. The Scriptures teach, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8 / NKJV), (Also see, John 14:6; 1 John 2:1 – 29; Acts 4:12; Romans 12:2; 2 Timothy 3:1 – 9; Ephesians 5:6). As a result of Postmodernism’s nefarious agenda against the biblical worldview, the incremental dismissing of objective reality to a more user-friendly reasoning is increasingly becoming the new normal (LeMay, 2012).

Theoretically, according to Carlson (2017), Secular Humanism, "Roots go back to Renaissance (14th – 16th centuries) & the Great Enlightenment (17th – 18th centuries)... and its "...emphasis is placed more on man & less on God." Carlson (2017) further contends that postmodernism is a "Term 1st used in the 20th century by philosophers, theologians, literary critics, historians, architects – due to the failure of Secular Humanism.” In that regard, Erwin (2023) provides Five Challenges Postmodernism Presents for the Church: Challenge #1: The Questioning of Universal Truth; Challenge #2: The Rejection of Meta-narratives; Challenge #3: The Emphasis on Personal Experience; Challenge #4: The Celebration of Diversity; and

Challenge #5: The Rejection of Institutions. The prioritized ministry rankings of *significant* and *concerning* related to the said identified themes and key focus areas place additional attention on the eschatological subject matter are vital when considering the enormity of serving in HPC.

Postmodernism rooted Secular Humanism and the radical acceptance of Intersectionality are sin-centered, cultural puzzle pieces that seemingly and seamlessly reflect the fulfillments of today's prophesized eschatological times. *Participant 7/Site G* stated that given the aggressive and invisible thrust of Postmodernism during these 'last days,' more responsible church leaders are necessary to face it.

The following are examples of improving the two ministry priorities:

1. Become familiar with biblical eschatology as it relates to postmodernism, religious worldviews, social media, cultural trends, nefarious leadership, self-defeatism, and sexual immorality.
2. Pass out literature related to end times (last days) prophecies and present-day fulfillments, and how vital it is to be ready for the return of Christ. And,
3. Update all church and ministry technologies related to effectively performing community outreach, i.e., staff computers and audio systems, online church capabilities, ministry websites, vehicle tracking, bullhorns, and walkie-talkies.

Research Question Four

The research findings associated with SUCD were prioritized as critical, significant, and concerning regarding six of the identifying general themes (Table 12). When attempting to answer RQ4, the historical traditions of the AA church which serve to contribute to leadership skills in HP urban communities must consider the inevitable realities of SUCD.

From biblical and theological perspectives, serving under cultural duress was certainly highlighted by Jesus, particularly throughout the NT narrative (Matthew 10:38, 16:24 – 26; Mark 8:34; Romans 8:35; James 1:2 – 4; Ephesians 6:11 – 13). To that point, the Bible emphatically

states, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12/NKJV).

In promise with the prophetic messages of the Scriptures regarding SUCD, the theoretical stance by Grenz (1994) argues:

Whenever the authors urge us to grow to maturity in our Christian life, the standard they invoke is Christ (Eph. 4:13). This pattern often focuses on Jesus’ mission of suffering for our sake, whether by direct appeal to his own example (1 Pet. 2:18-25) or by elaboration of the character traits which he himself demonstrated (Gal. 5:22-24). (p. 339)

Although the ministry prioritized rankings associated with RQ4 are critical, significant, and concerning, Christian leaders must understand that serving under duress will be an ever-increasing norm.

The expectation to serve under duress can be buffered through safety, planning, training, and relevant information. The following are examples of improving the three ministry priorities:

1. Develop a staff/volunteer safety manual that focuses on safety measures and using strategic outreach ministries in HPC.
2. Establish plans to serve under duress, i.e., national disasters, political and racial unrest, persecution of the church, community deprivation and emergencies, criminal injustice, and pandemics. And,
3. Become reputable citywide as an advocate for marginalized communities.

Oftentimes when discussing ministry outreach, there is seemingly a narrative painted that suggest being actively involved with urban-focused serving is always within the purposeful spectrums of joy and personal satisfaction. Although both emotions are certainly associated with performing outreaching duties, it should never be misunderstood that serving must also be done, even under duress. From the extensive, varied, and cathartic ministry of Moses – to the action and mind renewing vessel of the Apostle Paul who said, “Remember my chains” (Colossians 4:10 – 18), ministry leaders must be ready for those inevitable spiritual, cultural, personal, and

ministerial daggers (Ephesians 6:16). The researcher's concluding scriptures for this key area are, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24 – 25).

The research findings associated with the historical traditions of the AA church which serve to contribute to leadership skills for developing HPC were prioritized as significant and concerning (Table 12).

Theologically, in relation to Liberation theology in AAMT is of biblical relevancy (Isaiah 58:6–7; Jeremiah 7:6; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5 Matthew 10:34; Luke 1:52 – 53, 4:18). Coupled with Serving under cultural duress and serving the needs of the poor (Galatians 2:10; James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17), when considering the bygone, reputable history of the AA church (Gates, 2021, p. 196), inner-city based ministry leaders continue to identify or attach themselves with the fleeting notion of Liberation theology.

Theoretically, Cone (1970) directs attention to the systemic cultural division within the Christian faith:

Refusing to be separated from the community, Black Theology seeks to articulate the theological self-determination of black people, providing some ethical and religious categories for the black revolution in America. It says that all acts that destroy white racism are Christian, the liberating deeds of God. All acts which impede the struggle of black self-determination – Black Power – are anti-Christian, the work of Satan. (p. 33)

For this study, the social cleavages that attempt to advocate societal divisions within the Christian faith fall under the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of Black Liberation Theology. *Participant 10 /Site J* stated, much of the nonsense that is happening in our communities is because they don't serve the way they used to.

The *significant* and *concerning* ministry priorities both reflect the historical connections of ardent community liberation and support. The following are examples of improving the two ministry priorities:

1. Spotlight the historical contributions and serving standards of Early church traditions, and
2. Promote community and spiritual formation, via, serving TLOT as a church outreach focus.

Placing emphasis on ministry traditions of the Black church is fundamental to this study, because it the undeniable template etched by those bygone church institutions that confirms that the love and agenda of Jesus can still be effective in HPC despite the multiplicity of cultural confrontations. The said notion is aligned with the Shepherd Motif doctrine and is unfortunately and outwardly becoming lost to the phenomenon of serving in isolation in HPC. The researcher's concluding scriptures for this key area are, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24 – 25).

Research Question Five

The research findings associated with Bible-based, effective church leadership developing and maintaining community and spiritual formation in HPC begins with *Serving TLOT (Matthew 25:35 – 46)* in HPC. Prioritized as critical, significant, and concerning (Table 12), the twelve identified general themes are certainly ministry matters that need to be consistently focused on.

Essentially, the core basis of this dissertation study was established and designed to better progress serving TLOT in HP urban communities. Beginning with names of *God the Father* aligned with covenant community (Table 2), theological and theoretical frameworks, and related

literature that scaffolds this research study – the promotion of TLOT (Matthew 25: 35 – 46) has been thoroughly documented. In Chapter Two, McKay (2006) reminds "...the people of God that they are to think covenantally rather than individualistically" (para 2). In the OT, the divine arrangement and compassion of the covenant community was illustrated when eleven of the twelve tribes were required to pay 10% tithes to the Levites to serve the poor, marginalized, foreigners, orphans, and widows (Deuteronomy 16:11; 1 Chronicle 23:28 – 32). In the NT, God's character for mankind is realized through exemplifying the birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus (Matthew 16:24; John 3:16 – 17; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1 – 2).

Theoretically, "Ministering to "the least of these" is simply doing what Jesus has called us to do, especially for unfortunate persons living and surviving in poor city areas" (Hobson, J., 2023). According to (Anderson, 2013), "...charity to poor has the power to deliver one from eternal damnation," and "Charity acquires such power because one meets Christ through this concrete action of showing mercy" (p. 6).

The *critical* and *significant* ministry priorities, regarding these ministry areas are both paramount to the God of love and refuge, in central to the researcher's study. The following are examples of improving the three ministry priorities:

1. Establish efficient and effective strategies to serve safely in underserved communities,
2. Place emphasis on the expectations of church leadership to effectively serve despite being under spiritual, cultural, and/or personal duress,
3. Provide training information, strategies, and scriptures for ministry outreach workers, and
4. Always have resources available for feeding, clothing, and helping TLOT in respective communities where church sites are positioned.

Within today's Postmodern context, coupled with the deep depravity of mankind stemming from the Fall of Man (Genesis 3), serving the poor must be taken very seriously, especially as a ministry leader. When considering the multilayered and nuanced dynamics of America's high-poverty communities, leaders with strong faith, radical obedience in Jesus, and unshakable intentionality are needed to create positive and productive change for persons in marginalized neighborhoods. If serving in isolation is a standard of one's church leadership model, it is suggested to reread both OT and NT expectations for all believers to show Christ-centered love towards TLOT. In that regard, as a Christian leader, intentionally serving in isolation is akin to 'doing nothing,' and as Aristotle stated, "Nothing is what rocks dream about" (goodreads.com, 2024).

Implications

This study's conclusions ranked the identified themes per key area within each of the data sets using a Dissertation Basic Impact, Urgency & Ministry Priority Matrix (Figure 4) to calculate the findings based on *High Impact/Urgency %'s*, resulting in *Ministry Priority Ranks* of: Critical: 0% – 10%, Significant: 20% – 30%, Concerning: 40% - 50%, Notable: 60% - 70%, Important: 80% - 90%, and Minor: 100% (Table 14). The conclusion of the broad 39 identified themes were prioritized from the lowest to the highest (Table 12) to maximize high impact and urgent Ministry concerns in HPC.

The implications for this study's findings (Table 12) emphasizes the significance of the research, and are purposed for church Ministry leaders in general, and clergy leadership in urban high-poverty communities specifically. The sensible assumptions from the theoretical and practical implications herein will benefit and impact HPC throughout America as well as the world. This dissertation study is distinct from the previous research performed in the city of

Newark, NJ that focused on 1) "...ministry of training lay ministers to take up the work of pastoral care, evangelism, and social relief in the parish" (Ugwuanya, 2004, abs), and 2) "The issue of spiritual formation/soul care, as part of the discipleship ministry..." particularly in African American churches (Cadet, 2020, p. iii). This study focuses on the Shepherd Motif doctrine in relation to *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*.

When considering the broad plethora of identified themes that need to be addressed in urban, high poverty communities – the Shepherd Motif doctrine (Ezekiel 34:1 – 6; Jeremiah 3:15, 10:21; Psalm 78:70 – 72; Matthew 25:35 – 46) is based on the authority of God’s love and compassion, specifically towards TLOT, while addressing the ministry intentions of the previous research studies.

Using the key areas outlined in the purpose statement as points of references, the following theoretical and practical implications provides reasonable suggestions for the broad identified themes necessary for serving in HPC.

Theoretical Implications

In exploring the *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*, the theoretical implications for this study are suitable for:

1. Reintroducing the Shepherd Motif doctrine to implement effective leadership and community formation models for serving in HPC to Christian circles internationally, nationally, and locally.
2. Improving existing research related to serving TLOT in highly dense urban landscapes, via the Shepherd Motif doctrine.
3. Modifying existing research, data, and philosophical/ideological viewpoints that debunks worshipping and serving in isolation.
4. Explaining, understanding, and further investigating the key ministry areas and identified themes focused on in this research. And,
5. Developing academic curriculums related to the subject for Christian universities and colleges.

Practical Implications

In addition to the goaled theoretical propositions for this study, the practical implications are suitable for:

1. Developing applicable Christian leadership competencies and applications related to CF and ministry outreach in urban HPC.
2. Creating and disseminating summarized ministry pamphlets and/or manuals on *community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities*.
3. Teaching and/or preaching sermons on the subject matter pertaining to the six key areas outlined in the purpose statement.
4. Providing professional development lessons, via, training sessions, ineffective Christian leadership interventions, and urban ministry seminars. And,
5. Educating Christian leaders on unfamiliar principles, themes, and concepts related to the biblical expectations to serve TLOT under cultural duress using bygone African American ministry traditions.

Applications

Driven by serving TLOT, the following outreach ministry applications are purposed to impact front-line, grassroots issues associated with the ever-changing landscapes of urban ministry related to effective leadership, and community formation in HPC. Promote Bible-based spiritual formation principles, concepts, and themes to all community formation programming, ministry efforts, and future agendas.

1. Prioritize serving “the least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 46) in every area of church functioning and programing, “i.e.,” emergency church telephone numbers, bylaws, soliciting monies and resources, training, hiring, and firing, delegation of duties, community collaborations and fellowship, feeding and clothing assistance, programs geared to serve the youth, homeless, addicted, and incarcerated (per results of key area 1).
2. Establish a list of resourceful contact persons and organizations based off the checklist ministry needs per church/outreach programs in HPC (per results of key area 2).
3. Identify strengths and weaknesses of church leadership and programing based on the six focus areas outlined in the purpose statement and improve on ministry weak-points accordingly (per results of all key areas).
4. Develop a realistic rubric system for effective Christian leadership specifically for serving in socially and economically distressed neighborhoods (per results of key area 2).
5. Create and implement a training manual for church outreach and volunteer leaders serving in HPC to effectively lead ministries and social agencies in the urban areas of 1) Multicultural and multi-religious community engagement; 2) the restorative work of Christ and social Justice and; and 3) applied expected acts of Jesus that immediately contribute to both immediate and systemic change (per results of all key areas).
6. Identify and categorize target groups and their unique needs in HPC and assign informed and intentional leaders with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003, pp. 296–301) to serve accordingly (per results of key area 1).
7. Include a probationary and evaluation program (field training) to all church leaders, staff, and volunteer participants serving and expecting to serve in HPC (per results of all key areas). And,
8. Promote impactful ministry engagement through defining types and methods of urban evangelism, “i.e.,” personal, group, mass evangelism, and/or incarnational evangelism (per results of all key areas).

Distinct from previous research in the space of outreach ministry, the applications herein is designed to promote an insistent approach and a biblical accountability standard for the six key areas focused on in the purpose statement.

Research Limitations

In exploring community formation and effective leadership in high-poverty communities, this study was limited to ten study participants serving in the leadership capacity at ten church sites in the city of Newark, NJ. Additionally, the logic for applying the research limitations are as followed:

1. Study participants were limited to Ministry leaders not under the age of 40-years-old based on the scripture, “But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless” (1 Timothy 3:10 / NKJV). Also, the number 40 which “...generally symbolizes a period of testing, trial or probation” in biblical numerology.” (Biblestudy.org., 2023)
2. Interviewed Ministry leaders (study participants) were not exclusively limited to senior pastors and elders to capture the nuanced particulars associated with the lived experiences of the increasing phenomenon of serving in isolation in HPC.
3. The gender, marital status, and favorable community reputation of interviewed study participants were based on scriptural insights (Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6 – 9).
4. The poverty standards (Hila, 2021, para. 2), NJ largest populated city (Fox, 2021) and racial demographics (US Census Bureau, 2022) in relation to African American churches within the aggregate city of Newark, NJ were suitable for the study. And,
5. The ideological and philosophical beliefs of study participants in relation to the biblical worldview of community formation (Hughes, 2004) and serving TLOT is central to this study.

Further Research

In addition to the fresh lens of this dissertation study towards the research areas associated with effective Christian leadership, community formation, and urban outreach – the researcher insist that the ministry dynamics between church outreach efforts and America’s inner

city needs to be further explored. Given the undeniable, immense – social, economic, and political distresses in urban cities throughout America (Perkins, 1993, p. 21), there are a plethora of ministry opportunities to spread the love and gospel of Christ (Stetzer, 2016). However, to do so, specific research on Christian and urban ministry needs to be continually addressed.

In accordance with the researcher's lived experiences and advanced academic insights, the following urban-based/ministry related research needs to be further broadened:

1. Serving in Christian leadership positions despite the lack of spiritual maturity, biblical/theological expertise, and work-related experiences.
2. Christian leadership's relationship with cognitive dissonance and serving in isolation within urban settings.
3. Effectively serving through the Shepherd Motif doctrine in HPC.
4. Postmodernism's historical connection to prophesized Eschatology.
5. The historical spiritual decline of church leaders in HPC.
6. Christian academia's responsibility in preparing leaders to effectively serve in HPC.
7. The Denominational divide of churches in high-poverty, urban communities. And
8. Christian leadership within the Hip-hop community.

Summary

For this qualitative phenomenological dissertation study, the researcher designed the title, *Community Formation and Effective Leadership in African American Churches in High Poverty Communities* to explore the six key areas outlined in the purpose statement. All of which was designed to:

1. Intentionally place a spotlight on the expectations of effective Christian leadership in relation to serving TLOT byway of community formation.
2. Examine the urban, inner city phenomena of AA churches serving in isolation. And,

3. Develop applicable ministry insights on how to prioritize ministry outreach efforts in HPC.

The broad 39 identified themes (Table 13) measured into High Impact/Urgency %'s and Ministry Priority Ranks resulting in the closing findings were intentional in spotlighting the massive need for divinely connected urban church leadership. The researcher integrated the key areas throughout the dissertation completion process to capture what the aims and essence of a Christian leader in relation to proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003) in HPC.

General Takeaways

The general “take aways” that the researcher ascertained from the study are:

1. Effective Christian leadership in high-poverty communities is a direct result of a leader's authentic relationship with Jesus, their clear calling, and passion to serve.
2. Clergy-spired outreach programming, via community formation correlates with divine callings, personal desires, know-how, strategic planning, the ability to effectively communicate, and an aspiration to impact HPC through Christ.
3. Consistently serving the TLOT in HPC is based on Christian character within an individual (or group) that denies themselves for the purpose of living in Christ for others.
4. The phenomenon of serving in isolation directly correlates with *many* Christian leaders who subconsciously and/or consciously do not serve in their urban HPC due in part to the following reasons: fear of consistently serving under cultural duress, laziness, discomfort, disregard, indolence, spiritual lethargy and/or biblical illiteracy, being overworked and overwhelmed, and not understanding, accepting, or living in one's calling.
5. The undeniable ignorance and blind acceptance of Postmodernism and its nefarious impacts from Christian leaders in HPC is extremely unacceptable, “i.e.,” During the interviews, the responses from questions connected to Postmodernism from study participants were generally limited in insight and/or accepting of new aged worldly and cultural inclinations.
6. The unseen, interconnected, sin-centered tentacles of Postmodernism and Secular Humanism is more pervasive, culturally entrenched, and seamlessly nuanced in every aspect of its existence than initially expected.

7. Bygone African American church traditions are both the proof and possible remedy that the Shepherd Motif doctrine can be effective in HPC based on this study's findings, "i.e.," During the interviews, the responses from questions connected to African American church traditions were generally honorable, consistently mentioned, and used as points of references when discussing possible solutions. Ex. "When we were growing up, most of the church helped the poor in our neighborhood; We had too."
8. Christian leaders with proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003) are grossly missing in relation to the enormous ministry workload needed in urban landscapes.
9. In addition to being anointed and biblically astute, church leaders in HPC need to be better educated, trained and/or knowledgeable in all the six key areas of the purpose statement due to minimal quality assistance.
10. The Christian academic community needs to hold Christian leaders more accountable in relationship to serving TLOT through Bible-based CF versus the phenomenon of serving in isolation through the full spheres of academia.
11. Youth outreach ministries must be seriously focused on in high-poverty communities, "i.e.," During the interviews, study participants consistently discussed the urgent need to address the multiple concerns of youth groups living and surviving in HPC.
12. Effective ongoing outreach ministry efforts are unmistakably hinged on willing, able, and called church leadership. And,
13. Church centers serious about performing effective community formation should have a paid, fulltime, outreach ministry lead to develop, organize, implement, and facilitate church/community relations, programing, volunteer support, soliciting resources, etc.

Closing Remarks

After completing this dissertation study, the researcher suggests that the conclusions of the research can be simply summed up in Jesus's proclamation, "For many are called, but few *are* chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Which then largely boils down to Christ-centered "want to" in church leadership in any era, particularly this Postmodern era. Although the stated Scripture implies both sides of the church leadership spectrum, it can be argued that effective church leaders operating in the unyielding belly of urban ministry are likely serving through the intentions of the Shepherd Motif doctrine. When considering the multilayered nuanced

intricacies that define the undeniable realities of surviving in socially and economically distressed communities throughout America, being a servant after God's own heart (Jeremiah 3:15) and guidance through the Shepherd Motif doctrine is what is absolutely needed. In that regard, all other ministry outreach related research, implications, applications, and strategies must comfortably fall under those force-multiplying divine intentions.

This study is not an implied referendum on urban Ministry leaders serving in high-poverty communities. It is understood that "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37). However, in exploring the phenomenon of serving in isolation versus serving one's community, via, leadership-driven community formation, it is all about submitting one's free-willed *YES* (Proverbs 16:9; John 1:12-13; Revelation 3:20) to God's unfolding Kingdom plan (Titus 2:11:14). Something that research can neither quantify and/or qualify. Jonah's indifference towards the people of Nineveh, exemplified by his displeasure with the divinely created/divinely removed vine which provided him shade from the sun (Jonah 4:10) showed an unawareness and disregarding *NO* for a community that needed him most. To that point, as church leaders in the space of serving in HPC, assure that your *YES* is aligned with the liminal space of Jesus enduring in the Garden of Gethsemane, "...not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Study Participants,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirement for a Doctorate of Education: Christian Leadership: Ministry leadership online program. My study aims to explore community formation (CF) and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities of Newark, NJ. I am writing to invite eligible participants (clergy leaders) to join my study.

Participants must be 1) Newark, NJ church leaders with status to make decisions at the executive level, 2) Men who are 40-years or older who are married, reputable in assigned leadership roles (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6 – 9), and who served at their respective churches for a minimum of three years, 3) Clergy who serve at a Church led out of the African American church traditions of serving through community formation, and 4) Leaders must lead at churches in proximity to high-poverty) communities with an average church membership of 100 or more.

Participants will be asked to participate in an interview and then review their transcript for accuracy. The interview will be conducted face-to-face or virtually to assess participants' perspectives on community-based effective church leadership in socially and economically distressed neighborhoods. The interview should take between 30 to 45 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy. Study participants will be emailed a copy of the interview transcripts to clarify and validate the data collected. Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Once participants are confirmed, a follow-up letter will be sent to remind study partakers to complete the Participant Release Form enclosed. To encourage participants to send documents

back using one of the three stamped return envelopes inside of this mailed correspondence. The Participant Release Form includes the Consent Form, Procedures, Risks and Benefits, Confidentiality Form, Voluntary Nature of the Study, Withdrawing from Research, Contacts Questions, and Statement of Consent. The type-signed consent form must be returned via email before scheduling the interview. The deadline for participation is September 5, 2023.

All Ministry leaders who fulfill the stated criteria and are interested in advancing Christ-centered urban ministry, please email Kevin L. Moore, EdD Candidate, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Moore

Ed.D Doctoral Student at Liberty University

Appendix B: Recruitment Follow-Up Letter

Dear Study Participant,

As a doctoral student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, securing participants who satisfy the study's criteria is essential. As previously stated in the Recruitment Letter inviting participants to contribute to the research study, I am conducting research exploring community formation and effective leadership in African American Churches in High-Poverty Communities.

This follow-up letter is being sent to remind you to complete the Participant Release *Form* previously sent and to encourage you to send it back type-signed using one of the three stamped return envelopes inside of the mailed correspondence. The Participant Release Form includes the Consent Form, Procedures, Risks and Benefits, Confidentiality Form, Voluntary Nature of the Study, Withdrawing from Research, Compensation, Contacts and Questions, and Statement of Consent. The deadline for participation is March 5, 2023.

I can be contacted at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. if you and your church family have any questions regarding this opportunity. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Moore

Ed.D Doctoral Student at Liberty University

Appendix C: Consent Form

Title of the Project: Community Formation and Effective Leadership in African American Churches in High-Poverty Communities

Principal Investigator: Kevin Laron Moore, EdD 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. Participants/churches for this study must fulfill the following criteria:

1. Church clergy holding management or leadership positions with the status to make decisions at the executive level of a church and/or ministry (ethnicity and race insignificant).
2. Christian married males are reputable in the roles of under-shepherds, pastors, and primary leaders of their respective church communities (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6 – 9).
3. Church communities are led out of the African American church traditions of serving through community formation.
4. Leaders must lead churches near Newark, NJ's socially and economically distressed (high-poverty) communities.
5. Leaders must be 40 or older and have held the said leadership role in their respective churches for at least three years.
6. Leaders must have an average church membership of 100 or more.
7. Leaders must have a biblical understanding of church leadership expectations related to ministering to the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 45) and establishing Christ-centered communities.
8. These said leaders must be familiar with secular humanism, biblical eschatology, and the expectations of leading the community (like the Early Church) despite gross cultural and spiritual duress.

Taking part 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 qualitative phenomenological study explores community formation and effective leadership in African American churches in high-poverty communities. The research is being conducted to promote church-based community outreach versus serving in isolation.

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. Complete and return researcher sent documentation type-signed using one of the three stamped return envelopes inside the mailed correspondence promptly.
2. Participate in an online or in-person recorded interview, “i.e.,” Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or face-to-face at Newark, NJ, locations.
3. Participate in said interview time frame for 30 to 45 minutes. An additional follow-up interview may be required only if necessary.
4. Be available for an online or in-person interview during March 2023 and April 2023.
5. Participate in member checking. This is reviewing your transcript of the interview for accuracy. (30 Minutes).

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Study participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. In addition to advancing the Body of Christ in research and urban outreach ministry,

benefits to society include strengthening effective clergy leadership concerning community formation in economically and socially depressed landscapes.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

No intentionally understood, foreseen, or imagined risk is involved in participating as an interview participant for this qualitative phenomenological study. The benefit of participating in this study is to contribute to the final research finding, which will further advance Christian outreach ministry in high-poverty communities nationally.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this dissertation study will be privately and safely secured; interview data and audio/video recordings will be password protected on the computer, and the researcher will have exclusive access to the information. No information regarding the identity of interview participants will be included in the published findings of the study. The researcher will transcribe data using Microsoft® Teams software as a dependable transcription service throughout the secure and confidential transcribing process. All the interview participant names, pseudo names, and church names will be kept in a saved electronic file on a password-protected computer.

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

Interview participants for this study will also be provided 1) a \$100.00 gift or gas card of their liking as a measure of appreciation, 2) Receive a digital copy of the study's final findings, and 3) A thank you letter from this researcher.

Participants have the option to refuse compensation for their time and information sharing.

Is study participation voluntary?

Being a study participant in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to be part of the interview process, you are free or permitted not to answer research questions or withdraw from the research process at any time.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Kevin Laron Moore; contact information: [REDACTED]. If you have any questions regarding confidentiality concerns connected to this study, you are encouraged to contact the researcher. Suppose you have any concerns or questions regarding the ethical standards of this study and would like to discuss matters with someone other than this researcher. In that case, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502, or email at irb@liberty.edu or telephone (434) 592-5530, Green Hall ext. 2845.

Your Consent

You will be given a copy of this information for your records.

Participant consent for this study can be secured by signing this consent form. Thank you.

Statement of Consent

I have read and agree with the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: First Follow-Up Email to Participants

Dear Study Participant,

Thank you for participating in this study. Your responses are very necessary and valuable to my research. The transcript of our previous interview is attached to this email. Please review the attached transcript and inform me of the corrections needed to maximize this important study. Additionally, all participants and their respective church homes have been assigned an alias to protect their identities while writing the study. Again, thank you for your significant assistance during this data collection process.

May your shared lived ministry experiences greatly contribute to positive and productive leadership and outreach efforts toward underserved, high-poverty communities worldwide.

If you and your church family have any questions regarding this research step, I can be contacted at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Moore

Ed.D Doctoral Student at Liberty University

Appendix E: Second Follow-Up Email to Participants

Dear Study Participant,

Again, I sincerely appreciate and thank you for participating in the study. The first phase of transcribing your interview with me has been a success. The second phase in my study requires me to submit a list of themes informed by the interview for your review. Please examine the attached document and then send back your essential feedback.

The importance of adhering to these research steps is to effectively capture those nuanced perspectives related to the experience of those clergy leaders who serve in high-poverty, urban landscapes. Through that lens, this study intends to use the tabulated study findings to promote accountability and effective church leadership concerning intentionally serving poor, desolate, and disenfranchised communities. May we continue to unite through the intended purpose of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) in the space of academia and actual ministry applications to better serve "the least of these" (Matthew 25:35 – 45).

I can be contacted at [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. if you and your church family have questions regarding this research step. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Moore

Ed.D Doctoral Student at Liberty University

Appendix F: Interview Protocols

Topic: Community Formation and Effective Leadership in African American Churches
in High-poverty Communities

Table 16

Interview Data Description Information/Template

Clergy Leader/Site Pseudonym Names	Political Wards	INTV Dates	Time Stamp / Length	Inter. Format Person-to-person / Digital	No. of Pages per TSCP
Participant 1 /Site A					
Participant 2 /Site B					
Participant 3 /Site C					
Participant 4 /Site D					
Participant 5 /Site E					
Participant 6 /Site F					
Participant 7 /Site G					
Participant 8 /Site H					
Participant 9 /Site I					
Participant 10 /Site J					

RQ1. What accountability do Christian leaders have in community formation models in high-poverty, urban communities?

1. What are a church leaders' role in serving persons deemed as "the least of these" residing in distressed, urban communities?
2. What is your understanding of biblical/theological models of community formation?
3. How does your church align with the biblical/theological models of community formation?
4. What would Jesus do today as an urban outreach minister?

RQ2. What are proven leadership skills needed to develop community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

1. What are the characteristics and competences needed for a ministry leader to perform CF in high-poverty, urban communities?
2. What are your lived experiences as ministry leader serving marginalized persons and communities?

3. How have social ills, such as crime, drug addiction, homelessness, poverty, impacted you as a servant leader in the communities near your respective church home?
4. What are your perspectives on the biblical expectations that church leadership must serve through community formation, while serving “the least of these” via community outreach?

RQ3. How do postmodern cultural values affect Christian focused community outreach in high-poverty, urban communities?

1. How has the impact of postmodernism influenced how you lead and serve in communities near your church home?
2. What are the expectations of church leadership serving in an ever increasing postmodern, secular world?
3. How has general and social media impacted church lead community and spiritual formation in HP communities?
4. How can sharing the Gospel and agenda of Jesus still be effective when performing community outreach during these Eschatological times?

RQ4. What are the historical traditions of the AA church which serve to contribute to leadership skills for developing high-poverty, urban communities?

1. What do bygone African American church traditions related to CF and serving "the least of these" mean to you?
2. What are the distinctions and commonalities of African American leadership ministry roles during the 1950s – 1980s compared to now?
3. What are the similarities of the bygone African American church traditions and how the Early Church also served under gross cultural duress?
4. Why is serving in isolation a postmodern phenomenon that does not align with prior African American church traditions that placed an emphasis on community formation and service?

RQ5. How does Bible-based, effective church leadership develop and maintain biblical community and spiritual formation in high-poverty, urban communities?

1. What are a church leader’s responsibilities related to increasing church attendance in high-poverty, urban communities?
2. What are a church leader’s responsibilities related to church and community fellowship in high-poverty, urban communities?

3. What are a church leader's responsibilities related to youth ministry participation in high-poverty, urban communities?
4. What are a church leader's role in incorporating biblical and practical approaches to applying spiritual formation in ministry efforts and programming?

Appendix G: Coding Schema: Descriptions and Themes

1. Community formation through Ministry Programing

The following code set is based on language related to church involvement via community development, neighborhood fellowship, local connectedness, and ministry outreach programs:

- Church as Advocacy for Community
- Church/Neighborhood Fellowshiping
- Community Collaborations
- Housing/Employment Resources
- Court/Law Enforcement Relations
- Community Spiritual Formation
- Community Strategic Plan
- Church/Community Liaison
- Church Website/Social Media Sites
- Serving the Poor/Homeless Ministry
- Staff Development and Training
- Youth Ministries
- Jail/Prison Ministries
- Elderly/Sick and Shut-in ministry
- Drug Addiction Outreach

2. Effective Christian Leadership

The following code set is based on the Shepherd Motif doctrine and pastoral care (Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34) discussed in the scriptures:

- Effective communicator
- Establishes Community Collaborations
- Emotional/Culturally intelligence
- Proven character, doxological motives, and a passion to fulfill the divine agenda of Jesus (Howell, Jr., 2003, pp. 296–301)
- Delegates responsibilities
- Active followership
- Christ-centered integrity
- Vision-driven
- “the least of these” (Mat. 25:36 – 46)
- The Great Commission (Mat. 28:16 – 20)

3. Serving the “least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 46) in High-poverty Urban Communities

The following code set is based on verbiage associated with serving the “least of these” in economically and socially distressed communities in urban settings:

- Persons with Disabilities
- Homeless Outreach
- Prison Ministries
- N/A and A/A
- Clothing Closet
- Resource Information
- Community Advocacy
- Youth Outreach
- Foodbank/Feeding Programs
- Church Emergency Contact #
- Church Informational tracks
- Criminal Justice System Liaison
- Housing/Employment Support
- Safety Training/Crime concerns
- Specialized Training

4. African American Ministry Traditions

The following code set is based on bygone AAMT of ministry programming and standards aligned with the Early Church who served the community first despite limited resources, and adversity:

- Congregational/Neighborhood Support
- Church as Community Hub
- Welcoming Church Environment
- Community Relationships/Fellowship
- Church/Community Leadership
- Solid Pastoring/Gospel music
- Liberation theology
- Youth/Family Support
- Intentional Community Outreach
- Support for Church Leadership

5. Serving Under Cultural Duress

The following code set is based on the expectations to intentionally serve despite living and ministering under cultural or community pressure, and compulsion:

- Biblical Expectations
- Expected Persecution Worldview
- Safety in High Crime areas
- Not the vision of Church
- Incidents against Church Membership
- Preference to Serve in Isolation
- Refuse to Serve Under Duress
- Plans to Better Serve Under Duress
- Courageous Leadership
- Staff Fear/Excuses/Laziness

6. Impact of Postmodernism on Ministry Outreach

The following code set is based on cultural factors that impact the church in an ever-changing secular and postmodern world:

- Negatives of Mass/Social Media/Internet
- Lost Church Traditions
- Philosophical/Ideological views
- Political correctness, Cancel culture, Tolerance, Acceptance
- Understanding of Eschatology
- Choosing Worldliness over God
- Church Acceptance from Community
- New Age Ministry Training
- Ministry Approach/Design
- Use of Technology for Outreach Ministry

Appendix H: Thank You Letter

To whom it may concern:

The Bible teaches that Jesus healed ten lepers, and only one came back to say *thank you* (Luke 17: 11 – 19). Through that lens, this researcher must thank you for your valuable contribution in answering many of the questions needed when exploring the research title, Community Formation, and Effective Leadership in African American Churches in High-Poverty Communities. Based on your lived experiences as a clergy leader of Newark, NJ, your informational nuggets will contribute to advancing Christ-centered urban ministry and serving “the least of these” (Matthew 25:35 – 45).

Frequently, within the nuanced business lives, even as Ministry leaders, forgetting or even disregarding the needs of those who reside in high-poverty communities are overlooked, sometimes intentionally. The completed findings within this study will be captured to provide new avenues to serve inner-city neighborhoods across America better.

Through that energy and realized expectation, this researcher thanks you for assisting me in placing an additional spotlight on leaders who are after God’s heart (Jeremiah 3:15) in high-poverty communities during these eschatological times influenced by the impact of secular humanism. To that point, this student researcher states, in the name of Jesus, thank you and your church family!

A physical and digital copy of this research dissertation will be sent to you via email and mail upon successfully completing this study. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Moore

Ed.D Doctoral Student at Liberty University

Appendix I: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 19, 2023

Kevin Moore
William Harrison

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-656 Community Formation and Effective Leadership in African American Churches in High-Poverty Communities

Dear Kevin Moore, William Harrison,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: April 19, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

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

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office
